

THE PERIODICAL TEXT-NETWORK, SERIALIZED GENRES, AND THE MAKING OF
‘LITERATURE’ IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

“The exigencies of magazine life call for serial novels,” the *Atlantic Monthly* remarked at the start of its regular book review section in July 1889, “yet it is not impossible that as the publication of novels in separate monthly parts has ceased, so the fashion of printing works of fiction in successive numbers of a monthly or weekly magazine may pass away.”¹ Viewed from the perspective of the twenty-first century, when the still-running *Atlantic* and its contemporary counterparts typically offer a spread of political commentary, social analysis, and personal essay-writing interspersed with the occasional short story and poem, but the serial novel is utterly extinct, this claim seems like an astute reading of the periodical market’s runes. Situated in its original late-nineteenth century context, however, the *Atlantic*’s prediction was a far more speculative and uncertain one. True, the fascicule publication of novels pioneered by Dickens and Thackeray in the 1840s had proven economically unviable for all save a few extremely popular authors, and had long since withered away by 1889.² Yet *All the Year Round* and the *Cornhill*, two magazines which Dickens and Thackeray had respectively served as founding editors/contributors on, were still going in strong in 1889, and still proffering the instalment fiction that had initially made their reputation.³ In America, meanwhile, where the fascicule novel had never initially blazed as bright, the so-called ‘quality monthlies’ that had started to bring serial novels to a general audience in the 1850s similarly remained prominent at the end of the century, and titles like *Munsey’s* and the *Ladies’ Home Journal* were gearing up to sell instalment fiction to the first periodical readerships of a million and more.⁴ Tellingly, the *Atlantic Monthly*, which was part of that ‘quality’ market, was itself deeply imbricated in these publishing trends – as its review section noted in the July 1889 issue, two of the books which prompted the suggestion that

novelistic serialization may be “only a fashion,” Mary Noailles Murfree’s *The Despot of Broomsedge Cove* and Arthur Sherburne Hardy’s *Passe Rose*, “were printed originally as serials in *The Atlantic*.”⁵

What the *Atlantic*’s doubts in 1889 about the future of serialization reveal, then, is not so much a perceptive sensitivity to the direction of Anglo-American periodical culture as, I would argue, an ambivalence about the novel-in-part-form that had long haunted literary magazines. For if we reverse the orientation of the historical telescope and look back to the past from 1889, what we find are persistent echoes and anticipations of the *Atlantic*’s concerns. As *Harper’s Weekly* ruefully recognized in 1903, the question of “whether the serial story was on its last legs” is one that “had been asked and answered almost any time within the generations since serials began to run ... in literary periodicals.”⁶ The tone and inflection of such questions changes across time, of course, but a common thread running through the literary magazine’s interrogation of serialization from the eighteenth century to the twentieth was a basic fear that “literature” (in its necessarily various definitions) and the rendering of fiction in instalments might be basically incompatible. Whether advocating neoclassical ideals of formal symmetry, romantic notions of organic unity, or modernist conceptions of aesthetic autonomy, the key movements in Anglo-American literary history have often shared an emphasis on textual integrity that the material partitioning of the novel into separate magazine issues would seem to violate. Moreover, from Henry Fielding’s satirical comparison between the careful structuring of the Homeric epic into twenty-four books and the way eighteenth-century publishers “ease the public” by ensuring works are “divided and exhibited piecemeal,” through William Hazlitt’s complaint that “the public like to taste works in the sample, before they swallow them whole,” to Adorno and Horkheimer’s scathing assertion that “the subjectively restricted form of truth” is “now experienced as the

mere twaddle which is acceptable ... in women's serials," the treatment of instalment fiction has evidently been linked to a fear of mass culture and its allegedly poisonous effects.⁷ In this respect, the form of the magazine itself – its accessibility, its ephemerality, its miscellaneity – can be seen as embodying a set of cultural tendencies that often sharply conflicted with the aspirations of the novelists who once so dominated its pages. Typically much cheaper to purchase than the novel-as-book until well into the twentieth century, the novel-in-the-magazine has also long been associated with an aesthetic cheapening of fiction, a commercial compromising of higher values. Thus, in 1889, the *Atlantic* grounds its prophecy about the future of the serial novel on the claim that "it is manifest that a work of art in literature ought to be quite independent of its mere mode of publication, and the final issue in book form certainly gives the reader a better opportunity for regarding it as a whole than when it was constantly interrupting itself."⁸

One of the fundamental aims of recent scholarship on magazine serialization, which has burgeoned significantly since the return of interest to the subject in the 1990s, has simply been to rescue this mode of publication from such deep-rooted suspicion. The first wave of contemporary literary criticism to take on this task, exemplified in the work of figures like Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, Carol A. Martin, and Patricia Okker, characteristically adopted two complementary, and often overlapping, approaches.⁹ On the one hand, a new historicist analysis of the serial novel's nineteenth-century heyday as reflecting its ability to embody that period's concerns with evolutionary forms, cultural progress, and imagined communities. And on the other, a book historical analysis of the material circumstances of serial fiction's rise, largely framed through the reinsertion of certain canonical writers into the context of the periodical market and its peculiar demands. Both these approaches have been important in revealing the centrality and influence of serialization to the popular reception of

the Anglo-American novel, but both also have certain limitations. The first model, for example, has frequently tended to reduce the practice of serialization to a fairly restricted set of era-specific ideological triggers through analogical comparison, while the second model inclines toward an overly narrow conceptualization of serials that still separates individual texts from their messy periodical matrix by over-privileging individual authorship and certain attendant notions of creative resistance to the market. It pays, then, to turn toward current developments in seriality scholarship that can potentially help to mitigate these interpretive constraints. Most notably, the last decade has seen a wave of interest in serialization emerging from the field of media studies, which by taking its inspiration from serial films, television programs, and comics can point us beyond the well-established focus on the Victorian era and its particular social and cultural landscape toward the definition of a more complicated and more universal set of serial practices and conditions.¹⁰ Pushing the concern with cultural production and distribution that is inherent to, but sometimes over-simplified in, the book historical model in an explicitly comparative direction, the media studies approach, at its best, recognizes serialization as a self-structuring process that involves constant development between and across different domains and formats. As Frank Kelleter puts it, in one of the most theoretically sophisticated accounts of serialization to date: “These narratives exist, not so much as structures that can be programmatically designed, but as structures whose designs keep shifting in perpetual interaction with what they set in motion. ... As entities of widely distributed intention, commercial series pay permanent attention not only to the variation possibilities of their stories but typically also to the history of popular seriality itself, including changing generic options and media affordances.”¹¹ Thanks to the ongoing audience interaction they enable, the anticipatory possibilities they foster, and the dialectical movement between repetition and variation they embody, serial texts, Kelleter argues, “resist symptomatic readings that would seek to reveal a tightly controlled narrative underlying

whatever is being told” – they resist, that is, the emphasis on both authorial control and ideological determination that underpins much prior scholarship on serialization.¹²

In what follows I intend to take the theses outlined in Kelleter’s “Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality” (2017) as my analytical framework, but for all their value in generating a more nuanced model of serialization I also intend to partially refine and occasionally refute them. Whereas Kelleter, like other scholars who have been developing media-studies-influenced approaches to serialization, typically frames his account of its distinctive structural traits in terms of twenty-first century works of popular fiction, this essay seeks to understand the wider origins and applications of seriality, especially in relation to those emergent academic-disciplinary conceptions of “literature” which were starting to define their field in terms of notions of textual integrity antithetical to the part-publication techniques of mass periodical culture at the end of the nineteenth century. The various, significant revisions to his analytical model which this broader lens entails can each be clarified, I will show, by turning to the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly* in the decades immediately following its establishment in 1857. By considering how the set of serial practices identified by Kelleter operate in the case of the nineteenth-century literary magazine, for example, we can gain a more nuanced and more historically extended sense of the emergence of these practices than Kelleter himself actually provides. Aside from a few brief references to nineteenth-century serial novels like Eugene Sue’s *Mysteries of Paris* (1842-43), Kelleter’s accounts of serialization at work are very much focused on contemporary visual media, and so tell us little about the ways in which printed serials developed their own “recursive character” distinct from those of, say, television serials.¹³ In this respect, Kelleter’s description (inspired by Bruno Latour) of serial media as “actor-networks in the sense that they owe their existence to a (re)productive assemblage of acting

persons and transpersonal institutions as well as action-conducting forms, narrative conventions and inventions” may be equally as true for the *Atlantic* as it is for HBO in the abstract, but by neglecting the concrete affordances of the periodical as a medium he obscures the important ways in which these serial infrastructures also differ.¹⁴ One of the most notable of these differences is the degree to which magazines are more visibly networks of a range of interlinking and criss-crossing texts than television channels - the physical discreteness of the individual periodical issue and the direct juxtaposition of separate texts on the page, by contrast with the continual flow of televisual content, allows the consumer to more readily grasp this medium as a system.

This point, in fact, brings us to a second corrective to Kelleter’s model, which pertains to the cultural genres he privileges. If Kelleter is more careful than many seriality scholars schooled in media studies to avoid prioritizing singular textual examples over wider processual settings, he nonetheless shares with his fellow media-focused scholars (and it should also be said with most literature-focused scholars) the implicit assumption that serialized texts are invariably fictional in nature. Kelleter’s emphasis on seriality as a “field of narrative” does not inherently restrict the kinds of genres his theories can be applied to, but the cinematic and televisual genres that dominate his own and other cognate approaches are almost never nonfictional, just as treatments of literary seriality rarely look beyond the novel.¹⁵ In Kelleter’s case, though, we might use the tools of his own model to begin to push the study of seriality into wider generic territory. Crucially, Kelleter draws on Niklas Luhmann’s version of systems theory to argue that serial narratives are uniquely self-observing, that is they enable various “auto-referential operations” through their ongoing interaction with and response to their consumers that is akin to the way in which Luhmann sees particular socio-cultural domains (art, law, politics, economics) as growing ever more

distinct and complex through continual reflection on their own rules and practices.¹⁶ This is, in itself, a very useful way to reconceive of the fact that serials “have to do their work of coordination, pruning, and coherence-building within the ongoing narrative itself” as potentially contributing toward aesthetic sophistication rather than a directionless compromising with public taste.¹⁷ What Kelleter fails to import from Luhmanian systems theory, however, is its acknowledgment that although the process of system-formation occurs primarily through “differentiation,” wherein particular socio-cultural domains separate themselves from each other, and achieve and sustain that autonomy only by continually comparing themselves with and defending themselves against rival domains. As Luhmann puts it, every single system must “negotiate with each [other] individual system by relying on the backing of other domains in the environment and balancing the way these various contributions are combined.”¹⁸ In other words, Kelleter, by privileging what Luhmann calls the “art system” misses the extent to which fictional genres can only exist and evolve by making explicit reference to genres from other domains on top of reference to their own operations.¹⁹

Moreover, not only does a more systematic grasp of the process of “differentiation” alert us to this process of comparative self-development it also underlines the extent to which other genres whose primary aim is not the elaboration of an aesthetic “code” can utilize serial procedures.²⁰ For as Luhmann notes, one thing that all systems share is an orientation toward their ongoing reproduction, a desire to generate “no clearly defined boundaries but only horizons that imply further possibilities.”²¹ Indeed, a magazine like the *Atlantic* can only really be made sense of if we adopt the more expansive definition of serial genres that this argument leads us to. Its numbers in the nineteenth century were filled, after all, with far more than the serial fiction that literary critics have typically extracted from its pages for

detailed analysis: like other periodicals of the time it was replete with serialized essays, biographies, travelogues, histories, and treatises. The distinctive internal structure of the magazine-form, that visible networking-effect I have already described, is – in a sense – predicated upon “differentiation”: within its pages individual generic systems jostle for space, and engage with each other and with the narrative demands of serialization, in constantly shifting ways.

