

W.T. STEAD AND THE NEW JOURNALISM

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Abstract

This study examines the New Journalism of W.T. Stead during his editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Northern Echo* and challenges a number of ideas about the early development of the New Journalism as a concept and genre.

Firstly, it questions the widespread assumption that New Journalism was a name and concept generated by Matthew Arnold in his famous critique of Stead's editorial style at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. It argues that Stead himself was the pivotal figure in this process and looks at how he orchestrated press debate surrounding the New Journalism in response to Arnold's comments. The study then explores three high-profile press campaigns that Stead conducted during the year of 1887, which played their own part in establishing New Journalism as a popular and controversial concept in the public mind.

The study then turns to Stead's earlier years at the *Northern Echo* in order to compare and contrast the embryonic New Journalism that he was practicing there as editor from 1871-80. Firstly, it establishes the *Northern Echo* in the wider press history of Darlington. Secondly, it explores the ways in which Stead's journalistic rhetoric and campaigning style were shaped by a series of local political battles between powerful Pease family and local maverick, Henry King Spark. Finally, it analyses three campaigns that Stead pursued during his editorship of the *Northern Echo* to illustrate how he was using a range of New Journalistic techniques during this early part of his career.

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Introduction

We have had opportunities of observing a new journalism which a clever and energetic man has lately invented. It has much to commend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is feather-brained. It throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes them true; does not correct either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever.¹

When the eminent scholar, Matthew Arnold published these now famous comments on “new journalism” in the spring of 1887, he could have little known that they would go on to define an entire genre of newspaper history. Today, the concept of the New Journalism is primarily associated with newspapers such as T.P. O’Connor’s *The Star* and Lord Northcliffe’s *The Daily Mail* and *The Evening News*; but at the time, the source of Arnold’s exasperation were the outpourings of the radical W.T. Stead, whose overt sensationalism had become a new and disturbing feature of the *Pall Mall Gazette* since his taking up of the editorial hot-seat in 1883.

Comparing the early New Journalism that Arnold encountered with the mass productions that were later introduced by O’Connor and Northcliffe presents problems to the historian, since the new style evolved rapidly and, by the end of the nineteenth century, had deviated significantly from that pioneered by Stead in the mid-1800s. Turn-of-the-century New Journalism was more aggressive, more commercial, more industrialised and, in many ways, more homogenised. However, in essence, all New Journalism shared a number of common features.

American-style typographical and textual innovations, such as crossheads, gossip columns, illustrations and interviews were one of the fundamental hallmarks, while political and parliamentary reporting, so typical of mid-Victorian newspapers, increasingly gave way under the New Journalism to more

¹ Matthew Arnold, ‘Up to Easter’, *The Nineteenth Century; a Monthly Review*, 123 (1887), p.638.

human-interest stories on poverty, crime and sexual scandal. The public appetite for such material was shamelessly whetted by both Stead and O’Conner during their respective campaigns on child prostitution and the Whitechapel murders. Yet, it was by no means a new tradition, since it had long been a feature of the popular Sunday press.

According to O’Conner, in his 1889 essay on the subject, what really set the New Journalism apart from “old” journalism, was its “more personal tone...more modern methods”² and its ability to strike the reader “right between the eyes.”³ The New Journalism, he declared, bore “a certain resemblance to a street piano: its music is not classical, nor very melodious” but the notes were “clear, crisp and sharp.”⁴

Not all the hallmarks of New Journalism were introduced by Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. O’Conner and Harmsworth each added their own contributions to the mix (such as cartoons and women’s pages respectively), whilst another practitioner of New Journalism, George Newnes, developed a distinctive style of short, pithy anecdotes that characterised the hugely popular and commercially successful *Tit-Bits*. There was also a marked difference in the respective aims and motives of these early pioneers. For the pious Stead, the newspaper was an arbiter of social change and a manifestation of its editor’s moral conscience. For O’Conner, Harmsworth and most other journalists, mass readerships and profit were the order of the day.

Many characteristics of New Journalism had been evolving slowly throughout the century, and Wiener has rightly pointed out that much of the New Journalism was, in fact, very old.⁵ Stead’s exposés were not even a first for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, since founder editor, Frederick Greenwood’s series, “A Night in a

² T.P. O’Conner, ‘The New Journalism’, *New Review*, 1:5 (1889), p.423.

³ *Ibid.*, p.434.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Joel H. Wiener, ‘How New was the New Journalism?’, in Joel H Weiner (ed.) *Papers for the Millions: the New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) pp. 47-65, *passim*.

Workhouse”⁶ in many ways prepared the ground for Stead’s later campaigns.

What *was* new, however, was the forceful and unusual personality of Stead himself. When his combative nature, Puritanical upbringing, and messianic vision of himself as a “God-sent messenger”⁷ fused with older literary and journalistic forms, the result was a powerful, expansive journalism that created a bridge between the high-minded journalism of the mid-Victorian era and the tabloid productions of the next century. The exasperated Matthew Arnold failed to recognise these journalistic credentials. As a scholar and contributor to “old” journalism, he regarded himself as a guardian of good taste and culture, and viewed Stead as an uncouth product of the new, semi-educated democracy who had gate-crashed journalism with little more qualification than naked ambition.

Until Stead’s arrival, Arnold had enjoyed a long and mutually beneficial association with the *Pall Mall Gazette* since its inception in 1865. As an occasional contributor, he had formed a particular friendship with its first editor, Frederick Greenwood and a close acquaintance with its second, John Morley; but he regarded Stead as a muckraking sensationalist, and continued his association with the paper only because of his friendship with proprietor, Henry Yates Thompson and assistant editor, Edward Tyas Cook.⁸ “Under your friend Stead,” Arnold wrote to departed editor, John Morley, in 1883, “the P.M.G., whatever may be its merits, is fast ceasing to be literature.”⁹

Stead’s radical, visionary, yet often naïve imagination, wherein the press could be an “engine of social reform” and perhaps even a viable alternative to government itself,¹⁰ represented everything that traditionalists like Arnold feared

⁶ ‘A Night in a Workhouse’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12, 13 and 15 January, 1866. Based on the experiences of Greenwood’s brother, James (the ‘Amateur Casual’), who, to get an insight into the plight of the poor, spent a night in Lambeth Workhouse.

⁷ W.T. Stead, quoted in J. W. Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper* (London: Methuen, 1952), p. 100.

⁸ J. O. Baylen, ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 68 (1969), pp.543–545, *passim*.

⁹ Matthew Arnold to John Morley, April 8, 1884, in George W. E. Russell (comp.), *Letters of Matthew Arnold: 1848-1848*, (London: Macmillan & Co, 1900), p. 311.

¹⁰ W. T. Stead, ‘Government by Journalism’, *Contemporary Review*, 49 (1886), p. 669.

from the political empowerment of the “new democracy.” It also offered a new form of writing that offended Arnold’s generation and class. As Brake points out, “new journalism” arrived at a time when literature was “defending its ‘dignity’, not least against the upstart vulgarities of journalism.”¹¹

Arnold was not the only member of London’s literary elite to be outraged by Stead’s New Journalistic style. The poet, Algernon Swinburne, loathed it so much that he dubbed the *Pall Mall Gazette* the “Dunghill Gazette,”¹² while Stead’s scandalous crusades, such as “The Truth about the Navy,” “Outcast London” and his exposé of child prostitution, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,”¹³ resulted in many readers cancelling their subscriptions.

George Bernard Shaw declared Stead to be “stupendously ignorant” and “extraordinarily incapable of learning anything.”¹⁴ In his autobiography, *My Life and Loves*, the controversial journalist, Frank Harris, said that he was “rather relieved when he [Stead] went down in some shipwreck [the *Titanic*] and we were rid of him.”¹⁵ Even sterner censure came from Stead’s one-time admirer, William E. Gladstone, who came to detest his erstwhile supporter, declaring that he had “done more harm to Journalism than any other individual ever known.”¹⁶ And in one London journal, an “open letter” voiced an opinion with which many London traditionalists would have found themselves in deep accord:

¹¹ Laurel Brake, ‘Government by Journalism and the Silence of *The Star*’, in Laurel Brake and Julie F Codell (eds.) *Encounters in the Victorian Press*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 214.

¹² J. O. Baylen, ‘Swinburne and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, *Research Studies*, 36 (1968), p. 326

¹³ W.T. Stead, ‘What is the Truth about the Navy?’ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 September, 1884, p.1; for the ‘Outcast London’ campaign, see Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: an Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor*, (London: James Clark & Co, 1883), *The W.T. Stead Resource Site* (hereafter *WTSRS*).

<<http://www.attackingthediabol.co.uk/miscellanea/outcast.php>> [accessed 30 April, 2010]; and W.T. Stead, ‘Is it not Time?’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 October, 1883 and W.T. Stead, “‘Outcast London’ – Where to Begin?’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 October, 1883, p. 1. For Stead’s ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’ campaign, see *the Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 -10 July, 1885.

¹⁴ George Bernard Shaw in Frederick Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, 2 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), I, p. 305.

¹⁵ Frank Harris, *My Life and Loves*, John F. Gallagher (ed.), (New York: Grove Press, 1991), p. 641.

¹⁶ Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic minister, 1865-1898*, (London: Allen Lane, 1999), p. 450n.

Like your father, the Devil, you [Stead] sow tares broadcast while good men sleep; and many of them falling into the propitious soil of youth and innocence, are bound to spring up and multiply. If Socrates was put away as a corrupter of youth, how much more do you deserve to be bowstrung, oh, you pernicious scribe, Pharisee, Hypocrite!!!¹⁷

Such censure, though extreme, followed Stead wherever his editorial style took root, often with good cause. He was radical, rude, unpredictable and, at times, irresponsible. Many of his friends were as extreme, impressionable and unconventional as he was, while more stable acquaintances were often at a loss to understand the Northumbrian-born editor and frequently felt embarrassed by their association with him. George Bernard Shaw's recollections typify, perhaps, the exasperation that many of Stead's acquaintances frequently felt:

Stead once induced me to support him at a public meeting at Queen's Hall; and I attended accordingly, only to find that he did not know what a public meeting was (he thought it was just like a prayer meeting), or what public procedure was, or what a chairman was. Treating the assembly as his congregation and nothing else, he rose and said, "Let us utter one great Damn!" Then he burst into hysterical prayer; and I left. He had no suspicion that to invite Catholics, Jews, Agnostics, Hindoos (*sic*), and so forth to support him at a public meeting, and then treat them to a revivalist orgie (*sic*), was in any way indelicate or improper.¹⁸

Fortunately, Shaw's indignation was more than tempered by the affection felt for Stead by his numerous supporters, many of whom wrote glowing accounts of him following his untimely death on the *Titanic*. Alfred (later Lord) Milner, one of Stead's old *Pall Mall Gazette* staff, said that no editor "was ever so beloved by his staff, from the first lieutenant down to the office-boy,"¹⁹ while Fourth Earl Grey, who had known Stead from his earliest days at the *Northern Echo*, regarded him as "chivalrous and Quixotic" and "the first of journalists."²⁰ Stead's old friend, Lord Esher declared that he was "rich in the esteem of many

¹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 18 April, 1912, p. 2.

¹⁸ George Bernard Shaw in Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, I, p. 305.

¹⁹ Alfred Milner, quoted in the *Review of Reviews*, 45, 1912, p. 478.

²⁰ Fourth Earl Grey, quoted in the *Review of Reviews*, 45, 1912, p. 481.

noble minds,”²¹ and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who had come to know Stead through his “Maiden Tribute” campaign, lamented that “All who care for justice to women...have lost a stalwart friend in the death of W. T. Stead.”²² Perhaps the greatest tribute, however, came at Stead’s memorial service, at which Stead was mourned more as an eminent statesman than a mere journalist:

The memorial service at Westminster Chapel last evening was a notable tribute to a striking personality. The building seats 2,500 people, and it was completely full. People of all classes attended to show respect for Mr. Stead's memory. The Queen-Mother was represented; there were present representatives of foreign States, distinguished pro-Consuls, Cabinet Ministers, workers in many fields of social reform, political organizers, representative journalists, and sympathizers of almost every shade of religious and political opinion.²³

A Nonconformist, Russophile, and staunch Liberal, Stead had burst onto the London scene in 1880, having established himself, during his nine-year editorship of the *Northern Echo*, as the conscience of Nonconformist England. His coverage of such issues as the Bulgarian Horrors in 1876, and his frequent attacks on Disraeli’s Conservative government between 1874-80, had won him the esteem of many prominent Liberals, who rewarded him with an assistant editor’s position at the influential *Pall Mall Gazette*, then under the editorial control of John Morley. In 1883, Stead succeeded Morley following the latter’s election to parliament, and within two years of taking up the editorship, transformed the *Pall Mall Gazette* from a restrained gentleman's journal into a dynamic and controversial political organ that soon became required reading for London society.²⁴ “Conventionality,” Stead declared, “had been ridden to death;” and rather than adhering to old journalistic traditions, he “revelled in the

²¹ Lord Esher, quoted in the *Review of Reviews*, 45, 1912, p. 479.

²² Millicent Garrett Fawcett in Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, II, p. 349.

²³ ‘Memorial Service for Mr. W.T. Stead: a Notable Tribute’, *The Times*, 26 April, 1912, p. 10.

²⁴ According to Henry Massingham, ‘Mr. Morley had doubtless some of the gifts which go to make a journalist...but a passionate zeal for his profession, the journalist’s flair for news...he never had... Mr. Morley's essay-like leaders...were read, but his paper was not. When Mr. Stead, who had served under Mr. Morley... with a constant sense of repression, succeeded to the editorship, the nature of the rebound can be measured by the difference in the character of the two men. Mr. Morley, old-fashioned, cold and formal in manner...Mr. Stead, flamboyant, expansive, full of ideas...and a man of impetuously daring temperament.’ Quoted in the *Review of Reviews*, 6, 1892 p. 47.

delight of departing from them.”²⁵

What became known as “the New Journalism” would ultimately go on to define editors like Northcliffe and O’Conner rather than Stead himself. Yet, despite their attempts to replicate the journalistic example set by Stead, none was able to imitate neither his campaigning style nor his international stature. This may explain why, according to Schalck, O’Conner’s *The Star* had virtually no political influence,²⁶ and why Northcliffe’s press empire (and, indeed, all popular journalism thereafter) quickly succumbed to what Hampton has called “the cynical race for profits.”²⁷ This study therefore will explore how the original style of New Journalism was pioneered by Stead during his years at the *Pall Mall Gazette* and, indeed, during his earlier time at the *Northern Echo*.

Primary source material on Stead typically includes old biographical works of contemporary authors such as J. W. Robertson Scott, who worked under Stead at the *Review of Reviews*, Estelle W. Stead, who became sole custodian of her father’s papers following his death on the *Titanic*, Edith K. Harper, who worked as Stead’s personal assistant and Frederick Whyte, whose two volume biography has laid the foundations for contemporary Stead scholarship.²⁸

Secondary material, though much increased in recent years, is still significantly less thick on the ground compared to works on Stead’s contemporaries like Northcliffe. The various articles (written over several decades) by the American scholar, J.O. Baylen²⁹ provide a foundation for further study but fall short of an

²⁵ W.T. Stead from an unpublished and undated article on the *Pall Mall Gazette* in J. O. Baylen, ‘W. T. Stead and the New Journalism’, *Emory University Quarterly*, 21 (1965) p. 197.

²⁶ Harry Schalck, ‘Fleet Street in the 1880s: the New Journalism’, in *Papers for the Millions*, p. 78.

²⁷ Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950*, (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2004), p. 8.

²⁸ J. W. Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, (London: Methuen, 1952); Estelle W. Stead, *My Father: Personal & Spiritual Reminiscences*, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1913); Edith K. Harper, *Stead the Man*, (London: William Ryder & Son, 1918); Frederick Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, 2 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925); see also W. T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia: Reminiscences and Correspondence of Madam Olga Novikov* 2 vols. (London: Andrew Melrose, 1909).

²⁹ See, for example, J. O. Baylen, ‘W.T. Stead: a Christ in Chicago’ *History*, 3.3, (1992); ‘W.T. Stead’s Controversial Visit to South Africa, 1904’, *History Today*, 30:5, (1980); ‘W. T. Stead and the New Journalism’, *Emory University Quarterly*, 21, (1965); ‘The New Journalism in Late

in-depth history, and Baylen's long heralded biography of Stead, a work first promised some thirty years ago, seems destined never to see publication. Other Stead mainstays include, Raymond E. Schultz', *A Crusader in Babylon W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette*, Hugh Kingsmill's *After Puritanism*, Deborah Gorham's, "The 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Re-examined," Edward J. Bristow's, *Vice and Vigilance*, Charles Terrot's, *The Maiden Tribute: a Study of White Slavery*, and Judith Walkowitz' *City of Dreadful Delight*.³⁰ All, though well written and researched, focus predominately on Stead's career at the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

This preoccupation with Stead's later *Pall Mall Gazette* career was given continuance in 2007 with two new works: *Maiden Tribute: A Life of W.T. Stead*, by Prof. Grace Eckley, and Prof. Antony E. Simpson's republication of Stead's infamous exposé on child prostitution, the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", republished for the first time since 1885. However, in the latter (which is an otherwise very useful working text of the "Maiden Tribute" campaign), the author's thirty-four page introductory essay is concerned more with the wider issues of nineteenth century organised child prostitution than with Stead himself. In the former, Eckley's study, though thoroughly researched, as might be anticipated from a work of some twenty years in the making, is surprising lacking in balance, both in terms of the amount of text the author devotes to the

Victorian Britain', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18, (1972); 'W.T. Stead and the Boer War: The Irony of Idealism', *Canadian Historical Review*, 40, (1959); 'W. T. Stead's History of the Mystery and the Jameson Raid', *Journal of British Studies*, 4, (1964); 'The Press and Public Opinion: W.T. Stead and the New Journalism' *Journalism Studies Review*, no. 4 (July, 1979); 'W.T. Stead as Publisher and Editor of the *Review of Reviews*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 12 (1979); 'W.T. Stead and the Russian Revolution of 1905', *Canadian Journal of History*, 2 (1967); 'W.T. Stead, Apologist for Imperial Russia 1870-1880', *Gazette: International Journal of the Science of the Press* [Amsterdam], 6 (1960); 'Stead's Penny Masterpiece Library', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9 (1975).

³⁰ Raymond L. Schultz, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette*, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1972); Hugh Kingsmill, *After Puritanism* (London: Duckworth, 1952); Deborah Gorham, "The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late Victorian England", *Victorian Studies*, 21 (1978); Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Charles Terrot, *The Maiden Tribute: A Study of the White Slave Traffic of the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Frederick Muller, 1959); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London*, (London: Virago Press, 1994). See also Victor Pierce Jones, *Saint or Sensationalist: The Story of W. T. Stead*, (Chichester: Gooday, 1988), and Alison Plowden, *The Case of Eliza Armstrong: 'A Child of 13 Bought for £5'*, (London: BBC Publications, 1974).

respective periods of Stead's career, and in her overly sentimental critique of Stead himself.³¹

Other works on Stead have come from a wide range of historical genres, including journalism, social history, feminism, and even occultism. However, some of these authors, it must be said, have been actuated by renewed concerns over sex trafficking and child abuse, rather than an interest in Stead himself; his exposé on child prostitution, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," almost invariably forming the main focus of their attention.³² Unfortunately, this has sometimes led to Stead becoming more associated with child abuse and sexual deviancy than with the history of popular journalism.

One recent example of this is Richard Webster's book, *The Secret of Bryn Estyn: the Making of a Modern Witch Hunt*, in which he examines the child abuse hysteria that surrounded the Welsh care home, Bryn Estyn in 1992. In an effort to put a historical spin on the scandal, Webster invokes Stead's "Maiden Tribute" to draw comparisons between the antagonists of Bryn Estyn and the hysteria incited by Stead a hundred years earlier.³³ The feminist historian, Judith Walkowitz likewise utilises the "Maiden Tribute" in her celebrated book on sexual danger, *City of Dreadful Delight*, in which, over two chapters, she attempts, with considerable force, to place the narrative of Stead's great exposé within the context of melodrama and pornography.³⁴ Ultimately, Walkowitz presents Stead as a figure of villainy - an investigative journalist-cum-"compulsive voyeur" - whom she compares to Walter, the unknown author of *My Secret Life*.³⁵ She also ends by endorsing the Victorian

³¹ Grace Eckley, *Maiden Tribute: A Life of W.T. Stead* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corporation, 2007); W.T. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, Antony E. Simpson (ed.), (New Jersey: True Bill Press, 2007). Eckley's book devotes only twenty-three pages to Stead's early life and his *Northern Echo* career. She, moreover, focuses too much on the Bulgarian Horrors agitation of 1876 and fails to make enough use of several of Stead's key articles on prostitution and other social problems on which he spoke out, e.g. the West Auckland Poisonings. Ultimately, Eckley's book is overly sentimental and lacks critical examination.

³² See, for example, Richard Webster, *The Secret of Bryn Estyn: the Making of a Modern Witch Hunt*, (Oxford, Orwell Press, 2005) pp. 555-566.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

³⁴ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 81-121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

sex reformer, Havelock Ellis' highly speculative comments that Stead's "repressed sexuality" was the "motive force of many of his activities."³⁶

Such impressions, which view Stead through the single prism of the "Maiden Tribute," have not significantly furthered our knowledge of his political and journalistic career, but rather serve to place him as much within the history of prostitution as in the genre of Victorian journalism and politics. Thankfully, more useful works are offered by press historians, whose more considered approach rightly places Stead within the wider genre of journalistic history.

In "Who is We? The Daily Paper Projects and the Journalism Manifestoes of W.T. Stead", Laurel Brake examines Stead's doomed attempts to start his own daily newspaper from the platform of the *Review of Reviews*, and examines his growing fascination with American journalism.³⁷ Her chapter on, "The Old Journalism and the New," in her book, *Subjugated Knowledges*,³⁸ is equally informative, as she presents the New Journalism as an unstable form that brought neither new nor sudden transformation to English journalism. Brake's other important work on the genre, "Government by Journalism and the Silence of the Star,"³⁹ explores the Cleveland Street scandal of 1889 to debunk Stead's fanciful estimation of the power of the press projected in the *Contemporary Review* in 1886.⁴⁰ She points to the proprietary gagging and government manipulation of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and two other practitioners of the New Journalism (*The Star*, and *Truth*), to show that the radical press was rendered largely impotent during the Cleveland Street affair, and was not able to investigate the scandal with anything like the force of Stead's earlier "Maiden Tribute" campaign.

