

# Profiling the Heroic Through Magazines of the Victorian Period

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# Introduction

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The hero has often been rejected, exaggerated, exploited, scorned, but the idea remains, the idea that there are heights to be reached in courage and commitment which are admirable and inspiring. (Calder, ix)

This essay introduces the database for a research project analysing the discourse of the heroic in periodicals for the “common” reader in Victorian Britain.<sup>1</sup> The essay sketches some overall results of the project, and the database makes bibliographical and analytical data available for further use by other scholars.<sup>2</sup>

The database can be accessed via [heroics-in-periodicals.ub.uni-freiburg.de](http://heroics-in-periodicals.ub.uni-freiburg.de)

The research project was undertaken under the premise that general-interest periodicals give insight into *popular* concepts of heroes and heroic behaviour and the way they were discussed in the wider public sphere of Victorian society. As will be seen, the Victorians approached their heroes with an ambivalence that seems to anticipate the divided opinions about the heroic in the twenty-first century: Ideas about heroic figures and actions were diverse, contested, and sometimes contradictory. The Victorians honoured heroes, but they also saw them with scepticism and even suspicion. Their attitudes towards the heroic oscillated between disenchantment and a desire to be (re-)enchanted.

After 1850, Victorian society experienced a phase of accelerated mediatisation, especially on the print market. The Victorians were immersed in their mass media, which had become “the inescapable ideological and subliminal environment of the modern world. The press, in all its manifestations, became during the Victorian period the context within which people lived and worked and thought, and from which they derived their [...] sense of the outside world” (Wolff and Shattock, xiv–xv). And more and more people did have access to the press. As Richard Altick writes in his seminal study of *The English Common Reader*:

The reading public studied in this book is the one composed of what the Victorians were fond of calling “the million”. It is *not* the relatively small, intellectually and socially superior audience for which most of the great nineteenth-century authors wrote – the readers of the quarterly reviews, the people whom writers like Macaulay, the Brontës, Meredith, George Eliot, and John Stuart Mill had in mind. Here we are concerned primarily with the experience of that overwhelmingly more numerous portion of the English people who became day-by-day readers for the first time in this period, as literacy spread and printed matter became cheaper. The “common reader” [...] may be a member of the working class, or he may belong to the ever expanding bourgeoisie. [...] [N]ot until the nineteenth century did the appetite for print permeate both classes to the extent that it became a major social phenomenon. (6–7)

In particular, the second half of the nineteenth century was a phase when the market for periodicals flourished and when periodicals were perceived and discussed as a new medium with special social and cultural impact. “Nineteenth-Century Britain”, claim Jerry and Rosemary VanArsdel, “was uniquely the age of the periodical” (7), and Altick writes:

Great as was the increase in book production between 1800 and 1900, the expansion of the periodical industry was greater still. This was only natural, for of all forms of reading matter, periodicals – including newspapers – are best adapted for the needs of a mass audience. They can be produced and sold much more cheaply than books. They appeal to the millions of men and women who consider the reading of a whole book too formidable a task even to be attempted. (Altick, 318)

Before overall results from the project are presented, the following sections first address the understanding of heroes and the heroic, both in general and for the Victorian period, and introduce the medium of the periodical in more detail.

## 1. Heroic Figures and Concepts

All cultures seem to have, and perhaps need, a heroic imaginary – an assemblage of ideas about heroic figures and patterns of heroic behaviour. Such imaginaries are in flux: Their constellations vary across periods and cultures; they are subject to processes of negotiation and re-negotiation, of heroisation, de- and re-heroisation. For this reason, concepts of the heroic and the figures through whom they are embodied are best conceived as dynamic figurations. Such figurations accommodate new ideas about the heroic, its meanings and functions, but they also preserve traditions that are adapted and re-configured for present needs. As the historian Geoffrey Cubitt states: “The heroic is not a realm of fixed and timeless meanings, but one of changing definitions and shifting constructions, operating within and through the apparent regularities of heroic style and language” (Cubitt, 4). Universalist approaches to the heroic, such as Joseph Campbell’s “monomyth”, or some semiotic studies (Taha, Alkonin) – are limited to very basic structures of heroic types and “journeys” that are of limited value for more specific analysis. By contrast, cognitivist models, such as prototype analysis, emphasise that “heroes should be viewed as an inherently fuzzy and complex phenomenon that involves many elements that show a family resemblance to one another rather than one unifying feature” (Kinsella et al., 115).<sup>3</sup> “Dense” descriptions of the heroic typically aim to elaborate the specific qualities or features of heroic configurations and acknowledge that the borderlines between heroes, counter-heroes (villains, rogues, criminals), anti-heroes (who lack heroic qualities) and other figures of exceptionality (such as saints) are porous and dependent on specific cultural interpretation.

At the same time, what all the historically and culturally variant concepts of the heroic seem to have in common is the fact that they mark, and sometimes challenge, the

boundaries which societies draw between the realms of the ordinary and the extraordinary, between social norm and norm transgression, or between the profane and the sacred (see Giesen). It is this liminality which also seems to imbue heroic figures with a heightened significance and affective quality. Their existence is, as Cubitt writes, “endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment” (Cubitt, 3). Heroes project superiority, excellence and exceptionality over common human existence. They can provide “psychological resources to people” (Kinsella et al., 114), indicate human potentials (Brombert, 11–12), or function as a focus of collective identities and shared cultural meanings. They can stabilise the social order, but also pose a risk to it because they are excessive, transgressive and rebellious. Interpretations of one and the same heroic figure may change over time and be completely reversed: from positive hero to villain, or from hero to victim. In a manner that “attracts us and entrances us” (Allison/Goethals, 65), heroes are perceived both as useful and disturbing. An analysis of societies and cultures through the lens of their heroes and heroisations indicates dominant, resistant and emerging “structures of feeling”, in Raymond Williams’s terms, and these structures are embedded in larger frameworks of class, gender and sexuality, as well as race and ethnicity.

## 2. Victorian Attitudes Towards the Heroic

It has been acknowledged that concepts of the heroic were central to the Victorian cultural and social imaginary.<sup>4</sup> To Walter Houghton, the heroic appeared to respond to “some of the deepest needs and problems of the age” (Houghton, 310), offering ersatz belief in times of religious uncertainty,<sup>5</sup> orientation in face of rapid change, and an antidote to the perception that society was increasingly inclined towards the mass and mediocrity. It could also, as Juliette Atkinson points out, draw attention “away from the mercantile spirit of the age” (Atkinson, 48). Victorian culture showed great respect for national heroes (dead or alive), honoured heroism in military and civilian forms (see Smith; Price), and represented heroes in all its media: paintings and monuments, the theatre, public lectures and, of course, the many products of the Victorian print market. And yet, following Carlyle,<sup>6</sup> historians of Victorian culture have also diagnosed a “post-heroic” note. To George Levine, “heroism in these good old days had about it a very modern quality of desperation” and even “the most overtly heroic literature” produced “at best, problematic heroes” (48, 50). Ian Ousby finds that the Victorians were estranged “from an ideal that served their forefathers long and faithfully” but did not reject it: “instead of dropping the word [hero] from their vocabulary, they use it with an almost obsessive frequency that no other age in English culture has ever come close to rivalling. They make heroism over to their own needs, with mixed feelings of complacency and disappointment” (152–53). How the heroic could be made over to suit new social realities was shown by Samuel Smiles. In *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (1859, expanded 1866), and in his many

biographies of engineers and men of business, Smiles offered a democratic re-interpretation of the heroic. To Smiles, “the spirit of self-help” was “exhibited in the energetic action of individuals” (Smiles, 20), and the individual men (and very few women) he called “heroes” embodied values and virtues held high by the middle classes – industry, a sense of duty, piety and perseverance – while they would often come from lowly origins:

Though only the generals’ names may be remembered in the history of any great campaign, it has been in great measure through the individual valour and heroism of the privates that victories have been won. And life, too, is “a soldiers’ battle”, – men in the ranks having in all times been amongst the greatest of workers. Many are the lives of men unwritten, which have nevertheless as powerfully influenced civilization and progress as the more fortunate Great whose names are recorded in biography. Even the humblest person, who sets before his fellows an example of industry, sobriety, and upright honesty of purpose in life, has a present as well as a future influence upon the well-being of his country; for his life and character pass unconsciously into the lives of others, and propagate good example for all time to come. (ibid.)