In order to begin to more fully chart these interactions between different serial genres I will proceed, for the rest of this essay, by drawing some concrete examples primarily from one particular issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*: its October 1872 number. This specific issue is not ventured as representative of the *Atlantic* in its entirety, since as I have just asserted magazines are by definition continually reinventing themselves. But its serialized content – the tenth part of a novel by James De Mille, the tenth part of a biography by James Parton, the tenth part of an essay series by Oliver Wendell Holmes, and the first part of a short story by Henry James – does allow us to see the negotiation between competing systems up close.²² If a synchronic approach here is not intended to make the usual historicist claims about the part standing in for the whole, it is intended to generate some generally valid theoretical insights into how parts relate to other parts. Similarly, my choice of the *Atlantic* itself for this case study is not designed to make a claim for this title as representative of American magazines *in toto*, either then or now, but again to reveal some general aspects of how the dynamics of differentiation affected this serial medium. In fact, the *Atlantic*’s relatively unusual profile in the nineteenth century points the way to my third and final corrective to Kelleter’s model, which relates to the kind of audience he envisages as the norm for the serialized texts he discusses. As Kelleter makes clear, his interest is in what he calls “popular seriality,” that is instances of “commercial storytelling” that are directed at a mass market.²³

But in concentrating so intently on this mode of textual consumption he conveys the impression that serialization is absent from other cultural strata; ironically, in seeking to critically legitimate the mass appeal of serials he implicitly reaffirms the high/low distinction upon which traditional condemnations of the form have so often been based. The *Atlantic Monthly*, crucially, complicates this dichotomy. There was arguably no more strenuous and consistent defender of the value of what was becoming known as “high culture” in late nineteenth century America than the *Atlantic*, yet it was also packed with serials: in the October 1872 issue, for example, they made up just over half its contents.²⁴ The fact that the *Atlantic* was just as committed to serialization as ‘story papers’ like the *New York Ledger* and *Saturday Night* which sold twenty times as many copies and adopted a much more market-friendly tone keenly suggests that “popularity” is a weak criterion for a broad understanding of seriality.²⁵ Extrapolating on this point, in the next section of the essay I contrast the brief vogue for sensation novels in the *Atlantic* with the more sustained attention it devoted to serialized biographies as a means of understanding how this title’s serialization practices both overlapped with and diverged from those of other magazines, before going on to explore the forms of the serial essay and the short story in instalments in subsequent sections for what they reveal about the nineteenth-century magazine as a complex web of different modes of writing whose engagements with and adaptations of each other both resisted and were resisted by an increasingly narrow categorization of “literature.”

I.

If seriality was a practice shared by periodicals from across all levels of society in the nineteenth century then in order to see how the process of differentiation I have identified took place we need to move beyond a simplistic mapping of anti-serial/pro-serial sentiments

onto the high/low culture divide and consider how the latter divisions developed within the serial medium itself. As Janina Rojek has usefully put it, ‘quality monthlies’ such as the *Atlantic*, *Harper’s* and the *Century* can show us how “cultural hierarchization and the quality discourse with its distinction mechanisms are central to a historical approach to seriality.”²⁶ Such acts of differentiation are not permanent and inviolate, of course, otherwise they would not have to be repeated, and they would not have to use the kind of hyperbolic language the *Atlantic* used when it condemned the story papers in 1879 as “a tissue of extravagances, inaneness, contradictions, and want of probable cause.”²⁷ Indeed, in the case of magazines especially, precisely because they are constantly evolving forms which (if they lucky enough to survive) must respond to shifting cultural tastes and demands over a long period, the exclusion of certain genres or topics can often be temporary or retrospective. For an illustration of this fact we need look no further than the novel that the *Atlantic* was serializing in October 1872. Charting the star-crossed relationship between two wealthy young Canadian women and their potential suitors, and this group’s various trials at the hands of the same villainous French count during their vacations in Paris, James De Mille’s “A Comedy of Terrors” can be read as a consistent effort to parody the sensation novel.²⁸ Stacked with misdirected letters, duels, apparitional presences, evil schemes, and hair-breadth escapes from danger, De Mille’s tale pushes, as its title would suggest, the conventions of the sensation genre to deliberately risible ends, perhaps most notably during two parallel rescue plots in which the male protagonists absurdly fail to recognize, across days of narrative time and entire, lengthy instalments of text that they have liberated the wrong women from imprisonment. In its pastiching of what it called the “melodramatic energy” of popular fiction’s typical antagonists, and its deliberate undermining of the “alternations of utter despair and seraphic joy” that sensationalist suspense-effects thrived on, “A Comedy of Terrors” effectively serves to demarcate the critical lines between the kind of serious realism

that the *Atlantic* was beginning to foster under its new editor, William Dean Howells, and a rival genre more closely tied to the gothic and sentimental traditions that nineteenth-century periodical culture had inherited from its eighteenth-century precursors.²⁹

It had not always been the case, however, that the sensation novel was relegated to the margins of literary respectability in the *Atlantic*. In August 1864, for example, the magazine argued that the “elements of modern sensational writing: ... the broad canvas, the vivid colors, the abrupt contrast, all the dramatic and startling effects that weekly fiction affords” may tend toward the melodramatic but could be “saved from such accusation by the truthfulness of the handling.”³⁰ Indeed, it found this “true glance and gleam of genius” in the work of the British novelist Charles Reade, whose “Griffith Gaunt” it went on, in a rare instance of the kind of practice more familiar from its competitor title *Harper’s*, to simultaneously serialize with a London periodical, the *Argosy*.³¹ The American serialization of “Griffith Gaunt” generated some controversy among its readers, as a result of its frank depiction of bigamy, but at least in part ‘quality’ magazines like the *Atlantic* were drawn to sensation fiction because it could be seen as addressing important social issues in a newly honest way.³² Reade, Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the other leading sensationalists of the 1860s helped to take the themes of adultery, illegitimacy, and domestic violence that had previously been the province of cheap penny weeklies into the mainstream by situating them in realistic middle-class settings and tonally reframing them for the burgeoning middle-class periodical market.³³ Such was the vogue for these entertaining but morally charged narratives that, as the *Westminster Review* remarked in July 1866, in Britain the “Sensational Mania” was soon “spreading in all directions, from the penny journal to the shilling magazine, and from the shilling magazine to the thirty shillings volume.”³⁴ Yet sensation fiction, for all its success in leaping across the differentiating cultural hierarchies of

the nineteenth-century magazine system, never quite lost its negative associations with an initially working class readership. Thus in the United States, where the extensive reprinting of Reade, Collins and Braddon's work in *Harper's* and its kind had similarly been accompanied by native writers transplanting scenarios and techniques from three-cent story papers to twenty-five cent 'qualities,' the latter followed the *Westminster* in beginning to fear that these narratives might be best suited to "poverty-stricken minds."³⁵ Fretting that the realist possibilities of the genre were being drowned out by an increasingly mechanical interest in simply startling the reader, the *Atlantic* could be found suggesting by August 1870 that "the sensational is a revolt against humdrum, through the means of a vulgar wonder," while by the end of the decade it starkly concluded that the influence of Reade and his contemporaries had been so "immensely diluted and deteriorated" as to render the genre primarily of interest to impressionable young boys.³⁶ "A Comedy of Terrors" appeared, then, at an important transitional moment in the rapid rise and fall of sensation fiction through the strata of the nineteenth-century periodicals market. In this regard, for all the swiftness of the *Atlantic's* retreat from sensation fiction there is a lingering ambiguity in its attitude toward such serial techniques that many other 'quality' titles shared. For if parody, as the *Atlantic* generally conceived of it in the 1870s, requires the parodist to engage with a text on its own terms, rather than imposing a fully differentiated critical judgment on it, then parody is a concession to the practice of those terms, even when intended negatively.³⁷ With "A Comedy of Terrors," in other words, the *Atlantic* was both parodying sensationalist suspense effects and making use of them to engage, and re-engage, its readers.

Importantly, a similarly conflicted relation to the dynamics of critical imitation marks out the book review pages of the *Atlantic* in the late nineteenth century, indebted as they are to what Nicholas Dames has called the "descriptive" protocols of Victorian criticism, which

sought to “convey the effect of reading” through detailed plot summaries and extended passages of quotation.³⁸ Accordingly, the closest the October 1872 comes to prefiguring modern critical discourses is not in its review pages but in a short article that followed the tenth instalment of “A Comedy of Terrors.” Written by one of the *Atlantic*’s most forward-looking literary commentators of this period, G. P. Lathrop, “History of Hawthorne’s Last Romance” analyzed the origins and composition of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s unfinished novel “Septimius Felton; or, The Elixir of Life,” which had not coincidentally finished an eight-part serialization in the magazine two months earlier, using techniques that academic literary historians would subsequently refine into what we now recognize as genetic textual criticism.³⁹ Like his colleagues in the book review section who, as we have seen, were beginning to flirt with the idea that the book-form of a novel was superior to its serial-form, Lathrop insists on the “tangible completeness” and “integral idea” of what seems to be a frustratingly imperfect fragment, but unlike them he is starting to more clearly build a methodological framework to support this claim.⁴⁰ Indeed, looked at in the context of the late nineteenth-century issues of the *Atlantic*, Lathrop’s careful sifting of documents has more to do with contemporary modes of biographical writing, where evidential rigor and archival mining had been increasingly central since 1830s, than with its book reviews, which were still reliant on abstract principles like “spirit,” “feeling,” and “cleverness.”⁴¹ In this respect, Lathrop’s attempt to ground his analysis on information “found among the author’s papers” chimes most closely with the approaches adopted by James Parton in the tenth part of his biography of Thomas Jefferson, which appeared earlier in the same number.⁴² Indeed, tellingly, the October 1872 instalment of Parton’s life of Jefferson, covering his time as a minister to France in the immediate aftermath of the American Revolution, ends with a paragraph-long extract from a letter Jefferson wrote to Thomas Paine in 1787, commenting on the dangers of a licentious press. To some extent this conclusion can be seen as serving the

anticipatory function that scholars of seriality typically associate with instalment endings, since it foreshadows the rise of a viciously partisan press, essentially split over the French Revolution and Jefferson's re-entry into American politics, which took place during the period Parton covers in the next part of the biography. (Parton, in fact, explicitly underlines the proleptic nature of his final quotation by noting that anyone "who has glanced over the newspapers in the last four years can attest" that its sentiments are accurate).⁴³ A direct comparison of the climactic moment of Parton's October '72 instalment and that of "A Comedy of Terrors" in the same issue, however, reveals quite how distinct the practices of serial biography were from those of the serial novels critics usually take as their norm. James De Mille's tenth instalment terminates in an easily recognizable moment of narrative suspense, as the characters of Carrol and Mrs Lovell, having escaped from a French prison, find their respective love interests have mysteriously disappeared and seem to have betrayed them. Parton, on the other hand, eschews the string of open questions with which De Mille concludes – "where were they now? Into what peril had he borne her in his wild flight? What did he mean?" – for the presentation of a factual artefact that limits doubt far more than generating it.⁴⁴ Jefferson's letter to Paine is introduced as an assertion of Jefferson's perceptiveness (Parton calls it an "acute observation"), not a temporarily impenetrable conundrum.⁴⁵