³⁶ It must be stated, however, that Stead's one-time employee Grant Richards thought that Ellis' views on "W.T.S" were "substantially correct"; for more on this, see Grant Richards, 'W.T. Stead', *Then & Now*, (August, 1905) pp.18-19, available online at *WTSRS* <<http://www.attackingthediabol.co.uk/peers/richards.php>> [accessed 1 May, 2010]. For Ellis' remarks on "Stead's Obsession with Sex", see Whyte, *Life of W.T. Stead*, II, pp. 341-342.

³⁷ Laurel Brake, 'Who is We? The *Daily Paper* Projects and the Journalism Manifestoes of W.T. Stead', in Marysa Demoor (ed.), *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae Narrative Selves and Self Fashioning, 1880-1930*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 54-71.

³⁸ Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press: 1994), pp. 83-103.

³⁹ Brake, 'Government by Journalism and the Silence of *The Star*', pp. 213-235.

⁴⁰ W. T. Stead, 'Government by Journalism', *Contemporary Review*, 49 (1886).

Stead's "Government by Journalism" is also a theme in Mark Hampton's book, *Visions of the Press in Britain*, in which he expands on his earlier article, "Understanding Media: Theories of the Press in Britain, 1850-1914."⁴¹ Like Brake, Hampton also questions Stead's views on the political power of the press, and cautions against seeing them as being representative of late Victorian journalism. Debate on the New Journalism itself, meanwhile, (including Stead's place in that genre) is well served by Joel H. Wiener's book, *Papers for the Millions: the New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*.⁴²

Stead's career at the *Northern Echo* remains largely unexplored, with only a few authors touching on it with any depth. These include Simon Goldworthy's "English Nonconformity and the Pioneering of the Modern Newspaper Campaign," which focuses on Stead's Bulgarian Horrors agitation to highlight the role of Nonconformism in provincial radical journalism,⁴³ and Richard Shannon's book on Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, which is still the only secondary source that makes extensive use of Stead's *Northern Echo* articles.⁴⁴ Chris Lloyd's study on the first 150 Years of the *Northern Echo*,⁴⁵ is the first to look seriously at the history of that remarkable newspaper and the critical role that Stead played in its highly successful formative years.

Ultimately, it is to W.T. Stead himself that the historian must turn for any further insight into his editorship of the *Northern Echo*. His numerous articles and leaders in that paper are, of course, the greatest and most compelling evidence. Yet, old volumes of the *Review of Reviews*, a frequent custodian of many of Stead's personal reminiscences, are also a valuable source of material on these early years, while Stead's two volume work, *The M.P. for Russia: Reminiscences*

⁴¹ Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950*, (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2004) and 'Understanding media: Theories of the Press in Britain, 1850-1914', in *Media, Culture & Society*, 23 (2001).

⁴² Joel H. Wiener (ed.), *Papers for the Millions: the New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

⁴³ Simon Goldworthy 'English Nonconformity and the Pioneering of the Modern Newspaper Campaign: Including the Strange Case of W.T. Stead and the Bulgarian Horrors', *Journalism Studies*, 7:3 (2001).

⁴⁴ Richard Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1975).

⁴⁵ Chris Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil: 150 Years of the Northern Echo* (Darlington: *Northern Echo*, 1999).

& Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff, (1909) chronicles the events of the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation better than any other work either then or since.⁴⁶

This study will examine Stead's crucial role in the development of New Journalism, both at the *Pall Mall Gazette* and during his earlier career at the *Northern Echo*. It will firstly trace how he took Matthew Arnold's passing reference to "new journalism" and, through a masterly orchestration of public debate, buttressed by three high-profile campaigns in 1887, invested the phrase with an enhanced cultural and political significance that brought the concept of "the New Journalism" into public discourse.

The paper will then look at what is arguably the birthplace of the New Journalism - Darlington - and the highly-charged political contests during the 1860s and 1870s that not only brought the *Northern Echo* into being but, decisively, thrust the inexperienced Stead into its editor's chair, aged just twenty-two. As will be seen, Matthew Arnold was not the first political observer to recognise something new in Stead's journalism. Forged in the fire of provincial political battles, Stead was increasingly being recognised, even at this early stage, as an emerging journalistic phenomenon. By analysing three of his most controversial campaigns in these formative years, this thesis will provide fascinating evidence of an innovative and dynamic journalistic style that would later spark a revolution during his celebrated years at the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

⁴⁶ W.T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia: Reminiscences & Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff*, 2 vols (London: Andrew Melrose, 1909). For Stead's articles in the *Northern Echo*, see the British Library's newspaper digitization project. <<http://www.bl.uk/collections/britishnewspapers1800to1900.html>>. See also *WTSRS* <<http://www.attackingthediabol.co.uk/echo/index.php>>.

1. The Branding of the New Journalism

One of the pet phrases of the hour...is 'The New Journalism' and yet we venture to assert that a very appreciable majority of those who bandy it about would be nonplussed by a request to explain what they mean by the formula.⁴⁷

At first glance, this passage from a correspondent of the National Press Agency in the Summer of 1887 seems to confirm the modern consensus that Matthew Arnold's naming of W.T. Stead's editorial style at the *Pall Mall Gazette* as "new journalism" gave form and face to a new genre of newspaper history. Indeed, so fundamental are Arnold's comments in academic debate that his article, "Up to Easter"⁴⁸ is today considered to be crucial to our understanding of New Journalism history. However, this chapter will explore how Stead, rather than Arnold, not only coined the phrase, "the New Journalism" but exploited the scholar's comments on the subject to generate a wider public debate and consciousness about the power of the press during the 1880s.

The unlikely trinity of Matthew Arnold (self appointed arbiter of social and cultural taste and decline), W.T. Stead ("uncrowned king of an educated democracy")⁴⁹ and the New Journalism (in this case, Stead's radical editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette*) has become an indelible feature of what Brake has called the first phase of New Journalism.⁵⁰ Yet, despite his being the focus of Arnold's "jeremiad on the popular press,"⁵¹ as Wiener puts it, it is not the journalist, Stead, who is put forward as the man who named and defined "New Journalism" but the unlikely figure of Arnold. So much so that scholars now insert his comments on "feather-brained" democracy almost as a matter of course.

The many scholars who have cited Arnold include Wiener, who states that it was Arnold that "first articulated the presence of the New Journalism and gave it a

⁴⁷ Correspondent of the National Press Agency, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 August, 1887, p.12.

⁴⁸ Matthew Arnold, 'Up to Easter', *The Nineteenth Century; a Monthly Review*, 123 (1887).

⁴⁹ W.T. Stead, 'Government by Journalism', pp. 664.

⁵⁰ Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, p. 100.

⁵¹ Wiener, 'How New was the New Journalism?', p.47.

name.”⁵² Schalck likewise insists that “New Journalism...was a label first used by Matthew Arnold.”⁵³ Fulton is even more complimentary, declaring Arnold a “most influential...great sage [who] created the term ‘the New Journalism,’”⁵⁴ while Brake maintains that Arnold’s apparent naming of the New Journalism, created a “history” and a tradition that posited “a decisive and anomalous transformation” in the nature of 1880s journalism.⁵⁵ Perhaps the most significant statement comes from Professor Baylen, who claims that, following the publication of Arnold’s article, the phrase “new journalism” was “quickly taken up by Stead’s contemporaries.”⁵⁶

With so many scholars crediting Arnold with the naming of this new genre, evidence of this “cultural thunderbolt,”⁵⁷ as Wiener describes it, should not, then, be difficult to find; and yet, exhaustive scanning through relevant media of the time reveals barely muted reaction to Arnold’s article, both in the London press and the wider journalistic world. Indeed, the only major newspaper in whose columns Arnold’s comments *were* “quickly taken up,” was, significantly, the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁵⁸ Far from being a “cultural thunderbolt,” Arnold’s article, it appears, was barely even a spark.

How, then, do we account for scholars’ tenacious insistence that Arnold brought the concept of “new journalism” into the public domain, despite Stead’s much fuller writings on the subject? In part, the answer must lie in Arnold’s status as a cultural commentator and in his pioneering role in the establishment of English

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Schalck, ‘Fleet Street in the 1880s’, p. 84.

⁵⁴ Richard D. Fulton, ‘Sensational War Reporting and the Quality Press in Late Victorian Britain and America’, in Joel H. Wiener and Mark Hampton (eds.), *Anglo-American Media: Interactions, 1850-2000*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 29n.

⁵⁵ Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, p. 83.

⁵⁶ See J.O. Baylen, ‘The “New Journalism” in Late Victorian Britain’, p.368, and ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, p. 550.

⁵⁷ *Papers for the Millions*, p. xi

⁵⁸ According to the Gale database, *19th Century British Library Newspapers*, the first contemporary newspaper to take up Arnold’s phrase was the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Search results suggest that Arnold’s critique of New Journalism was notably absent from other important newspapers of the day until Stead himself began to promote the phrase “the new journalism” in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (see issues starting 3 May, 1887). The *Times*, according to Gale’s *The Times Digital Archive*, does not introduce the phrase “new journalism” until 13 November, 1890.

and Cultural studies.⁵⁹ However, this places undeserved emphasis on the importance of Arnold and fails to observe the pivotal role that Stead played in the transforming of “new journalism” from a throwaway reference into a journalistic debate, concept and movement.

In truth, Arnold’s comments in “Up to Easter” were more of a thinly-veiled attack on W.T. Stead than a critique of journalism, and scholars continue to give weight to them only because of the innocuous insertion of the phrase “new journalism.” Yet, Arnold neither coined nor disseminated the phrase and, indeed, played no further part in its evolution. Rather, the journalistic brand name with which he is now so closely linked, owes its coining and dissemination not to Arnold, but to Stead.⁶⁰

A figurehead of provincial radicalism, Stead must have seemed to Arnold the very manifestation of the ill-educated Englishman asserting his right to “do what he likes...hoot as he likes...where he likes.”⁶¹ But, Arnold’s comments in “Up to Easter” were, in truth, nothing that he had not already said before. As the guardian of “the best that has been thought and said in the world,”⁶² his views on popular journalism had been set out, decades earlier, in his essay on “The Literary Influence of Academies.”⁶³ In a passage, which smacks remarkably of his comments in “Up to Easter,” he declared:

The provincial spirit, again, exaggerates the value of its ideas for want of a high standard at hand by which to try them. Or rather, for want of such a standard, it gives one idea too much prominence at the expense of others; it orders its ideas amiss; it is hurried away by fancies; it likes and dislikes too passionately, too exclusively. Its admiration weeps hysterical tears, and its disapprobation foams at the mouth. The newspaper, with its party spirit, its thorough-goingness, its resolute avoidance of shades and distinctions,

⁵⁹ See Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁶⁰ For an earlier coining of the phrase “the new journalism”, see W.T. Stead, ‘The Future of Journalism’, *Contemporary Review*, 50 (1886), p.677 and p. 678.

⁶¹ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1869), p.58.

⁶² Matthew Arnold, quoted in John Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: a Reader*, (London: Pearson, 2009), p. 6.

⁶³ Matthew Arnold, ‘The Literary Influence of Academies’, in Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1865), pp. 42–78.

its short, highly-charged, heavy-shotted articles...is its true literature ; the provincial spirit likes in the newspaper just what makes the newspaper such bad food for it, just what made Goethe say, when he was pressed hard about the immorality of Byron's poems, that, after all, they were not so immoral as the newspapers.⁶⁴

In many ways Arnold anticipated the journalistic alliance of the middle and working classes, and “their unwelcomed eruption into formal politics,”⁶⁵ and yet, despite his evident distaste for newspapers, this did not prevent him from using the press, particularly the *Pall Mall Gazette*, as a means to disseminate his own ideas.⁶⁶ His ambivalence in this regard, did not diminish with age. Throughout the 1860s, he typically associated newspapers with rising middle-class provincial culture that was, in his mind, ‘philistine’ in nature. In the late 1880s, this view polarised even more so with the emergence of a new semi-educated, working class reading public that had emerged in the wake of the 1870 Education Act.

Arnold’s contradictory stance on newspapers is probably one of the key factors that raised Stead’s hackles in his response to “Up to Easter.” “This eminent apostle of sweetness and light,” he responded, should have “condescended to remember one ancient Hebraic mandate which runs ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness.’”⁶⁷ Stead had good reason to feel betrayed. After utilising the space given him in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for his own ends, the old scholar now, it seemed, sought to present its editor as the personification of “feather-brained” democracy. “He remains up aloft,” sneered Stead, “serene and somewhat stoically self content, dropping every now and then...his sterile cry of ‘Excelsior!’”⁶⁸

In typically combative fashion, Stead dismissed Arnold’s assertions as statements “thrown out at a venture to help a man of letters in search of an illustration.”⁶⁹ Here Stead had a valid point; “Up to Easter,” was an unlikely arena in which to

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

⁶⁵ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Baylen, ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, p. 544.

⁶⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 May, 1887, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

make an attack on journalism. The article is primarily concerned with Irish Home Rule and the entire piece (7500 words) mentions the word journalism only twice. “Mr. Matthew Arnold,” concluded Stead, was “walking in a vain show, and really seems to have been describing as the New Journalism his own methods of constructing articles upon, let us say, the politics of Ireland.”⁷⁰

Stead also took issue with the allegation that the *Pall Mall Gazette* did not correct itself when wrong. There was no journal, he fumed, “more ready to correct any misstatement into which it may have been betrayed.”⁷¹ Had he the presence of mind, Stead could have cited here Arnold’s personal letter to him of a few months earlier extending his “Many thanks for the judicious correction in your last night’s paper. I was disturbed at seeing how Lord C. quoted me, and I am glad to have had what I did say recalled.”⁷² Equally, Stead could have countered Arnold’s claim that Stead’s journalism was essentially “feather-brained” by printing another piece of correspondence, in which the scholar felt “much obliged to the newspaper [the *Pall Mall Gazette*] for its fullness, levelness and general freedom from political bias.”⁷³

Arnold’s uneasy relationship with Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette* reveals, perhaps, the extent to which men of letters like Arnold had grudgingly come to depend upon popular journalism to disseminate their ideas. The newspaper, once influenced and shaped by cultured minds like Arnold’s, was increasingly falling under the control of self-educated, lower middle-class editors like Stead, and although Arnold enjoyed an amicable relationship with the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s inaugural editor and coach-builder’s son, Frederick Greenwood, he was nonetheless delighted when fellow Oxonian, John Morley “accepted [his]

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Arnold to Stead, 9 December, 1886, quoted in Baylen, ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, p. 553-554. Arnold’s objection is in regard to a *Pall Mall Gazette* article of December 8, 1886, in which Lord Coleridge suggests that Arnold believed classical literature to be a “lost cause.”

⁷³ Arnold to Stead, 19 September, 1886, quoted in Baylen, ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, p. 553.

counsel to [edit] the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁷⁴ “I am very glad of it,” wrote Arnold to his sister, “and now we shall have...[a newspaper] with a considerable and known literary personality” informing it.⁷⁵ This is, perhaps, what Stead's one-time assistant, E.T. Cook was referring to when he observed that, when Victorian writers like Arnold were “pouring scorn as men of letters upon journalism, the men of letters were themselves busy at it.”⁷⁶

By the end of 1886, the editorial style of the *Pall Mall Gazette* under Stead had become an increasing concern to Arnold. Stead's brief incursion into the realm of mass readership with the “Maiden Tribute” campaign, followed by his projected martyrdom and imprisonment over the Armstrong Case, confirmed to traditionalists like Arnold the growing power of the popular press and its manipulative effects on an expanding working class electorate.⁷⁷ Even whilst abroad in the United States, Arnold was perturbed enough by Stead's coverage of the General Election to complain to his sister that, “The *Pall Mall* splashes about more wildly than ever, but I suppose it represents a certain phase of Liberalism.”

⁷⁸

By the time Arnold came to write “Up to Easter” in early 1887, Stead's famous articles, “Government by Journalism” and “The Future of Journalism,” had both appeared in the *Contemporary Review*.⁷⁹ Stead's posited vision in “Government by Journalism,” of the newspaper editor as “the uncrowned king of an educated democracy”⁸⁰ must have excited the scholar's scorn even more than Stead's campaigns in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. However, Stead's other key article, “The

⁷⁴ Arnold to his sister, Frances (“Fan”), 15 March, 1880 in Russell, *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, p. 195.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Edward Tyas Cook, *Literary Recreations*, (London: William Heinemann, 1918), p. 122.

⁷⁷ For “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” campaign, see the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 4–10 July, 1885; for proceedings in the Armstrong case see the *Pall Mall Gazette* starting 7 September, 1885. For Stead's experience in prison see: W.T. Stead, *My First Imprisonment*, (London: E. Marlborough & Co, 1886), available online at *WTSRS*,

<<http://www.attackingthediabol.co.uk/steadworks/imprisonment.php>> [accessed 2 May, 2010]

⁷⁸ Arnold to his sister, Frances (“Fan”), 15 March, 1880 in Russell, *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, p.32.

⁷⁹ W.T. Stead, ‘Government by Journalism’, *Contemporary Review*, 49 (1886); W.T. Stead, ‘The Future of Journalism’, *Contemporary Review*, 50 (1886).

⁸⁰ W.T. Stead, ‘Government by Journalism’, p. 664.

Future of Journalism,” with its talk of major-generals, journalistic travellers and, as one reviewer put it, “men on the watch towers everywhere throughout the land,”⁸¹ was of even greater significance. For, here, in Stead’s grandiose vision, was the likely source of Arnold’s passing reference to “new journalism.” “These peripatetic apostles of the new journalism,” wrote Stead,

..would make it their duty to visit the associates, in every town, to infuse into each a sense of the importance of the common work, and to make every one feel that he or she is an important and indispensable part of the system...It may be that the editor is not yet born who is destined thus to organize the new journalism, and take this vast new stride in the direction of intelligent and conscious self-government.⁸²

Brake and Baylen both suggest that “The Future of Journalism” contributed to Arnold’s attack on journalism in “Up to Easter,”⁸³ but Stead’s prior use of the phrase “the new journalism” in an article where he expounded on the concept at great length is never given the attention it deserves. This surprising lack of importance placed on this article, and the disproportionate weight attached to Arnold’s largely ignored comments are difficult to account for.⁸⁴

In truth, Stead utilised the old scholar’s social and literary good standing to endorse the catchphrase and then to embed it into the public imagination.

Arnold’s passing reference to “new journalism,” in his long article on Home Rule

⁸¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 8 November, 1886, p.6. Stead proposed a network of journalistic major generals who were “as nearly as possible the alter ego of the editor” to gather news in the localities. The idea played to Stead’s Puritanical background and reverence of Oliver Cromwell, whose extremely unpopular system of Major Generals placed “a man after his own heart” who was “responsible...for the peace and good government of the district under his care.” (see Stead, ‘The Future of Journalism’, pp. 671-672)

⁸² W.T. Stead, ‘The Future of Journalism’, pp.667-668.

⁸³ See Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, p. 94 and Baylen, ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, p. 549.

⁸⁴ In *Papers for the Millions*, B.I. Diamond’s article, ‘A Precursor of the New Journalism: Frederick Greenwood of the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, pp. 25–45 wrongly cites passages to ‘The Future of Journalism’ that actually come from ‘Government by Journalism’ (pp.27-8). In the same publication, Ray Boston’s piece, ‘W.T. Stead and Democracy by Journalism’, fails to comment on Stead’s use of the phrase “the new journalism”, despite its insertion in the article (p.98). Richard Salmon, in his article, “‘A Simulacrum of Power’: Intimacy and Abstraction in the Rhetoric of the New Journalism’, quotes from ‘The Future of Journalism’ but ignores or overlooks Stead’s use of the phrase “new journalism” (p.28). Baylen, meanwhile, in ‘Matthew Arnold and the *Pall Mall Gazette*’, does briefly acknowledge Stead’s coining of “new journalism” but erroneously accredits it to ‘Government by Journalism’ (p.550).

was largely ignored by contemporaries, but it *was* seized upon by Stead and talked up in the columns of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He did this, firstly, by affirming that the *Pall Mall Gazette* was, indeed, the “originator of the new Journalism” and, thereafter, took pains to remind readers that Matthew Arnold “said I had invented” it.⁸⁵

Whether or not Stead’s earlier article, either consciously or subconsciously, prompted Arnold’s use of the term, “new journalism,” we shall never know. What is a matter of record, however, is Stead’s role in the transforming of Arnold’s throwaway comment into the new catch phrase of the moment, and thence into a significant stage in the history of journalism. In other words, the fame of New Journalism did not happen overnight merely because of Arnold’s passing reference to it; rather it grew slowly during the summer of 1887, gathering momentum along the way. As we shall see, the *campaign* for the New Journalism was incited, generated and maintained, not by Arnold’s article, but by Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Within twenty-four hours of the publication of “Up to Easter”, Stead had begun disseminating the phrase “new journalism” in occasional notes, review articles, press reports and even public correspondence. He instantly recognised the immense journalistic power in the catchphrase as a cultural and journalistic watchword, particularly in its association with a respected man of letters like Arnold.

Starting on May 3, 1887, Stead proudly boasted that Arnold had done him “the honour of describing the New Journalism which, he says, we have invented.”⁸⁶ The use of capitals here is significant; where Arnold’s throwaway line was neither capitalised nor prefixed by the word *the*, Stead’s version harked back to its original usage in “The Future of Journalism.” It thus transformed Arnold’s innocuous comment into a much weightier concept that instantly conjured in the

⁸⁵ See the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 May, 1887, p. 4; For Stead’s comments on the New Journalism, see Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 62.

⁸⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, 3 May, 1887.

public imagination an apparently new, journalistic phenomenon that was “eminently typical of the democratic spirit of modern England.”⁸⁷ In effect, Stead’s journalistic pen transformed Arnold from being the New Journalism’s greatest critic to its most unlikely promoter.

