

What the Victorians really read: nineteenth-century fiction available to non-elites

This paper discusses when texts that had initially been published for an elite readership became available to non-elites and gives examples of physical changes the texts underwent in their various editions.

Focusing on late Victorian examples, the paper will show that there was usually a substantial time delay between the first, expensive edition of a text and later, cheaper ones. Mrs Needell's *Stephen Ellicott's Daughter*, for example, took eleven years to arrive at an edition cheap enough for a mass-readership to afford. It was first published by Warne as a three-decker in January 1891 at the usual price of 31s 6d, with a print run of 550, to arrive, finally, at a paperback edition priced 6d in 1902, with a hugely increased print run of 10,000. Not only does this show that the cheaper the edition was, the more readers it attracted, but also that the majority of readers only had access to the novel eleven years after it had first been published. This fact emphasizes our need to look into which layers of readers had access to what texts at what times, since it is only with this knowledge that we can begin to assess the effects of reading.

The other aspect this paper is concerned with is the physical appearance of these editions. Physical changes between a text's original edition and later ones hint at how each readership was expected to read the novel. Added illustrations offer a good example of this: a 1902 paperback edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, published by Dicks at 6d, includes six illustrations, one of them showing a rather unobvious scene: Elizabeth Bennet talks over her engagement to Darcy with her mother. Taking examples from late Victorian editions of Austen's novels, the paper will discuss the implications of the inclusion of images such as this for the readership of the respective edition of a novel.

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