This rebalancing, via documentation, of the instalment ending away from suspense and toward resolution in Parton's serial biography is indicative of the wider challenges that the biographical form faced in being serialized and the solutions it came up with. Most fundamentally writers like Parton had to wrestle with the fact that when it came to biographies of famous individuals like Jefferson the reader already knew the major 'plot' points and narrative twists that were in store. And, moreover, with real-world subjects the

possibility of repeatedly postponing the ultimate end-point of the story was radically curtailed. In contrast to fictional “serial figures” like Sherlock Holmes or Fu Manchu, the living cannot be brought back from the dead or transferred to parallel universes in order to have their adventures continued indefinitely.⁴⁶ In this sense, then, the “death drive” that James Mussell sees the periodical form as struggling to surmount through serial extension is more inescapably woven into biographical writing than fictional texts. There is always a literal expiration point in biographies that a magazine can only do so much to avoid. One of the avoidance strategies they can, and did, adopt though was the use of documentation. On one hand, nineteenth-century biographical writing’s emphasis on archival materials is representative of this genre’s delimitation of suspense. Parton was savvy enough to emphasize the mysterious and controversial nature of his subjects in order to generate readerly interest, but fundamentally the whole point of his biographies was to resolve rather than compound matters of dispute. Thus, in the preface to his 1858 *Life and Times of Aaron Burr*, Parton stresses that his aim in handling this particularly Machiavellian figure was not to “leave ... to the consideration of the reader, a baffling enigma.”⁴⁷ If the biographical mode primarily explains away historical puzzles through the careful assessment of “documents,” “volumes,” and “sources,” however, it can also use these means to put off the metaphorical death that is a serial’s last instalment.⁴⁸ The biographical subject’s already well-known exploits and experiences may undermine Frank Kelleter’s claim that in serial media it must be the case that “certain narrative options are still open or have not yet even materialized as options,” but biographical writers learnt to compensate for the relative finitude of their options by emphasizing the importance and interest of archival materials.⁴⁹ Serialization in a more holistic sense than is usually allowed by critics who focus on serial fiction, concerns itself as much with the aggregation of local fact as it does with narrative surprises. As commentators on serial fiction have occasionally recognized, especially when considering

works in the Dickensian tradition, the need to stretch out narratives across multiple instalments and defer their final closure creates room for what the London *Athenaeum* called the serial's "accumulation of fine, exact, characteristic detail."⁵⁰ It is in serial biographies, and their explicit emphasis on the comprehensive assemblage and vivid appeal of details, though, that we can see this tendency most clearly.

To be sure, some observers saw biographical writing's documentary impulse as a poor substitute for the forms of narrative tension that serial fiction could offer. Commenting on "The New School of Biography" in the *Atlantic* in late 1864, for example, Gail Hamilton declared that those biographers who had become less "over-scrupulous about breaking open the casket" than their predecessors "do not, like too many of our modern authors, leave a book half written, forcing the reader to finish their work as he goes along. They are instant, in season and out of season, with explanation, illustration, reflection, until the idea is, so to speak, reduced to pulp, and the reader has nothing to perform save the act of deglutition."⁵¹ Yet serial biographies not only long predated the rise of serial fiction – Samuel Johnson, for one, had contributed some of his famous *Lives* in parts to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the foundation stone for all general interest magazines, in the 1730s – serial biographies managed to rival the popularity of serial novels throughout the nineteenth century. Remarking on the work of the American historian John S. C. Abbott, whose life of Napoleon had run in its own pages in the early 1850s, *Harper's*, for example, asserted of his biographies in October 1871 that he had regularly "carried them as a serial through a popular magazine in competition with the best novelists of the day, and each time his serial history has proved, not only a success, but the success of the season."⁵² Persistently granted a recurring lead station or independent department in American magazines as they flourished from the late eighteenth century onwards, and a feature of magazines from across the thematic and social spectrum,

biography needs to be seen as a dominant node in the history of the periodical text-network. As Tim Lanzendörfer has succinctly put it, biography “can be understood as an exemplary genre for periodicals, capable of being adapted into a great variety of roles ... and showing clearly the ways in which content was subordinated under the heteronomous demands of the periodical.”⁵³ Indeed, for confirmation of this dual issue-and-market-structuring flexibility we have to look no further than the career of James Parton.⁵⁴ Carefully building a reputation as America’s first professional biographer from the late 1850s through to his death in 1891, Parton managed to straddle the increasingly fixed divide between cheap story papers like the *New York Ledger* and quality monthlies like the *Atlantic*, both of which he contributed to simultaneously. Whereas sensation fiction achieved only a temporary move across this gap, and even widely respected proponents of this genre like Wilkie Collins found themselves compelled to scramble for smaller wages in tattier outlets by the 1880s, Parton’s biographical endeavors in the periodical world retained a universal appeal.⁵⁵

A key factor in the different fates of Collins and Parton, perhaps, lies in the different role that serialization played in their chosen genres. For while sensation fiction in the qualities never quite escaped the opprobrium that attached to its serialization in the story papers, especially once hierarchical notions of literary “integrity” began to harden, the serialization of biographies in the late nineteenth century was largely the province of the qualities. Early American periodicals like *The Port Folio* and *The Columbian Magazine* had serialized lives of great men in the vein that the *Gentleman’s Magazine* had initiated, but these rarely ran to more than thirty pages in total, and always appeared alongside what the *North American Review* characterized, in 1818, as “biographical sketches, notices, and anecdotes.”⁵⁶ Since the dominant approach of biographers in the early nineteenth century was a didactic one, geared toward the exemplary public actions of their subjects, since few

Americans were writing book-length accounts of single figures in this period, and since the infrastructures that made archival research (such as local historical societies) were still rudimentary at this time, it is hardly surprising that, as the *North American* noted, the demand for short biographies was a “taste, which has become ... prevalent.”⁵⁷ As the mass market press emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century it was very much these pithy, non-serialized biographies that principally made their way into the pages of magazines like the *New York Ledger*. Thus, in January 1879, when the editor of the seven cent *Youth's Companion*, Hezekiah Butterworth, successfully solicited Parton for some of the kind of stand-alone articles he had been contributing to the *Ledger* for the previous two decades, Butterworth stressed that he was looking for “not *biographies*” in the grander sense of the term, “but the strong stereoscopic incident that made the subject of it worthy of a biography.”⁵⁸ What Parton provided for the *Atlantic Monthly*, by contrast, were not fleeting biographical high points designed to inculcate familiar virtues of honesty and industry, but extensively detailed accounts of an individual's full life and times, typically geared toward the explication of America's national progress.

Reviewing Parton's one-volume *Life of Burr* in March 1858, the *Atlantic* had initially been suspicious of its future contributor, and his ties to the mass magazine market, damningly concluding that his book “abounds with the slang usually confined to the sporting papers” and “often evinces a disposition to exaggeration little calculated to produce confidence in its reliability.”⁵⁹ By the time the *Atlantic* came to consider his work again, however, in September 1864, it was praising Parton, who had taken care to preface his three-volume *Life of Andrew Jackson* (1860-61) with thirteen pages of heavily annotated bibliography, for his “patient and extensive research.”⁶⁰ Crucially, it was precisely such assiduous archive-mining and the narrative amplification it led to that then made biographies ripe for extended

serialization. “Outside of fiction,” *Harper’s* observed in 1901, “the serial habit is indulged for the sake of comprehensiveness. Here we have in view not the culmination of a keen dramatic interest, but an adequate perspective.”⁶¹ For ‘quality’ periodicals, in other words, the serialization of biographies, and other forms of non-fiction, became a marker of cultural seriousness and durability. In fact, in one of the nicest ironies of nineteenth-century periodical culture, the biography, for all the apparent obstacles it presented to successful serialization in terms of its muted suspense and limited replication of characters, was one of the most protracted of genres in the quality publications. Parton’s Jefferson biography, for instance, appeared over twenty-two issues in the *Atlantic*, at a point when the typical length of a novel like “A Comedy of Terrors” was twelve parts, while the longest-running serial in *Harper’s*, by far, was Abbott’s life of Napoleon, which came out between September 1851 and February 1855.

Indeed, one might even argue that it was the very lack of suspense-generating mechanisms in serial biographies that made them conducive to such remarkably extended appearances. Discussing John G. Nicolay and John Hay’s “Abraham Lincoln: A History” in *The Century Magazine* early on in its serialization (it would eventually run for two and a half years), the *Century’s* editor Richard Watson Gilder noted that while it could “be followed continuously from month to month for the serial interest of the narrative, which has from beginning to end the sequence and logical progress of a great drama,” this biography was also “a connected, logical, historical story, which can be read chapter by chapter for the interest or charm of narrative contained in every separate sub-division of the work.”⁶² Nicolay and Hay’s biography, to put it another way, did not rely on holding back some of its meaning as serial novels did, and because the reader of “Lincoln” already knew the “sequence and ... progress” of the larger narrative arc he or she could take more away from individual parts and

even miss particular instalments without losing the thread or the pleasure of the narrative. Serial novelists and their critics, on the other hand, both frequently worried that this genre was too dependent upon audience loyalty and attention, and that the use of dramatic cliffhangers could become alienating and desensitizing over time. As *The Galaxy*, a regular purveyor of serial fiction itself, remarked in 1869, in theory - if not always in practice - with magazine novels “the memory is taxed in a way that loose readers (who use book-marks) do not like,” while “unpleasant interruption at the most interesting moment ... is a rough and unfeeling principle, at best, and wanting in human kindness.”⁶³ To some degree, then, biography’s enjoyment of a greater independence between its instalments was an advantage in maintaining a prolonged presence in the inevitably intermittent and distinct issues of a magazine. Reviewing the book version of Parton’s life of Jefferson in December 1874, *Harper’s* argued that because it had been “prepared for serial publication, there is some lack of historical continuity in its present form,” but this critical verdict, perhaps triggered by the text’s origin in a rival magazine more than genuine aesthetic concern, overlooks the lesson that this publication should have learnt from the longevity of Abbott’s Napoleon biography.⁶⁴ In book form, certainly, any disjunction between different sections could prove visibly problematic; in magazine form, however, a certain amount of cultivated discontinuity could help keep a text alive.