By drawing the public’s attention to “the New Journalism,” and thereby investing it with controversy, Stead then trawled his press contemporaries for responses, which he reprinted, just as he had done during the “Maiden Tribute.” It was a simple and powerful method of both creating debate and elevating the New Journalism to a higher level of public consciousness. Stead even used his press contemporaries to refute Arnold’s original “feather-brained” remarks:

Mr. Matthew Arnold...*has* some severe strictures for the New Journalism...he condemns it as feather-brained, as ready to throw out assertions at a venture because it wishes them true. Certainly the New Journalism may feel that it is fortunate in the opportunity of the accusation; for it comes at a time when its leading representative, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, has achieved a signal triumph, and by means of the very qualities it is said most conspicuously to lack.⁸⁸

By August of 1887, when the New Journalism was being talked up as “one of the pet phrases of the hour,”⁸⁹ it had become, through Stead’s efforts, a high-profile topic of public debate. However, the branding of the New Journalism was also the result of three high profile court cases in 1887, all of which were publicised and influenced by Stead’s distinctive approach to journalism. Firstly, there was the Langworthy Marriage, in which Stead successfully assisted jilted wife and mother, Mildred Langworthy, in securing alimony from her estranged husband, Martin Langworthy; secondly, the case of Miss Cass, a respectable young woman wrongly arrested for soliciting in Regent Street; and thirdly, the Lipski case, in which Jewish immigrant, Israel Lipski was apparently wrongfully convicted of for murder.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Tablet*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 May, 1887, p. 3.

⁸⁹ See the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 August, 1887, p.12.

The first of these, and the most immediate beneficiary of the phrase “the New Journalism” was the Langworthy case, on which Stead had been honing his journalistic pen since April of 1887. The story opened in typically New Journalistic style, in which conventional press reporting of a real-life case was fused with sensationalist melodrama:

Four years ago last February, a wealthy Englishman, plebeian in birth, but immensely rich, was staying at the Hotel Braganza, Lisbon...He was on his honeymoon, and seemed jealously devoted to his *spirituelle* young wife...But in the mornings...he used to amuse himself by torturing the cats which frequented the garden of the hotel. It was rare sport to him...to drop a red hot coal fresh from the fire upon the confiding and unsuspecting pet...That English *milord* was Edward Martin Langworthy, and the story of his marriage, which we are now about to tell, is foreshadowed with curious fidelity in the horrible little episode of the Cats of the Hotel Braganza...the only difference being that in our narrative of facts the victim of a millionaire’s sport is a refined and cultured lady.⁹⁰

In this opening chapter, the first of seventy-five in the protracted and highly melodramatic “Strange True Stories of Today: The Langworthy Marriage,” Stead showed he had lost none of the journalistic force of his “Maiden Tribute” days. Just as he had done in 1885, he drew on public fears and prejudices of the time to present the person of Mrs. Langworthy as an innocent heroine, while reducing the figure of Mr. Langworthy into a clearly discernible human monster. With the *Pall Mall Gazette* playing the role of knight-errant in defence of the Mrs. Langworthy, Stead was thus able to associate the New Journalism with both the fight against injustice and corruption *and* the defence of women. So much so that, by May 5, the term “the New Journalism” had been inserted into the story itself:

...what was being done by those who had promised to look into her case? She asked that question often enough with eager pertinacity. But even to the New Journalism it is impossible to do everything at once..⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 April, 1887, p. 1.

⁹¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 May, 1887, p. 2.

The introduction of “the New Journalism” into the Langworthy crusade breathed added vigour into the story. Not unlike Stead’s “Maiden Tribute” campaign in 1885, the Langworthy case had hitherto enjoyed only muted coverage in the London press, even prompting one newspaper to sneer that it was “nothing but jealousy which causes the rest of the daily press in London to ignore the whole story.”⁹² Just as in his previous crusades, Stead compensated for this by fortifying his leaders with supporting comments and reaction from provincial newspapers, while being careful to promote his brand of New Journalism in the process. His old employer, the *Northern Echo*, declared that the Langworthy campaign was “a production worthy of the New Journalism,”⁹³ while a correspondent of the National Press Agency thought that the New Journalism stood for the “vast amount of unredressed grievances which a great people patiently, but needlessly and uselessly, endure in silence.”⁹⁴

Stead thus ensured that, far from being merely the deliverer of news, the New Journalism became very much the subject of it. Bold crossheads, such as “THE NEW JOURNALISM AND THE LANGWORTHY MARRIAGE,”⁹⁵ “VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE NEW JOURNALISM”⁹⁶ and “THE ANTIQUITY OF THE NEW JOURNALISM,”⁹⁷ assisted him in hammering home the point, whilst his reprinting of carefully selected comments from other newspapers served to endorse the growing reputation and power of what was fast becoming known as the New Journalism phenomenon:

Of all the London papers now alive, the one which takes the premier place for its direct, hard – and what is more, effective – hitting is undoubtedly the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in proof of which some half dozen instances may be quickly cited... First and foremost was the Langworthy marriage. These are examples of the power of the ‘new journalism.’⁹⁸

⁹² *Western Daily Mercury*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 August, 1887, p.11.

⁹³ *Northern Echo*, 30 May, 1887, p.3.

⁹⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 August, 1887, p. 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 May, 1887, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 August, 1887, p. 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 August, 1887, p. 12.

⁹⁸ *Bury Free Press*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 August, 1887, p. 11.

The evocative power of the new phrase meant that it was soon disseminated far beyond the confines of London. In Paris, a correspondent of the *Leeds Mercury* reported that, “Echoes of the New Journalism at home have reached us abroad, and perhaps have contributed to advance the movement on this side.”⁹⁹ An article on the *Shanghai Gazette* entitled “The New Journalism in China,” meanwhile, could easily have been describing its near namesake in London:

The persistent exposure of abuses is not a peculiarity, it seems, of Western journalism; nor even occasional agitation for the reversal of magistrates' decisions...Of the papers started under the direction of foreigners, the leading place is occupied by the...*Shanghai Gazette*, which had reached a circulation of 10,000 copies daily in 1882...the paper has distinguished itself by the way in which it has exposed official abuses, and denounced the use of torture. It is even said to have succeeded in obtaining the revocation of unjust decrees issued by provincial governors.¹⁰⁰

Stead also took pains to encourage debate and comment on the religious connotations of his particular brand of the New Journalism. His self-image as “a God-sent messenger to the age in which I live,”¹⁰¹ had long been an important part of his complex Nonconformist psychology, and now, with the *Dundee Advertiser* describing the New Journalism as “a terror to evil-doers,”¹⁰² and the *Methodist Times* declaring that “the ‘New Journalism’...fills plain, practical Christians with great delight,”¹⁰³ Stead must have exulted in his role as a punishing staff of righteousness that took “insufferable wrong...and dragged it into the light of day.”¹⁰⁴

The Langworthy crusade proved to be a valuable journalistic coup for Stead, and its successful conclusion left the public in no doubt as to the power of the new journalistic force that had won the victory. Indeed, the campaign had been almost as successful in establishing the name of the New Journalism as it was in restoring the fortunes of the triumphant Mildred Langworthy. The *Staffordshire*

⁹⁹ ‘The New Journalism Abroad’, *Leeds Mercury*, 29 August, 1887.

¹⁰⁰ *National Review*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 September, 1887, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, pp. 99-102.

¹⁰² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 August, 1887, p. 11.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20 May, 1887, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Tablet*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 May, 1887, p. 3.

Sentinel went so far as to declare that the case marked “the complete success of a daring attempt to bring before the notice of the public that ‘new journalism’ of which the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* may certainly claim to be the founder.”

¹⁰⁵

By now, the New Journalism was being viewed by its supporters as a kind of journalistic bulls-eye lantern that sought out corruption and illuminated “the dark places of the earth.”¹⁰⁶ Stead’s next two crusades, the Cass case and the Lipski murder, both served to give even greater impetus to this perception. They also allowed Stead to attack an establishment that he would continue to berate throughout the rest of his *Pall Mall Gazette* career: the Metropolitan police.

Elizabeth Cass, a young dressmaker from Stockton-on-Tees, had been in London looking for employment when she was arrested for soliciting. Again donning the mantle of knight-errant and defender of ill-used womanhood, Stead once more deployed New Journalistic methods to tell a tale that would have terrified respectable young women throughout London. In emotive, yet powerful prose, he told of Miss Cass being “seized...by a policeman,” of her spending “a night of terror and anguish in the cells usually occupied by the off-scourings of the streets,” of a magistrate’s “wanton attack” and of a brand of disgrace “affixed...upon the girl’s character which appears in every newspaper in the Kingdom.”¹⁰⁷ Stead stuck doggedly to the case throughout July, launching one withering barrage of criticism after another until Scotland Yard was compelled to conduct an official inquiry. The result was not only Miss Cass’ complete exoneration but also the prosecution of the constable who arrested her.¹⁰⁸

Israel Lipski’s case presented Stead with another apparent miscarriage of justice. An immigrant Jew of previous good character, Lipski was charged with poisoning his partner, Mariam Angel with acid poison. Inexplicably, he had been found under the dead woman’s bed, himself, apparently, also the victim of the

¹⁰⁵ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 August, 1887, p.11.

¹⁰⁶ *Tablet*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 May, 1887, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 July, 1887, p.1.

¹⁰⁸ For Stead’s coverage of the Cass case, see the *Pall Mall Gazette*, starting 2 July, 1887, p.1

poisoner. In the absence of other suspects, authorities charged Lipski with the murder, and at his trial, he was found guilty and sentenced to death.¹⁰⁹ Stead and other observers were disturbed by the circumstantial nature of the evidence used to convict Lipski. Encouraged by the New Journalism's earlier successes, Stead attacked the verdict with sensational leaders, such as "A LEGAL MURDER,"¹¹⁰ "HANGING AN INNOCENT MAN,"¹¹¹ "WILL LIPSKI OR THE HOME SECRETARY SURVIVE?"¹¹² and "DARE WE HANG LIPSKI?"¹¹³ For supporters of Lipski and, indeed, for Stead himself, the campaign was a test of the true power of the New Journalism. Stead knew that alimony hearings and wrongful arrests were one thing, but overturning a death sentence, legally arrived at in a Crown Court, was quite another. As it turned out, the campaign was a success for the New Journalism, but a personal failure for Stead.¹¹⁴

Stead ran both the Cass and Lipski campaigns in tandem throughout July and August of 1887. As with the Langworthy case (and, indeed, many other of his crusades), he looked for a suitable male villain to stand at the dark centre of his New Journalistic narrative; and in both cases, he found this in the maligned figure of Home Secretary, Henry Matthews:

..the infallible Mr. Matthews, who was so sure that the evidence against Miss Cass left no doubt that she was soliciting in Regent-street, is now quite as sure that the unfortunate Lipski committed murder in Whitechapel. Miss Cass, not being doomed to die, had time to vindicate her reputation. Lipski, however, will be hanged on Monday morning, which is convenient for the prosecution. If Miss Cass, for instance, had been hanged the morning after Mr. Matthews assured the House of Commons that there was no doubt of her guilt...Matthews himself, would have been spared many an uncomfortable quarter of an hour present and to come. But in the case of Lipski—all will be safe. Dead men tell no tales, and the ghosts of the legally murdered never haunt the corridors of the Home Office.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ For the particulars of the case, see the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 July, 1887, p.10.

¹¹⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 August, 1887, p.1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 16 August, 1887, p. 9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 19 August, 1887, p.1.

¹¹⁴ Lipski eventually confessed to the murder. For Stead's reaction to this, see the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 August, 1887, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 August, 1887, p.1.

Stead's relentless criticism of Matthews, who, according to Stead, had "the cruelty of a coward,"¹¹⁶ was almost a daily feature of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Convinced of Lipski's innocence, Stead felt not only justified in his conscience, but empowered enough by the New Journalism to demand that the Home Secretary overturn the murder conviction. That this was both unconstitutional and illegal did little to assuage Stead or his supporters, and as the day of Lipski's execution drew closer, so the rhetoric of the *Pall Mall Gazette* grew ever more dramatic. Lipski, Stead announced, was about to be "strangled to death...in the name of the law and by the will of the Home Secretary!"¹¹⁷ The *Leeds Mercury*, meanwhile, encapsulated the public pressure that the New Journalism was now mounting on the Home Secretary:

The movement in favour of a reprieve for the convict Lipski appears to be gathering strength, and we imagine that general surprise will be felt if Mr. Matthews should not give way to the pressure which is now being brought to bear upon him. The nerve of the Home Secretary has unquestionably been shaken by the result of his attempt to defy public opinion in connection with the Cass case, and it is probable that he has now reached a frame of mind in which he must find it exceedingly difficult to stand against anything like a popular agitation.¹¹⁸

Matthews's decision to delay Lipski's execution and re-examine the case was a triumph for Stead, establishing in the public mind the growing power of the New Journalism and, according to the *Birmingham Post*, representing "another step in the direction of government by journalism."¹¹⁹ But not everyone shared in this exultation. The *County Gentleman* complained that "the champion of oppressed women [was] trying to take the rope off one man's neck to put on another's,"¹²⁰ while the *Leeds Mercury* asked, "while the prominent leaders of what is known as 'the New Journalism' will hail Lipski's reprieve as another triumph...is it desirable that...sentences of death...should be subject to revision in response to

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 July, 1887, p.1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 August, 1887, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 18 August, 1887, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ *Birmingham Post*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 August, 1887, p.12.

¹²⁰ *County Gentleman: A Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal*, 20 August, 1887, p. 1119.

newspaper agitations[?]" Trial by newspaper, it concluded, "was bad enough in itself, but re-trial by newspaper is simply intolerable."¹²¹

The ultimate collapse of the Lipski case, occasioned, somewhat mysteriously, by the prisoner's sudden confession, was a serious blow to the credibility of both Stead and the New Journalism. Once seen as the champion of oppressed womanhood, the New Journalism was suddenly now the agent of a criminal convict and self-confessed murderer of women. Stead met the defeat in typically combative fashion, declaring that "All's well that ends well;"¹²² but in private, he secretly communicated his misery over the failure to his old friend, Madame Olga Novikoff. "The Respite," he wrote, "brought me immense fame. The confession dashed me to the ground again...How I am hated."¹²³ In the *Pall Mall Gazette*, meanwhile, Stead could barely contain his sense of betrayal and bitterly condemned Lipski to his fate. "Few criminals," he wrote, "ever went to the gallows who better deserved their fate."¹²⁴

More humiliation was to come when P.C Endacott, the constable who had wrongfully arrested Miss Cass, was acquitted of all wrong doing and restored to his former office. This second failure was, according to the *Glasgow Herald*, a blow "harder even than the confession of the murderer Lipski—to the alliance of inordinate vanity, reckless un-scrupulousness, and hysterical passion which, under the name of 'the new journalism,' has lately tried to arrogate to itself the functions...of Government."¹²⁵

It is, perhaps, somewhat ironic that one of the severest critics of the New Journalism was the *St. James's Gazette* editor, Frederick Greenwood, the man who had brought the *Pall Mall Gazette* into being in 1865. Greenwood was disturbed by Stead's highly personal attacks on the Home Secretary and by the financial incentives that, in Greenwood's mind, lay behind the Lipski case:

¹²¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 18 August, 1887, p. 4.

¹²² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 August, 1887, p.1.

¹²³ Stead to Madame Olga Novikoff, 12 September, 1887, quoted in Eckley, *Maiden Tribute*, pp. 117-18.

¹²⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 August, 1887, p.1.

¹²⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, 2 November, 1887, p.6.

While acknowledging to the full the difficulties which the Home Secretary has had to encounter, we must not forget who aggravated them or for what motives. A catchpenny print, with a well-known and special animus against the Minister, sees a double opportunity. If by an ingenious display of theatrical excitement a sufficient number of persons unacquainted with the facts can be persuaded that...an innocent man may be hanged, an unrivalled opportunity presents itself of damaging and embarrassing a hated political opponent. At the same time a good stroke of business may be done in the gutter...That all this was done is perhaps the greatest disgrace that has ever happened to English journalism.¹²⁶

In many ways, the Lipski case was a critical blow to Stead's influence at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, on both personal and professional levels, and his critique of the police and political establishment during the "Bloody Sunday" demonstration in Trafalgar Square later that same year, further damaged his relationship with *Pall Mall Gazette* proprietor, Henry Yates Thompson. The campaign, wrote Stead, "hit us in advertisements and also in circulation,"¹²⁷ a financial reality that served to make Stead's position as editor increasingly untenable.

Stead finally left the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1890 to join *Tit-Bits* proprietor, George Newnes in a new venture entitled, the *Review of Reviews* (hereafter, the *Review*). The *Review* was, according to Stead, "the maddest thing" he had yet done,¹²⁸ since the venture had been decided on only a month earlier. The *Review* was written almost exclusively by him. Along with dozens of magazine and book reviews, it also included a running commentary of world events entitled, "The Progress of the World," and a character sketch of a current "celebrity." The first issue was an instant success, and opened with numerous welcome messages, which Stead had courted from various dignitaries of the time.

In many ways, the *Review* took Stead back to his youth at Howden, where a family journal entitled, the *Magazinctum; a Journal of the Stead Family*, had given him (under the pseudonym, W.T. Silcoates) his first editorial experience. According to Stead's daughter, Estelle, the *Magazinctum* was devoted to "the

¹²⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 August, 1887, p. 11.

¹²⁷ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 149.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

various interests and adventures of the different members of the Stead family.”¹²⁹

In the preface of the first issue, Stead had declared:

Magazinctum will, we trust, always be found of interest to its readers, both of this and of following generations. To show on what firm ground this trust is founded, we need only mention of what it will consist. First there will be a continued story running through the whole year . . . This alone is sufficient to insure its popularity, but when we proceed to enumerate the various other attractions it will present, all our readers will be satisfied that never before in the annals of the Steadian *gens* was such a varied and delightful amount of literature made public. There will be mechanical devices, instrumental plans, and many other outpourings of perfect genius . . . It is certain that a tale, weirdly romantic, from the pen of a well-known student of sensation will appear every month. . . . Stories illustrative of ancient times are expected from the philological member of the race.¹³⁰

Written entirely by hand and running for some ten issues over a five-year period, much of the *Magazinctum*, with its featured illustrations, pen portraits and character sketches, ended up being reincarnated in the *Review*. However, Stead’s relationship with Newnes came under strain when the latter strongly objected to Stead’s scathing attack on *The Times*.¹³¹ Perhaps seeing this discord as a sign of things to come, Newnes severed ties, and after buying out Newnes’ share, Stead re-shaped the *Review* after his own image.

With article titles such as “Baby-killing as a ‘Good Investment’”¹³² and “Ought Mrs. Maybrick to be Tortured to Death?”¹³³ Stead showed he had lost none of the sledge hammer force of his journalistic prose. But the influence of his journalism, constrained as it was by the monthly, rather than daily publication of the *Review*, was beginning to wane. As if perturbed by this, in 1893, Stead decided to launch his own daily newspaper.¹³⁴ Intended to run in tandem with the *Review*, and entitled, rather unimaginatively, the *Daily Paper*, the new venture began its short life in October, 1893. It was a radical concept in that it was to be

¹²⁹ Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 48.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

¹³¹ W.T. Stead, ‘The Times’, *Review of Reviews*, 1, 1890, pp. 185-191.

¹³² W.T. Stead, ‘Baby Killing as a “Good Investment”’, *Review of Reviews*, 1, 1890, p. 394.

¹³³ W.T. Stead, ‘Ought Mrs. Maybrick to be Tortured to Death?’, *Review of Reviews*, 6, 1892, pp. 390-396.

¹³⁴ For more on this, see Brake, ‘Who is We? The *Daily Paper* Projects’.

funded by its own subscribers by way of a debenture system, which, as Stead hoped, would give him “the advantage which comes from enlisting the pecuniary interest of a large number of shareholders”¹³⁵ and keep him free from the pressures of commercial journalism.

However, not even Stead's devoted readers supported the scheme and only one issue of the *Daily Paper* appeared as a supplement to the *Review*. More sermonic than journalistic, and with items such as “Saint of the Day,”¹³⁶ “In Place of Morning Service”¹³⁷ and “Wanted, an English Bible,”¹³⁸ the *Daily Paper* harked back to quasi-religious rhetoric of Stead’s earliest *Northern Echo* articles, while “Lady Brooke: a Telepathic Interview”¹³⁹ played to his latest infatuation, spiritualism. Stead re-launched the *Daily Paper* in 1904 to considerable fanfare and expense. This second incarnation was aimed at domestic readers, particularly women, so much so that Stead omitted items concerning business and financial matters and set delivery for mid-morning to avoid competition with other morning dailies. By now, however, he had lost touch with the workings of daily journalism and could only watch in despair as his second *Daily Paper* proved to be a spectacular failure. Once the king of New Journalism, he was now being overtaken by new innovators like as Harmsworth, whose newspaper revolution was profoundly changing the expectations of the reading public.

The collapse of the second *Daily Paper*, within weeks of its launch, took Stead to the brink of financial ruin, and disposed of what George Bernard Shaw described as, his “imaginary reputation as an editor.”¹⁴⁰ In many ways, Shaw was not far from the truth. At heart, Stead was an evangelist; a minister’s son who saw the editor’s chair as a pulpit and the reading public as his congregation. Business matters often did not feature in this restless universe, a fact which frequently drove the *Review of Reviews* to the brink of ruin. As his assistant at that publication, Grant Richards lamented:

¹³⁵ W.T. Stead, ‘An Offer of £100,000 to my Readers’, *Review of Reviews*, 8, 1893, p. 349.

¹³⁶ W.T. Stead, ‘Saint of the Day’, *Daily Paper*, 4 October, 1893, p. 13.

¹³⁷ W.T. Stead, ‘In Place of Morning Service’, *Daily Paper*, 4 October, 1893, p. 12.

¹³⁸ W.T. Stead, ‘Wanted: an English Bible’, *Daily Paper*, 4 October, 1893, pp. 25-26.

¹³⁹ W.T. Stead, ‘Lady Brooke: a Telepathic Interview’, *Daily Paper*, 4 October, 1893, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Whyte, *Life of W.T. Stead*, I, pp. 304-6.

Had that revered chief of mine, W. T. Stead been a man of business rather than a crusader, a visionary, he would have made a fortune. He had a magnificent conception of ends but very inadequate ideas as to how those ends were to be achieved...the money he made...might have been doubled again and again had he kept his eye on the ball...[but] anything he did make was expended on other of his projects or activities which were in their turn entirely quixotic or altruistic in their nature. His manager, Edwin H. Stout, had continually to pull him up sharp—or had to try to do so!¹⁴¹

Stead suffered a nervous breakdown after the second failure of the *Daily Paper* and never again mounted a major journalistic enterprise. With a characteristic sense of the dramatic, he went down with the *Titanic* in 1912.