According to Geoffrey Cubitt, whereas Carlyle saw heroes as a “natural elite of humanity” that was “there to be worshipped and followed rather than to be emulated” (Cubitt, 17),<sup>7</sup> Smiles promoted heroes as models that could be admired and imitated because they rose “above the heads of the mass” (Smiles, 20) but were similar enough to their fellow-men to serve to them as exemplars. As Cubitt notes: “Those whom we take as exemplars may be better than we are, but not than we might in principle become – not better in some absolute way that implies a difference of kind, but better relative to some common standard against which we hope to improve” (11).

### 3. Victorian Periodicals and the Heroic

The positions of Carlyle and Smiles mark two ends of the Victorian heroic spectrum, and it is the medium of the periodical which brings out not only the diversity within this spectrum, but also some hegemonic tendencies. The high of interest and concern which the heroic enjoyed in Victorian society coincided with Victorian culture’s “periodicity” (Law), and one may claim that periodicals, which reached all literate parts of the population, were an ideal platform for the lively discourse in which Victorians engaged about heroes, hero-worship and hero-scepticism. An analysis of periodicals, *the* mass medium of the nineteenth century, complements studies of the Victorian heroic which have, as far as textual evidence is concerned, often been restricted to “literary” novels and poetry, biography and sage-writing.

Above all, a study of periodicals yields a more popular view of the heroic than more “high-cultural” sources. Not all periodicals on the Victorian print market were popular. But those that were, seeking their readers in the middle and educated working classes, and offering entertainment and pleasure as well as instruction and opinion, took a

prominent place in Victorian culture and had significant power to affect public opinion. Periodicals for the “common” reader typically sought to establish close relationships to their audiences and proclaimed a wish to be their companion in daily life. Charles Dickens, for instance, proclaimed in the first issue of *Household Words* that this publication would aspire “to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts” of his readers, whom he envisaged as being “of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions”.<sup>8</sup> Popular periodicals were both a seismograph, *and* a producer of their readers’ interests, desires and explanatory needs.<sup>9</sup> They “functioned as social discourse” (Pyckett, 107) and were a constitutive force in the construction of nineteenth-century identities (see Brake et al., 2000). Periodicals engaged with all of the Victorian lifeworld’s major issues and discourses, and this included their role in the representation, dissemination and critical discussion of contemporary notions of the heroic for the *common* reader.

It is significant in this respect that soon after it had begun to expand rapidly around 1850, the periodical market was already scrutinised for its popularity. In 1859 periodicals were identified as distinctly “popular” reading matter in a *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* article by the critic E.S. Dallas entitled “Popular Literature – the Periodical Press”.<sup>10</sup> As part of a remarkable assessment of the impact of popular writing,<sup>11</sup> Dallas claimed that “[t]he rise of the periodical press is the great event of modern history” (Dallas, part 1, 100), and he described it as a mass phenomenon that had impregnated the everyday life of all classes in his society:

The most vivid idea of the enormous diffusion of periodical literature will be obtained by a visit to any flourishing newsvender; by seeing how his shop is loaded with periodicals of all sorts and sizes, and at prices from a halfpenny up to a shilling; by noting the rapidity with which he disposes of all these, each transaction being for the most part limited to the value of a penny; and by considering how many hundreds of such shops and stands there are in London alone, not to speak of the country, where we find every shire, every town, almost every village, with its local newspaper, strong in itself, and stimulating the absorption of the metropolitan literature. It is out of such an organisation, which is continually spreading in its influence, that we obtain journals whose daily or weekly circulation is to be measured by tens and hundreds of thousands. (ibid., 101)

Dallas further emphasises that periodicals have a different social performance than books and *need* to be popular:

A periodical differs from a book in being calculated for rapid sale and for immediate effect. A book may at first fall dead upon the market, and yet may endure for ages, a wellspring of life to all mankind. A periodical, on the other hand – be it a daily paper, a weekly journal, a monthly magazine, or a quarterly review – is a creature of the day: if each successive number does not attain its object in the short span of existence allotted to it, then it fails for ever – it has no future. [...] The magazines are thrown aside before the month is out. It is necessary, therefore, to the success of a periodical, that it should attain an instant popularity – in other words, that it should be calculated

for the appreciation, not of a few, but of the many. Periodical literature is essentially a popular literature, and, enormously as our literature has been increased of late years, it is in the direction of periodical publications – publications for the million – that it has been especially developed. (part 1, 101)

Dallas goes on to note other characteristics of periodical publication: its serial nature,<sup>12</sup> its preference for anonymous authorship,<sup>13</sup> its miscellaneous content, and what Dallas calls “classification” – the need for periodicals to specialise in terms of content and/or for specific parts of the readership: “No matter on what principle the classification proceeds, the result is still the same – to divide and subdivide this kind of literature more and more. It is the rarest thing in the world for a periodical to succeed which does not either represent a class of readers or select a class of subjects” (Dallas, part 1, 102). Stiff competition on the print market made it necessary to classify in that way, and further specialisation was due to the ideological agendas that some periodicals adopted, for instance those with a declared religious orientation. Graham Law, who also cites Dallas’s article, claims that Dallas “anticipates Habermas in identifying the periodical press as a key agent in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere” (Law, 538).

The mentioned properties of the medium have a number of bearings on its representation and negotiation of the heroic. Because of their heterogeneity of content and form,<sup>14</sup> and their textual “flow” within and beyond an individual number,<sup>15</sup> periodicals were almost bound to confront their readers with a *variety* of heroic figurations which they presented side by side. Most significant, however, is the fact that, while there are strong general tendencies, the individual magazines investigated in the Freiburg project, including those in the database, have distinctive heroic profiles. For, as Margaret Beetham remarks, each periodical had to maintain a regular readership on a highly competitive market:

The reader is addressed as an individual but is positioned as a member of certain overlapping sets of social groups; class, gender, region, age, political persuasion or religious denomination – to name only the most important. This positioning is effected by all aspects of the periodical: price, content, form and tone. (Beetham, 99)

The heroic profiles of individual publications will be sketched below.

## 4. The Database Sample

Given the intimidating number of periodicals that Victorian Britain produced from the 1850s on, the project had to be restricted to a limited sample. First of all, it concentrated on *magazines* as a type of general-interest periodical distinguished by a heterogeneity of authorship, themes, genres and, in many cases, illustrations (see Beetham, 391–392). The project worked only with magazines with a long publication run and a significant national distribution – that is, publications that were “popular” on the basis

of their circulation as well as on account of their content and targeted readership. The audiences of these magazines were located in the middle and ambitious (educated) working classes. They sometimes comprised the whole family (in the case of family magazines), but in other cases had a more specialised audience of boys, girls or women.

Ideologically, the magazines investigated in the project subscribed to hegemonic middle-class ideals and values, even where they were meant to appeal to working-class readerships. An investigation of periodicals rooted in other belief systems than those included in the study would have yielded different results. For example, a radical publication such as the Chartist *Northern Star* (which ceased publication in 1852) promoted other heroes than those featured in the later popular magazines,<sup>16</sup> and so did dedicated feminist periodicals.<sup>17</sup> As Christiane Hadamitzky shows for *Fraser's Magazine*, periodicals with an upper-middle class orientation also approached the heroic with slightly different inflections than publications aimed at lower levels of society (Hadamitzky, "Homely, Easy", and "A Magazine"). The so-called penny dreadfuls, which from the 1860s were mainly targeted at children, took a sensational outlook on heroes and heroics,<sup>18</sup> which more respectable periodicals, including some in the database, intended to steer against.