What the 1874 *Harper’s* reviewer seems to have had in mind is the way in which Parton’s biography proceeds through very clearly demarcated phases of Jefferson’s life, with fairly minimal references back to preceding events during each phase. Each of these phases, importantly, correlates with one instalment of the *Atlantic* serialization, so every individual part (“Jefferson, American Minister in France,” “Jefferson’s Return from France in 1789,” “Meeting of Jefferson and Hamilton” etc.) has a readily definable start and end point. The

differences in narrative continuity and readerly engagement between Parton's biographical serial and fictional serials are then apparent if we compare this chapter-like structure with the internal instalment structure that many magazine novels were using by the late nineteenth century. It took, it is worth noting, some time for the serial novel to work out its characteristic cliffhanging mechanisms and the typical narrative patterns of resolved suspense and fresh hazard that often shaped the direction of individual instalments. As Mark Turner has noted of early endeavours in the form, with many eighteenth-century serial texts the "parts break mid-sentence, without any sense that a weekly [or monthly] number is the primary organizing serial principle."⁶⁵ By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, novelists were consciously crafting their serials for the newly lucrative magazine market and what is more they had begun to subdivide their instalments for even greater effect. Echoing and adapting the model that Dickens established with his wildly popular part-issue and periodical fictions, numerous novelists composed their instalments out of two or three distinct chapters that offer a clear sequence of narrative events building to a dramatic point or chart the progress of a particular subplot.⁶⁶ "A Comedy of Terrors," for one, follows this pattern: the three chapters in its October 1872 instalment (entitled "A Rescue," "An Overwhelming Discovery" and "Anxious Inquiries") all focus on the Carrol/Mrs Lovell grouping from the overall quartet of protagonists, and each one moves them through geographically separate zones of danger toward a thwarted reunion with the other pairing of characters. The result of such a structure is an intensification of the instalment's internal suspense effects, and a foregrounding of the continuity between the text's individual chapters, whereas in biographical serials like Parton's *Life of Jefferson* the chapter-as-instalment structure lends itself to greater dissociation between instalments. For Frank Kelleter one of the things that typifies serial media is the way that they "constantly suggest a narrative totality (even to themselves) that is anticipatory by definition because it must remain elusive as long as the series has not yet

reached its ending,” yet the latter approach, which reduces narrative ambiguity in order to lean toward a kind of quasi-anticipatory totality, suggests another, equally important and equally successful, mode of serialization.⁶⁷

That biography was a dominant node in the nineteenth-century periodical system is evident not only in the fact that readers took as much interest in it as they did in serial fiction, but also in the degree to which biography exerted a magnetic pull on other elements in the magazine text-network. Commenting on its recently completed run of Parton’s life of Jefferson in July 1874, the *Atlantic* remarked that as “the most popular feature in twenty-one successive numbers ... [p]eople turned to it before they read the serial stories, or even cut the pages whose jealous fold concealed the instruction and delightfulness of the book-notice.”⁶⁸ As this comment might suggest, the book review section, notwithstanding its growing claims to significance in this period, struggled to attain the wide appeal of the other parts of periodicals. One, appropriately critical, solution the genre gradually adopted, apparent in the assertion from the review I opened this essay with that seriality is one of “the arbitrary conditions of magazine life,” was to attempt to articulate the book review as a more intellectually independent and unified component of the periodical form than either biography or fiction.⁶⁹ Thus, while J. S. Tunison worried in an *Atlantic* article on “The Book Review, Past and Present” from September 1899 that because “a large number of the prominent novels of the year have already been subjected piecemeal in magazines and newspaper syndicates to the judgment of readers” any further criticism of these texts resembled “carrying fagots to the forest,” he also insisted that literary commentators could add something worthwhile if they aimed at what he called “the universal ... critical review,” a mode which extracted the core values from a text and sought to “preserve them in miniature.”⁷⁰ From this perspective, concise, one-shot review articles were both a formal and

an aesthetic means for generating distance from the popular readerly taste for serialization. In fact, serialized book reviews had long been a rarity in the American magazine market. Charles Brockden Brown's *Monthly Magazine, and American Review*, the first U.S. periodical to devote a regular department to literary criticism, had run a review of Count Rumford's *Essays* in six parts between 1799 and 1800, but that had more to do with a shortage of other material to cover than the intentional embrace of instalment dynamics.⁷¹ And those early nineteenth century titles offering the most direct precursors to the mode of criticism adopted by the *Atlantic*, such as the *North American Review*, took the form of book-length issues coming out quarterly, a format and production cycle that obviated the need for and potential effects of serialization.⁷² What had changed for literary criticism by the late nineteenth century, then, was less its formal relationship to serialization than its forms of self-observation, that is the ways in which it was now consciously starting to differentiate its terms and goals from serial writing.

Ultimately, the differentiation process that literary criticism began to engage in in the mid nineteenth century led it to find an institutional home, the university English department, outside of magazines, while even highbrow titles like the *Atlantic* were unable to entirely shed serialized narratives until broader changes in publishing cycles and the triumph of rival media reconfigured the print market in the middle of the twentieth century.⁷³ In the case of the novel its serialized form was primarily rendered intellectually disreputable by this academic consolidation of authority over the definition of "literature," but in the case of biography its serial status was brought into greater question by the strategies of differentiation that the competing disciplinary province of history began to exercise at the end of the nineteenth century. More particularly, as fin-de-siècle professional historians sought to distinguish themselves from the Romantic style of predecessors like Francis Parkman and

William Hickling Prescott by arguing that historical events were the product of abstract forces that were best understood through positivistic, objective laws the genre of biography came under intense suspicion.⁷⁴ “History must be clearly differentiated from biography,” William Preston Johnston asserted in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* from 1895. “[Biography] is particular, not general. Biography narrates the events of one life in its manifold and interesting relations; ... history is the biography of a race, or of a nation, or of mankind. ... An individual life is a single ray, but in the white light that constitutes the totality of a historical phenomenon, every significant figure ... must blend.”⁷⁵ In that same year, crucially, the American Historical Association, which had come into being as the nation’s first society of academic historians a decade earlier, also published the first issues of a new quarterly journal, the *American Historical Review*.

A noteworthy addition to the roster of specialist/professional periodical titles that had been growing since the middle of the nineteenth century, the *Historical Review* not only echoed Johnston’s disavowal of biography, it eschewed the practices of serialization that were endemic in the more popular magazines of the time.⁷⁶ Whereas earlier figures like Parkman had occasionally serialized works in generalist magazines such as *The Knickerbocker*, the generation of historians who wrote for the *Historical Review* helped to establish the now familiar parameters of the formally hermetic, twenty or thirty page, peer-reviewed scholarly article. This mode of writing was no mere convenience in a field where growing numbers of academics were trying to access limited publication venues and the professional prestige that came with them – the single-part scholarly essay also carried with it certain methodological assumptions that further undermined the respectability of serialized biographies. Discussing William Milligan Sloane’s *Life of Napoleon*, which had recently appeared in twenty-three parts in *The Century Magazine*, the Columbia University history

professor Frank Moore Colby remarked in early 1897, for example, that: “Sloane’s exhaustive life of Napoleon was put to a severe test when it was made to appear in serial form. It is hard to form a correct estimate of a work of this kind when it comes out in monthly instalments, for if the reader is interested, he is tantalised by the postponement, and if he is bored, he is denied the privilege of skipping. ... Of all subjects, history is the least fitted for serial publication, for continuity is absolutely indispensable, and what comes after is meaningless except in the light of what has gone before.”⁷⁷ Here then, the style of mitigated continuity that I earlier identified in Parton’s Jefferson biography, and which served its serial audience well, has become an intellectual liability. The goals of an ‘objective’ historical approach, which were very much oriented around the identification of sequences and totalities, demand the kind of narrative unity that can only be provided by self-contained articles or books. Sloane, who was one of the founding editors of the *American Historical Review*, seems to have intuited this much himself, even before Colby issued his critique. In the lead article of the first issue of the *Review*, he proceeds from the argument that the “laws of nature [have] demanded for their apprehension ... a conception of unity” to the speculation that those reading works of history in the “public press” might “rise from perusing the best products of the day with [no] definite conception of the historian’s spirit and purpose.”⁷⁸

II.

If the necessary discontinuities of instalment publication can be both an advantage and a limitation for serial biographies like Parton’s life of Jefferson, then the same is even more true for serial essays like Oliver Wendell Holmes’s *The Poet of the Breakfast-Table*, which began its run in the same January 1872 issue of the *Atlantic*. For with this genre formal discontinuity is visibly written into the very fabric of its discourses and modes of address. In

order to clarify this distinctive kind of serial practice, it is perhaps useful to compare the serial essay with an ostensible sibling, the essay series. To take one concrete example of the latter, Parton, who honed his data-gathering skills as a journalist before becoming a full-time biographer, contributed a group of essays on the emergent industrial centres of the Midwest to the *Atlantic* between March 1867 and January 1868.⁷⁹ Like Holmes's serial essays, which had been a feature of the magazine since "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" had appeared in its inaugural issue, Parton's accounts of places like Cincinnati and Chicago operated as a connected sequence of first-hand observations on the contemporary social and cultural milieu. But whereas Parton's series shared a single, common theme - "the planting, the growth, and the decline of cities" in the West - and a single, unifying tone - the journalistic rhetoric of geographical detail and statistical information - Holmes's serials are strikingly diverse in their concerns and language, shifting unpredictably with each instalment across philosophy, history, religion, science, poetry and whatever else seems to have caught the author's attention that month.⁸⁰ At first glance, this thematic and stylistic mobility may seem to render the serial essay even more typical of the "passion for momentary success" and "ephemeral triumphs" that the *Atlantic* tended to associate with "modern journalism" than Parton's essay series.⁸¹ Crucially, though, the point of Holmes's work was not to offer bluntly factual summaries of the latest trends or events, designed so as to provide the reader with all they needed to know on a given topic. Instead, his essays were intended to probe beneath the socio-cultural fact for more abstract, universal truths, which the reader was prompted to reflect upon in their own time and on their own terms. As such, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table" stakes a claim to falling within the province of the second of the two categories that the *Atlantic* titularily opposed in an 1891 article on "Journalism and Literature," since like the latter mode of writing it is concerned with "the eternal elements of human nature" and "the power of discriminating quest" required to apprehend them rather than matter of "a day's

permanence.”⁸² Indeed, Holmes is quite explicit about this distinction, as were the founding fathers of the serial essay, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, a century and a half earlier.⁸³ Just as they, and their innumerable imitators through the turn of the nineteenth century, sought to differentiate the periodical publications they wrote for from the mundane record of dates and names provided by the newspaper, so Holmes does the same. “These newspaper fellows are half asleep when they make up their reports at two or three o’clock in the morning, and fill out the speeches to suit themselves,” he asserts early on in the first number of “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table,” thereby reversing ownership over factual significance in favour of his self-evidently fictionalized essays and their notions of a higher truth, and positioning them as the site of a fully-awakened consciousness.⁸⁴