Had he lived to see it, Matthew Arnold would no doubt have welcomed Stead's resignation from the *Pall Mall Gazette* at the end of 1889. The editor's persistent attacks on the establishment, along with the New Journalism's heady success in swaying important decision makers, bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the government by journalism projected by Stead in 1886. Yet, Stead's departure from the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1889, left New Journalism in the hands of another newspaper that would prove even more extreme. Edited by Irish radical, T.P. O'Conner, himself a shrewd observer of the New Journalism, *The Star*, through its harrowing coverage of the Whitechapel murders, would go on to achieve circulations that Stead could only dream of. Under the direction of *The Star* and later practitioners, the New Journalism would quickly depart from the moral high ground that Stead had made so much his own, while Stead himself became increasingly disassociated from the genre. So much so that, in 1890, one journal stated that, "Nobody seems to know who invented the New Journalism. That is lucky for the inventor, for, if he could be identified, he would probably be waylaid some evening and ducked in the nearest horse-pond."¹⁴²

This statement suggests that Stead's efforts in establishing the concept of New Journalism were already being forgotten only three years after its dramatic

¹⁴¹ Grant Richards, *Memories of a Misspent Youth*, (London: William Heinemann, 1932) pp. 332-333.

¹⁴² *Judy: the London Serio-Comic Journal*, 3 September, 1890, p.114.

inception. His departure from the *Pall Mall Gazette* removed him from the cut-and-thrust associated with the new genre and his later attempts to revive his journalistic career with the *Daily Paper* were, as we have seen, a complete failure. The influence of Matthew Arnold, in contrast, continued to grow through the burgeoning academic study of literature and culture throughout the twentieth century. The inevitable effect of this has meant that, while Stead's stature has diminished, Arnold's passing comments on New Journalism continue to be cited by scholars as the place where the genre was first defined.

This importance is unmerited. Arnold's innocuous statement - "we have had opportunities of observing a new journalism"¹⁴³ - buried as it was in a lengthy essay on Home Rule and aimed largely at a scholarly readership, had neither the force nor the reach of Stead's campaigning rhetoric; and without Stead's intervention, could not, in itself, have fired the public imagination sufficiently to establish New Journalism as a house-hold name. The earlier appearance of the phrase "the new journalism" in Stead's article "The Future of Journalism," moreover, reasonably suggests the scholar may originally have picked up the phrase from there.

Baylen's suggestion that Arnold's comments in "Up to Easter" were immediately seized upon by Stead's contemporaries only make sense when we recognise Stead's key orchestrating role in taking the scholar's passing remark and elevating it into something more distinct and substantial. Evidence suggests that the Langworthy case, the first to carry Stead's new brand name, was not even covered by the London press and only in provincial papers was the phrase "the new journalism" actively taken up.¹⁴⁴ This pattern suggests that Stead's distinctive brand of New Journalism gained its main support from a loose coalition of provincials, Nonconformists and radicals that often defined themselves against the Metropolitan centre. Careful examination reveals that these newspapers were responding to Stead's discursive rhetoric, rather than to

¹⁴³ Arnold, 'Up to Easter', p.638.

¹⁴⁴ See the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 August, 1887, p.11.

Arnold's comments in "Up to Easter," which went largely unnoticed until revived by Stead in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁴⁵

Ultimately, the New Journalism owed its branding to Stead's adroit manipulation of Arnold and the highly public campaigns of Langworthy, Cass and Lipski. All served to ally the New Journalism with the fight against social inequality and official corruption, and in doing so, briefly presented it as a powerful deliverer of justice and an agent of democracy. This popular esteem, however, was not to last; for, neither the New Journalism nor Stead would fully recover from the Lipski failure, and both, thereafter, were regarded with increasing suspicion and distrust. This was particularly the case when second generation New Journalists, like O'Conner, drove the genre into a more commercially motivated direction that, more often than not, abandoned the moral high ground in pursuit of profits.

Scholars have often defined the New Journalism by its stylistic features, particularly those imported from the American press. Stead never denied this American influence. Indeed, in his book, *The Americanisation of the World* (1902), he openly admitted that the personal interview, one of the most salient features of New Journalism, "was a distinctively American invention," along with "the art of scare-heading" (headlines).¹⁴⁶ Even the famous *Pall Mall Gazette* "extra," which drove home campaigns such as the "Maiden Tribute," the "Truth about the Navy" and the Langworthy Case, was an American idea, inspired, Stead acknowledged, by "an excellent series of extras issued by the *New York Tribune*."¹⁴⁷

Yet, for Stead, the New Journalism was so much more than mere journalistic style. As if to illustrate this, in his 1908 interview with American yellow journalist and press tycoon, W.R. Hearst, he seemed less concerned about Hearst's *New York Journal* than he was about whether or not the American "had

¹⁴⁵ Based on a search of the Gale online databases, *19th Century British Library Newspapers* and *19th Century UK Periodicals* and Proquest's, online database *British Periodicals*.

¹⁴⁶ W.T. Stead, *The Americanisation of the World or the Trend of the Twentieth Century*, (London: *Review of Reviews*, 1902) p. 111.

¹⁴⁷ W.T. Stead, 'The *Pall Mall Gazette*', *Review of Reviews*, 7, 1893, p. 153.

got a soul.”¹⁴⁸ For, journalism, he told the perplexed Hearst, was “not a business like everything else...[but] the heir of all the theocracies, monarchies, aristocracies, hierarchies, plutocracies.”¹⁴⁹

Stead both identified with and envied Hearst, for the American’s millions meant he could publish with a freedom that Stead, throughout his career, was never able to enjoy. “I have been long on the look out,” he went on, “for a man...who will carry out my ideal of government by journalism...and I wonder if you are that man.”¹⁵⁰ If Hearst was somewhat puzzled by this, it was, perhaps, because, in truth, he was closer in temperament to the commercialised T. P. O’Conner than the evangelical Stead. Like O’Conner’s *The Star*, Hearst’s *New York Journal* was a scandalous and scurrilous organ aimed at a base readership for maximum profit, and Stead would, perhaps, have better put his question to Hearst’s archrival and editor of the *New York World*, Joseph Pulitzer, with whom he had significantly more in common.

Like Stead, Pulitzer came from humble origins and used his journalism to challenge corruption and poverty wherever he found them. As Spencer remarks: “Victims were numerous, and among the leading villains of the day were the Standard Oil Company, the New York Central Railway, the telephone monopoly, slum landlords, crooked contractors [and] sexual exploiters.”¹⁵¹ Where Hearst saw sensationalism as an end in itself, Pulitzer saw it only as a means to an end,¹⁵² a view that chimed strongly with Stead’s philosophy that sensationalism was “justifiable up to the point that it is necessary to arrest the eye of the public and compel them to admit the necessity of action.”¹⁵³

The yellow journalism war that Pulitzer and Hearst waged against each other throughout the 1890s ultimately damaged both newspapers; so much so that

¹⁴⁸ W. T. Stead, ‘W. Randolph Hearst’, *Review of Reviews*, 38, 1908, p. 332.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹⁵¹ David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: the Press and America’s Emergence as a World Power*, (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p.103.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁵³ W.T. Stead, ‘Government by Journalism’, p. 621.

many of New York's public libraries, clubs and learning institutions banished them from their reading rooms. Interestingly, both papers were now considered practitioners of New Journalism, which, quoted the *New York Times*, had "a most demoralizing influence" and attracted "a very undesirable class of readers."¹⁵⁴

In many ways, the war in New York mirrored the similar power struggle in London between the New Journalism of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the very different New Journalism of *The Star*. The former, progressive and high minded, the latter, profit-driven and morally neutral, their brief rivalry was effectively rendered pointless by Northcliffe's revolution.¹⁵⁵

By then, however, Stead had fallen out of daily journalism. As the editor of the monthly *Review of Reviews*, his continued attempts to influence the New Journalism met with repeated frustration, while his watchwords on the increasingly fading ideal of government by journalism went largely unheeded: "In a democracy the journalist is the one man whose voice is heard day by day by all the people...It is his mission to be the Moses of Humanity."¹⁵⁶

Alluding here to American poet, James Russell Lowell's poem, "The Pious Editor's Creed,"¹⁵⁷ Stead reveals not only one of his greatest journalistic inspirations,¹⁵⁸ but his passionate belief in the missionary power of the press. It was a power that other men would ultimately go on to wield in very different ways, while Stead himself became an increasingly obscure figure, relegated to a journalistic hinterland. So much so that, according to George Bernard Shaw, "younger men in Fleet Street began to wonder, not merely who Stead was, but whether he had ever been a journalist."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ *New York Times*, 4 March, 1897, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ John Goodbody, 'The Star: its Role in the Rise of the New Journalism', in *Papers for the Millions*, pp. 158-160.

¹⁵⁶ W. T. Stead, 'W. Randolph Hearst', p. 332

¹⁵⁷ See James Russell Lowell, *The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1871) p. 203.

¹⁵⁸ For the profound influence of James Russell Lowell on Stead's journalism, see W.T. Stead, 'James Russell Lowell: his Message and How it Helped Me', *Review of Reviews*, 6, 1891, pp. 235-247.

¹⁵⁹ Whyte, *Life of W.T. Stead*, I, p. 305.

Turn-of-the-century New Journalism nonetheless owed much to Stead. His skilful manipulation of Matthew Arnold's comments and his orchestration of public and political debate during the Langworthy, Cass and Lipski cases in 1887, had succeeded in thrusting a new and powerful concept into the public imagination. Despite the later setbacks associated with the Cass and Lipski cases, Stead's early promotion of the New Journalism provides an object lesson on the potential power of the press and represents a pivotal milestone in the evolution of popular journalism itself.

The year 1887 also marks the summit of Stead's journalistic career; a career that had begun in 1871 at the *Northern Echo* in Darlington. As we shall see in the next chapter, the events in that town during the 1860s and 1870s were, in many ways, an important precursor to the development of New Journalism at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. For it was here, as the provincial editor of "the heartiest fighting morning paper between Leeds and Edinburgh"¹⁶⁰ that Stead developed the first embryonic signs of his distinctive style and voice."

¹⁶⁰ W.T. Stead, 'A North Country Worthy', *Review of Reviews*, 10, 1894, p. 85.

2. Stead and the *Northern Echo*

In order to understand the origins of Stead's journalistic philosophy and style, it is necessary to study his years at the *Northern Echo* and understand the specific historical and political context in which the paper was launched. This chapter, therefore, will trace the development of journalism in Darlington and examine the specific political battles that not only gave rise to the *Northern Echo*, but also helped shape Stead's first experience as an editor.

The Early Press in Darlington

The *Northern Echo* was not the first newspaper to be sold in Darlington. In fact, the very first newspaper in the town was the *Darlington Pamphlet, Or County of Durham Intelligencer*, which was first printed and published in 1772 by a Mr J. Sadler. Published weekly and priced at 2d., the *Darlington Pamphlet* was not really a pamphlet at all; but by calling it so, its editor reasoned that he would circumvent the government's crippling newspaper tax, then in force. Like many early provincial publications, this early production initially contained little actual news of the town in which it sold. In the first issue, the little Darlington news it contained included the election of a new MP for nearby Aldbrough, an announcement concerning the Newcastle to London post coach, a back page of local advertisements and several letters to the editor. Things were, however, a little more entertaining by June, when one issue included a sensational human interest story that could easily have held its own in the tit-bit columns associated with New Journalism a century later. It reported that local man, Richard Jefferson:¹⁶¹

..having got a cup too much, went into a meadow to take a little repose. When having laid about two hours he got up and went to Mr. Johnson's at the Black Swan in Staindrop, and sat for some time drinking a tankard of ale, but on a sudden he felt a tickling in his

¹⁶¹ John Robert Page, *Darlington Newspapers*, (Darlington: Darlington Corporation, 1972) p. 2; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p.9.

lungs which caused him to cough very much, and after straining himself very much he threw up a very large bumble bee... It is imagined he had had it in his breast upwards of two hours quite alive without doing him the least harm.¹⁶²

As Weiner and others have rightly argued, examples of styles and stories that pre-figure the so-called New Journalism of the late nineteenth century are frequently to be found in both late eighteenth and early nineteenth century newspapers.¹⁶³ Moreover, it is important to recognise that stylistic features, such as cross-headers and illustrations that came to typify Stead's journalism at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, were not an invention of the 1880s, but rather evolved slowly throughout the century. All this was, however, still a century away in 1772, and despite his best efforts, Sadler eventually fell prey to the "taxes on knowledge" and his *Darlington Pamphlet* was forced to cease printing.

Sadler's next journalistic endeavour, the *Darlington Mercury*, of the following year, proved equally unsuccessful (though another paper of the same name would appear in 1864). Following the demise of the *Pamphlet* and its sister, the *Mercury*, the journalistic needs of Darlington continued to be met by the Leeds, York and Newcastle press,¹⁶⁴ and Darlingtonians had to wait almost eighty years before another newspaper was successfully established in the town. This came in the shape of the *Darlington & Stockton Times* (hereafter the *D&S*), which was published weekly in Darlington from 1848. However, even this was not strictly a Darlington-born paper, since it was actually founded in the neighbouring town of Barnard Castle in 1847. In fact, after Sadler's ill-fated productions, Darlington never founded another newspaper until the 1850s, when newspaper taxes began to be repealed and when, as in so many other provincial towns, several newspapers came into existence on a euphoric wave of newfound press freedom.

¹⁶² Quoted in Page, *Darlington Newspapers*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶³ See Wiener, 'How New was the New Journalism?'

¹⁶⁴ Jeremy Black, *The English Press: 1621-1861*, (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2001), p. 111.

Among these new and often hastily conceived papers were the *Northern Express* (1855), which later became the *Northern Daily Express*, the *Tees Mercury* (1855), which failed after only one issue, the *Darlington Telegram* (1858), which lasted only a few months, and the *Darlington Telegraph, General Advertiser and Servants Register* (1854). The latter proved very resilient and survived until 1880 under the guise of the *Darlington and Richmond Herald*, a name which it adopted from 1873.¹⁶⁵

Of all these productions the *Northern Express* is the most significant since, begun on April 21, 1855, it had the distinction of being the first “daily” newspaper in Darlington. Founded by a Mr. John Watson and priced at 2d. prior to repeal and just one penny thereafter, the *Northern Express*’s inaugural address declared that “Facts will be stated without comment”, that “all party Politics will be excluded”, and that “a stern morality of tone will pervade its columns.” The paper also announced that it had “entered into an arrangement, at an immense expense, with the Submarine and British Electric Telegraph Company, to supply us DIRECT with the same news which they supply to the London morning papers.”¹⁶⁶

Sadly, Darlingtonians were not to benefit from Watson’s hi-tech “arrangement”, since both he and his paper soon deserted Darlington in favour of the more prosperous Newcastle, whose booming industries and growing population offered substantially richer pickings. There he renamed his paper the *Northern Daily Express* and enjoyed considerable success, much to the dismay of existing Newcastle newspaper barons.¹⁶⁷

It was left, then, to the *Darlington Telegraph* and the *D&S* to carry the torch of local journalism in post-tax Darlington, and here the latter took centre stage until it was eclipsed by the *Northern Echo* in the 1870s. The *D&S* was the brainchild

¹⁶⁵ Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p.20.

¹⁶⁶ Maurice Milne, *Newspapers of Northumberland and Durham: a Study of their Progress During the ‘Golden Age’ of the Provincial Press*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Frank Graham, 1971) p. 40.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 11.

of staunch Liberal, philanthropist and barrister, George Brown, who, like many other northern Liberals of the time, sought to challenge the Tory monopoly of the press in the North and promote reform.¹⁶⁸ According to Brown's pre-publication prospectus, the *D&S Times* would:

..labour to promote the diffusion of liberal principles, and the progress of peaceful and enlightened measures for the removal of national Abuses, and for securing the just Rights and Privileges of all men and the safety and welfare of the Country... Our views are in favour of Peace, Temperance, a reformed criminal code, thorough Sanitary Regulations, and the Extension of unfettered Education to all.¹⁶⁹

It was a powerful and appealing message, so powerful, in fact, that the first issue of the *D&S* sold out almost immediately and Brown and his staff found themselves in the embarrassing position of being unable to satisfy demand. Not that the first *D&S* was in any way extraordinary; indeed, page one contained only auction news, insurance and general advertisements, while the annual meetings of the Darlington Abstinence Society and the Stockton Institute of Literature and Science took up the whole of page two, typically emphasising the educational and moral ethos of so many Liberal mid-Victorian newspapers. Brown's leading article on poverty entitled, "The Labourer", again typified this radical, mid-century journalistic genre and tradition that Stead would later take and develop in his own dramatic way:

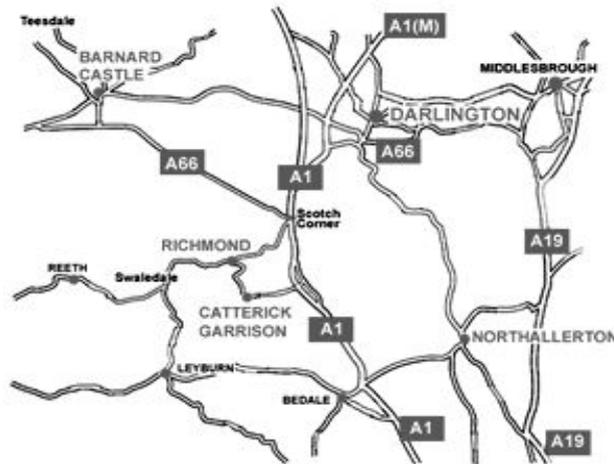
In London, 20,000 persons rise every morning without knowing where they are to sleep at night; in Dublin 60,000 people in one year passed through the fever hospital...The artisan will go into his miserable cottage, take one by one his furniture and his garments to the pawn broker and at last sit down to hear the wailing of his family for bread....Taxation on the necessities of life ought to be lessened, if not absolutely removed...physical and moral education should be provided for the people; their homes should be improved by judicious sanitary measures and state aid afforded to those voluntary and co-operative associations by which the labourers of Great Britain are now seeking to improve their own state.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 2 October, 1937, p.3; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 21.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Page, *Darlington Newspapers*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 2 October, 1937, p.3.

Ironically, the initial success of the *D&S* was the very reason for its departure from Barnard Castle. After a few weeks of publication, it became evident to Brown and his backers that the geographical location of Barnard Castle, along with its tiny population, was a severe handicap to the newspaper's expansion.



Moreover, transporting the *D&S* to other areas was problematic, particularly in winter, since delivery relied heavily on the use of horse-drawn carriages, which often fell foul of snow-blocked roads and other weather related impediments.

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In February, 1848, the *D&S* operations moved to the more practical location of Central Hall in Darlington, at the time the most socially and politically important building in the town. Brown severed ties with the paper a year later to pursue other business interests and, thereafter, the *D&S* came under the control of respected accountants, share brokers and property developers, Robert and William Thompson. They remained in charge of the paper for a further sixteen years. With offices in Bondgate, Darlington, the Thompsons were leading businessmen in the town and able to give the *D&S* considerably more financial backing than the paper had hitherto enjoyed. However, disaster struck in 1864 when plummeting property prices and a concomitant drop in business sent the Thompsons into liquidation.¹⁷²

Darlington's ability to support a permanent newspaper in the period between the late eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth was, therefore, limited. As a relatively small provincial market town with a population of only 4,670 in 1801,

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 21.

it struggled to establish the necessary economic foundation and readership that could support a daily newspaper. Nonetheless, what emerges from this brief history of journalistic endeavour is a continuing desire, on the part of a nucleus of local townspeople, to enjoy the civic advantages of newspaper culture. Moreover, despite its relative smallness, Darlington was in the forefront of many nineteenth-century commercial developments, particularly railway development. The ubiquitous Quaker Pease family stood at the centre of this commercial and industrial innovation; and in the period between the 1820s and 1870s, their power and influence expanded rapidly.

The Northern Echo and Henry King Spark

The *D&S* might easily have gone the way of its short-lived predecessors. The fact that it avoided this fate was due to the ambitions of local businessman and one-time employee of the *D&S*, Henry King Spark who, in the years ahead, would play a central role in both the early history of the *Northern Echo* and its proprietors' decision to install the inexperienced Stead as editor. Like Stead, Spark was brought up in a strictly Nonconformist household and was educated at home. Imbued with a strong religious conviction, his parents intended him a position in the ministry and, to that end, encouraged him to preach from an early age (Spark was teaching in Sunday school at only nine years old). Despite this, he did not share his parents' ambitions and, after the family moved to Leeds, Spark ended up working as an apprentice compositor in the printing trade. In 1847, aged twenty-two, he made his way north again and landed himself a job in Barnard Castle on the *D&S*. When the paper moved to Darlington, so, too, did Spark.¹⁷³

He soon, however, began to chafe at his new working environment in the basement of Darlington Central Hall; and after seeing an advertisement in the *D&S*, he quit the printing trade for a more lucrative post as a clerk and assistant traveller for a local coal merchant. However, no sooner had the young Spark

¹⁷³ *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 2 October, 1937, p.3; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 22.

settled into his new position than his employer inexplicably fled Darlington, leaving the business in the hands of his inexperienced but determined young assistant. Spark spent the next few years scratching out a living, buying and selling coal and coke in and around the south Durham area, until a business deal in the mid 1850s made him a wealthy man with an estimated fortune of £30,000. Spurred on by this success, he ventured further into the coal business and leased the Inkerman Colliery from the Weardale Iron Company in 1857. Two years later, he snapped up collieries in Shincliffe and Houghall. He also purchased the grandiose Greenbank estate on the outskirts of Darlington, where he became widely known as the “Lord of Greenbank.”¹⁷⁴

What all this meant was that, by the time *D&S* owners, the Thompson brothers, encountered their financial crisis in 1864, Spark was in a position to purchase what even the mighty Pease family did not have - a newspaper. He bought the paper outright and moved everything into purpose-built premises. Two years later, the fledgling mid-weekly *Darlington Mercury* (established in 1864) was absorbed into the Sparkian fold and Spark launched both newspapers in his own image, with the Pease empire firmly in his sights.¹⁷⁵

The ensuing power struggle between Spark and the Peases was, in truth, part of a growing resentment that many of Darlington’s businessmen had come to harbour against the powerful Quaker family. With their allies, the Backhouses, the Peases had long dominated the town’s economic affairs, including iron, textiles, banking and, of course, railway development. Many Darlingtonian businessmen understandably viewed the Pease empire as a leviathan of corruption, and some, led by the ambitious Spark, felt it was high time for reform.¹⁷⁶

Not that Spark himself was an improvement. An habitual and debt-ridden gambler, whom Stead would one day describe as a “glib-tongued” orator whose

¹⁷⁴ Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 22.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22; Milne, *Newspapers of Northumberland*, pp. 55-6.

¹⁷⁶ For more on the Pease empire, see M. W. Kirby, *Men of Business and Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Quaker Pease Dynasty of North East England 1700-1943* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

“tinsel seem[ed] better than a plain honest man’s gold,”¹⁷⁷ he frequently drove his business ventures to ruin, often to the great loss of fellow investors.