A comic periodical like the famous *Punch* (1841 to 2002) also had its own heroic profile.<sup>19</sup> As a "British institution" (Altick, *Punch*) that provided an ongoing comment on current affairs and often worked with satire in its letterpress and caricature in its many illustrations, *Punch* is distinguished by a high number of references to the heroic, but with a penchant for the debunking of heroes, a trend that also comes out in its meta-heroic comments and irony in many text pieces.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, *Punch's* main interests were located in the present. The great majority of its pieces had a topical reference and were dedicated to subjects from public and especially political life. Quite frequently, *Punch* criticised contemporary practices of heroisation, especially the public commemoration of figures deemed heroic. *Punch* noted the suitability and/or appropriateness of monuments, engaging, for instance, in the public controversy over the Nelson column in Trafalgar square: "Britannia is a great deal happier in her heroes than she is in her attempts to perpetuate their memory".<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Method

The distinctive heroic profiles not only for subtypes of magazines but for each individual publication bring to light the breadth and diversity with which the Victorians imagined, represented and debated their heroes. The idea that magazines can be "profiled" for their representation of the heroic on the basis of the analysis of a comprehensive sample of texts is grounded in Franco Moretti's method of "distant" reading for larger patterns. In the case of the Freiburg project, these larger patterns are discursive ones: significant trends in the representation and negotiation of heroes and the heroic. The project used mainly digitised versions of magazines<sup>22</sup> and searched them, in intervals of several years, for occurrences of the word root *hero-*. Of course, the negotiation of

the heroic in Victorian magazines is not restricted to such instances. Basically, as the prototype study by Kinsella et al. suggests, an impression of the heroic can be triggered by all features that are associated with concepts of heroic figures and action,<sup>23</sup> independent of an *explicit* identification of someone or something as “heroic”. The sample of articles with which the project worked is therefore the tip of an iceberg, but one from which significant tendencies can be extrapolated. However, a search for *hero-* generates a considerable number of items (especially in the case of fiction) where the word “hero” simply designates the protagonist of a narrative or a centre of attention, without any heroic qualities. On average, such occurrences made up 20 per cent of the search, and the database was cleared of them.

## 6. Database Entries

Entries in the database first provide the **bibliographical data** of an article. Depending on the quality of the digitised material, missing data were checked in the periodical holdings of the British Library.<sup>24</sup> The entries also give **citations** of the actual phrase(s) in which the words *hero*, *heroine*, *heroic* or *heroism* occur, and provide a rough **content description** of the respective article. Subsequently, the entries are classified according to the following categories:<sup>25</sup>

**Article Type:** Genres configure the heroic in specific ways. Biographical essays and obituaries focus on character and *being* heroic, while narratives emphasise agency and *doing* heroism, both in fiction (tales and serialised novels) and in factual articles (such as travel writing and historiography). The sampled magazines also feature poetry, which tends to accentuate the affectual element of the heroic and can convey the grandeur of a heroic act, or the admiration which a hero attracts from others.

**Domains** of the heroic help to distinguish different fields and kinds of heroic activity presented in Victorian periodicals, such as the military, seafaring, colonisation and imperialism, the Christian mission, everyday life, life-saving, religion, science and technology, sports, and last but not least, moral heroism.

**Qualities** of the heroic is a category that distinguishes between elements of heroic character and action independent of domain, such as determination, autonomy, leadership, courage, selflessness, duty, nobility, moral excellence, endurance, strength, kindness, or magnanimity.

**Period** references in an article are noted because popular magazines reflect the strong co-presence in Victorian culture of modern and historical concepts of the heroic. As a medium with close ties to their readers’ lifeworld, Victorian magazines took notice of contemporary manifestations of the heroic but often related them to heroic traditions and historical contexts of the heroic: the heroes of classical epics and Northern sagas, medieval knights, Elizabethan discoverers, and the more recent heroes of the Napoleonic wars. Indeed, the historical layers of the Victorian heroic imaginary emerge with particular clarity in the pages of magazines, where articles and pictures relating to historical periods and the present often stand side-by-side within a single issue.

**Meta-heroic** comment and **irony** are categories that indicate the highly reflexive manner with which the Victorians approached the heroic and often disagreed about it.<sup>26</sup> Meta-heroic comments refer to qualities of the heroic, but also to society's treatment of heroes and the media in which heroes were represented.

**Centrality** is a category to distinguish instances in which the heroic is a central theme from instances in which the heroic is referenced in passing. Even passing references added to the frequency and regularity with which the heroic was evoked in the periodicals and made it a pervasive presence.

**Series** is a category that notes whether an item was a piece of serialised fiction, or part of a series of articles. Seriality was a distinguishing feature of Victorian periodicals, and occasionally the heroic was the theme of an entire series, thus receiving special weight and visibility.

**Illustration** identifies items in which the letterpress of an article is accompanied by one or more pictures.<sup>27</sup> In general, periodicals were an intermedia form of publication, responding to the great attraction – or “lure” (Brake and Demoor) – which the visual, and specifically the pictorial, had for their readers.<sup>28</sup> As Brake and Demoor note, Victorians lived in a culture in which they were “bombarded” with images: “The advances in technology as a result of which images were being produced and reproduced more rapidly, more sophisticatedly and in hitherto unequalled numbers turned image, in the course of the century, into an invaluable accessory to text, and the mark of a whole new genre, the pictorial paper” (“Introduction”, 12). Because of the essential way in which illustrations could contribute to a periodical's (or individual article's) discourse, with a pictorial discourse in its own right, Simon Cooke refers to periodicals as a “dual medium” (2010).<sup>29</sup> However, the ratio between illustrations and letterpress in Victorian periodicals is variable. Not all periodicals were illustrated (Dickens, for instance, felt that he could do entirely without pictures, and the success of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* proved him right), but most editors obviously found it important to attract readers with pictures as well as words. Even so, the extent to which illustrations were used in the database sample, whether these pictures were specially commissioned or “found”, and how they related semantically to the letterpress, shows significant variation and can only be studied meaningfully in close readings of individual articles. Articles about heroes are illustrated with narrative scenes, with portraits, but also with material objects and landscapes. They can emphasise heroic being vs. heroic doing, or moral heroism vs. action heroism. The database therefore only notes whether an article is illustrated or not; in many cases the illustrations have no direct relationship to a reference to the heroic in the letterpress, especially when this is a casual reference.

The **notes** column, finally, marks special features of an article, as well as instances of overt attention to gender, class and race issues in relation to the heroic.

## 7. The Magazines of the Sample

The database sample includes the following magazines, which are listed here in the order in which their profiles will be presented. Three magazines were published for the influential Religious Tract Society (RTS),<sup>30</sup> which had an evangelical mission. Their presence in the sample pays tribute to the fact that “still in the 1860s well over a third of all Victorian periodicals had a declared religious association” (Law, 550). The three other magazines have a secular background.

(1) *Boy's Own Magazine (BOM)*, 1855 to 1874, edited by Samuel Beeton.

(2) *Boy's Own Paper (BOP)*, 1879 to 1967, published by RTS.

(3) *Girl's Own Paper (GOP)*, 1880 to 1956, published by RTS.

(4) *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine (EDM)*, 1852 to 1879, edited by Samuel and Isabella Beeton.

(5) *Leisure Hour (LH)*, 1852 to 1905, published by RTS.

(6) *All the Year Round (AYR)*, 1859 to 1895, published by Chapman and Hall and edited by Charles Dickens until his death in 1870.

## 8. Heroic Profiles of Individual Magazines

### 8.1. Magazines for Young Readers

Magazines for young male readers are discussed first because they had a comparatively high frequency of articles with an explicit heroic theme.