As the deep-rooted debt to Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* can also help us to see, another key point of difference between the serial essay and the essay series is the former’s adoption of a foregrounded narratorial presence. Echoing the verbal prominence of Mr. Spectator, and the explicitly editorial function he serves, serial essays typically structure their wide-ranging contents around a single, intimately characterized figure or group of figures, whereas the essay series utilizes the neutral, third person perspective of the journalist.⁸⁵ Accordingly, a serial essay like “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table” actually has more in common discursively with James Parton’s biographies than it does with his studies of Midwestern cities. Indeed, a reader coming to the end of the *Atlantic*’s March 1858 review of Parton’s *Life of Burr*, which I discussed earlier, could hardly have failed to see the connection, since directly below its concluding paragraphs, on the same page, appears the fifth instalment of “The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table,” with its large-type subtitle “Every Man His Own Boswell.”⁸⁶ This conceit, that the essay serial is in some form a mode of life-writing, is one that Holmes carried through all his endeavors in the genre. Thus “The Poet at

the Breakfast-Table” opens its first number by emphasizing the centrality to what follows of the “idea of a man’s ‘interviewing’ himself”:

I talk half the time to find out my own thoughts, as a school-boy turns his pockets inside out to see what is in them. He brings to light all sorts of personal property he had forgotten in his inventory. ... And a good many people who flatter themselves they are talking wisdom to me, are only helping me to get at the shelf and the book and the page where I shall find my own opinion about the matter in question.⁸⁷

In this fashion, the breadth of subjects in the essay serial can be understood as fundamentally apprehended and shaped by the filtering mind of the narrator-figure. If recurring themes are what unify the essay series, the periodical eidolon is what unifies the serial essay. These eidolons typically offer the reader a fair dose of conventionally autobiographical material – Holmes’s Poet, for example, continues his first number with a long excursus on his childhood home and the memories he has of it, much as Mr. Spectator recalls the “small Hereditary estate” on which he grew up in his opening instalment.⁸⁸ Yet we should also note that there are important limits to the indulgence of a memoiristic approach in the serial essay. For unlike the subject of the serial autobiography, who echoes the subject of the serial biography in following a progressive, linear trajectory from birth to old age or death, the narrator of the serial essay cannot physically advance beyond a certain point. Eidolons were, it is true, often represented as being men of mature years, a conventional indicator of the wisdom they were deemed to possess, but as the controversy which greeted Addison’s decision to kill off one of his personae, Sir Roger de Covereley, would suggest, imposing a clear end point on their lives was unusual, and once a serial essay got going the narrator’s life-phases tended to disappear into the background. Taking up the distinction that the *Atlantic* noted in 1860 between “biographies of thought and biographies of action,” texts like Holmes’s “Poet at the Breakfast-Table” essays can very much be situated in the former group, eschewing as they do

public behaviour and its historical contextualization in favour of patterns of non-chronological intellectual development.⁸⁹

Clearly, this means of structuring literary serials still presents considerable risks in terms of generating the “affective bonds” with a text that Frank Kelleter sees as central to the serial’s ability to coerce readers into returning for the next instalment, particularly by the late nineteenth century, when magazine fiction had effectively refined the art of utilizing character-empathy to shape tightly organized patterns of narrative suspense and resolution.⁹⁰ In this light, Ouida’s argument from the *London Times* that “in the serial form ... the writer sacrifices form and harmony to the object of attaining an exciting fragment for each duration of his work” is surely truer of the serial essay than the sensation novels she actually had in mind.⁹¹ The fact that serial essays persisted even into the heyday of the serial novel, however, suggests that they offered something fairly indispensable to the Anglo-American periodical. Long predating the rise of serial fiction at the end of the eighteenth century, and far more widespread than serial biography through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, serial essays might be said to have the closest affinity to the structural demands of the form of a magazine itself.⁹² The medium and the genre were, not coincidentally, born simultaneously from the experiments of titles like *The Spectator*, with both working to find complementary methods of organizing and rendering attractive the flood of miscellaneous information released by the Enlightenment. As Michael Warner has succinctly observed: “The authors of ... British essays, like those of their American counterparts, devoted their labors to the elaboration of terms that would allow continuous, normal, normative publication. ... A normative routinization of print discourse lies behind the very idea of the serial essay.”⁹³ What the serial essay offered the magazines it appeared in, to put it another way, was a microcosmic version of the same effort to find a repeatable and coherent yet flexible and

innovative container for knowledge. The serial essay not only operates as a metonymic device in structural terms (hence the way in which the essayistic eidolon often served during the eighteenth century as an ostensible editor of or figurehead for the magazine he appeared in), it allows the magazine to carry out crucial procedures of self-observation, by incorporating a range of other genres under its umbrella in order to test and reflect on their appeal. It has often been easy to dismiss the serial essay as a marker of a kind of primitive seriality, as evidence of a still-emergent periodical culture that was unable to surmount the underlying discontinuities in its production and reception, but to take this line is to obscure endo-structural solutions under infrastructural challenges, and assume that the heavily narrative-oriented serialization practices of the nineteenth century became the only game in town. Resisting such a conclusion in order to recognize the broad spectrum of serial effects in play in a magazine like the *Atlantic* we might instead take up Matthew Garrett's point that "the reader of a serial periodical essay is carried along ... by habit: *habit*, not plot – or, we might say, *habit as plot*."⁹⁴ Seen through this lens, what a writer such as Oliver Wendell Holmes offers to the *Atlantic* is not so much the archaic residue of a mode of primitive seriality as a perennially useful mode of architectural seriality, a means of generating visibly linked blocks of text across disparate magazine issues irrespective of currently fashionable topics or particular suspense effects.

Such temporary topics or effects, after all, can only help a magazine survive across a finite number of issues, whereas what the magazine form ideally and inherently aims at is infinite continuation. The effort to mimic such an unending flow, and to approximate the quotidian regularity of habits, perhaps helps to explain why serial essays have so often adopted the discourse of conversation rather than identifying themselves with the more fixed affordances of the printed word. Whether through a self-conscious aspiration to the rhythms

of speech, the framing device of clubs and salons, or claims to be reporting overheard dialogue, serial essays frequently structure themselves around the virtues of what “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table” romanticizes as “a talk with the right listener.”⁹⁵ In carrying on this tradition, Holmes’s serials tellingly present the talk contained in their pages as merely partial glimpses of a ceaseless colloquy. “I was just going to say, when I was interrupted,” the very first line of the first number of “The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table,” from the very first issue of the *Atlantic*, begins, thereby rhetorically surmounting the absence of a preceding instalment in order to assert communicative continuity, as well as indicating that the inevitable interruption of the Autocrat’s talk at the end of each subsequent instalment is only a temporary inconvenience.⁹⁶ Indeed, there are few more crystalline examples of what James Mussell has called the “in our last” trope – a kind of “retrospective gesture” that “is uniquely connected to seriality, presupposing as it does a place from which to look backwards at a predecessor while implying that there is something more to come.”⁹⁷ The ability of such tropes to aid the reader in imagining that the magazine serial in question has always been around and always will be, and hence that one can be confident of picking up the conversation at any point, was evidently well understood by Holmes, who used them again and again in his serial essays following the bravura opening of “The Autocrat.” “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table,” for example, works a teasing variation on the theme by having one of the Poet’s interlocutors ask, extemporarily, in the first lines of the first instalment “You don’t know what your thoughts are going to be beforehand?” while the October 1872 instalment begins with the Poet harking back to the conversational style of a character named The Old Master, “whose words I have so frequently quoted.”⁹⁸

Yet while such rhetorical gestures are designed to reassure the reader that they are privy to some previous discussion, even when – as with the start of “The Autocrat” – they are

patently not, there is also a risk to this authorial feint. Readers, after all, might be unimpressed by the familiar style of Holmes's mode of address and feel the need to actually see what has been said in earlier conversations for themselves, or they might take the dispensation to dip in and out of the endless conversation as grounds to return to it far less often than the author would like. Thus, serial essays tend to expend a great deal of energy in trying to collar and corral their readers outside of their "in our last" moments. If one key difference between the serial essay and the essay series is the greater foregrounding of the narrator in the former, as we have already seen, then another key distinction lies in the serial essay's greater foregrounding of its audience. This often takes the form of the inclusion of (real and imagined) correspondence from readers, or the use of particular interlocutors as readerly stand-ins, but most pervasively perhaps it is apparent in the serial essay's explicit cultivation of the intimacy of speech. Holmes, for instance, offers a particularly fervent gesture in this direction in the opening lines of the second instalment of "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table": "I am going to take it for granted now and henceforth, in my report of what was said and what was to be seen at our table, that I have secured one good, faithful, loving reader, who never finds fault, who never gets sleepy over my pages, whom no critic can bully out of a liking for me, and to whom I am always safe in addressing myself."⁹⁹ As this idealized account of *The Poet's* reception might suggest, in the absence of the plot-led suspense mechanisms that the serial novel could rely on to more programmatically persuade readers to return for the next instalment, the serial essay had to self-consciously articulate its "affective bonds." The serial essay's observations of its reception, to put it another way, needed to be continually and explicitly present within the text itself. Because they are plot-driven, serial novels must have a fairly well-defined narrative sequence – they may stretch out their beginnings, middles, and ends to various degrees but these markers (at least until the birth of modernism) are ultimately needed. Serial essays, on the other hand, have no final

destination, and very often no internal direction, meaning they must recurrently situate the reader themselves in order to keep them on board. Such orientation is not always as florid as the example from “The Poet” I have just quoted, however. For in eschewing plot for habit serial essays like Holmes’s are able to tap into the rhythms of the everyday in a way that even realist novels, with their lingering affinity to dramatic plotting, cannot. As Holmes’s constant recourse to the setting of the “breakfast table” neatly indicates, he imagines his serial essays to be attuned to universally shared daily routines. The culinary metaphor is a common enough one in many nineteenth-century discussions of seriality, to be sure – *Harper’s* remarked in 1855, for example, that one of the virtues of the instalment fiction it was offering was that you could “breakfast on Thackeray, ... dine on Dickens, [and] tea and toast on Bulwer” – but with Holmes’s essays the average household’s regular gatherings are envisaged as the site which the serial text itself documents and from which it is produced.¹⁰⁰

A habit is, by definition, an intractably repetitive practice, and when the habitual infiltrates plotting it leads to the formulaic (a characteristic often assigned by critics to serial fiction), but any serial, and the magazine containing it, also needs flexibility and innovation in order to grow and survive. In the case of the serial essay its generic inclusivity and its explicit, ongoing self-observation offer this balancing openness to change. Indeed, because of its fostering of thematic discontinuity and adaptation, the serial essay can sometimes draw rather unexpected literary modes into the orbit of serialization’s procedures. Thus “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table” incorporates a Romantic poem divided into seven parts, “Wind Clouds and Star-Drifts,” which appeared at the end of each of its instalments in the middle part of its run, thereby directly violating Edgar Allan Poe’s influential dictum that “the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression” in a poem is dependent on “a distinct limit, as regards length, ... of a single sitting.”¹⁰¹ Reflecting this emphasis on lyric

concision, all five of the independent poems that were published in the October 1872 issue of the *Atlantic* were less than two pages long, and even those that focus on a dramatic personal event, like Marian Douglas's "The First Parting," emphasize mood and sensibility over character development. By distinct contrast, in an echo of Holmes's conceptualization of serial essays as a constant flow of social discourse whose part-endings are largely arbitrary (a very different notion of the eternal than the religious one Constance Fenimore Woolson offers in her poem "Ideal," from the October '72 issue), the Poet tellingly remarks at the end of the third helping of "Wind Clouds," "I may just as well stop here as anywhere, for there is more of the manuscript to come, and I can only give it in instalments."¹⁰² As Michael A. Weinstein has argued, one of Holmes's central concerns in "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table" is how "the structural-functional differentiation of society, including the scientific community, becomes hyper-specialized and loses a common perspective and discourse."¹⁰³ Thus the primary conceit of "Wind Clouds," that it is written by the character of the Young Astronomer, a fellow resident in the Poet's boarding house, and that it charts the Young Astronomer's growing engagement with literary humanism, indicates the fusion of disciplines that Holmes aspired to. The fact that "Wind Clouds" appears embedded within a serial essay also pointedly underlines the limits of such an ambition, though, for the dependence on and subordination to this other genre's miscellaneous format breaches the formal boundaries that Poe's successors were ever more successfully asserting "can never properly be overpassed in a poem."¹⁰⁴