Nonetheless, Spark’s first major broadside against the Peases came in 1867, when he launched a two-pronged attack against Darlington’s Pease-dominated political landscape. Part of his attack came in the form of a campaign to make Darlington into a parliamentary borough, which could thus elect its own M.P. In truth, the Peases were not overly worried by this prospect; given the size of their empire and its influence in the north of England, any election fought in Darlington was almost bound to return a Pease affiliate. What really set the alarm bells ringing, however, was Spark’s more immediate objective: the Incorporation of Darlington, which meant replacing the old Pease controlled Board of Health with a new town council and mayor. Rightly, the Peases saw this as a serious threat to their influence. Moreover, Spark had a significant number of Darlington’s businessmen at his back, ten of whom had registered their resentment of the Pease monopoly by funding the Sparkian campaign.¹⁷⁸ Much later, in 1917, the *D&S* recalled what followed:

A very fierce controversy arose from 1867 onwards, the old local and political parties resenting the attempts of Mr Spark to upset the current order of things...The Spark party alleged what was little short of peculation on the part of the leading men on the opposite side.

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To see off Spark’s challenge, the Peases turned to Mark Fooks, editor of the *Darlington Telegraph*, which they had hastily taken over to represent them “in opposition to the organs of Mr H.K. Spark.”¹⁸⁰ Fooks was an experienced newspaperman, late of the *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle*, and it was hoped that his experience would be enough to counter the upstart Spark. However, Fooks and the *Telegraph* proved only moderately successful; Spark’s papers, the *D&S* and the *Mercury*, outgunned the Quaker organ two to one and Spark himself was a formidable public speaker with no equal within the Pease camp:

¹⁷⁷ *Northern Echo*, 9 March, 1874, pp.2-3.

¹⁷⁸ Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, pp. 20-22; Milne, *Newspapers of Northumberland*, pp. 55-6.

¹⁷⁹ *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 7 July, 1917, p.6.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

How the illiterate manworkers of those days worshipped at his political shrine. What meetings he used to get up; and he moved the great crowds as easily as the wind the golden grain in August, for he had a wonderful and magnetic power in his voice and gestures, and few could better evoke earnest and enthusiastic response from an election crowd.¹⁸¹

With slogans such as “FOR MAYOR. KING HENRY THE NINTH”, Spark spoke out from the public platform and in his newspapers, and characterised the existing Pease order of things as old-fashioned, autocratic and corrupt. As the star speaker at the Mechanics’ Hall in Darlington, he spoke out vehemently against the ruling Quaker clique who clung “with tightening grasp to their crumbling power” and sought only to keep the town “within their own narrow circle.”¹⁸²

Much to the dismay of the Peases, and despite the best efforts of Fooks and the *Telegraph*, the Incorporation juggernaut proved unstoppable. After a public inquiry in March, 1867, Darlington was granted its charter, and all that remained was for the town to elect its first town council and mayor. Spark’s aspirations of becoming mayor, however, were thwarted at the very first Council meeting; the Pease camp flatly refused to elect Spark, and demanded that the honour should be given to Henry Fell Pease. Much to Spark’s horror, the motion was passed; Henry Fell Pease became the first elected mayor of Darlington while Spark had to settle with just an ordinary seat on the Council.

It was a humiliating defeat, but Spark was never a man to be silenced; embittered but unperturbed, he moved to a new campaign: the election of Darlington’s first Member of Parliament. Spark had been calling for Darlington to become a Parliamentary borough since early 1867 and in 1868 this finally became a reality. “The bitter feeling,” recalled the *D&S*, “was renewed, and if possible intensified,

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12 December, 1899, p.3.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 31 October, 1867, p.3.

when Darlington became a Parliamentary Borough, and Mr. Spark became the opposing candidate to the old Liberal Party's nominee."¹⁸³

Once more the battle lines were drawn as Spark, standing as an "independent Liberal", squared up to the Pease party machine in a bid to become Darlington's first MP. In response, the Peases fielded Edmund Backhouse, a prominent and highly respected banker with impeccable Quaker credentials. Again, Spark deployed his rhetorical skills from the hustings and again his newspapers demonized his Pease antagonists:

The Quakers have made all the wealth they care to make out of Darlington...they seek to keep it merely as a toy, a bauble, to please their Quaker pride...With the tenacity of life which...appertains to a sordid old age, they cling to the mouldering relics of their family pride...brood over the old because it is theirs [and] hate the new because it is the people's.¹⁸⁴

Such rhetoric, which portrayed the old and corrupt clinging to power while resisting "the new" would one day find voice in Stead's New Journalistic rhetoric at both the *Northern Echo* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Indeed, despite towing the party line in his own (later) political battles with Spark, Stead later hinted that he quietly admired his opponent and the "'consummate ability' with which Mr. Spark played his cards."¹⁸⁵ This is, perhaps, unsurprising; both men had much in common, being shaped as they were by their respective Nonconformist backgrounds and driven by a sense of mission that drew on radical political traditions, in which the concept of "old corruption" was a central theme.

For Spark, "old corruption" was manifested in 1868 in the figure of Edmund Backhouse, as the two men locked horns on a crisp November morning before a rowdy, 6,000 strong crowd. Backhouse's speech was able enough, but public speaking was Spark's forte, and in a soaring oration, he spoke out against the

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7 July, 1917, p.6.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 November, 1868, p.3.

¹⁸⁵ *Northern Echo*, 9 March, 1874, p. 2.

corruption of the Peases and their attempts to coerce the electorate. Spark warned his supporters:

Let no slander or defamation, however dishonorable; let no vile aspiration, however malignant; let no misrepresentation, however ingenious, turn you from your purpose, and Heaven will smile on your efforts and your country will unite in rejoicing with you at the power and the spread of freedom.¹⁸⁶

It was an inspirational address that brought a show of hands overwhelmingly in Spark's favour. However, polling day turned out to be a cold, rain-filled affair with biting winds that kept voters indoors. Spark's support evaporated and Backhouse won comfortably by just over 900 votes.

It was another humiliating defeat for Spark, who by now had amassed considerable debts and, doubtless, had banked on an election victory to improve his fortunes. To add insult to injury, Spark's war with the Quaker establishment was satirised (presumably at the behest of the Peases) in an anonymous pamphlet, entitled "The Great War and What became of it."¹⁸⁷ The story is a richly sarcastic jibe at Spark and his followers. Spark himself is alluded to as "the great Hoo Kee...most remarkable for his wonderful talking powers" but "possessed of the most consummate egotism and an unbounded ambition."¹⁸⁸ The pamphlet continues:

Our hero joined the ranks of the new party, and at last the old and simple form of government was abolished and a new Charter of Nationality was established. Hoo Kee, being such a marvellous talker, was often used as the Spokesman of his party, and thus appeared as a sort of leader among them. This flattered his vanity, fanned the flame of ambition, and led him to take such an elevated view of himself as put all of his compatriots in the shade.¹⁸⁹

Despite this lampooning of their opponent, the Peases had found the election too close for comfort. They had been taught an important lesson in political

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 December, 1939, p.3.

¹⁸⁷ *The Great War and What became of it*, 2nd edn (Darlington: William Dresser, 1868).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

journalism, and the impact Spark's newspapers had exerted on public opinion was not lost on them. It was decided that the *Darlington Telegraph* was too lightweight to stand alone against Spark's two organs, the *Darlington Mercury* and the *D&S*, and within a year of the election, the Peases had invited to Darlington John Hyslop Bell, proprietor and editor of the *South Durham Mercury* in Hartlepool, with a view to launching a new daily newspaper. The paper was the *Northern Echo*, and in late 1869, Bell's prospectus announced to Darlingtonians that they might expect:

a well-conducted, high-class Daily Newspaper, advocating Advanced Liberal opinions, and published at a price which will bring it within reach of all classes of the people... Their aim is to provide every morning, for rich and poor simultaneously, a carefully collated and neatly printed digest of the latest authentic intelligence on all matters of social, commercial, or political interest, and that at the lowest price charged for even the most ephemeral reprints...A thoroughly organised system will be adopted for the conveyance of the papers by early trains to every station in the North of England, by the various lines of railway that radiate east, west, north, and south from Darlington.¹⁹⁰

Bell followed his announcement with three months of print trials, with the very first edition of the *Northern Echo* appearing on January 1, 1870. As proprietor, Bell's first job was to find a suitable editor for the new paper, and the man chosen was John Copleston, late of the London paper, the *Morning Star*. Copleston was assisted by Mark Fooks, who, after his efforts at the helm of the *Darlington Telegraph* during the election, might have wondered why he had not been offered the editorship himself. Whatever the reason, the omens looked good for the paper; its birth in 1870 coincided with the introduction of the Education Act (which promised an expanding population of readers) and the paper also found itself located at the centre of a powerful railway network, with a natural distributional outlet that many other newspapers might understandably have envied.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Prospectus for the *Northern Echo* (Darlington: *Northern Echo*, 1869).

¹⁹¹ Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, pp. 25-26, *passim*.

In contrast, Henry King Spark's fortunes were in sharp decline; and, indeed, by the 1874 election, with creditors pursuing him, he was on the verge of bankruptcy. To raise capital, he was forced to take a number of drastic measures in order to balance his crumbling finances. One such action was the merging of his mid-weekly *Darlington Mercury* with the weekly *D&S*. Another was a desperate and ultimately doomed lawsuit against a former business partner, the legal costs of which served to place Spark in even deeper trouble.¹⁹²

None of these setbacks, however, prevented Spark from standing in the 1874 election, in which, aside from Edmund Backhouse, he also faced the Tory candidate, Thomas Gibson Bowles, editor of *Vanity Fair*. He also had to contend with the Pease's new mouthpiece, the *Northern Echo*, whose dynamic, editorial rhetoric was now the equal of anything the *D&S* could offer. Yet Spark was unfazed; from the balcony of his headquarters in Tubwell Row in Darlington, he addressed the crowds with a force and charm that betrayed nothing of his financial troubles. The final count was closer than even the 1868 election; Backhouse limped to victory with a majority of just 18 votes, polling 1,625 votes to Spark's 1,607. Backhouse had been assisted in no small degree by the tactical voting of hundreds of Tory voters, who had flocked to his cause rather than see the maverick Spark win the day. Bowles polled just 302 votes.¹⁹³

It was a bitter-sweet victory for the Peases. They had managed to retain their precious seat in Darlington, but elsewhere in the country, the Liberal vote had collapsed. In fact, the thirteen Liberal MPs returned in County Durham were the only Liberal seats held as a region in England. The "Durham 13", as they became known, were honoured in a book of the same name,¹⁹⁴ and were also

¹⁹² See 'Spark v. Love', *Northern Echo*, 3 March, 1876, p.3; *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 3 February, 1962, p.3; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 26.

¹⁹³ *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 30 December, 1939, p.6.

¹⁹⁴ W.T. Stead, *The Durham Thirteen* (Darlington: William Dresser, 1874). Years later, in the *Review of Reviews*, Stead wrote of the 1874 Election: "When counties and boroughs all over the land were going Tory with the most appalling unanimity, the county of Durham alone among the English counties returned an unbroken phalanx of thirteen Liberal members. It was a great and notable victory." See W.T. Stead, 'A North Country Worthy', p. 85.

profiled in the pages of the *Northern Echo*, which had played its own part in bolstering the Durham Liberal vote.

Yet, how easily thirteen might have been twelve. Again Spark had run the Peases uncomfortably close; so close, in fact, that the result, said the *D&S*, merely illustrated “the utter rottenness of the system by which Mr. Backhouse was forced on the borough five years ago.”¹⁹⁵ Spark continued:

Here was a great party, with all the power that wealth, influence and position could give them. They had all the appliances known to electioneering craft...They brought up all the lawyers they could get hold of...They had committees in every ward. They had gangs of canvassers scouring every street and alley in the borough...They had extensive works employing thousands of hands...Who, on the other hand, was the popular candidate? A man who was late in the field, who had no machinery, no committees, no canvassers...not a single workshop in the borough. He made his appearance... delivered a few speeches...and relied on the free will and unbought favour of the people. Yet with all [their] means and appliances...the Quaker party was only fluked in at the last moment...by a coalition...with the Tory party, who basely deserted their candidate.¹⁹⁶

Spark’s retort seems to have raised a few hackles within the Pease camp, who were all too aware of the ingloriousness of their victory. It was left to the *Northern Echo* to save the Quakers’ blushes:

In 1868, Mr. Backhouse had the Catholic vote almost unbroken. In 1874, owing to the artful tactics of Mr. Spark, it was transferred almost *en bloc* to his opponent...That Mr. Spark should gain on the new electors was natural enough. He had been carefully nursing the constituency since the election. Mr. Backhouse, unfortunately, resided out of town and could not throw open his grounds to the holiday-makers. Mr. Spark did, and gained much popularity thereby.¹⁹⁷

By now, the *Echo* had parted company with its first editor, Copleston, and was under the editorial control of Stead,¹⁹⁸ whose blunt, uncompromising rhetoric was

¹⁹⁵ *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 7 February, 1874, p.3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Northern Echo*, 19 March, 1874, p.3.

¹⁹⁸ Stead took over the editorship of the *Northern Echo* in 1871.

proving an able defence against even Spark's rhetorical attacks. Stead had learned a few lessons from his editorial opponent, and had seen, in the venomous leaders of the *D&S*, how the press could be used to devastating political effect.

He now used that strategy to discredit Spark, and, by cleverly aligning him with the recently discredited Tichborne Claimant, Arthur Orton, he drew a parallel between the latter's fraudulent claims to wealth and Spark's claim to political position:

Last week brought the British public a great relief. It terminated the Tichborne Trial, and let us hear the last of the infamous Claimant. This week has brought a boon equally welcome to many of the inhabitants of Darlington. It has brought the controversy as to the Borough Election to a close, and finally disposed of the Greenbank claimant to the representation of the Borough in the Commons House of Parliament... The final judgement of the Town Council upon Mr Spark's claims will be hailed... with even more delight than the celebrated verdict of the Tichborne Jury. The latter sent Arthur Orton to penal servitude... the former, although interfering in no degree with Mr Spark's personal liberty... has crushed his pretensions to be considered M.P. for Darlington.¹⁹⁹

Thereafter, Spark's fortunes finally gave out and, hopelessly insolvent, he was forced to sell his beloved Greenbank estate. He was also compelled by the trustees of his estate to sell his precious *D&S*. The greatest ignominy of this was that the purchasers and now new owners of the paper were a group of Liberals headed by John Hyslop Bell (proprietor of the *Northern Echo*), Sir Joseph Whitwell Pease MP (head of the Pease family), and Henry Fell Pease, the man to whom Spark had lost the mayoral election in 1867.²⁰⁰ It was the final insult, and in a letter addressed to "The People of Darlington,"²⁰¹ Spark delivered his bitterest condemnation yet:

Gentlemen, the *Darlington & Stockton Times*, though appearing as of old and of the same imprint, has fallen into "the camp of the enemy." The cloven foot appears in it and their other newspapers alike... For nearly 10 years they have pursued their object, and the *Darlington & Stockton Times* has at length fallen into their power. But, my

¹⁹⁹ *Northern Echo*, 9 March, 1874, p.3.

²⁰⁰ Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 29.

²⁰¹ Henry King Spark, 'To the People of Darlington', 20 April, 1878.

Townsmen, I have not fallen into their power nor under its fear... I am the same—determined, unflinching, incorruptible... They may set themselves up as your gods, and toy with you to your manly disgust. Their Newspapers may adulate them with a fulsomeness that is sickening; but you see them as they are—selfish, self-seeking, hollow and inglorious. Graven images... the poor handiwork of man, made to order, and sorely perishable. For my part, I envy them not. I prefer to be their victim.²⁰²

Such rhetoric presented Spark as a victim and martyr, cut down in his heroic battle against evil. Stead, dismissing this evil as “imaginary,” later asked:

Who are the degraded serfs who... are compelled, as Mr. Spark declares, to lie and cringe and fawn upon some invisible detested masters?... the people of Darlington will always be described by Mr H. K. Spark as downtrodden serfs until they gratify his ambition and choose him as their member.²⁰³

Yet, Spark’s strategy would not be lost on Stead, for, in the years ahead, he himself would deploy similar rhetoric to turn his imprisonment, following the Armstrong Case, into an even more powerful piece of melodramatic martyrdom.

Spark’s parting shot against the Peases came in 1880 when, despite his now desperate personal situation, he again stood for election. In reality, he was a beaten man even before the election began; but just in case, and to avoid any repetition of the 1874 election, the Pease camp unleashed the full might of its burgeoning newspaper stable, which now, of course, included the *D&S*.

“Mr. Facing Both Ways,”²⁰⁴ declared the *Echo*, “who pretends to be the victim of a non-existent tyranny, and bemoans the hard fate that exposes him to the ‘persecution’ of creditors to whom he has not yet paid three-half pence in the pound,”²⁰⁵ was “dependent upon the Tory vote... [and] upon “Tory money”²⁰⁶ to

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Northern Echo*, 31 March, 1880, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 March, 1880, p. 4.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 31 March, 1880, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 March, 1880, p. 4.

“artfully...foist himself on an assembly in which...he is morally disqualified to sit.”²⁰⁷ Speaking of one of Spark’s pre-election speeches, the *Echo* warned that:

Mr. Spark’ right had has not lost its cunning, nor his voice its skill, and although he was not up to his old mark in dramatic force and melting pathos, there were touches here and there that reminded his hearers of his better days, when he was justly regarded as one of the best actors in the whole North Country.²⁰⁸

Here we may again discern hints that Stead admired something in Spark’s rhetoric, despite being pitted against him politically. Nor was it Stead and the *Northern Echo* that really finished Spark off, but the *Darlington Telegraph* (by now the *Darlington & Richmond Herald*. Now under John Hyslop Bell’s editorial control, the paper published, on the very eve of the election, a deal-by-deal history of all of Spark’s business, political and commercial failings, finally dismissing him as an “undischarged bankrupt and vain-glorious braggart.”

²⁰⁹

Spark’s support collapsed; he lost heavily to the Pease candidate, Theodore Fry, a successful industrialist who went on to hold the seat until 1895. After finally settling with his creditors, Spark left Darlington politics for good and retired to the seclusion of Startforth near Barnard Castle, where he had been living since 1876. Remarkably, he was able to repair his public reputation and was even elected to the Teesdale Board of Guardians.²¹⁰

In Darlington, however, Spark’s star had fallen; and though he attributed many of his troubles to his political opponents, his fall was largely self-inflicted. His stance on social reform, both in public and in his newspapers, won him many political friends and doubtless played an important role in Darlington’s early municipal development. But, equally, his many commercial disasters lost him the support of Darlington’s business fraternity and his narcissistic vision of

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 March, 1880, p 2.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 March, 1880, p 1.

²⁰⁹ Quoted in *Darlington & Stockton Times*, 30 December, 1939, p.3; Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 30, *passim*.

²¹⁰ Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 30.

himself as local hero made him vulnerable to the shrewd political manoeuvring which eventually overwhelmed him.

That the *Northern Echo* was one of the agents of his downfall was ironic, for it owed its very existence to the political challenges that Spark had first launched in 1868. The *Echo* grew in power and prestige throughout the 1870s, eventually becoming, in the minds of some, “the best paper in England.”²¹¹ Indeed, the Liberal Party’s great elder statesman, William E. Gladstone, commented: “It is a sincere regret to me that I cannot read more of the *Echo*...It is admirably got up in every way.”²¹² Other leading Liberals, such as the great reformer, John Bright, likewise praised the *Echo* as “one of the ablest, in point of sheer intellect of all the country papers.”²¹³

The journalistic phenomenon behind the *Northern Echo* was, of course, W. T. Stead, yet, Stead’s inaugural years had been aided in no small measure by the cut-and-thrust of the Pease-Spark political war. Indeed, Stead’s campaigning rhetoric during the 1880 election was one of the primary reasons for his elevation to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Yet, despite his resolute support for his Quaker employers in these political battles, Stead may well have been moved by the tenacity and character of Henry King Spark. Certainly, both men had much in common, sharing, as they did, a penchant for challenging established political hierarchies and elites, and although it is difficult to discern how much of Spark rubbed off on Stead, it seems likely that his political campaigns, narcissistic though they were, could not have failed to impress the young Northumbrian.

By threatening to unhorse the long established Pease ascendancy, Spark had illustrated the potential power of the press. He had also shown that even an isolated figure could influence the people. It was a strategy not lost on Stead, and one which he would ultimately use to propel himself to the height of journalistic celebrity. So much so that, when he ostensibly condemned Spark’s

²¹¹ E.A. Freeman, quoted in W.T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, vol. I p. 336.

²¹² Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 92 .

²¹³ *Ibid.* p. 98.

“consummate ability as a mob orator” and “his recklessly audacious statements,”²¹⁴ he was describing a journalistic style that he was already adopting himself.

The Growth of the *Northern Echo* and the Rise of W.T. Stead

The story of Spark and the battle for Darlington was but one of a series of conflicts that, by 1880, had brought the *Northern Echo* a level of notoriety that went far beyond that of any of its provincial rivals. Few other contemporary newspapers could have had a more auspicious beginning. The passage of the Education Act, which heralded a new age of literacy, had coincided with the *Echo*'s birth and Darlington's geographical position at the heart of the railway network meant that the paper could potentially enjoy both a local and a national readership.

Yet, the *Northern Echo* was nothing remarkable to look at in its early years; indeed, it was, in many ways, identical to any number of provincial papers of the period. The very first issue consisted of only four pages of six columns each, with page one, and half of page two given over to small adverts, public notices and trade reports. Page three, consisted of the daily leader that had spilled over from the previous page, followed by local news, sport intelligence and shipping news. Page four, finished with more news, obituaries and public notices, snippets from the London press and more adverts.²¹⁵ This restrictive format changed little in the *Echo*'s inaugural year. With so much space given over to advertising, there was relatively little space for expansive news reporting, gossip columns and letters to the editor.

Copleston's daily leaders in these early issues, though reflecting the paper's Liberal origins and values, featured little of the powerful rhetoric that, under Stead's later editorship, would bring the *Northern Echo* international fame. The first issue opened with a recap of the previous year, warning that the “transitory despotic government of France was rapidly assuming the form of a constitutional

²¹⁴ *Northern Echo*, 9 March, 1874, p.3.