*Boy's Own Magazine (BOM)* was conducted as a monthly from 1855 until 1863, when it changed to weekly publication.<sup>31</sup> At first it was sold for a moderate price of 2d per number. It addressed boys under the age of 18 and attracted mostly middle-class readers. According to its editor Samuel Beeton's first preface in 1855, *BOM* was launched in order to provide “the numerous Youth of Great Britain with a periodical especially adapted to their reading”. This reading included “Tales of Adventure, Stories of Heroism and Courage [...] which will arouse feelings of ardent admiration for all that is good and noble”.<sup>32</sup> The boys targeted by *BOM* came across heroes (both adults and youth) in adventure fiction, public-school stories, biography and historiography, editorials and even riddles and essay competitions. The heroic permeated the entire magazine. In the spirit of the editor's proclamation of intent, the heroes *BOM* identified served as entertainment but also as instruction: Reading about exemplars of heroic behaviour – in the present and in the past, in war and exploration, science and technology, in school and everyday life – impregnated boys with accepted norms of “manliness, patriotism, chivalry, service, sacrifice, comradeship and courage” (Richards, 83; see also Boyd). Men equipped with such standards would be willing and able to serve their country in war and colonial expansion. Apart from heroism in the military domain, where they might prove noble manliness in the future, the boy readers

were presented with models of moral heroism in daily life which they might imitate already at their young age. Occasional stories about boys proving their mettle in war or situations of emergency<sup>33</sup> suggested that even adolescents could be roused to extraordinary valour in times of need if the right spirit was imbued in them. Meta-heroic articles discouraged boys from worshipping doubtful heroes, like the dashing highwaymen which “cheap” sensational fiction popularised.<sup>34</sup> Instead, they were encouraged to be inspired by great soldiers, sailors and explorers, but also by models of humane behaviour and by the civilising heroism embodied, for example, by the great engineers of the nineteenth century like George Stephenson. A two-part biographical article about Stephenson not only praised his achievements but also offered a good dose of meta-heroic reflection by suggesting that civil heroism was not inferior to belligerent heroism:

there are other kinds of greatness besides that which we call war greatness – there is other heroism besides that in the field, great and honourable as that is, too. [...] his exploits were, the building of the first locomotive engine and the construction of the first railway in Great Britain. How our hero came to do this was through perseverance of the very highest order.<sup>35</sup>

As *BOM* also emphasised, military and moral heroism could go hand in hand. An article from a series that portrays bearers of the Victoria Cross notes explicitly that bravery in the field which is accompanied by humanity is superior to mere daring:

It is ever gratifying to be able to record the deeds of brave men who for the honour of their country have risked their lives, without thought of self. It is, however, a still more agreeable task to perform when, in addition to the mere act of daring, we have to speak of kindly and humane feelings, which indicate higher and more noble sentiments on the part of the individual than the mere bull-dog courage which is more frequently found.<sup>36</sup>

Significantly, this article further notes that the Victoria Cross was also awarded to soldiers in the ranks and even civilians. It thus assured readers of the Smilesian belief that, in a more egalitarian society, the social scope of the heroic was wide enough to incorporate all classes of contemporary society:

To become distinguished for deeds of bravery, or to gain such a prize as the Victoria Cross, is now within the reach of every individual, for, as we have here shown, the honour is conferred where it is deserved, whether the individual who has won it be soldier or civilian, and thus many of our readers who may have no intention of joining the army may yet be placed in such situations as to call from them acts of courage and daring which will gain them the highest distinction, and the one most coveted by the modern soldier.<sup>37</sup>

*BOM* was gendered in very obvious terms. Even if moral heroism was observed and praised for both men and women, the magazine’s frequent presentation of warriors

and explorers promoted a masculine-inflected heroism. This was consistent with a remark in the editor's first preface that "feminine accomplishments [...] are to 'boys' entirely useless, if not distasteful", and that the pages of the magazine would "avoid naturally all these subjects".<sup>38</sup> That women were capable of heroic behaviour, also outside the moral domain, was occasionally recorded, for instance in the case of Garibaldi's admirable wife Anna (who supported her husband with a weapon in her hand),<sup>39</sup> but by and large, women in *BOM* are associated with kindly service to others rather than risk-taking agency.

One of the most famous and successful successors of *BOM* was *Boy's Own Paper*.<sup>40</sup> *BOP* was an illustrated weekly published by the RTS from 1879 to 1967 and sold at a price of only 1d since it was meant to compete with the penny dreadfuls and lure readers away from them. It was also available in monthly issues (with added colour plates) and in annual hardback volumes, thus catering to different segments of its audience, which included readers with both middle- and working-class backgrounds, even if it was actually mainly read by middle-class boys. "Whereas the weeklies satisfied immediate curiosity, the monthlies and annuals represented a more refined version of reading aimed at middle-class families" (Penner, 63). Despite RTS's intention to disseminate Christian values, *BOP* also aimed to provide entertainment. It was therefore not overly religious. It included more serialised fiction than *BOM* had, especially adventure and public-school novels. By and large, it located heroism in the same domains as the earlier magazine, and with the same mix of masculine adventure and moral heroism, but never with an approval of militarism. As a publication launched in the late nineteenth century, *BOP* also showed slightly more interest in sports and sporting heroes than *BOM*. "Muscular Christianity" had already been propagated in the late 1850s and 60s, when it was especially associated with the writings of Charles Kingsley. However, physical fitness was idealised in the final decades of the nineteenth century, also in order to counter the feminisation perceived in the new masculinity of the dandy.<sup>41</sup> A domain of heroic behaviour where *BOP* did not have to disguise the religious intentions of the RTS was the Christian mission, whose representatives received regular attention alongside other agents of colonial expansion during the decades of Victorian high imperialism. All in all, it is not surprising that *BOP* identified moral, selfless behaviour as the highest form of heroism, also for men.

*Girl's Own Paper*<sup>42</sup> was edited by RTS as a companion publication to *BOP*, and it was similarly long-lived (1880–1956). It addressed mainly middle and lower-middle-class young women between the schoolroom and the threshold of marriage. *GOP*'s heroic profile is strikingly different from *BOP*'s. It is obvious at first sight that the number of references to the heroic, and especially that of hero-themed articles, is smaller than in the sample's boys' magazines. The heroic also occurs less frequently in the action- and adventure-oriented domains that characterise the boys' magazines. *GOP* thus reflects the fact that even in the final decades of the nineteenth century, when women's lives were less restricted than in high Victorianism, the ideal of domestic femininity still prevailed. This can be seen in a widely noted article by Edward Salmon, published in 1886 on "What Girls Read". The idea of female heroism which Salmon promotes in this context is unmistakably conservative and confined to a specific domain:

In the ranks of girls and women it may be conceded are centred the greatest heroism, the noblest devotion, the highest purpose, the longest suffering, the harshest and cruellest of human trials. [...] It is courage of the first order. The courage which makes a man face boldly an enemy on the field of battle or fling himself into the boiling surf to rescue a fellow-creature is, too, deserving of all honour, but it is, nevertheless, courage of a second order and is primarily man's. [...] It requires to face fever in a loathsome alley, or to minister to the needs of the wounded soldier, a courage dissimilar in all respects to that called forth by the necessity of spiking a gun or swimming out to a wreck. The one is devotion, human, spiritual, Christian; the other is pluck, animal-like in its character, desperate in its instincts. The former is noted by God and lauded by man, but requires an uncommon power to treat adequately from the point of view of the story reader; the latter is easily susceptible of a treatment, feverish and romantic, which may be expected to appeal to the dullest of imaginations. (Salmon, 516)

While the strategy here is to elevate a morally refined female heroism over a more active but also more violent male heroism, it also serves the purpose of confirming the boundaries between genders. These boundaries are also constantly marked and negotiated in *GOP*. As a publication of the late nineteenth century, even a magazine of the Religious Tract Society could not disguise the fact that the understanding of women's place in society was beginning to change. Within limits, *GOP* therefore encouraged the participation of women in social life beyond the confines of the home. The third number (17 January 1880) already included an article about "Female Heroism" that acknowledges brave and active womanhood at its very beginning and suggests, from the perspective of an "old woman", that some change has taken place in the general conception of female life:

It is a very great mistake for any one to imagine, as numbers of people do, that women are destitute of bravery. Boys especially are very apt to think that women and girls are fitted only to lead a kind of passive life, and that nothing should be required of them but that they should quietly pursue their ordinary avocations, with the exception perhaps of being allowed occasionally to become admiring spectators of some manly deed of valour. Their idea is that women are destined to be the protected rather than the protectors of their race; and though to a certain extent this feeling is commendable, we must not allow it to influence any of us in forming a wrong estimate of woman's true character. I am an old woman now, consequently I have changed my opinion on many subjects during my lifetime but on no time have I so completely altered my views as on that of women's bravery.<sup>43</sup>

The article then presents historical and contemporary examples of female bravery, but it is obvious that these examples have been carefully chosen according to the magazine's Christian orientation, and that the driving force behind the brave women's behaviour is in all instances love, altruism and firm religious belief. The article is richly illustrated, but significantly, none of the pictures emphasises a woman's heroic agency. The converted Hawaiian princess Kapiolani is described as bravely challenging the heathen gods of her island at the crater of a volcano, but the human figures in the

accompanying image are tiny in proportion to the sublime landscape that surrounds them. Similarly, Grace Darling, a girl who had famously saved nine drowning people off the coast of her home in Northumberland in 1838 and who is described in the letterpress as rowing “so skilfully, and with such power, one would have thought, to see her, that she had the strength of a hardy sailor”,<sup>44</sup> is not shown in this manner in the picture on the same page; here, she is depicted in a moment before her actual deed, standing next to her father on top of their lighthouse.

*GOP* thus had strategies to contain its presentation of “female heroism” within limits acceptable to the RTS and other more conservative circles in late-Victorian society. Nevertheless, it did publish articles about adventurous women (like the “Famous Lady Travellers” portrayed in a series during the summer of 1885), and women who proved their courage and powers of endurance in exceptional situations.<sup>45</sup> The issue of 7 February 1880 featured an article on the “Courage of Women” who had been awarded medals from the Royal Humane Society for saving people from drowning, and in the summer of 1890, there was another series on “Orders for Women”. Displays of female courage in situations of exceptional threat, for instance during the South African War, are also portrayed appreciatively. An article in the 7 April 1900 number promotes “The Physical Training of Girls” and contrasts it to the “lackadaisical education” which the heroines of older novels used to enjoy and therefore “commonly died of an interesting consumption”.<sup>46</sup> *GOP* also printed advertisements for books that promoted adventurous heroism; most of these books were presumably intended for boys, but at least the advertisements, and possibly the books themselves, were read by the girls which the magazine addressed. Such instances suggest that *GOP* did not turn a blind eye to the changes which definitions of femininity were undergoing towards the end of the Victorian age. In most cases, however, the magazine’s heroic women excel less in spectacular adventure than in situations of everyday life and in caring functions, as exemplified by Florence Nightingale. Heroic agency of girls and women beyond this domain could not yet be presented as a matter-of-fact. With the exception of a caring and serving moral heroism, female heroism remains a “marked”, that is, unusual and therefore notable, phenomenon even in a publication targeted at female readers of a new generation – while the heroic action of boys and men is taken for granted. In this respect, *GOP* did not advance very far from the position of a high-Victorian women’s magazine.

## 8.2. *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*: Contours of Female Heroism in High Victorianism

*Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine (EDM)*<sup>47</sup> was an illustrated monthly published from 1852 to 1879 and sold at a price of 6d, which was affordable for middle-class readers. Its editor and publisher was Samuel Beeton, in cooperation, until her early death, with his wife Isabella. *EDM* soon became one of the leading women’s periodicals of its day. When the Beetons’ magazine for women was launched in 1852, the issue of female heroic agency was more precarious than in the late nineteenth century because the ideal of domestic femininity was still firmly entrenched. And yet,

*EDM* indicates that female heroes could be promoted to a certain extent. It was part of a new wave of magazines for middle-class women. It is typical of this wave in that it links femininity with the private and the domestic sphere (Ballaster et al., 88), while showing some sympathy for the emerging struggle for women's rights. *EDM* paid tribute to the achievements of women, for example in many biographical essays and even long series about "celebrated women". These women were found in the domains of art and philanthropy, but articles were also published about more contested and transgressive women like Joan of Arc, the female warrior,<sup>48</sup> and Jeanne-Marie Roland, who turned against the Jacobin faction during the French Revolution and was guillotined in 1793. Such articles drew attention to women's determination, courage and even public agency.

However, like other women's magazines that appeared in mid-Victorian years, *EDM* was quite reserved in its use of the *vocabulary* of heroism when referring to exceptional women. One of few examples in the sample for *EDM* is its article about Madame Roland. It praises her as "wise, earnest, self-contained, courageous, industrious, fruitful in resource, equal to emergency, and various as the sternest demands of every hour – the grand heroine of the Revolution".<sup>49</sup> Arguably, ideas of heroism were still too closely coupled with masculinity to be comfortably and regularly associated with women. As in the case of *GOP*, the female heroic is a marked phenomenon, and male heroism the unmarked case. It is telling that one of the most emphatic appreciations of heroic behaviour in *EDM*, in the poem "Fire, Fire, Fire" (January 1872), refers to a fireman who gave his life when saving a woman and a child. That this is an act of civil and moral heroism is characteristic of women's magazines, where military heroism is generally more rarely noted than in publications that were also, or exclusively, targeted at male readers.

### **Two Family Magazines: Leisure Hour and All the Year Round**

*Leisure Hour*<sup>50</sup> was published in weekly and monthly numbers from 1852. The weekly numbers sold at 1d and were affordable for the working classes, while the monthly numbers were mainly intended for the middle-class readers which the magazine also addressed. *LH* published factual articles and some fiction and poetry, and it was illustrated. From 1880 to 1905, *LH* was exclusively conducted as a monthly. As a family magazine, it was launched by RTS not only as a cross-class publication, but also for a cross-gender and cross-generation readership, as its subtitle clearly signalled: *A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation*. In contrast to *LH*, the magazines for family reading established by Charles Dickens were rooted in a more secular value system. Following *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* was an unillustrated weekly that ran from 1859 to 1895. Since women formed a major part of the readerships of family magazines, the tendency to show appreciation for heroic behaviour in civil life is also reflected in this type of magazine. However, because family magazines targeted male readers as well, military heroism, like that of seafaring and exploration, is more frequently mentioned than, for example, in *EDM*.

Family magazines had the widest range of readers among the periodicals represented in the database. As *Leisure Hour* proclaimed in its first, programmatic editor's address in January 1852, it aimed to reach readers from all classes, and these readers were meant to be forged into a community:

We dedicate our pen to the thoughtful of every class. We aspire to catch the attention of peer and peasant, of master and man. From the highest to the lowest, there is no circle from which we desire to exclude ourselves; and none, we would fain hope, which will be disposed to exclude us. Our sympathies are universal; and though they will adapt themselves to the special circumstances of different classes, they will vibrate, we trust, with the love towards all. And why should they not? Are we not one people, one great commonwealth?<sup>51</sup>

As an RTS publication, *LH* had a Christian bias and considered exemplary heroes – along with saints – as essential for the formation of the national identity:

A nation, a whole nation, is raised and blessed by its heroes and saints. They give it a character by their own virtue, and largely help their fellows to be better than they would have been without their example and influence. The great men of a people bring, moreover, a blessing on that people, directly and indirectly. Now although a man may not be so gifted as to become conspicuous for the wholesome effect he has upon mankind, or upon a particular nation, everyone can contribute something, and so far bring about that general good state which all desire.<sup>52</sup>

In accordance with its mixed readership, *LH* has a mixed heroic profile, which is developed in factual rather than fictional pieces. *LH* presented its readers with historical and biographical articles about military leaders and national heroes such as “The Duke of Wellington” (November 1852), explorers and fighters for liberty (such as Garibaldi in “Sicily and Its Wrongs”, 23 August 1860), but it also acknowledges the valour of common soldiers and life-savers, as well as the work of heroes of progress and the spread of civilisation: engineers, missionaries, and philanthropists.<sup>53</sup> Like later periodicals of RTS, *LH* strongly promotes moral heroism and values qualities such as duty, perseverance and selflessness. It also shows a strong interest in distinguishing “right” from “wrong” heroic behaviour and, in most of its meta-heroic comments, cautions readers not to worship “false” heroes. For example, an article about Robert Clive asks whether the victor of the Battle of Plassey (1757), and hence an important figure in British empire-building, deserved a monument since he was also known for his corruption.<sup>54</sup> The poem “War” asks critically how one might distinguish in war between heroes and killers: “One murder makes a villain, Millions a hero” (24 September 1870, 624).