Holmes's interest in the fusion of genres is also evident, and also now evidently ill-fated, in the way that *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table* seeks to infuse the serial essay with some of the structural dynamics of the novel. The Young Astronomer's psychological maturation across the course of "Wind Clouds and Star-Drifts" reflects his budding romance

with the character of the Young Girl, which eventually leads to their establishment as “a new double-star in the living firmament” at the end of the penultimate instalment.¹⁰⁵ Persistently deflected by the Poet’s various colloquies and the Young Astronomer’s metaphysical musings as it may be, this love story offers an enclosing plot that frames the typically open-ended margins of the serial essay. Such gestures toward narrativization are not that unusual in serial poems, the rarity of the latter notwithstanding. The only other serial poem to appear in the *Atlantic* before “Wind Clouds,” for instance, Arthur Hugh Clough’s “Amours de Voyage,” self-consciously draws on epistolary fiction in order to recount its tale of thwarted love and political turmoil in the form of a sequence of criss-crossing letters. The periodical essay, on the other hand, was a harder proposition when it came to the imposition of a binding plot since, as Amanpal Garcha has pointed out, its static eidolon and breadth of subject matter “often rendered narrative ‘seriality’ essentially impossible.”¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, Holmes managed to rework the genre sufficiently enough for William Dean Howells to argue that the *Breakfast-Table* writings were actually forms of what he called the “dramatized essay.”¹⁰⁷ Using the boarding house inhabited by the narrator to delimit the range of this eidolon’s interlocutors, and illustrating the development of a particular philosophical question through the emotional relationship between secondary characters, Holmes managed to build a more centripetal structure into his serial essays. This was particularly true of “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table,” in fact, which foregrounded its romance plot more insistently than its predecessors.¹⁰⁸ But if Holmes intended to harness something of the narrative compulsion and readerly loyalty that was offered by serial novels (and we should not forget that he also ventured into this field), the endeavour was ultimately a fruitless one. “How do I know I shall have a chance to open it again? How do I know that anybody will want it to be opened a second time?” Holmes asks at the conclusion of a December 1885 instalment of “The New Portfolio,” his final serial essay for the *Atlantic* – perhaps recognizing that the romantic novel

that took over its pages was inadequate to the task of successfully pulling attention away from other, less generically-mixed elements in the magazine's text-network.¹⁰⁹

III.

Casting our eye to one final component of the average literary magazine's text-network, the short story, we might here feel confident that we have a genre that was neither susceptible to internal instalment-division like the novel and the biography, or had to strenuously define its textual integrity in opposition to serialization like the essay and the poem. A short story is, after all, by almost any definition, formally discrete and concise, and carries with it the various assertions of aesthetic singularity that those qualities entail. As Brander Matthews influentially proclaimed in 1885, "the difference between a Novel and a Short story is a difference of kind. ... A true Short-story differs from the Novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression. ... The Short-story is not only not a chapter out of a Novel, or an incident or an episode extracted from a longer tale, but at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger or if it were incorporated into a more elaborate work."¹¹⁰ In some fundamental sense, then, it seems that the short story, unlike the poem or the essay, cannot be narratively extended without entirely losing its generic identity or materially partitioned without wholly abdicating its characteristic effects. Yet, if we turn to the pages of a nineteenth-century magazine like the *Atlantic* we find numerous serialized works of fiction that are categorizable as nothing other than short stories, among them Henry James's "Guest's Confession," a thirty-page tale that appeared in two separate instalments in October and November 1872. James alone, in fact, contributed half a dozen serialized short stories to the *Atlantic* between 1867 and 1891, as well as a slew of others to the *Galaxy*, the *Century*, *Scribner's*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, the *English Illustrated*

Magazine, *Longman's Magazine*, the *Universal Review*, and *Harper's Weekly* during the same period. These titles cover the breadth of the 'quality' market on both sides of the Atlantic ocean, but serialized short fiction was also ubiquitous in cheaper, mass periodicals at the end of the nineteenth century. The building of an extensive syndication infrastructure for fiction in both Britain and America from the 1860s on, for example, supplied a growing demand for serialized short stories in the newspaper industry, where the brevity of the genre better suited the smaller page count of the individual newspaper issue and the journalistic predisposition to a faster turnover of content.¹¹¹ Among periodical editors on both sides of the cultural divide there was, in effect, a recognition by the turn of the twentieth century that the appeal of serial novels, which took a long time to produce and could only be incorporated one or two at a time, might be readily supplemented through the serialization of short tales. As William Dean Howells remarked of the business of making American magazines in a *Harper's* article from 1887: "The serial novels they must have, of course; but rather more of course they must have short stories, and by operation of the law of supply and demand, the short stories, abundant in quantity and excellent in quality, are forthcoming because they are wanted."¹¹²

Seen from this perspective, the serialization of short stories is most likely to appear as a crudely commercialistic imposition on the genre, an instance of exactly the kind of capitulation to market forces that an emergent generation of professional critics and university teachers would work so hard to protect "literature" from. At the very least the almost complete dearth of twentieth-century scholarship on serialized short fiction suggests that this mode of publishing the genre is a formal aberration that lies somewhere outside its core definitional qualities. The indispensable generic characteristics of the short story and the practices of serial dissemination are not necessarily antithetical forces, though. Many editors

surely cut up the short fiction they published in fairly arbitrary ways, but as the demand for serialized short stories became more routinized and explicit writers were equally able to shape their work to fit the dynamics of the instalment. James, for example, was characteristically careful about crafting his narratives when it came to the briefer serials that the *Atlantic* solicited from him. Thus “Guest’s Confession,” which is subtitled as being “In Two Parts,” breaks its opening number at the crucial point where the narrator recognizes that he is in love with the sister of a man, John Guest, whose private humiliation he has earlier been complicit in. That this turning point is primarily represented as an epoch in the narrator’s “state of mind,” rather than lingered on in terms of Guest’s inevitable rejection of his prospective brother-in-law, tells us something important about serialized short fiction that is true not just for the typically inward-looking work of James.¹¹³ For we might argue that psychological suspense is more central to the short story in serial form than the plot suspense familiar from the novel-in-parts. Instalment stories could certainly accommodate versions of the conventionally plotted suspense narrative - Poe’s pioneering detective tale “The Mystery of Marie Roget” came out in two halves in *Snowden’s Ladies’ Companion*, for instance, despite all his concerns with the ‘unity of impression’ - but the temper of serialized short fiction was often realist in nature. This tendency, which threads back to the earliest experiments in the form (*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, which helped to first popularize short serials, ran ‘regionalist’ tales-in-instalment by the likes of James Hogg and John Galt alongside Gothic fare in the 1820s) was clearly on the rise by the end of the nineteenth century, as realist fiction became hegemonic in certain literary circles.¹¹⁴

Some advocates of the style were duly wary of serialization, suspecting that its traditional links to sensationalist subject matter and its apparent emphasis on narrative drama conflicted with the subtler effects they associated with realism. Reflecting on the book

version of James's *The Tragic Muse* in September 1890, the *Atlantic*, for one, noted that while the novel's appearance in its own pages had allowed readers to "delight in the brilliancy of the group of portraits which it presents," they who "now take up the two comely volumes in which the serial is gathered" would find "their attention will be held by what may be called the spiritual plot of the tale."¹¹⁵ As my earlier discussion of biographical serialization has already suggested, however, the staggered publication of a text was not uncondusive to the kind of incremental character development, and attendant shifts in consciousness, that realist fiction was invested in. In some respects, the limited potential to develop plot lines and establish extended and antagonistic relationships for characters in the short story pushed its practitioners toward realism's emphasis on interiority, but these practitioners also found the short form allowed them to more actively utilize serialization to mark out the literary values they wanted to explore. Tellingly "Guest's Confession" has all the ingredients for a more sensationalist narrative – predicated as it is on an epistolary confession of guilt that circulates between different characters and whose revelation would be ruinous to its signer – yet James unmistakably neglects this plot device at the end of the first instalment in order to focus on what the narrator calls "an impression of a period of vague sentimental ferment and trouble, rather than of definite utterance and action."¹¹⁶ In refusing to spring the elaborately arranged trap of the incriminating letter, even at the end of the story, James pointedly signals his desire to move serialization and its mechanisms away from the familiar readerly compulsion of the novelistic cliffhanger. Seen from this angle, the "serial story," as the *Century* observed in an 1885 article within which James is namechecked, was being revolutionized: "The hungry curiosity to follow the events, discover the plot, and swallow the book whole, which belonged to the world's younger days and long nights of novel-reading, is turned into the discriminating attention of a patient public, whose interest in

the story does not preclude the study of underlying problems presented in a lifelike and artistic way.”¹¹⁷

Such was the emerging appeal of the serialized short story, for editors and readers alike, that by the final decade of the nineteenth century it was beginning to overtake the serial novel as a central node of the quality magazine’s text-network. “There will be no long serial story, but in its place will appear several short stories running three or more issues, as well as single-number stories,” the *Atlantic* announced of its contents for the coming year in December 1895, a move echoed, around the same time, by rival titles like the *Century* and *Lippincott’s*.¹¹⁸ For the *Atlantic*, this decision was motivated by the then-editor Horace Scudder’s dissatisfaction with the serialized historical romances that were currently in vogue, which he had come to feel were straying too far from the standards of serious “literature” to be further encouraged, while other, more demotically-inclined, quality magazines framed their retreat from the serial novel rather differently, as a concession to popular reading habits.¹¹⁹ Thus *Lippincott’s*, which had published Brander Matthews’s “The Philosophy of the Short-Story” only a couple of years earlier, remarked of its reorientation toward briefer serials in 1886 that “magazine-subscribers themselves, especially the male portion, are beginning to weary of the serial reading of fiction. They are too hurried, too busy, they read too much and forget too easily.”¹²⁰ In both cases, though, the consequence was a demotion of the serial novel that foreshadowed the eventual expulsion of the form from American periodical culture as a whole. The triumph of the short story was neither immediate nor complete at the turn of the twentieth century. The *Atlantic*, for example, pretty quickly reintroduced extended serial fiction and continued publishing it right down until the 1950s, well after other similar titles – including its equally long-running competitor *Harper’s* – had ceased the practice. But the *Atlantic* only persisted in this vein because, to a considerable

degree, it was slowly ceding the high cultural territory it once occupied in response to changes in definitions of the “literary” to which the short story was central. The editorship of Bliss Perry, which stretched from 1899 to 1909, can be taken as a watershed moment.¹²¹ Perry, who taught English at Princeton University before taking over the reins at the magazine, and who by the end of his editorial tenure was also simultaneously teaching at Harvard, was the last man to take charge of the *Atlantic* who could straddle the growing division between literary academia and the literary market. In the decades that followed, those at the helm of the *Atlantic* were all professional periodical editors, who turned the magazine into a middlebrow publication that increasingly subordinated both serial fiction and stand-alone short stories to journalism until the latter entirely took over, while university-based literary critics turned their attentions to scholarly monographs and academic journals.