²¹⁵ See the *Northern Echo*, 1 January, 1870, pp. 1-4.

monarchy,²¹⁶ while, in February, the paper celebrated the passage of the Education Bill and its promise to raise the “intellectual and moral condition of hundreds of thousands of benighted children.”²¹⁷ In June, floggings in prisons were being attacked as “a course and degrading punishment.”²¹⁸ Interestingly, the leader for May 18, opened with a glowing report on the Sultan of Turkey. This early foray into Turkish affairs sits in sharp contrast to the anti-Turkish rhetoric of the *Echo*'s later years under Stead. It began by asking:

Who can henceforth designate the Sultan “the Sick Man”?... The bonds of friendship existing between himself and his people and foreign Powers have been more firmly knit...[and] enabled by measures of reform and progress calculated to promote the welfare of his people.²¹⁹

In 1876, the *Echo*'s stance on Turkey's treatment of the people it governed would bring it international notoriety. In 1870, however, the paper lacked the swagger and confidence of its later years and stuck to traditional, essay-like leaders that sought to inform and educate rather than shock and scandalise. Yet, this did not stop the paper from offering a modest set of innovative features that pre-figured some aspects of the later New Journalism that Stead developed during his own tenure at Darlington.

Relatively bold headlines and cross-heads, typographical characteristics often associated with the New Journalism, were a feature of the *Northern Echo* even in its inaugural year. Such features were not, in themselves, untypical of the period; other newspapers of the time were also experimenting with new ways of organising and presenting the page.²²⁰ However, the *Northern Echo*'s radical credentials were evident from the start and many of the controversial issues that Stead would address in the later 1870s were already being given a voice and platform. Indeed, the very first issue carried a report “sent for publication” by the

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 February, 1870, p. 2

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 June, 1870, p. 2

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 May, 1870, p.2

²²⁰ See, especially, the *Northern Echo*'s coverage of the Franco-Prussian War from July, 1870.

Ladies' Association for Repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts,²²¹ revealing the paper's early support for that movement. In March, 1870, the paper's position on the virtues of women's suffrage was made perfectly clear, when it asked if: "The capacity of the feminine mind to grasp all questions, whether literary, social, or political, is known and admitted," why, then, "should they be denied political equality?"²²² Opponents of the suffrage, observed the *Echo*, imagined that England would "soon become a nation of Amazons."²²³ It concluded, in typically mid-Victorian fashion, by recognising the special maternal instincts and qualities of women with regard to poor relief, and argued that few men would dispute that women were "better qualified than men for the administration of the Poor Law. The evils that have lately disgraced our workhouses would never have grown up had women been responsible for their management."²²⁴

Despite such relatively controversial editorial comments, local affairs, religious issues, education and, of course, party politics typified the daily leaders of the *Echo's* early issues, and not until the onset of the Franco-Prussian war did it find more dramatic copy, both for its daily leaders and its news content. In July, fearing that Britain would be dragged into the conflict, the *Echo* declared that, "England does not want to be inveigled into the horrors of a European war. She rather dreads it."²²⁵ Despite this perfectly valid point, articulated, as it was, in Copleston's suitably measured editorial voice, Stead's tenure would give way to a more robust and vigorous war cry that would typify the *Echo's* stance on ideals of liberty, freedom and justice, both at home and abroad. In this regard, Copleston's comments were in stark contrast to the combative prose of Stead's later leaders:

War is the fiery portal through which peoples have to pass into the possession of their liberties.

Liberty does not exist which has not first been won and then been defended by the sword.²²⁶

²²¹ *Northern Echo*, 1 January, 1870, p. 4.

²²² *Ibid.*, 30 March, 1870, p. 2.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 14 May, 1870, p. 2.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 March, 1870, p. 2.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 July, 1876, p. 3.

The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, coming, as it did, in the year that the *Northern Echo* was founded, was fortuitous for the paper. War was news, and week after week, up-to-date war reports were telegraphed back to the *Echo*'s offices. Through a network of "special sources," the *Echo* was thus able to inform its readership of sensational events, such as Napoleon III's defeat, often more quickly than some London papers.²²⁷

However, by far, the *Echo*'s biggest boost came in its second year of printing, when its proprietor, John Hyslop Bell, decided to replace Copleston (who had resigned to go to America) with the untried Stead. Remarkably, Stead, then just twenty-two years of age, had only twelve months' journalistic experience behind him, having been a regular (unpaid) contributor to the paper. In that time, he had become Copleston's protégé. Yet, he probably never met his mentor and had never been inside the *Northern Echo*'s offices.

Why Bell took so great a risk in installing Stead as editor is unclear, although the most likely explanation is that, for all his inexperience, Stead's writing style was more vigorous and more incisive than that of his mentor. Indeed, even before Copleston's resignation,²²⁸ Stead and Bell had been in secret contractual talks for some months. Stead's reminiscences on the issue paint a somewhat rosy picture:

I asked if the editor were leaving. He [Bell] said that he was going to leave, and that his place had to be filled. I said I would take no further steps until I had communicated with him, as he was my friend...I wrote to the editor and told him of the offer that had been made, and said that if it would in any way help him for me to refuse to entertain the idea, I would refuse.²²⁹

As heart-warming as this sounds, in reality, Stead's recollections bear little resemblance to real events and fly in the face of his own correspondence at the

²²⁷ In 1874, W.T. Stead commented that "The *Northern Echo* first gained distinction by its early intelligence, partly from special sources of information, during the Franco-German War". Quoted in Lloyd, *Attacking the Devil*, p. 35.

²²⁸ According to Whyte, Copleston emigrated to America, where he was employed by the *New York World*. See Whyte, *Life of W.T. Stead*, I, p.30

²²⁹ Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 59.

time. In a letter to Reverend Henry Kendall, to whom he wrote “in strict confidence relying upon your absolute secrecy”, he confided, “all this [Bell’s offer] is entirely unknown to Copleston...whom Mr. Bell does not wish to know anything about it... Just think, your humble servant editor of the *Echo*...It is enough to turn a fellow's head.”²³⁰

Unbeknown to Stead, his articles for the *Echo* had been turning a few heads of their own. Despite having virtually no other journalistic experience, save twelve months as a part-time hack for Copleston, his “three leaders a week and half a dozen occasional notes”²³¹ had been attracting considerable attention, not least from the *Echo*’s proprietor, Bell. Whilst on business abroad, Bell had become “much struck” by a leader in his newspaper discussing the role of Christianity in democracy.²³²

In Russia the Nihilist scoffs at God, Law and Marriage, precisely because religion in his land has been a department of a despotic state; but America, that land founded by Christian pilgrims and colonised by the sturdy descendants of men whose song of praise had been heard on the Moor of Long Marston and the heights of Dunbar, has shown to the world that Christianity flourishes most in a Democracy.²³³

On his return to Darlington, Bell “made enquiries as to the writer” and heard, probably for the first time, the name, William Thomas Stead. In all likelihood, Bell saw a hint of the waspish rhetoric that could be mobilised against Henry King Spark, who, despite electoral defeat in 1868, still entertained hopes of wresting Darlington’s parliamentary seat from Edmund Backhouse in the next General Election. Whatever the case, by August 1871, Stead was installed as new editor of the *Northern Echo* and Copleston emigrated to America. “I never dreamed of such an elevation so easily,” Stead wrote, “What a glorious opportunity of attacking the devil.”²³⁴

²³⁰ *Ibid.*; Letter from W.T. Stead to Rev. Henry Kendall, 11 April, 1871.

²³¹ Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 58.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²³³ *Northern Echo*, 14 October, 1870, p.2

²³⁴ W.T. Stead to the Rev. Henry Kendall, 11 April, 1871.

Stead's obsession with attacking the devil had begun at an early age. Born in Northumberland, the son of a Congregational minister, he grew up in the industrial town of Howden-on-Tyne near Newcastle, "that grimy spot... darkened by the smoke of innumerable chimneys."²³⁵ For the first twelve years of his life, he was educated at home by his father. The Reverend's influence over his excitable young son was clearly profound, and in later years was frequently celebrated in Stead's sermonic leaders. However, it was not until Stead was sent to complete his education at Silcoates School for boys near Wakefield in North Yorkshire, that he experienced the profound religious spirit that would subsequently influence the rest of his life. He later wrote:

I was a little more than twelve when I joined the Congregational Church and I have remained a member of that Church ever since. The Congregationalists, as the heirs of Cromwell, Milton and the Pilgrim Fathers, and the representatives of extreme democracy...have always attracted me.²³⁶

Cromwell was one the mainstays of Stead's Puritan history and psychology, a figure to be loved and revered, an idol for whom he had a "more passionate personal love...[than] for the divine figure of Jesus of Nazareth."²³⁷ In later years, Stead's reverence of Cromwell would influence even his journalistic ideals and find voice in articles such as "The Future of Journalism."²³⁸ It was Cromwell also who brought Stead his first literary success. As a contributor to Beeton's *Boys Own Magazine*, and writing as W.T. Silcoates, Stead's essay on Cromwell sufficiently impressed the judges to be awarded a coveted "order of merit."

The essay is ably written, and the writer has evidently entered heart and soul into the production of a glowing picture of his hero. He does not defend Cromwell—it never seems to occur to him that Cromwell needs a defender...There is no elaborate analysis of the character of Cromwell, but a fair statement of all the leading events in Cromwell's life.

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²³⁵ W. T. Stead, *My Father*, (Darlington: William Dresser, 1884), p. 3.

²³⁶ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 91.

²³⁷ W.T. Stead, 'Oliver Cromwell and the National Church', *Review of Reviews*, 19, 1899, p. 425.

²³⁸ W.T. Stead, 'The Future of Journalism', *Contemporary Review*, 50 (1886);

²³⁹ Quoted in 'A Biography of Oliver Cromwell', *Boy's Own Magazine: An Illustrated Journal of Fact, Fiction, History & Adventure*, issue 55, 1 July, 1867, p.348. Available in Gale's online database of 19th Century UK Periodicals.

These formative literary works are worthy of closer examination, as they illustrate that, even as a youth, many of Stead's radical views and politics had already begun to take shape, particularly those on women. In an essay on "The Villains of Shakespeare", which smacks of his later articles in both the *Northern Echo* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he declares:

We may notice that though their number be few they make up for it in the atrocity of their crimes, and they all die unrepentant and unforgiven. When a woman falls great is her fall, and rarely does she rise again to purity and virtue.²⁴⁰

These early works also illustrate Stead's life long combative nature and inability to take criticism. After receiving Stead's essay entitled, "The Moors in Spain", the *Boy's Own* editor, presumably Beeton himself, declared that:

W.T. Silcoates has compiled a goodly amount of really useful information into an essay devoid of all literary merit...It is curiously involved, and extravagantly pretentious. Surely it is a pity that master Silcoates should not study a little more closely the rules of English composition before he competes for literary Prize, and especially before, in an ill-written letter, he rudely challenges critical notice.²⁴¹

Stead's prize for his Cromwellian triumph was a guinea's worth of books that included the works of American poet, James Russell Lowell. It was a book that would ultimately change the course of Stead's life. For, not only did Lowell's "Pious Editor's Creed" steer Stead into a career in journalism, but it also bore the seeds of the New Journalism.²⁴² In extract, it runs:

see what a pulpit the editor mounts daily, sometimes with a congregation of fifty-thousand within reach of his voice... And from what a Bible he can choose his text – a Bible which needs no translation, and which no priest-craft can shut and clasp from the laity – the open volume of the world, upon which, with a pen of sunshine or destroying fire, the inspired Present is even now writing the annals of God! Methinks

²⁴⁰ Quoted in 'The Villains of Shakespeare', *Boy's Own Magazine*, issue 32 (date unknown). Available in Gale's online database of 19th Century UK Periodicals.

²⁴¹ *Boy's Own Magazine*, issue 42 (1866) (page no. unknown). Available in Gale's online database of 19th Century UK Periodicals.

²⁴² See W.T. Stead, 'James Russell Lowell', pp. 235-247.

the editor who should understand his calling and be equal thereto...would be the Moses of our nineteenth century...²⁴³

In Stead's young and radical imagination, Lowell's words were a call to Christian action, a divine decree to right the evils of Britain's socially-divided population. "It was one of the decisive moments in my life," he later recalled. "The idea that everything wrong in the world was a divine call to use your life in righting it sank deep into my soul."²⁴⁴ Lowell's words chimed well with Stead's brand of radical Nonconformism. Like the powerless victims he often championed, and, indeed, like the Nonconformist community itself, he was an relative outsider, excluded from many of the bastions of affluent respectable society that men like Matthew Arnold enjoyed and defended.²⁴⁵ In later years, this sense of *otherness* would serve to encourage his fight against injustice, which, whether in the form of child prostitution or jingoistic imperialist causes, he challenged with a combative pen and a style that owed as much to the pulpit as it did to the editorial chair.

Yet, even before he became editor of the *Northern Echo*, Stead's passionate zeal for writing wrong was evident in his earliest articles. "I had very much laid upon my heart the misery of the vagrant class," he later wrote of this formative period, and one day coming upon a vagrant in Newcastle, "gave him what I could, wrapped him up in an old coat...and was very friendly and brotherly to him."²⁴⁶

This early instance of charity, however, ultimately became a sharp lesson in human cynicism for the young, would-be philanthropist when, having "ascertained that he had got as much out of me as I had to give he vanished, carrying off with him all the portable property of his fellow lodgers in the lodging house where I had maintained him."²⁴⁷ Stead railed against the experience in the *Northern Echo*, where the editor, Copleston, had sufficient confidence in his protégé to allow him to write the occasional leader. Oftentimes affected with hysteria and, in this case, with understandable bitterness, Stead's article was

²⁴³ *The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*, p. 203.

²⁴⁴ W.T. Stead 'James Russell Lowell', p.237 .

²⁴⁵ Goldsworthy 'English Nonconformity', p. 390.

²⁴⁶ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, pp. 90-96.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

nonetheless as powerful as it was uncompromising, and offers a valuable insight into his mentality and style:

Almsgiving at present existent in England, produces not good, but evil – curses instead of blessings; it debases instead of ennobling, and it is the fruitful parent of vice, indolence, ignorance, falsehood, and crime... There are, it is calculated, thirty thousand vagrants in this country... They are dirty, vicious, drunken, and deceitful... They are a curse to the country... they find begging pays better than working...²⁴⁸

Stead followed this up a few days later with another blast entitled “The Begging Profession”, exclaiming that, “To hang a man now for being a gypsy or a vagrant, would be perhaps too severe. But something must be done.”²⁴⁹

Such passionate zeal, personal involvement and uncompromising prose style would one day be the most manifest feature of Stead’s own distinctive brand of New Journalism. It was a writing style that evolved in the cauldron of Darlington’s political war between the Peases and Henry King Spark, both of whom deployed the power of the newspaper to win their battles.

It seems likely that Henry King Spark’s protracted struggle with the Peases had an significant influence on Stead, and may even have influenced John Hyslop Bell’s decision to elevate the young Northumbrian to the editorship of the *Northern Echo*. Certainly, Bell’s decision to install Stead, inexperienced as he was, carried a high risk of failure; and the only plausible explanation for such a gamble is that, in Stead’s distinctive writing style, Bell perceived a rhetoric and power that he had rarely encountered before.

The political threat of Spark was the first real test of that power. Spark had demonstrated the potential of the newspaper as a political weapon and, in doing so, ran the Quaker party too close for comfort in the Darlington elections. It was a lesson in campaigning journalism that was not lost on Stead, whose rhetoric, during his own political attacks on Spark, were a match for anything that the Sparkian papers could muster. Spark’s stance as knight-errant, battling against what he saw as the old and corrupt, was a model that Stead would later invest in

²⁴⁸ *Northern Echo*, 7 February, 1870, p.2.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 February, 1870, p.2.

his own journalistic campaigns at both the *Northern Echo* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. And, although Spark's heroic performances, grounded as they were in Nonconformist traditions, were nothing new, they nonetheless chimed well with Stead's own sense of mission and his self image as an instrument of God.

4. The New Journalism at the *Northern Echo*

The first embryonic signs that a new kind of journalism was being practiced at the *Northern Echo* can be found in three unique and highly emotive campaigns that Stead pursued during the 1870s: the West Auckland Poisonings in 1873, involving the execution of serial murderess, Mary Ann Cotton; the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts, which ran throughout the decade and which brought Stead into contact with reformers such as Josephine Butler and issues he would later revisit at the *Pall Mall Gazette*; and most importantly of all, his orchestration of the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation in 1876, that won both Stead and the *Northern Echo* a degree of international fame and brought him to the attention of higher Liberals such as Gladstone. As we shall see, all of these campaigns provided a valuable honing stone for Stead's journalistic pen, and allowed him to develop a distinctive style and voice that would find its fullest expression in his later campaigns at the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

The key to all these future events was *Northern Echo* proprietor, John Hyslop Bell's radical decision to make Stead editor of his newspaper, a bold step that carried considerable public and financial risk. Most local newspapers were edited by leading, often politically astute, public figures, such as Joseph Cowen of the Newcastle *Daily Chronicle*.²⁵⁰ Others, such as former compositor, Henry King Spark and self-taught shorthand writer, William Hall Burnett, of the *Middlesbrough Exchange*, had served informal apprenticeships in the industry and entered the profession through a craft-based route. Stead, however, had no such background or stature, and, indeed, despite his occasional contributions to the *Northern Echo*, had never even set foot in a newspaper office before.

To make up for his lack of experience, either through his own volition or at the request of his employer, Stead paid a visit to *Leeds Mercury* editor, Sir Wemyss Reid, himself the son of a Congregational minister, whose father was an old

²⁵⁰ Aled Jones, 'Local Journalism in Victorian Political Culture', in Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (eds.), *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 65.

friend of the Stead family. Doubtless, Stead intended to pick Reid's brain and thereby acquire a better understanding of the newspaper business, but, as Reid later recalled, "he had, even then, his own ideas as to how leaders ought to be written and newspapers edited, and he did not affect to conceal them."²⁵¹

He was pleasingly distinguished by an entire lack of diffidence ... There was something that was irresistible in his candour, his enthusiasm, and his self-confidence... I was staggered by the audacity of the schemes for revolutionising English journalism... If he had come to me in the guise of a pupil, he very quickly reversed our positions.²⁵²

As Reid suggests, Stead probably took little from the experience and, as he so often did throughout his career, kept his own council as to how a newspaper should be run. This was certainly the view of George Bernard Shaw who, years later, worked under Stead at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead, he maintained "was impossible as a colleague" and "had to work single-handed because... He was so extraordinarily incapable of learning anything even from daily experience."²⁵³ Critical though Shaw's views of Stead were,²⁵⁴ they nonetheless highlight the feelings of exasperation that Stead so often provoked in many of the people who worked around him. For Reid, however, Stead was "a man of remarkable gifts" who possessed, even at this early stage of his career, "something that came near to genius."²⁵⁵

One of Stead's "remarkable gifts" lay in his ability to squeeze into the *Echo's* constricted format features which had been utilised only infrequently under the previous editor. These included "Housewife's Corner" (in reality, a list of food

²⁵¹ Stuart J. Reid (ed.), *The Memoirs of Sir Wemyss Reid, 1842-1885*, (Project Gutenberg) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/7wemr10.txt>> [accessed 10 May, 2010].

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Quoted in Whyte, *Life of W.T. Stead*, I, pp. 304-6.

²⁵⁴ Shaw always felt that he and others had been duped by Stead over the Eliza Armstrong Case, which Shaw believed was it "a put-up job." After that, wrote Shaw, "it was clear that he was a man who could not work with anybody; and nobody would work with him." (see Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 85.)

²⁵⁵ "At the end of twelve months," writes Reid, "he wrote to me asking if I would give him my opinion in writing of his work during the year, and the capacity he had shown as a journalist. With great willingness I wrote to express my high opinion... Back in a few days came a reply from this extraordinary man. It was to tell me that he had shown my letter to the proprietor of the *Northern Echo*, Mr. Bell, and on the strength of it had succeeded in obtaining an increase of salary." See Reid, *The Memoirs of Sir Wemyss Reid* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/7wemr10.txt>> [accessed 10 May, 2010].

prices in local markets), “Correspondence”, and a regular column entitled, “North Country News”, which placed a much greater emphasis on provincial affairs. By 1873, such features, along with the increased news items that the *Echo* now regularly carried, had begun to overwhelm the paper’s original dimensions, prompting the announcement:

Owing to abridgements of our space by the growing pressure of advertisements, we have occasionally had to increase the original dimensions of this journal. Exceptional extensions have of late been so frequent we now determine to constitute them the rule. Henceforth the *Northern Echo* shall be published usually on a sheet the size of this day’s publication. Whenever it may be necessary to still further enlarge, the necessity will be cheerfully acquiesced in.²⁵⁶

The apparent surge in businesses now wanting to advertise in the *Northern Echo*, and its owners’ cheerful acquiescence in enlarging its format, an expense normally shunned by proprietors, reflected both the paper’s increased popularity and Stead’s growing power and confidence as an editor. This popularity was not just confined to Darlington; thanks to the town’s railway connections, the paper also announced in 1873 that Londoners could now receive the *Northern Echo* “through Messrs W.H. Smith and Sons, immediately after the arrival of the train from the North at King’s Cross at 10am.”²⁵⁷ The most significant change, however, came in the *Northern Echo*’s news and editorial content. Under Stead, the essay-like outpourings of his predecessor were replaced with vibrant, controversial and often socially orientated articles. Such material, often told in a distinctive narrative voice that later became a feature of Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette* campaigns, was sometimes disapproved of by the *Echo*’s Quaker backers.²⁵⁸ It nonetheless made compulsive reading and brought the greatest expansion to the *Northern Echo*’s range and readership.

The West Auckland Poisonings

²⁵⁶ *Northern Echo*, 25 March, 1873, p.2.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ “In the *Northern Echo*,” Stead wrote in 1893, “I preached just the same as I preach now...much to the horror of the good Quakers, who found, I believe, the money with which the *Echo* was established.” Quoted in Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 108.

One of the most sensational murder cases of the nineteenth century, the West Auckland Poisonings attracted media attention up and down the country. At the centre of the case stood the pathetic, yet lethal figure of Mary Ann Cotton, who, between 1865 and 1873, had poisoned to death five husbands and a dozen children. Stead's coverage of the Cotton murders has been largely overlooked by scholars, and yet it carries several of the features that would later be associated with his brand of New Journalism. One such feature - the use of headlines - had seen limited use in the *Northern Echo* under Stead's mentor, Copleston,²⁵⁹ but never with the vigour with which Stead used them in his coverage of this story. Where other local papers, such as Wemyss Reid's *Leeds Mercury* stuck to traditional crossheads to report the story, Stead gave the Cotton murders a regular column with the provocative headline, "THE WEST AUCKLAND POISONINGS" in a large, bold typeface, followed by bold sub-heads that stated the newest developments.