*LH*'s special commitment to moral heroism was motivated not only by its identity as a Christian publication,<sup>55</sup> but also by its intended social range, because moral heroism can be performed by people in all classes and generations, and by members of both sexes.<sup>56</sup> But *LH* did not confine its female heroes entirely to the domain of moral heroism. It pointed out that in the exceptional situation of the Indian Uprising of 1857,

women had behaved with great courage: “men and women, soldiers and civilians, of all ranks in the revolted districts, swelled for the time to the dimensions of heroes”.<sup>57</sup> The stamina of Ida Pfeiffer, the famous traveller, was also appreciated: “a perfect heroine in foreign travel, undauntedly mingling with lawless tribes without an escort, penetrating the depth of woods, roaming the desert, exploring the terrible phenomena of volcanic sites, and accomplishing a journey round the globe”.<sup>58</sup> In principle, however, *LH* was careful to maintain gender boundaries. A biographical article about the poet Felicia Hemans, for instance, claims that women embody a “higher heroism” than men, one of enhanced moral sensibility distinguished by self-denial and devotion. According to this article, such heroism even elevates itself over the great public deed:

In these days of utilitarianism, it is not without its uses to show woman as she has been, and we venture to say, ever will be – capable of the loftiest actions of self-denial and devotion, imbued with the heart of the martyr, and the spirit of the hero. Wherever danger and death have been, in all ages and in all countries [...] there do we find the presence of woman as the “falcon-hearted dove”, showing strength out of very weakness, courage out of very cowardice.<sup>59</sup>

This is the same strategy already observed above, in Edward Salmon’s attempt to camouflage a conservative view of female heroic agency with the ascription of moral superiority. Nobilitating a less agentive kind of heroism serves to maintain the gender boundaries of mid-Victorian society and to channel possibilities of heroisation.

*All the Year Round*,<sup>60</sup> conducted by Charles Dickens until his death in 1870s, was a secular publication and deviates in its heroic profile from *LH* in several respects. It also makes regular reference to the heroic, but rarely as a central theme, and also rarely in relation to heroic figures of Christian belief. Its secularity, in contrast to *LH*, is expressed, for instance, in many, if often only brief, references to heroic figures of non-Christian origin, especially from classical and Northern mythology. *AYR* does not mention female heroism significantly more frequently than *LH*, but apart from charitable women from high society,<sup>61</sup> it appreciates women like Mary Anning, the fossil collector, who made a contribution to the progress of knowledge and science despite their humble origin.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout its run, and in accordance with its original editor’s sympathy with democracy, *AYR* published articles that esteemed fighters for liberty in history and the present.<sup>63</sup> Garibaldi was admired with the same enthusiasm as in other publications of the day.<sup>64</sup> As far as heroic behaviour in the military context is concerned, *AYR* showed respect for the bravery of simple soldiers (especially subsequent to the Crimean War),<sup>65</sup> and some great commanders,<sup>66</sup> but it also expressed a gently ironic distance to displays of military glory,<sup>67</sup> and harsh criticism of the violence of war,<sup>68</sup> sometimes in one and the same issue. By contrast, *AYR*’s respect for moral heroism in everyday life, and notably for deeds of life-saving, was unanimous.<sup>69</sup> As in *LH*, metaheroic comments reveal a scepticism of unqualified and unjustified heroisation, especially the naïve hero worship in connection with the reading of romance and the unrealistic expectations this could give rise to in female readers. This did not hinder its editors,

however, from printing advertisements – in the regular pages of the magazine (rather than in separate parts or on wrappers) – for books that propagated hero worship; the database lists several advertisements for Carlyle editions.<sup>70</sup> Gift books about heroes for children, such as Annie and Eliza Keary's *The Heroes of Asgard* and Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes*, were also advertised (for example in the 5 November 1870 number). With its own distinctive profile, the secular *AYR* was a family magazine that offered its readers just as many different facets of the heroic as *LH*.

## 9. Overall Tendencies

A “distant” reading of popular magazines as represented in the database reveals distinctive profiles of heroic discourse in individual magazines. It also points to some overall trends in the Victorian heroic imaginary and the ways in which Victorians used heroic figures and patterns of behaviour to mark boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary, and between norm and transgression.

1) The database confirms that the Victorian common reader had a broad understanding of the heroic and its qualities. These qualities comprised leadership, courage, nobility of character and patriotism as well as a sense of duty, industry, endurance and selflessness, to name just a few. Such qualities are affirmed across all periodicals in the sample, and they are perpetuated through frequent repetition. However, the magazines investigated also make clear that the Victorian heroic imaginary was a dynamic figuration in which different concepts stood side by side, where old traditions of the heroic were remembered and appropriated, while new ones were introduced and promoted. A study of popular periodicals thus underscores Atkinson's claim that the word *hero* and “what it represented were indeed extremely unstable. This instability meant that space was created for a whole range of individuals to whom the label ‘heroic’ could be applied” (Atkinson, 10).

2) The database confirms that references to the heroic are a constant presence in Victorian popular magazines, even in articles where the heroic is not itself thematic. This result supports the view that heroes and the heroic were central to the Victorian cultural and social imagination. A diagnosis of widespread hero scepticism, or even “desperation” (Levine), is not supported in a reading of mass-circulation periodicals.

3) The periodicals' references to the heroic are largely appreciative. Heroes and their heightened significance are represented and esteemed. However, at the same time, the frequency of meta-heroic comments and ironic statements indicates that the Victorians were not prone to naïve hero worship. Indeed, their readers were cautioned that their hero worship might be inappropriate. The Victorians were clearly not ready to be unconditionally enchanted. Rather, heroic figures and concepts were carefully scrutinised for their social usefulness or potential harm, and desires for the heroic were channelled in the “right” direction.

4) The admirability of heroes and the modes of their appraisal were carefully gauged. The magazines in the database still express admiration for great and famous men

whose deeds were perceived as exceptional and above the norm. Significantly, however, the boundaries between the extraordinary and the ordinary were not presented as impermeable. This confirms the conclusion drawn by Juliette Atkinson from her study of Victorian biographies, and especially those of quiet, 'hidden lives': "Walter Houghton stressed 'the Victorian tendency to think of men in two categories, heroes and ordinary mortals'; it appears, however, that the Victorians were reluctant to define the line separating the two in such clear terms" (Atkinson, 49). While Carlyle was still quoted (and advertised), the prevalent tendency suggested by the investigated sample of magazines is one towards a Smilesean interpretation of heroic behaviour as a model for everyone in society. This preference for exemplary heroes results in a clear tendency to locate heroic behaviour and character in spheres that were close to the condition of the magazines' readers. Furthermore, there is much appreciation for heroic behaviour that is compatible with the social norm; a radically transgressive, uncontained heroism is rarely portrayed and more rarely approved of. Victorian magazines for the common reader of the middle and ambitious working classes promote *moral* heroism – a heroism of attitude (duty, perseverance, endurance, selflessness) that could be practiced in all walks of life, by men and women, and from an early age. It was a heroism strongly coloured by evangelical tendencies, which also went hand in hand with a critical scrutiny of military heroism, even in the secular magazines. Military and naval heroism were perceived as necessary, and they were appreciated, but also presented as inferior to moral heroism in civil life. Until the 1860s, the period preceding high imperialism, magazines show a strong tendency to profile moral *against* military heroism. Later in the century, as the British imperial project gained speed and military heroism became more popular again, moral heroism was incorporated into the conception of military behaviour.