These newly discipline-minded critics set about erasing the presence of serialization from the texts they considered, just as many authors themselves started to find the practice of instalment-writing increasingly déclassé.¹²² Such powerful acts of cultural differentiation, which helped to further hierarchize the American magazine market by corralling titles still deploying serial fiction into the domain of the pseudo-literary or sub-literary, in a sense relied on the materially unified short story as the paradigm of what the New Critics called “the logic of the whole,” a “total structure” that could be extended to interpretations of the novel, in the process writing off the latter’s serialistic manifestations.¹²³ The rise to dominance in the magazine text-network that underpinned this paradigmatic status was, as I have already suggested, by no means smooth nor swift. Admitting that “the world will never see long novels again as good as those of ... Thackeray” in November 1897, the *Atlantic* nonetheless concluded that “short stories and little poems” are “two classes in literary art [that] lack seriousness, if considered as an end in themselves. They are characteristic of a tentative ...

age.”¹²⁴ The short story, then, like its counterpart, the non-narrative poem, had to stake a claim to autonomy, both within and without the confines of the magazine, a claim that in each case might be said to have only come to fruition under the guise of modernism. Contrary to the widespread assumption of many scholars, including those in the field of serial studies, modernism did not completely forgo the serial novel – one need think only of *Ulysses*’s instalment-run in *The Little Review* – even if the modernist novel’s characteristically radical openness of meaning and disregard for plot did subvert traditional serial effects.¹²⁵ But in the realm of short fiction part-publication in the mould of “Guest’s Confession” was largely eliminated. Eliminated, if not unincorporated, we might add. For as Frank Kelleter notes, “once we shift our attention to networked cultural practices, seriality will become visible in ostensibly nonserialised textual structures as well, precisely because these structures can now be investigated as (inter)actions that have been consolidated in domain-specific forms.”¹²⁶ Accordingly, it might be argued that while the short story’s physical serialization was erased under modernism the endogenous lessons the genre had learnt from serialization actually lingered on – in the form of the “epiphany” moment pioneered in a tale like “Guest’s Confession” – just as modernism’s establishment of the short story cycle as a respectable mode drew on the characteristics of increasingly defunct genres like the essay series (in its use of geography or theme as a point of connection between different individuals) or the serial essay (in its use of a fairly static, recurring central character who threads together disparate events).

Charting these specific debts and transformations is beyond the scope of the present article, but in trying to articulate the intersections between different serial genres in the late nineteenth-century periodical, their struggle to achieve dominance in the *Atlantic*’s text-network, and the influence of changing ideas of “literature” on this process of differentiation

and re-differentiation, I hope to have laid down an interpretive model that could be pursued in this chronological direction, as well as in many others. The challenge for seriality studies now is to take the already insightful conceptualizations of theorists like Kelleter and further expand them by considering how magazines from across the social spectrum have negotiated and defined cultural prestige, through a range of genres, and in relation to a range of other media, from the triple-decker to Twitter. My exploration of the diverse parts of the October 1872 issue of the *Atlantic*, and the internal and external links that they both forge and sometimes try to interrupt, shows how the model of serialization as a self-regulating, evolutionary process being developed by media studies scholars can be applied and refined through an engagement with its longer historical trajectory. The further prosecution of this intellectual project will inevitably need to toggle between individual magazine issues and more extended texts and trends, as I have done here, but in doing so it can perhaps get at that peculiar combination of impersonal self-observation and agential collaboration, of system and network, that is a periodical's defining trait, even in the absence of explicitly serialized texts.

¹ "Recent American Fiction," *The Atlantic Monthly* 64, no.378 (July 1889), 122-29, 122.

² On the rise and fall of part-publication see John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 87-106.

³ On the establishment and development of *All the Year Round* and the *Cornhill* see Catherine Delafield, *Serialization and the Novel in Mid-Victorian Magazines* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁴ In the United States the part-publication of fiction, where it did happen, remained associated with working-class culture. For one important example see Michael Winship, "In Search of Monk Hall: A Publishing History of George Lippard's *The Quaker City*," *Nineteenth-Century*

Literature 70, no.1 (2015), 132-149. Useful discussions of the American ‘quality’ market and its major titles include: Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Mark Noonan, *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2010); Janina Rojek, *‘A Feast That Lasts a Year or Two’: Writing, Reading, and Editing Serials in the Quality Monthlies* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019). On the development of the mass magazine market see Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996) and Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, 1880-1910* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁵ “Recent American Fiction,” 122.

⁶ “The Serial Story and its Shrinkage,” *Harper’s Weekly* 47, no.2453 (26 December, 1903), 2090.

⁷ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77; William Hazlitt, “The Periodical Press,” *The Edinburgh Review* 38, no.5 (May 1823), 349-78, 370; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 115.

⁸ “Recent American Fiction,” 122.

⁹ See Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), Carol A. Martin, *George Eliot’s Serial Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), and Patricia Okker, *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003).

¹⁰ For representative examples of this trend see the essays collected in *Serialization in Popular Culture*, eds. Rob Allen and Thisj van den Berg (New York: Routledge, 2014) and *Media of Serial Narrative*, ed. Frank Kelleter (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017).

¹¹ Frank Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality," in *Media of Serial Narrative*, 7-34, 14, 18.

¹² Ibid., 28.

¹³ Ibid., 18. One of the issues preventing magazines being more fully integrated into the media studies approach may be a long-standing tendency to ignore their status *as a medium*, a tendency exacerbated by the historical dominance of print. For useful corrections to this blind spot see Faye Hammill, Paul Hjartarson and Hannah McGregor, "Introducing Magazines and/as Media: The Aesthetics and Politics of Serial Form," *English Studies in Canada* 41, no.1 (2015), 1-18, and the special issue of *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 6, no.2 (2015) on "Magazines and/as Media: Periodical Studies and the Question of Disciplinarity."

¹⁴ Kelleter, "Five Ways," 26. For discussions of the magazine-as-network that draw on Latourian theory see: John Fagg, Matthew Pethers and Robin Vandome, "Introduction: Networks and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical," *American Periodicals* 23, no.2 (2013): 93-104; Nathan K. Hensley, "Network: Andrew Lang and the Distributed Agencies of Literary Production," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 48, no.3 (2015): 359-382; and Sabine Sielke, "Network and Seriality: Conceptualizing (Their) Connection," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 60, no.1 (2015): 81-95.

¹⁵ Kelleter, "Five Ways," 9.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15. Luhmann's model of the development of modern society argues that it is made up of various subfields of knowledge which have increasingly defined themselves as autonomous and self-monitoring since the eighteenth century, thereby allowing highly complex processes and interactions to be parcelled out into more manageable units. Luhmann

most fully addresses literature's place in this pattern of intellectual differentiation in *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), which positions the aesthetic program of Romanticism as a key initial manifestation of a growing tendency to conceive of "art" as an independent, organically-structured cultural realm. For a detailed attempt to apply Luhmann's theories to nineteenth-century American literature and painting see Phillip Schweighauser's *Beautiful Deceptions: European Aesthetics, the Early American Novel, and Illusionist Art* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸ Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, trans. Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 144.

¹⁹ Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 185.

²¹ Luhmann, *Differentiation of Society*, 230.

²² My choice of this issue as a case study is relatively arbitrary since, as I note below, there is a high level of serialized matter in the *Atlantic Monthly* throughout the nineteenth century. The October 1872 issue is particularly useful, though, because it features each of the main literary genres that were serialized in the *Atlantic* during its early years, not all of which were serialized in every issue.

²³ Kelleter, "Five Ways," 9, 12.

²⁴ Sedgwick's *The Atlantic Monthly* offers the most comprehensive account of the magazine's engagement with and definition of "high culture." For a broader account of this sphere that also happens to concentrate on several writers who wrote for the *Atlantic* see Robert Dawidoff, *The Genteel Tradition and the Sacred Rage: High Culture Vs Democracy in Adams, James and Santayana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). The classic account of the development of "high culture" in mid-nineteenth century America is

Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

²⁵ For a good overview of this strand of the periodical market see Lori Merish, "Story Papers," in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: US Popular Print Culture, 1860-1920*, ed. Christine Bold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43-62.

²⁶ Rojek, 'A Feast', 5.

²⁷ W. H. Bishop, "Story-Paper Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly* 44, no.263 (September 1879): 383-93, 389.

²⁸ De Mille's work is now entirely forgotten with the partial exception of a parody of the genre of fantastic travel stories that Poe had helped to initiate in the mid-nineteenth century, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, which was serialized in *Harper's Weekly* in 1888. For a useful analysis of the comic intentions of this novel which throws light on De Mille's parodic style in "A Comedy of Terrors" see Gwendolyn Guth, "Reading Frames of Reference: The Satire of Exegesis in James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*," *Canadian Literature* 145, no.1 (1995): 39-59.

²⁹ James De Mille, "A Comedy of Terrors," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.189 (September 1872), 290-302, 300; De Mille, "A Comedy," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.190 (October 1872), 438-49, 442. For a full account of Howells's tenure at the Atlantic see Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 113-159.

³⁰ Harriet E. Prescott, "Charles Reade," *The Atlantic Monthly* 14, no.82 (August 1864), 137-49, 142.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

³² See Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 91.

³³ The standard account of the sensation novel's path to respectability in Britain is Deborah Wynne's *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001).

³⁴ "Belle Lettres," *The Westminster Review* 30, no.7 (July 1866), 268-80, 270.

³⁵ Ibid. On the tradition of popular magazine sensationalism in nineteenth-century America see Mary Noel, *Villains Galore: The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

³⁶ "Mr. Hardhack on the Sensational in Life and Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly* 26, no.154 (August 1870), 195-99, 196; Bishop, "Story-Paper Literature," 390.

³⁷ As the magazine's then-editor William Dean Howells remarked of Bayard Taylor's *The Echo Club*, which he had recently serialized, in "Some New Books of Poetry," *The Atlantic Monthly* 39, no.231 (January 1877): 87-94: "A parody is really ... the finest sort of criticism, while it does not assume to describe or limit the genius upon which it plays. ... It assembles and refreshes the reader's impressions, and gives the author a more distinct and tangible form" (92).

³⁸ Nicholas Dames, "On Not Close Reading: The Prolonged Excerpt as Victorian Critical Protocol," in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, ed. Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 11-26, 21, 17.

³⁹ For more on Hawthorne's ultimately futile efforts to finish a serial novel for the *Atlantic* at the end of his career see Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 88-91.