Over several few weeks, the *Northern Echo* devoted over thirty columns and one leader to the story, as it sensationalised and serialised the courtroom drama being played out at the Durham Assizes, building up to the execution of Mrs. Cotton. It was compulsive reading, and a journalistic strategy that Stead would employ to even greater effect at the *Pall Mall Gazette* during campaigns such as the Langworthy Marriage and, particularly, during his own trial for the abduction of Armstrong Eliza.²⁶⁰ Though other regional newspapers (and, indeed, some London papers)²⁶¹ had begun reporting the West Auckland poisonings several months earlier, none took up the case with more zeal than the *Northern Echo*, as it attacked the figure of Mary Ann Cotton with an enthusiasm that sometimes bordered on frenzy. Even her due execution at Durham Gaol was not enough to assuage the animated Stead, who continued to pursue his quarry even to the grave. His astonishing editorial began:

Strangled! Yes, It might have been worse. She might have been boiled alive!...Before many of our readers have opened this journal she will be hanging by the neck...a corpse to be

²⁵⁹ See the *Northern Echo*'s coverage of the Franco-Prussian War, July, 1870 - March 1871.

²⁶⁰ See the *Pall Mall Gazette*, September -November, 1885.

²⁶¹ See the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, 5 October, 1872, p.8.

cut down and flung into a dishonoured grave...It is horrible. But what would it have been if Calcraft, instead of pulling a bolt...had seized the trembling, shrieking convict and hurled her, pinioned and helpless into a huge cauldron, beneath which roared a furnace, and in which the water was bubbling and seething with the intense heat! Ugh!

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Extreme as this passage sounds, such rhetoric, evolved as it was from Stead's Nonconformist upbringing, in which hell-fire and brimstone were common images, was not merely an exercise in sensationalism. For Stead, "attacking the devil," as he saw it, whether in the form of poverty, corruption or, as in this case, a mass-murderess unrepentant to the last, was an important part of his psyche and a duty that had to be daily discharged. As Goldworthy remarks: "sons of the manse such as Stead who ventured into newspaper editing found in it a natural fit with the world their fathers inhabited."²⁶³ The progression was an easy one for Stead; with Quaker backers, a Methodist proprietor and a Congregationalist editor, the *Northern Echo's* Liberal roots were steeped in dissent. Small wonder, then, that Stead regarded his paper pulpit as "power placed in my hands, to be used on behalf of the poor, the outcast and the oppressed,"²⁶⁴

But Stead was also aware of the financial promise of the Cotton story and his responsibilities to his employers to make a profit. To that end, on the day after Mrs. Cotton's execution, he announced that a special edition of the *Northern Echo* had been published "with a full account of MRS. COTTON UNDER THE DROP."²⁶⁵ Such "extras", sensational money-spinners that not only increased profit but also allowed Stead to flex his journalistic muscles, were a feature that he would develop further at the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Even at this relatively early stage of his career, Stead had a profound understanding of the power that human-interest elements could bring to a story. In the later New Journalism, this would be most manifest in features such as the personal interview and in the lurid "fly-on-the-wall" accounts, such as

²⁶² *Northern Echo*, 24 March, 1873, p. 2.

²⁶³ Goldworthy 'English Nonconformity', p. 391.

²⁶⁴ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, pp. 102-103.

²⁶⁵ *Northern Echo*, 24 March, 1873, p. 3.

“Confessions with Brothel Keeper,” in the “Maiden Tribute.”²⁶⁶ Yet, even this technique can be traced back to Stead’s coverage of the West Auckland poisonings, where a scene described by the *Echo*’s “own reporter” takes the reader into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, the temporary foster parents of Cotton’s last remaining child. After describing Mrs. Edwards, as “a kind-hearted woman,” the reporter evokes the moment when the couple resolve to take care of the child, and offers a tender counterpoint to the terrible crimes of Cotton herself:

Mrs. Edwards, who was sitting in the house beside her husband, said “Lowrey’s writing to Mrs. Cotton to-night.” [Lowrey is a neighbour] Mr. Edwards heard her words. Suddenly he broke the silence. “Be-god,” said he, “I’ll just put a note in asking to let us have the bairn.” Mrs. Edwards joyfully assented. It was no sooner said than done. An offer to take the child was written in Mr. Lowrey’s letter.²⁶⁷

The reader is then transported to the prison cell, and a cathartic scene in which Mrs. Cotton reluctantly hands over her infant child. Mrs. Cotton’s disposition as a child-killer makes the scene both chilling *and* heart warming, and taps into the conflicting emotions that would later become an intrinsic ingredient of the New Journalism style. The scene unfolded:

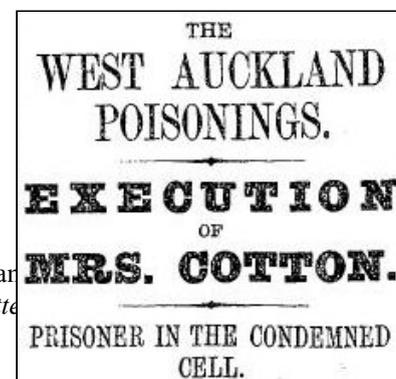
There she was [Mrs. Edwards]... face to face with her old neighbour, whose minutes were numbered, and whom every successive heart-throb brought nearer the gallows tree... “I’ve many sins to answer for,” said she repeatedly... The mother, up till then, had been nursing her child before the fire, sitting on a stool, sometimes giving it the breast, and sometimes laying it on her lap, where it smiled and crowed in the cheerful firelight. She had given it milk for the last time now. Never again would the smiles of the little stranger enliven the gloom of the condemned cell. The mother was parting with her babe for ever!²⁶⁸

The vivid prose may not have been written by Stead himself, although it bears all the hallmarks of his style, but it nonetheless reveals his

²⁶⁶ See the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July, 1885, p.4; for a good example of Stead’s ‘General Gordon on the Soudan’, the *Pall Mall Gazette*

²⁶⁷ *Northern Echo*, 22 March, 1873, p.3.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*



controlling influence in the investigating, construction and, most importantly, in the delivery of a story that readers found irresistible. Stead bolstered this human element with letters, both from people who had visited Mrs. Cotton and from the condemned woman herself. Whatever sympathy the prison cell scene had generated was ruthlessly undercut by Mrs. Cotton's letter of March 21, published "*verbatim et liberatum*," which revealed a justly convicted murderess unrepentant to the last:

My der frend, I have just reseaved your letter whitch it will be to know youse to tell you the state of mind, but ie must say As i saide before i Am not guilty...Smith [the solicitor] has led me rong. he told me not to speake a single Worde if I Was Asked... he has never brote forth Won Witness fore me. he new What they Ware Wanted fore not only the childe but for my sealfe i do not want nothin but the trouth of Every Won, then ie Would have A Chanse fore my Life.²⁶⁹

On March 25, Stead concluded his coverage of the Cotton murders in a lengthy, full page article entitled, "EXECUTION OF MRS. COTTON: PRISONER IN THE CONDEMNED CELL."²⁷⁰ Again, he used a bold black headline and subheads, while his vivid prose gave *Echo* readers a ringside seat at Mrs. Cotton's execution. This, in turn, was followed by the entire "CAREER OF MRS. COTTON," from her birth "in the year of the great Reform Bill" to her eventual demise at the hands of "old Calcraft" at Durham Gaol.²⁷¹ Such protracted coverage, wherein the drama of a story was prolonged until the last ounce of copy had been extracted from it, would ultimately become one of the defining features of the New Journalism. Yet, ironically, the extravagant bold headlines of the Cotton story, stylistic features that Stead would use again and again at the *Northern Echo*, did not travel with him to London, where he stuck to traditional crossheads, even during campaigns like the "Maiden Tribute."

Stead's intense focus on the West Auckland poisonings was, of course, partly prompted by the fact that they were local; West Auckland was little more than

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

ten miles from Darlington. It could be argued that, had the crimes been committed elsewhere in the country, he may not have covered them with such detail and vigour, nor attacked Mrs. Cotton with such ferocity. Conversely, this may also explain the more muted coverage of the West Auckland poisonings in other provincial newspapers, whose communities and readership did not feel the same sense of scandal. Going back to the *Northern Echo*'s "own reporter" and his visit to West Auckland, he describes a scandalised community reeling in shock:

It is remarkable that nowhere has there been so little exertion to rescue the convict from her righteous doom as in the district in which she committed her awful crimes. It is one of the healthiest signs of a good moral tone of the community, that even those who knew her as a friend and neighbour should be so profoundly impressed with the magnitude of her crime, as to be unable even to sign a petition that her life may be spared.²⁷²

How much of this reaction was generated by the crimes themselves and how much was provoked by Stead's passionate prose in the *Northern Echo*, we shall never know. What is certain, is that Stead's coverage of the Cotton murders allowed him an early foray into the crime-ridden world of Britain's social underclass, which would prove a fertile ground for his later campaigns at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. It was a world that continued to fascinate him throughout his career. It also whetted the appetite of the *Northern Echo*'s readership for similar subject matter. To satisfy this, and, indeed, his own penchant for dramatic news copy, Stead kept a regular feature in the *Northern Echo*, in which emboldened, American-style headlines and intriguing subheads divulged the most sensational murders, poisonings, assaults and deceptions that the criminal justice system had to offer. The headlines used to deliver these courtroom dramas, though not necessarily unique for the period, are as attention-grabbing today as they were at the time.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

In the case of “THE WILLINGTON MURDER,” the *Northern Echo* announced, in a chilling subhead, “THE ARRIVAL OF CALCRAFT” the executioner,²⁷³ while in the “FATAL POISONING AT CLEASBY,” the “Strange Verdict of the Jury” declared the death to be “Accidental Through Negligence.”²⁷⁴ In the case of “THE “MIDDLESBROUGH FORGERIES,” the sentence of “PENAL SERVITUDE FOR SEVEN YEARS” stunned the convicted Rev. V.H. Moyles so much that he was “led out of the court with a faltering step.”²⁷⁵ The “CROPTON MURDERS,” which was actually just one murder but with two defendants, Robert Charter and William Hardwick, ended with the sensational headline, “CHARTER GUILTY OF MANSLAUGHTER: TWENTY YEARS PENAL SERVITUDE” but “HARDWICK ACQUITTED.”²⁷⁶ The “HORRIBLE MURDER OF A WOMAN AT DARLINGTON,” meanwhile, manifested “such a display of brutal atrocity as seldom characterises any human action.”²⁷⁷ Often, as much as half a page was given over to the particulars of such crimes.²⁷⁸

Not that Stead’s focus on lurid crimes was in any way unique; indeed, for many nineteenth-century newspapers, crime reporting was a staple of their everyday content. But, what made Stead’s coverage of the Cotton murders special was the introduction of several innovative features that would go on to define the New Journalism. These included personal interviews, that served to draw the reader into the story; stylistic features, such as bold headlines, that helped to grab the reader’s attention; special supplements (extras), that became a major monetising strategy during his tenure at the *Pall Mall Gazette*; and a narrative approach to the story, that heightened the drama and deepened its sense of human interest. In the case of Mrs. Cotton, Stead’s partisan views towards social evils like murder were explicit. Yet, in his support for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, he displayed a manifestly sympathetic view of another social evil – prostitution – that few newspaper editors of the period dared to express.

²⁷³ *Northern Echo*, 28 July, 1873, p. 3.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *Northern Echo*, 25 March, 1873, p.3.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 March, 1873, p. 3.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 September, 1873, p. 3.

²⁷⁸ See, for example, *Northern Echo*, 26 March, 1873, p.3.

The Contagious Diseases Acts

Stead's interest in lurid and controversial subject matter did not limit itself to crime reporting. Prostitution was an issue which, through Stead's "Maiden Tribute" campaign and O'Conner's coverage of the Whitechapel murders, became indelibly linked with the early exposés of the New Journalism. As early as 1871, however, Stead had confronted this taboo subject by telling his readers that prostitution was "the ghastliest curse which haunts civilised society, which is steadily sapping the very foundations of our morality."²⁷⁹ It was, he wrote, "a contagion which pervades all classes" and a "monstrous plague spot of our social system" that was "rotting every circle of our land..."²⁸⁰ Stead's rhetoric here reveals the influence of his predecessor and mentor, Copleston, who, in 1870, had similarly described prostitution as "one of the most ominous plague-spots upon our national life...which has eaten into the heart of society."²⁸¹ Yet, to both men, it was not the spectacle of a woman "staving off starvation by prostitution"²⁸² which caused the greatest offence; but the men who frequented the brothels. "Stylish houses of ill-fame", fumed Stead, "could only be supported by men of wealth and respectability," to whose "reckless passion" the ruination of the poor was due.²⁸³ Needless to say, by allocating space to this subject on a regular basis, Stead was courting controversy.

The widening gap between rich and poor, which, in Stead's mind, necessitated evils like prostitution, struck at the heart of his radical and Nonconformist psychology. His upbringing as the son of a Nonconformist minister, in an atmosphere of "extreme democracy, which knows neither male nor female,"²⁸⁴ had left him with ideals of justice and a respect for women that were often seen as dangerously advanced in ultra-masculine, mainstream, late-Victorian society. English upper class villainy, moreover, reinforced by widespread melodramatic

²⁷⁹ *Northern Echo*, 27 October, 1871, p.3.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 20 May, 1870, p. 3.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 27 October, 1871, p.3.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 91.

literary stereotypes,²⁸⁵ and later personified in the New Journalism by officials like Henry Matthews and wealthy cads such as Martin Langworthy, further served to magnify his ideas.

For Stead, prostitution represented the worst example of upper-class exploitation of poor girls and women. In a typical passage, he claimed that many prostitutes were “on the verge of childhood, some having commenced the process of slow suicide involved in their dreadful calling at the age of fourteen.”²⁸⁶ Society, he concluded, “which outwardly, indeed, appears white and glistening...within is full of dead men's bones and rottenness.”²⁸⁷

Though crime reporting was a well-established feature of most mid-Victorian newspapers, the open discussion of prostitution was a far more controversial and dangerous exercise; prostitution had few sympathisers in respectable society and the subject of prostitution – particularly child prostitution - was “tabooed by the press.”²⁸⁸ Yet, Stead’s articles defending the humanity of prostitutes met with little resistance from the *Echo*’s proprietors, nor even its readership, and in many ways, anticipated the controversial journalism of his later “Maiden Tribute.”

Modern society, after all, does not differ very much from the old massive fortresses of the Dark Ages...Deep down in the dark dungeons of despair, at the roots of the social edifice, dwell a vast multitude of the victims of Vice...whose daily bread is gained by the sale of all that woman holds dear. Above them is the fair assembly of those upon whose brow beats the light of domestic peace.²⁸⁹

Such rhetoric drew on the Victorian preoccupation with the imagined labyrinth of an urban-industrial underworld, one of the many wellsprings that fed Stead’s later New Journalism.²⁹⁰ But it was also fuelled by Stead’s stance against the continued existence of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had first come into force in 1864. Ostensibly aimed at controlling venereal disease, the three Acts

²⁸⁵ For more on Victorian melodrama, and on its influence on Stead’s “Maiden Tribute” articles, see Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 81-120.

²⁸⁶ *Northern Echo*, 27 October, 1871.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ See Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 142.

²⁸⁹ *Northern Echo*, 23 October, 1872, p.2.

²⁹⁰ See “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” (*Pall Mall Gazette*, July 6-10, 1885).

(1864, 1866 and 1869) provided for the identification, medical inspection and incarceration of diseased prostitutes in specific ports and army towns of southern England and Ireland.²⁹¹ For Stead, however, they were a brazen example of the Victorian double standard. It was a subject on which, he later admitted, he became “quite mad:”

I am ready to allow anybody to discuss anything in any newspaper that I edit: they may deny the existence of God or of the soul: they may blaspheme all the angels and all the saints: they may maintain that I am the latest authentic incarnation of the Devil. But one thing I have never allowed them to do, and that is to say a word in favour of the C.D. Acts.²⁹²

Both the nature of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the fight for their repeal were no stranger to the press, not even to the *Northern Echo*. Almost from their inception, vociferous repeal advocates, such as Josephine Butler, ensured that the Acts were a frequent topic of debate in many newspapers, both provincial and national. Indeed, throughout the 1870s, Wemyss Reid’s *Leeds Mercury* discussed the Acts, in both its news columns and in its letters to the editor, almost on a daily basis.²⁹³ Most of these papers, however, compelled by matters of delicacy and good taste, consigned such content to ‘Occasional Notes’ and other less-prominent sections. What distinguished Stead’s coverage was the sheer boldness with which he used his style of New Journalism to disseminate his views on the subject in the *Echo*’s daily leader:

we demand the repeal of the Acts, because they outrage our English notions of liberty and Justice...and because it is scandalously unfair that laws which they detest and abhor, should be forced upon the weaker sex, while we dare not apply the same measures, no matter how necessary, to the male portion of the community.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ For a full examination of the workings of the C.D. Acts, see Judith R Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, class, and the State*, (Cambridge University Press, 1980) and especially Miles Ogborn, ‘Law and Discipline in Nineteenth Century English State Formation: The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 6 (1993).

²⁹² Quoted in Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, p. 109.

²⁹³ See, for example, the *Leeds Mercury* from January 1, 1870.

²⁹⁴ *Northern Echo*, 23 October, 1872, pp.2-3.

The daily leaders of his future employer, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, had several times discussed the Acts from as early as 1870, but where the *Pall Mall Gazette*, then still a Conservative organ, promoted the Acts and resisted “ill-judged attempts to repeal the limited acts already in force,”²⁹⁵ Stead’s leaders, affected as they were with Nonconformist notions of liberty, morality and freedom, condemned them as measures that “violate[d] the fundamental principles of morality, of liberty, and of justice...without preserving health...[and] cynically sacrifice[d] the liberty and honour of English women in a futile attempt to save abandoned men from the consequences of their crimes.”²⁹⁶

Stead would “make no apology”²⁹⁷ for urging such a repugnant subject on his provincial readers. In his mind, the defence of prostitutes against a social system that had crushed them, played to his Liberal views of individual freedom and his religious sense of moral duty. Like many Nonconformists, he believed in his personal election by God, and his actions, therefore, were justified in terms of this divine call. As Goldsworthy suggests, this gave Stead, and, indeed, many other Nonconformist journalists, a sense of mission and self-confidence that few other men in their profession possessed.²⁹⁸ When a crisis in confidence did arise, moreover, Stead usually combated this with a greater exercise of faith, rather than a tactical change in the running of his newspaper.²⁹⁹

Pious, radical and oftentimes intensely belligerent, Stead’s religious convictions and journalistic drive to get at the heart of things permitted no false pandering to either public delicacy or a conventional sense of journalistic good taste. It was “The man who makes the cesspool,” he thundered, “not the man who cleans it out [that] is the offender against public health.”³⁰⁰ This was a view shared by north country campaigners against the CD Acts, such as the Northern Counties

²⁹⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 May, 1873, p. 1.

²⁹⁶ *Northern Echo*, 21 June, 1875, pp.2-3.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Goldsworthy, ‘English Nonconformity’, p. 392

²⁹⁹ See Stead’s thoughts on losing his confidence following his release from prison in 1886. “I am sorry for Thompson [proprietor of the *PMG*]. I have injured his property...If God would only enable me to make him an immense return! But that must be as God wills.” (Quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 147)

³⁰⁰ *Northern Echo*, 21, June, 1875, pp.2-3.

League for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (NCL). During its first annual conference, it gratefully acknowledged the *Northern Echo*'s support in the agitation, and Stead did not hesitate to publish their comments: "At a time when so many newspapers affected to deem the question unfit for publicity, it is right to notice that the *Northern Echo* rendered essential service to our cause by its friendly record of our operations and its truthful reports of our meetings."³⁰¹

Such self-aggrandisement did not merely play to Stead's journalistic vanity; it was a strategy that also served to increase the credibility of his newspaper and was a particular feature of the New Journalism ridiculed by Matthew Arnold. Stead would make particular use of this technique to fortify and endorse campaigns such as the "Maiden Tribute." In 1887, the same strategy would be used to urge upon the public the phrase, "New Journalism" itself.

Stead gave almost three columns to reporting the NCL's first conference under the headlines, "THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS: REPEALERS MEETING IN DARLINGTON."³⁰² These headlines were not so large, nor as sensational as those that accompanied his crime reports of the West Auckland poisonings; but through the first half of Stead's editorship, the fight for repeal was frequently the subject of the *Northern Echo*'s daily leader and increasingly featured in its "Latest News."³⁰³

A group that particularly profited from Stead's attack on regulation was the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA). Its charismatic leader, Josephine Butler, particularly impressed the young Stead, so much so that she frequently featured in his articles and, ultimately, became a lifelong acquaintance. "Gifted beyond most women with natural abilities," wrote Stead, "Mrs. Butler has consecrated her life to the service of those of her own sex from whose touch most women recoil as if it were pollution. To her, the opening of the campaign...seemed like a divine call."³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24, October, 1873, p. 3.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12 November, 1874, p. 3.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 April, 1876, pp. 2-3.

Walkowitz has suggested that the modern focus on Butler ignores the important roles of male activists of the time, such as Henry J. Wilson and James Stansfield;³⁰⁵ and yet, she could equally have included Stead in this list. Even Butler herself acknowledged that the *Northern Echo* “had always been from the first favourable to our cause, and had published at frequent intervals articles of a very striking nature.”³⁰⁶ Like many of Stead’s readers, Butler had discerned that a very different and distinct journalist style was being practiced at the *Northern Echo*. This early recognition of the New Journalism is not, perhaps, surprising, given her own radical upbringing amid the impassioned rhetoric of the anti-slavery movement. What is, perhaps, less known to scholars, is that Stead’s articles on the C.D. Acts were also being disseminated in the LNA’s official organ, *The Shield*.³⁰⁷ One such article, a disturbing description of the workings of continental regulation, was as powerful as any of the LNA’s literature on the subject:

She [the prostitute] is watched and dogged by the officers. Every action is strained to support their suspicions, and too often the victim finds her name inscribed on the roll of the fallen. She receives official notification that she must present herself for surgical examination as a recognised prostitute. Her character is blasted, her position is lost...the strategy...may be employed—nay, will be employed—here, should the Contagious Diseases Acts be enforced universally..³⁰⁸

By 1876, articles such as “The New Abolitionists”,³⁰⁹ inspired by Butler’s pamphlet of the same name, had begun to associate the campaign against regulation with the anti-slavery movement of the early nineteenth century. It was a powerful argument, and an idea that found particularly fertile soil in Nonconformist culture. That prostitutes were slaves to their profession was one thing, but being enslaved by an English Parliamentary Act, whose practical effects were to “doom women who have once resorted to prostitution to life-long

³⁰⁵ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p.6.