5) The esteem for moral heroism goes hand in hand with the widened social range of heroisation. Potentially, every Victorian could now prove, and be appreciated as, a hero, including members of the working classes. Popular magazines therefore provide clear evidence for a democratised understanding of the heroic, which was also, however, a more domesticated one.

6) While revealing this more egalitarian understanding of the heroic, which gave wider scope for the heroisation of women, the database also points to the fact that the gendering of the heroic in the Victorian period was a contentious issue. It is numerically obvious that articles with a heroic theme were more frequently offered to an exclusively male audience than to an exclusively female one; the cross-gender family magazines take a middle position. There is a tendency to praise women for heroic selflessness and altruism, while a more agentive, physical heroism is still widely associated with men. A female heroic that transgresses gender norms is accepted only where the ends seem right and where the transgression is not permanent. At the same time, the concept of *moral* heroism, which could be practiced by men and women, constituted a heroic domain where men and women were equal, and where women could even be represented as superior to men.

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7) Popular magazines and their individual articles not only disseminated ideas about the heroic but also negotiated them in terms that were compatible with a hegemonic, middle-class set of ideals and values. They aimed to make sure that certain preferred kinds of heroes and heroic behaviour were widely valued and sought after by a “mass” audience. The negotiation of the heroic in popular periodicals thus played an important role in stabilising British society through shared values and ideals in times of rapid transformation and social change.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The project entitled “Semantische Konkurrenzen und mediale Inszenierungen des Heroischen in britischen Zeitschriften zwischen 1850 und 1900” [“Competing Semantics and Medialisation of the Heroic in British Periodicals 1850 to 1900”] was conducted within SFB 948 (“Helden, Heroisierungen, Heroismen” / “Heroes, Heroisations, Heroisms”), a collaborative research project funded by the German Research Foundation at the University of Freiburg. Published and forthcoming work from the project, by Barbara Korte and Christiane Hadamitzky, is included in the bibliography below.

<sup>2</sup> The database does not include all periodicals with which the project actually worked. The periodicals included were selected because the data accumulated for them provide particularly clear evidence for different heroic profiles of individual publications.

<sup>3</sup> According to this study, which worked in part with ethnographic methods such as questionnaires, the following features seem to be central in present-day (Western) understandings of heroes: “Brave, Moral integrity, Courageous, Protect, Conviction, Honest, Altruistic, Self-Sacrifice, Selfless, Determined, Saves, Inspiration, Helpful” (Kinsella et al., 117). Such largely positive features are also named by Allison and Goethals: “smart, strong, selfless, caring, charismatic, resilient, reliable, inspiring” (62). An assumption of family resemblances between different understandings of the heroic is also made by SFB 948 (see von den Hoff et al.).

<sup>4</sup> See Putzell and Leonard; Houghton.

<sup>5</sup> “Venerating great men provided a means of reaffirming faith in the individual at a time when scientific advances and the successive blows dealt to religious institutions threatened to reduce human action to a set of impersonal laws” (Atkinson, 47).

<sup>6</sup> See Carlyle’s famous dictum in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* that “in these days Hero-worship, the thing I call Hero-worship, professes to have gone out, and finally ceased” (Carlyle, 12).

<sup>7</sup> While this is a dominant reading of Carlyle, Atkinson emphasises that “*On Heroes* has produced diametrically opposite readings” and that a “central part of Carlyle’s vision” is sometimes overlooked, namely the fact that to him, too, “heroism was not limited to a few but potentially encompassed everyone” (Atkinson, 54).

<sup>8</sup> “Preliminary Word”, *Household Words* (1 March 1850), 1.

<sup>9</sup> This double function is also emphasised by Lyn Pyckett in her review of approaches to the medium before the late 1980s: “Periodicals can no longer be regarded in any simply reflective way as ‘evidence’ (either primary or secondary), as transparent records which give access to, and provide the means of recovering, the culture which they ‘mirror’. Far from being a mirror of Victorian culture, the periodicals have come to be seen as a central component of that culture – an ‘active and integral part’, and they can only be read and understood as part of that culture and society, and in the context of other knowledges about them” (Pyckett, 102).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, they were scrutinised as a media form precisely because they were perceived as popular and having an impact on public opinion. Apart from Dallas’s article, contemporary periodicals printed many other meta-medial articles. Pyckett refers to the series “Periodical Literature”, published in the *Westminster Review*’s first volume as early as 1824, which “attempted to submit the contemporary periodical press to a ‘regular and systematic course of criticism’”. James Mill’s contribution to the series, according to Pyckett, “develops a theory of hegemony” (Pyckett, 105) when it states that periodical literature, because it addresses a large readership, must “patronise the opinions which are now in vogue” (ibid.).

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the following passage: “Literature [including popular writing] thus seizes upon the whole of our public life, and upon so much of our private life as through social irregularity or individual force of character necessarily emerges into publicity. It is accordingly to the historian precisely what the dial-plate is to a time-piece: it is a perfect index of the innumerable processes at work throughout the whole frame of society, all tending, by slow revolutions and oscillations, to complete the destined cycle of events. To the politician, however, it is far more than a dial-plate. A dial-plate has no reflex action on the complicated mechanism of which it is the register. Literature, on the other hand, is not only the expression of public opinion and the index of contemporary history, it is itself a great force that reacts on the life which it represents, half creating what it professes only reflect [sic]. We receive but what we give; we see only what we have eyes for; we remember but what interests us; – these are commonplaces which apply to literature as a whole not less than to individual minds. It creates in the mere act of expressing public opinion; it leads while it follows; like the Parthian bowmen, it shoots its most effective arrows as it flies” (Dallas, part 1, 97).

<sup>12</sup> So far, the seriality of Victorian periodicals has been mainly studied for their serialised fiction. As Hughes and Lund, for instance, point out, serial reading had its special temporal dynamics, a special importance of beginnings and endings, and, because they were consumed over a long period of time, “serials could become entwined with readers’ own sense of lived experience and passing time” (Hughes and Lund, 8). As the database shows, the discourse about the heroic in Victorian periodicals unfolds more prominently in non-fiction than fiction. Non-fiction articles were also serialised, but their element of continuity and resistance to closure was less pronounced than in fiction, with its ongoing narrative arcs.

<sup>13</sup> The anonymity of authors helped to mask the heterogeneity of a periodical’s contributions. In Dallas’s words: “A great public journal must of necessity be the work of a considerable number of hands, some of them writing from the most opposite points of view; and although an organ of opinion thus constituted can never attain perfect consistency, yet without the anonymous it would be impossible to reach even that degree of harmony which is at present attainable – that continuity of thought and sentiment which is its life and power” (Dallas, part 2, 182–183).

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Beetham emphasises that periodicals are typically “a mixed genre” which is “characterized by diversity of voice and authorial attribution” (Beetham, 97).

<sup>15</sup> It should be pointed out here that what constitutes periodical “text” is a vexed question in periodicals research since the “boundaries” of periodicals are not fixed. There are individual numbers, but some periodicals came in weekly *and* monthly issues, and many also had annual or semi-annual volumes that collected monthly issues. And there was significant continuity between the various issues, especially through serialisation, but also other devices. As Margaret Beetham notes: “Since the periodical depends on ensuring that the readers continue to buy each number as it comes out, there is a tendency in the form not only to keep reproducing elements which have been successful, but also to link each number to the next. This can be done through running a series of articles, through constant reference to past and future issues, through advertising, through readers’ letters and through serialization” (Beetham, 97).

<sup>16</sup> For instance, the *Northern Star* portrayed heroes of the Chartist movement and democratic movements all over Europe, as well as historical and legendary heroes of liberty such as William Tell or Robin Hood. Working men were also heroised, for instance in an address “To the Frame-Work Knitters of the Mansfield District” (January 1847): “You who glory in singing of the heroic deeds of your ancient sires, how they fought, bled, and conquered, in the cause of humanity, justice, and liberty, copy their glorious example, be energetic, act nobly, and posterity will regard you as their benefactors and deliverers” (6).