⁴⁰ G. P. Lathrop, "History of Hawthorne's Last Romance," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.190 (October 1872), 452-60, 452.

⁴¹ "Recent Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.190 (October 1872), 487-98, 495.

⁴² Lathrop, "History," 453.

⁴³ James Parton, "Jefferson American Minister in France," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.190 (October 1872), 405-24, 424.

⁴⁴ James De Mille, "A Comedy of Terrors," 450.

⁴⁵ Parton, "Jefferson American Minister in France," 424.

⁴⁶ I take the term "serial figure" from Ruth Mayer and Shane Denson's "Spectral Seriality: The Sights and Sounds of Count Dracula," in *Media of Serial Narrative*, 108-124, where they use it to refer to "a type of stock character populating the popular-cultural imagination of modernity – a 'flat' and recurring figure subject to one or more media changes over the course of its career" (108).

⁴⁷ James Parton, *The Life and Times of Aaron Burr* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1858), vii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vii, viii, x.

⁴⁹ Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking," 12.

⁵⁰ "Mutual Friend," *The Athenaeum* 73, no.1983 (28 October 1865), 569-70, 570.

⁵¹ Gail Hamilton, "The New School of Biography," *The Atlantic Monthly* 14, no.85 (November 1864), 579-89, 584.

⁵² "Editor's Literary Record," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 43, no.257 (October 1871), 781-85, 781.

⁵³ Tim Lanzendörfer, *The Professionalization of the American Magazine: Periodicals, Biography, and Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), 14.

⁵⁴ For a full account of Parton's career as a biographer, and his publishing practices, see Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 220-245.

⁵⁵ On Wilkie Collins's publishing travails in the latter part of his career see Graham Law's "Wilkie in the Weeklies: The Serialization and Syndication of Collins's Late Novels," *Victorian Periodical Reviews* 30, no.3 (1997), 244-269.

⁵⁶ Jared Sparks, "Mr. Wirt's Life of Patrick Henry," *North American Review* 6, no.18 (March 1818), 293-324, 294.

⁵⁷ Ibid. On the rise of historical societies and their impact on nineteenth-century American literature see Lindsay Di Cuirici, *Colonial Revivals: The Nineteenth-Century Lives of Early American Books* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁵⁸ Qtd. in Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 255.

⁵⁹ "Aaron Burr," *The Atlantic Monthly* 1, no.5 (March 1858), 597-614, 597, 598.

⁶⁰ "Reviews and Literary Notices," *The Atlantic Monthly* 14, no.83 (September 1864), 383-91, 384.

⁶¹ "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 104, no.619 (December 1901), 167-70, 168.

⁶² Richard Watson Gilder, "To Our Readers – In Confidence," *The Century Magazine* 33, no.2 (December 1886), 318.

⁶³ "Magazine Novels," *The Galaxy* 7, no.1 (January 1869), 130-32, 130.

⁶⁴ "Editor's Literary Record," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 50, no.295 (December 1874), 136-40, 137.

⁶⁵ Mark W. Turner, "The Unruliness of Serials in the Nineteenth Century (and the Digital Age)," in *Serialization and Popular Culture*, 11-32, 22.

⁶⁶ On chapter construction in Dickens see Archibald Coolidge, Jr., *Charles Dickens as Serial Novelist* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1961). On the instalment as a formal device see Matthew Pethers, "Serialization and the Narrative Scales of the Literary Magazine," in *The Routledge Companion to the Literary Magazine*, ed. Tim Lanzendörfer (New York: Routledge, 2021), forthcoming.

⁶⁷ Kelleter, "Five Ways," 17.

⁶⁸ "Recent Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly* 34, no.201 (July 1874), 102-16, 110.

⁶⁹ “Recent American Fiction,” 122.

⁷⁰ J. S. Tunison, “The Book Review, Past and Present,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 84, no.503 (September 1899), 311-20, 319, 320.

⁷¹ On literary reviewing in the early republic in general see Harry H. Clark, “Changing Attitudes in Early American Literary Criticism,” in *The Development of American Literary Criticism*, ed. Floyd Stovall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 15-73, and on Brown’s role in its development see Michael Cody, *Charles Brockden Brown and the Literary Magazine: Cultural Journalism in the Early American Republic* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004).

⁷² On quarterly reviews and their outmoding see Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 1-35.

⁷³ On the increasing institutionalization of literature in English departments at the end of the nineteenth century see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Kermit Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Memory of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

⁷⁴ On Romantic historians and their literary methods see David Levin, *History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959). On the increasing scientification of history see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁷⁵ William Preston Johnston, “The Definition of History,” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), 45-53, 52.

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- ⁷⁶ On the rise of academic historical journals see Margaret F. Stieg, *The Origin and Development of Scholarly Historical Periodicals* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986).
- ⁷⁷ Frank Moore Colby, "Sloane's 'Napoleon'," *The Bookman* 4, no.6 (February 1897), 551-53, 551.
- ⁷⁸ William Milligan Sloane, "History and Democracy," *The American Historical Review* 1, no.1 (October 1895), 1-23, 1, 11, 18.
- ⁷⁹ See Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 84-85.
- ⁸⁰ James Parton, "Cincinnati," *The Atlantic Monthly* 20, no.118 (August 1867), 229-46, 230.
- ⁸¹ W. J. Stillman, "Journalism and Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly* 68, no.309 (November 1891), 687-95, 688, 689.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 691, 692.
- ⁸³ See Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 109-58.
- ⁸⁴ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 29, no.171 (January 1872), 90-105, 91.
- ⁸⁵ On the early history of periodical idolons see Manushag Powell, *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2012).
- ⁸⁶ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 1, no.5 (March 1858), 614-25, 614.
- ⁸⁷ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," 90.
- ⁸⁸ Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele, *Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1982), 197.
- ⁸⁹ "More Words About Shelley," *The Atlantic Monthly* 5, no.33 (July 1860), 59-66, 60.
- ⁹⁰ Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking," 13.

⁹¹ Ouida, "English Novels," *The Times* 97, no.30523 (2 June 1882), 3.

⁹² On early serial essays in America see Richard Squibbs, *Urban Enlightenment and the Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay: Transatlantic Retrospects* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

⁹³ Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 66.

⁹⁴ Matthew Garrett, *Episodic Poetics: Politics and Literary Form After the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 50.

⁹⁵ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 29, no.172 (February 1872), 224-36, 224. On conversation and the early periodical see Iona Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2005). On Holmes's career-long engagement with conversation as a literary model see Peter Gibian, *Oliver Wendell Holmes and the Culture of Conversation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁹⁶ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 1, no.1 (November 1857), 48-57, 48.

⁹⁷ James Mussell, "Repetition; Or, 'In Our Last'," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 48, no.3 (2015), 343-58, 345.

⁹⁸ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," 90; Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.180 (October 1872), 426-37, 426.

⁹⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," 224.

¹⁰⁰ "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 12, no.67 (December 1855), 123-24, 127. On the intersections between seriality and domesticity see Maria Damkjaer, *Time, Domesticity and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).

¹⁰¹ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Graham's Magazine* 28, no.4 (April 1846), 163-67, 163.

¹⁰² Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.177 (July 1872), 98-110, 110.

¹⁰³ Michael A. Weinstein, *The Imaginative Prose of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 117.

¹⁰⁴ Poe, "The Philosophy," 163.

¹⁰⁵ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Poet at the Breakfast-Table," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.181 (November 1872), 513-26, 526. For a full account of "Wind Clouds" see Weinstein, *The Imaginative Prose*, 138-41.

¹⁰⁶ Amanpal Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34.

¹⁰⁷ William Dean Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintances* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), 154.

¹⁰⁸ On the evolution of the "Breakfast-Table" essay series see Weinstein, *The Imaginative Prose*, passim.

¹⁰⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The New Portfolio," *The Atlantic Monthly* 56, no.338 (December 1885), 836-47, 847. By the 1880s 'quality' magazines were routinely eschewing idolons for the voices of their real editors, and dispensing with single-authored serial essays in favour of multi-authored forums like the *Atlantic's* "Contributors' Club" section, which started in January 1877. Such endeavours, which reworked the more elite "club" metaphor that had been inherited from eighteenth-century serial essays into a far more open-ended involvement on the part of reader-writers, and which sacrificed the serial essay's meditations on abstract social concepts for more journalistic matter, effectively pared the serial essay of its already minimal claims to continuity.

¹¹⁰ Brander Matthews, "The Philosophy of the Short-Story," *Lippincott's Magazine* 36, no.10 (October 1885), 366-74, 366.

¹¹¹ On short stories and syndication see Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000) and Charles Johanningsmeier, *Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace: The Role of Newspaper Syndicates in America, 1860-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹¹² William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 74, no. 342 (February 1887), 482-85, 484.

¹¹³ Henry James, "Guest's Confession," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.180 (October 1872), 385-403, 398.

¹¹⁴ On early serialized short fiction see Tim Killick, *British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Tale* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 22-38.

¹¹⁵ "The Tragic Muse," *The Atlantic Monthly* 66, no.395 (September 1890), 419-22, 419.

¹¹⁶ Henry James, "Guest's Confession," *The Atlantic Monthly* 30, no.181 (November 1872), 566-83, 566.

¹¹⁷ Charlotte Porter, "The Serial Story," *The Century Magazine* 30, no.5 (September 1885), 812. [812-813]

¹¹⁸ "The Atlantic Monthly," *Scribner's Magazine* 18, no.1 (July 1895), vi. For a detailed account of the shift from serials to short stories in the American magazine see Thomas Lloyd Vranken, *Literary Experiments in Magazine Publishing: Beyond Serialization* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

¹¹⁹ See Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 224-26.

¹²⁰ "Book-Talk," *Lippincott's Magazine* 30, no.11 (November 1886), 554.

¹²¹ For a full account of Perry's tenure see Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 275-318.

¹²² Henry James's reputation in fact offers a test case in the erasure of serialization from twentieth-century accounts of nineteenth-century literature, both at his own hand, as with the notions of literary 'wholeness' that he emphasized in his prefaces to the New York Edition (1907-9) of his collected works, and at the hand of others, as with disciples like Percy Lubbock who declared in his influential *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960) that the "image of the book" which the author had in mind when writing should take priority over those methods of reading and interpretation "directed at certain fragments of the book" (3). It remains the case that despite James's prolific serialization of his work the majority of the large body of scholarship on him ignores this. For a notable exception see Rachel Ihara's "'Rather Rude Jolts': Henry James, Serial Novels, and the Art of Fiction," *Henry James Review* 31, no.2 (2010): 188-206.

¹²³ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc., 1959), xii-xiii.

¹²⁴ J. S. Tunison, "The Coming Literary Revival," *The Atlantic Monthly* 80, no.381 (November 1898), 694-701, 698.

¹²⁵ For a detailed argument in favour of the supposed incompatibility between modernism and serialization see Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 229-74. For a useful case study of modernist serializing see Clare Hutton, *Serial Encounters: Ulysses and the Little Review* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). It is worth noting that literary serialization continued, much more sporadically, in the late twentieth century. For a perceptive analysis of one well-known example from the 1980s see Robyn Warhol's "Queering the Marriage Plot: How Serial Form Works in Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*," in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press), 229-48.

¹²⁶ Kelleter, "Five Ways," 14.