<sup>17</sup> Even the early *English Woman’s Journal* (1858–1864), which was conducted by the women of the feminist Langham Place Group, was more daring in its identification of non-conformist female heroes than non-feminist periodicals of its day. See, for instance, its obituary on the German revolutionary “Johanna Kinkel” in February 1859: “Some years have elapsed since her heroic exertions in Germany brought her name forward as one of the most remarkable sufferers in the great rising of 1849, and in her own country her name is still held in loving and honoured remembrance” (297–309).

<sup>18</sup> For an introduction to penny dreadfuls, which were highly illustrated and whose fiction had a penchant for highwaymen and Gothic tales, see the article by Judith Flanders for the British Library.

<sup>19</sup> Since heroes and processes of heroisation and deheroisation in *Punch* would deserve a study of their own, the Freiburg project had to restrict itself to a probe of the years 1850, 1855 and 1860.

<sup>20</sup> This is also noted by Atkinson (46), who specifically mentions a satirical article on “Universal Hero-Worship” in the 4 June 1864 number of *Punch*.

<sup>21</sup> “The Finest Column in the World” (5 January 1850), 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* are cited from Dickens Journals Online, The University of Buckingham, [www.djo.org.uk](http://www.djo.org.uk); other periodicals from Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals (available through Gale Cengage) and British Periodicals (available through ProQuest).

<sup>23</sup> “We hypothesized that some features of heroes will be communicated more frequently (central) than others (peripheral), and the central features of heroes will activate the concept of hero more quickly and strongly than peripheral features” (Kinsella et al., 116).

<sup>24</sup> The digitised version of the *Boy’s Own Magazine* is particularly deficient regarding issue and page numbers because the digitised text was made from copies in which the original wrappers, which contain this information for some years, had been cut out.

<sup>25</sup> The complete lists of categories are included in the database.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of this disagreement, but based on a study of biographies, see Atkinson (46–72).

<sup>27</sup> For a survey of Victorian periodical illustration see Maidment and Jones’s entry in the *DNCJ*.

<sup>28</sup> On Victorian visual culture and fascination with seeing in general, see for instance the study by Kate Flint and the essay collection by Renate Brosch. Of special interest for an investigation of the heroic is Julia Thomas’s study on the “inscriptions of values in word and image” during the Victorian period.

<sup>29</sup> Despite the importance of illustration in periodicals, it has only begun to be noted in critical studies. See, for example, the collections of essays by Goldman and Cooke, and by Brake and Demoor. Most attention has been dedicated to the interplay of illustrations and letterpress in serialised fiction. Leighton and Sturridge point out for sensational fiction how illustrations could fulfil important narratological functions and were “an essential part of the Victorian reading experience” (66). To Sillars, illustrations were “equal partners in the discourse” (21). Patton notes the many different semantic relationships in which illustrations could be positioned in relation to the verbal narrative. They could “suppose, support, subvert, explain, interpret, and critique its verbal partner, entering into a complexly reciprocal, interactive, and [...] persuasive dialogue” (Patton, 92).

<sup>30</sup> On the publishing ventures of the RTS see Fyfe.

<sup>31</sup> For further information on *Boy’s Own Magazine* see the article by Banham.

<sup>32</sup> “The Boy’s Own Magazine” (January 1855), n.p.

<sup>33</sup> “The Little Dutch Hero” (October 1855), “Kit Snyder: The American Boy-Patriot” (April 1857), “The Linden Tree of Fribourg: A Story of Heroism” (July 1857).

<sup>34</sup> For instance, *BOM* pointed out that criminals like Jack Sheppard, the hero of many penny dreadfuls, were not worth their pocket money; “A True Account of the Rascally Jack Sheppard” (1 April 1869).

<sup>35</sup> “The Hero of the Iron Horse” (November 1857), 326.

<sup>36</sup> “Ross L. Mangles, Esq., and the Victoria Cross” (July 1864), 18. See also MacKenzie’s general observation that a “tradition of Christian militarism developed from the 1860s and the Church increasingly gave its blessing to the army” (1); this is also discussed by Mangan.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> “The Boy’s Own Magazine” (January 1855), n.p.

- <sup>39</sup> “A Hero’s Son” (May 1861).
- <sup>40</sup> For further information on *Boy’s Own Paper* see the articles by Banham and Noakes.
- <sup>41</sup> See, for example, “Games and Recreations” (9 December 1899).
- <sup>42</sup> For further information on *Girl’s Own Paper* see the articles by Doughty and Skelding.
- <sup>43</sup> “Female Heroism” (17 January 1880), 43.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>45</sup> Joan of Arc, for instance, was the subject of a short article series in *GOP* in November 1885.
- <sup>46</sup> “The Physical Training of Girls” (7 April 1900), 422.
- <sup>47</sup> For further information on the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* see Beetham as well as Hughes.
- <sup>48</sup> “Female Heroism, Exemplified by Anecdotes” (date unknown).
- <sup>49</sup> “Madame Roland” (June 1872), 332.
- <sup>50</sup> For further information on *Leisure Hour* see the article by Lloyd and Law as well as Lechner.
- <sup>51</sup> “A Word with Our Readers” (1 January 1852), 8–9.
- <sup>52</sup> “Bible Lessons for Every-Day Life” (September 1880), 614.
- <sup>53</sup> See, for example, articles like “The Vanguard of Progress” (8 January 1852), “Science in Humble Life” (May 1875), “Livingstone’s Heroic Spirit of Duty”, in “Varieties” (27 March 1875).
- <sup>54</sup> “Lord Clive” (8 March 1860); on the contested reputation of Clive, see also Sifaki.
- <sup>55</sup> Indeed, *LH*’s religious orientation makes its stance on the heroic particularly complicated. Hero-worship was strongly opposed by many believers for whom worship in a religious sense could only apply to god. This opposition is also reflected in the periodical, and it concurs with an observation in Juliette Atkinson’s study of Victorian biography: “Many clergymen and Christian writers expressed unease with the association of hero-worship with fame, fortune, and earthly concerns” (Atkinson, 50). At the same time, heroes with strong religious connotations, such as missionaries, were normally *not* portrayed as role models, but as saintly heroes with less potential for identification and emulation than in the case of other moral heroes (see Hadamitzky, “Homely, Easy”).
- <sup>56</sup> See, for example, “Heroes in Humble Rank” (12 July 1855); the last part of the series “The Lessons of Biography: A Lecture for Working-Men” emphasises that “among the labouring and industrious classes [...] we have witnessed as many examples of real heroism and stern virtue as we have found in the most cultivated circles” (29 July 1852), 486.
- <sup>57</sup> “English Heroism in India” (16 February 1860), 109.
- <sup>58</sup> “The Lady Traveller” (29 January 1852), 69.
- <sup>59</sup> “Felicia Hemans”, *LH* (29 January 1852), 72 and 73.
- <sup>60</sup> For further information on *All the Year Round* see Drew.
- <sup>61</sup> Such as Louise-Marie of France; “A Royal Devotee”, *AYR* (29 January 1870).
- <sup>62</sup> “Mary Anning, the Fossil Finder”, *AYR* (11 February 1865).
- <sup>63</sup> See, for instance, its article on the Bohemian Jan Ziska, “A Council Stronger than three Popes” (29 January 1870), or the one on Louis Kossuth, “The Great Magyar” (9 April 1870).
- <sup>64</sup> See, for example, “To Nicea, the Birthplace of Garibaldi” (14 July 1860), or “Going to the Front” (10 November 1860).
- <sup>65</sup> See, for instance, “How the Victoria Cross Was Won” (6 August 1859).

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<sup>66</sup> Such as the admirals Robert Blake (5 May 1860) and Nelson (16 June 1860), or Sir Henry Havelock, who is compared to Greek heroes in “When Greek Meets Greek” (13 October 1860)

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, “The Conquering Heroes Come” (1 October 1859).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, “Real Horrors of War” (3 December 1859), or the poem “The Cages Lark” (31 March 1860).

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, “The Fire Brigade” (2 September 1865).

<sup>70</sup> For example the 3 September 1870 and 28 February 1880 numbers.