³⁰⁶ Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1896), p.180.

³⁰⁷ See *The Shield: Established to Promote the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts*, 1 March, 1873, p. 72 and Saturday, 31 January, 1874, p. 34.

³⁰⁸ *Northern Echo*, 22 February, 1873, p. 2, republished in *The Shield*, 1 March, 1873, p. 72.

³⁰⁹ *Northern Echo*, 3 April, 1876, pp. 2-3.

servitude,”³¹⁰ offended Stead’s moral conscience even more so than the black slavery of the early nineteenth century:

Even in the worst days of American slavery, a negro could always call his soul his own... But into the prison-house of Prostitution glares no ray of hope athwart the darkness of despair. Its only light is the lurid glare of Hell... The doors of their dungeon, locked, bolted, and barred by the State, can only be opened by death.³¹¹

Often invoked by campaigners like Stead, the “white slavery” metaphor gave reform rhetoric a new and powerful voice, and encouraged society to look upon prostitutes more sympathetically. Where the Acts defined prostitutes as sexual harpies who preyed upon the apparent sexual weakness of their male customers,³¹² the slavery metaphor portrayed them as unwilling sex slaves, cast out and crushed by tyranny and sin. This was an important psychological leap, since it shifted the stigma of prostitution from the “unrespectable” prostitute to her “respectable” male client. It also had connotations for women in respectable society, who, early feminists argued, had even less liberty than the prostitute.³¹³

Traditionally, the “white slavery” crusade and the related issue of child prostitution are seen as the inaugural campaigns of Stead’s New Journalism at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Yet, as early as 1873, he had introduced the term and concept of “white slavery” to his readers in an article about white slaves in America. In an uncanny prefiguring of his later “Maiden Tribute” campaign, Stead described a prolific traffic in enslaved children “from two to six years of age,” who had been either kidnapped or sold by their parents into a lucrative trade “conducted by men of capital.” Drawing his power from the slavery

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² According to pro-regulationist, William Acton, prostitutes were “ministers of evil passions, [who] not only gratify desire, but also arouse it. Compelled by necessity to seek for customers, they throng our streets and public places, and suggest evil thoughts and desires which might otherwise remain undeveloped.” William Acton, *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspect, in London and other large cities and Garrison Towns, with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Attendant Evils*, (London: John Churchill and Sons, 1857), p. 166.

³¹³ For more on the significance of the “white slavery” metaphor, see Catherine Hall, *White Male and Middle Class, Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Mary Ann Irwin, ‘White Slavery as a Metaphor: Anatomy of Moral Panic’, *Ex Post Facto*, 5 (1996) <<http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~epf/1996/wslavery.html>> [accessed 10 May, 2010].

metaphor, Stead told of a nefarious underground trade, where children were “pigged together” in “slave cellars,” and where beatings and torture, and even murder, were the daily lot of its helpless prisoners.³¹⁴ He continued:

“The Zanzibar Treaty abolishes for ever the transport of slaves from the mainland of Africa, and gives our ships full power to seize and confiscate all vessels which carry these contraband goods...[but] The head-quarters of the white slavery which demands suppression is in New York; the route of the slave traders lies between Italy and the States.”³¹⁵

According to Stead’s sources “from across the Atlantic,” children were “kidnapped in the streets of Italian towns, smuggled on board emigrant steamers, and from thenceforth...[were] considered to be the private property or stock-in-trade of the kidnapper.” It was computed, wrote Stead, that “there are at present...in the United States about 8,000 Italian children who are to all intents and purposes slaves, who are worked for the profit of their owners...and who are sold like cattle at so much a head to any one desirous of becoming the owner of a fine boy or girl.”³¹⁶

In a prose style as powerful as anything in his later “Maiden Tribute” articles, Stead detailed the pathetic histories of the victims of this “trade in human flesh,” their attempts to escape, and the insurmountable barriers put in place to prevent them from doing so. Like the brothel keepers in the “Maiden Tribute,” the men who profited from the white slave trade were, he claimed, protected by figures in authority, authorities who, in the naïve and terrified imagination of one young escapee from this trade, included the King of Italy, the President of America, and even the Pope.³¹⁷ “To tame him,” wrote Stead, the boy was bound:

...every night with cords round the wrists so tightly that they cut into his flesh. His ears were pinched, and with every pinch pieces of flesh were torn away. The poor wretch’s scarred arms and mutilated ears bore horrible testimony to the truth of his story...For

³¹⁴ *Northern Echo*, Friday, July 4, 1873, pp.2-3 (*passim*).

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3 (*passim*).

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3 (*passim*).

three years, such was the daily story of his life...death alone brings relief to these enslaved ones.”³¹⁸

Stead scholars will see parallels in this early exposé and, indeed, in Stead’s stance against the C.D. Acts, for both exercised the self-same rhetoric that he deployed in later campaigns such as the “Maiden Tribute.” Though he responded to the ever present demand for profit and circulation, Stead also believed that his editorial duty lay in “the ideal of faith...[and] the aspirations after a nobler and better future.”³¹⁹ Rooted in older Liberal and Nonconformist traditions, Stead’s moral stance invested his journalism with a powerful, often irresistible voice.

Despite Stead’s passionate articles, by 1876, the repeal of Contagious Diseases Acts was still a decade away. Now, however, he was increasingly being drawn away from British social inequalities by a crisis that was developing in war-torn Bulgaria. The human catastrophe unfolding there, though previously reported in several British newspapers, had yet to fire the public imagination. It would take all of Stead’s journalistic powers to bring the full horror of the Bulgarian Atrocities home to the Christian world. It would also make the *Northern Echo* one of the most famous newspapers in Europe.

The Bulgarian Atrocities

By 1876, Stead’s burgeoning journalistic talents had gone largely undiscovered in Liberal political circles. Despite having helped to silence the political outpourings of the now bankrupt Henry King Spark, and having further honed his evangelising pen on issues such as crime and execution, poverty, and the regulation of prostitution, Stead was still virtually unknown elsewhere in the country. In 1876, however, the so-called Bulgarian Atrocities offered him a campaign that would draw him into the very centre of Victorian high politics and bring him into personal contact with some of the most celebrated figures in Victorian society. As his assistant editor, Mark Fooks recalled:

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.2

³¹⁹ Quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, pp. 99-102

Until the advent of the Eastern Question Mr. Stead had not achieved more than a local reputation in connexion (sic) with the *Northern Echo*. The intensity of his political convictions, as shown by the fervour of his writings, had been previously manifest to Liberal political circles in Durham and Yorkshire and adjacent counties. The advent of the struggle between Russia and Turkey...first brought Mr. Stead into recognition amongst the leading statesmen of the Liberal party.³²⁰

The origins of the Bulgarian Atrocities lay in the wider and complex political issues of Turkey as a waning power and the crumbling economic fortunes of the rapidly disintegrating Ottoman Empire. But they were also attributed to the impetuous character and unrestrained spending policies of the then Sultan, Abdul Aziz, a “nervous hypochondriac,” wrote Stead, whose life “was barren of pleasure as the Libyan desert” and who had “long been one of the most miserable men in the whole of his wide dominions.”³²¹

In 1875, with government bankruptcy looming, the Turkish authorities imposed a series of crippling tax increases on the Empire’s already impoverished, mainly Christian farmers. Resistance to the new taxes, beginning in Herzegovina, spread rapidly and, by the end of 1875, widespread insurrection among the Slavs of the Balkan Peninsula threatened to bring down the Empire.

As complex as the causes of insurrection were, Stead, typically looked for the human face behind the emerging crisis, and laid the ultimate blame for Turkey’s problems at the door of the Sultan himself. “One Abdul Aziz,” he wrote, “was sufficient to destroy any state,” much like King Louis of France “before the guillotine spared him any further trouble by relieving him of his head.”³²² Stead’s journalism was now beginning to develop a wit and a sarcasm, as well as a ruthless disregard of complexity that, in later years, exasperated more academic contemporaries like Matthew Arnold; but for all that, he also exhibited a confident overview of foreign affairs that belied his young age. Stead continued:

³²⁰ Quoted in John Kensit, *The Life of Mr. W.T. Stead: Editor of the Pall Mall Gazette*, 2nd edn (London: John Kensit, 1885), pp. 10-14.

³²¹ *Northern Echo*, 31 May, 1876, p.1.

³²² *Northern Echo*, 25 August, 1874, p.2-3 *passim*.

It is as possible to fill the Treasury of Abdul Aziz as to hold water in a sieve... Whether his treasury is empty, or whether it is full, he spends recklessly and lavishly, in a manner that has not frequently occasioned serious suspicion as to his sanity... To satisfy his ever changing crazes, money is spilt like water; and no sooner does he succeed in attaining the object he desired than he desires it no longer... He may get along for a while by makeshifts more or less desperate, but sooner or later the end will come..³²³

Other newspapers, too, were becoming concerned over these politically destabilising issues, but not many. Not until December, 1875 did *The Times* begin to question the financial instability of Abdul Aziz's empire,³²⁴ while in early 1874, Stead's future employer, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was the only London paper that shared the *Northern Echo's* concerns about "the costly caprices of an arbitrary monarch."³²⁵

Stead's confident expectation of the Sultan's ultimate overthrow bore fruit in May 1876, with his forced abdication and the succession of Murad Effendi to the Turkish throne. Aziz ultimately took his own life (or was murdered), but his overthrow did little to alleviate the emerging crisis. Indeed, Slavs throughout the Balkans now sensed a weakness in the failing Ottoman Empire and understood that "the hour was about to strike for their emancipation from the Ottoman yoke."³²⁶ By June, Serbia and Montenegro, appalled by Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria and elsewhere, and encouraged by the Pan Slavic religious rhetoric of Russian radicals, had declared war on the Ottomans.³²⁷

The advent of this new Eastern crisis was an unwelcome development to all the major European powers, but especially Britain. The Crimean War had made an alliance with the Ottomans a necessary evil, since Turkey acted as an important buffer between British interests in the East and Russian expansionist ambitions in

³²³ *Ibid.*,

³²⁴ See *The Times*, 14 December, 1875, p.10.

³²⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 April, 1874, p.1.

³²⁶ W.T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia*, I, p. 200.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

the Balkans. With her European neighbours now threatening to intervene in these destabilising Turkish affairs, British Premier, Disraeli, moved the Mediterranean fleet into the Besika Bay. It was an ominous manoeuvre intended to deter other European powers (particularly Russia) from intervening.³²⁸ It was also a move that brought Stead's bitter reproach in the columns of the *Northern Echo*:

Should he [Disraeli], from jealousy of Russia, venture to play the game of the Moslem tyrant, he will discover when too late how terrible the judgment he will have brought upon himself. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depths of the sea than that he should...disgrace the English name by assisting to defeat the heroic men who have gone forth against the Turks under the banners of Independence.³²⁹

Here, Stead's war cry contrasts sharply with his predecessor, Copleston's measured views on war in 1870, reflecting his growing confidence as an editor and his penchant for attacking authority. Yet, Stead made no apology for such sabre-rattling; "Much as war is to be detested," he wrote, "in cases like the present, war is the only solution which has yet been devised."³³⁰

By May, 1876, Bulgarian nationals, enthused by their Servian neighbours, had themselves taken up arms against Turkey. The insurrection, small and hopelessly incompetent, was ruthlessly crushed by an Ottoman force of ill-disciplined (probably by now unpaid) Muslim irregular troops (*Bashi-Bazouks*), who swept through Bulgaria, slaughtering all in their path.

Stead had warned of such an eventuality as early as 1874, because of the "recent revival of intolerance in the Ottoman Empire" and the zeal with which "Christians have been persecuted."³³¹ The revival of the Moslem religion, he went on, offered "abundant opportunities for zealous Mohammedams to come to blows with the Christians."³³² More seriously, he warned that "the tendency to

³²⁸ Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 20.

³²⁹ *Northern Echo*, 5 July, 1876, p. 2

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.1-2

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 5 October, 1874, p.2

³³² *Northern Echo*, 26 September, 1874, p.2.

exclude Christians not only from Moslem neighbourhoods, but from all offices in the Ottoman Empire, is one which may result in such an expulsion of Christians as would necessitate the interference of the Continental Powers.”³³³

It was a grim portent, and one which, by the spring of 1876, had already begun to unfold. Mass expulsions, wrote Stead, had now escalated into “a war of extermination being carried on against the Christians in Bulgaria!”³³⁴ He continued:

Upon the provocation of an insurrection the dimensions of which cannot have been great, a company of Bashi-Bazouks, the off-scourings of Turkish society, which sufficiently describes their character, were let loose upon the people, and never did dogs pursue their game more mercilessly...Men, women, and children have been ruthlessly murdered. Among the incidents mentioned is the burning of a stable with forty or fifty young women within its walls; and a massacre of innocents, to the number of a hundred, found in a school house. The details are sickening.³³⁵

Shannon has suggested that Stead’s orchestrating role in the Bulgarian agitation in the north was the most important development before the publication of Gladstone’s famous pamphlet, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*.³³⁶

³³⁶ Yet, the *Northern Echo* was not the only provincial newspaper to cover the emerging crisis; the horrors coming out of Bulgaria via dispatches to the *London Daily News*, were being picked by newspapers up and down the country.

However, the *Northern Echo* was the only paper that became a journalistic power as a result of the agitation.³³⁷ There was good reason for this.

Stead’s irrepressible journalism, sense of Nonconformist duty and, most importantly, his refusal to fudge issues on grounds of good taste and delicacy, particularly suited the campaign. While his daily leaders were filled with horrific revelations of massacres, summary executions and rapes,³³⁸ all elements that

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 June, 1876, p.3.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Atrocities*, p. 49.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³³⁸ See, for example, Stead’s leader in the *Northern Echo*, 24 June, 1876, p.3.

would one day form the meat and drink of New Journalism, other provincial papers sought to shield their respectable readers from the reality of the reports. The *Liverpool Mercury*, for example, said it would “not horrify our readers with attempts to describe the indescribable.”³³⁹ The *Leeds Mercury*, whilst providing extensive reports and official views on the subject, including almost a full page on Gladstone’s pamphlet,³⁴⁰ likewise resisted the urge to dwell on the particulars of the atrocities. Ironically, even the *Daily News* itself, was not immune to this apparent squeamishness. After publishing a series of horrific dispatches on the atrocities,³⁴¹ and then breaking the story in earnest on August 22, 1876 with J.A. MacGahan’s celebrated yet harrowing Batak letter,³⁴² the *Daily News* editorial quickly returned to its usual diet of current affairs and politics.³⁴³

But there was another explanation for Stead’s key role in the atrocity agitation, a reason that transcended the mere selling of a newspaper and rather served higher religious ideals of justice and duty:

..the Bulgarian agitation was due to a Divine voice. I felt the clear call of God's voice, “Arouse the nation or be damned”. If I did not do all I could, I would deserve damnation.³⁴⁴

Stead’s sense of divine election for the task at hand gave the *Echo*’s atrocity campaign a power and an earnestness that few other papers could match. This was particularly manifest in his attacks on Disraeli. For Stead, the British Premier was almost as responsible for the atrocities as the Turkish soldiers who had carried them out, and Bulgarians, he fumed “need not expect anything but the Iscariot kiss from the lips of Lord Beaconsfield.”³⁴⁵ If Stead believed himself

³³⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 August, 1876, p.6.

³⁴⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 7 September, 1876, p.8.

³⁴¹ See the *Daily News* throughout August, 1876, for various dispatches and articles on this.

³⁴² See the *Daily News*, 22 August, 1876, p.4 and p. 5. MacGahan was a celebrated American war correspondent (late of the *New York Herald*) whose vivid reports from the front line in France, Russia and central Asia had earned him an almost celebrity status, with his articles frequently appearing in European newspapers (such as the *Daily News*). He was first informed about the emerging Bulgarian crisis by his friend, Eugene Schuyler, then the American Consul-General in Constantinople, who invited him to report on the massacres.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³⁴⁴ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 104.

³⁴⁵ *Northern Echo*, 11 September, 1876, p.2.

the saviour of oppressed Bulgaria, then Disraeli and the “terrible havoc wrought by [his Turkish] protégés,”³⁴⁶ was, equally, a clear and present devil to be attacked. Indeed, so strong was Stead’s loathing of Disraeli that, throughout his career, he would revisit this quasi-holy war whenever similar events gave him the opportunity. “If Lord Beaconsfield,” he wrote in 1890, “had been permitted to plunge us into war in order to prevent the liberation of Bulgaria,” Britain as a nation, would have been “more guilty...than were the Jews who crucified Jesus, or the Romans who allowed him to be put to death.”³⁴⁷ Like a latter-day prophet, he denounced the man who had “betrayed the cause of humanity to pursue that glittering bubble of ambition, and sacrificed the lives of thousands to his ‘spirited’ policy in the East.” Stead continued:

Mr Disraeli is largely responsible for these massacres. The blood of the slaughtered Bulgarians is on his hands, and in vain will he attempt to wash it away...He turned a deaf ear to the wail of the widow and the despairing cry of the violated maiden...As he has sown so shall he reap...as he closed his ear to the anguished wail wrung from the heart of a tortured race, in like manner an indignant nation...will exult when...it hurls him from the pinnacle of power into the lowest abyss of degradation and contempt.³⁴⁸

Though Stead had long been aware of massacres committed in Bulgaria, the main impetus of his attacks on Disraeli was, in large part, the graphic dispatches of the Irish-American war correspondent, J. A. MacGahan, in the London *Daily News*. MacGahan had not been the first journalist to report on the massacres; indeed, atrocity reports in Bulgaria had reached the pages of most London newspapers, and had even provoked a demonstration in Trafalgar Square by the Manhood Suffrage League on “the attitude of the working classes in the event of war.”³⁴⁹ But MacGahan, was one of the most brilliant journalists of his generation, and his powerful journalism, a style not unlike the New Journalism being practiced by Stead, brought to light the full horror of the crisis. His harrowing description

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 August, 1876, p.3.

³⁴⁷ W.T. Stead, *The Story that Transformed the World or the Passion Play at Oberammergau 1890*, (London: *Review of Reviews*, 1890), p. 158.

³⁴⁸ *Northern Echo*, 9 August, 1876, p.3.

³⁴⁹ *The Times*, July 10, 1876, p. 10.

of the devastated village of Batak was a veritable *tour de force* of man's inhumanity to man:

At last we came to a kind of little plateau or shelf on the hillside, where the ground was nearly level, with the exception of a little indentation where the head of a hollow broke through. We rode towards this, with the intention of crossing it, but all suddenly drew rein with an exclamation of horror, for right before us, almost beneath our horses' feet, was a sight that made us shudder. It was a heap of skulls, intermingled with bones from all parts of the human body, skeletons nearly entire rotting, clothing, human hair, and putrid flesh lying there in one foul heap, around which the grass was growing luxuriantly. It emitted a sickening odour... These, then, were all women and girls... the skeletons were nearly all headless. These women had all been beheaded.³⁵⁰

While journalists like MacGahan and Stead did their best to highlight the extent of the atrocities, Disraeli typically tried to play them down, dismissing such reports as written by “gentlemen who attacked him for want of sympathy with the sufferers by imaginary atrocities.”³⁵¹ Disraeli's response was not, perhaps, mere cold-blooded flippancy. Mindful of Slavic sympathies in Russia, he knew that a war between Russia and Turkey, a conflict that would inevitably prompt British military intervention against Russia, would be more horrifying and destructive than anything described by MacGahan or Stead.

Stead's view, however, was by now far too inflamed to see this wider political picture. In the editor's outraged mind, the need to alleviate the humanitarian crisis far out-weighed any concerns of impending war. Again, Stead looked for a suitably villainous face on which to base his agitation, and he found it in the figure of Disraeli:

..12,000 Bulgarians had been massacred, and sixty-villages burnt, Mr Disraeli, in his place in the House of Commons, sneered at the Bulgarians as “sufferers by imaginary atrocities.” The next day Mr Schyler, the American representative, stood in the midst of the rotting corpses of three thousand victims of these “imaginary atrocities”... Even now the gallows are “going always,” like the guillotine in the first French Revolution...³⁵²

³⁵⁰ *Daily News*, 22 August, 1876, pp.5-6.

³⁵¹ Quoted in the *Northern Echo*, 31 August, 1876, p.3.

³⁵² *Northern Echo*, 11 August, 1876, p.2 and 31 August, 1876, p. 3.

By now, Stead, certain of himself as an instrument of God, had come to the realisation that his mission in life “was to labour unceasingly, by all methods and in every season, to help on the social regeneration of the people of the world.”³⁵³ In the Bulgarian atrocities, he had a springboard from which to launch this radical mission and a rhetoric powerful enough to whip up a mass political movement. To that end, on August 23, he reprinted MacGahan’s Batak dispatch, and on the same page, declared that it was:

...with sincere satisfaction that we announce this morning, that a public meeting will be held on Friday — the first, we hope of a series of meetings which will be held in the North—to express the sentiments with which all truehearted Englishmen regard...the men who are struggling for liberty against intolerable despotism of the Crescent, and express in plain outspoken terms its abhorrence of the atrocities wherein the Turks have massacred their subjects into horror-stricken obedience.”³⁵⁴

The Darlington meeting set a trend, and soon similar meetings were taking place throughout the north. In the *Northern Echo*, Stead started a regular feature entitled “The North Country and the Atrocities,”³⁵⁵ in which, with feverish enthusiasm, the minutes of atrocity meetings up and down the country were faithfully reproduced. He also appealed to leading Liberals to spearhead the movement against Lord Beaconsfield’s Eastern policy.

Encouraged by the success of the atrocity meetings, and realising he had ignited a tinderbox of public indignation, Stead wrote to the semi-retired W.E. Gladstone, imploring him to take up the cause of the slaughtered Bulgarians. In truth, Gladstone’s knowledge of events in Bulgaria was less than perfect. He admitted that much of what he knew came from the pages of the *Northern Echo*, for copies were being dispatched to him by Stead, even prompting the statesman to modestly declare that the “acute discernment with which your [Stead’s] articles are written needs no help from me.”³⁵⁶

³⁵³ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 103.

³⁵⁴ *Northern Echo*, 23 August, 1876, p.2.

³⁵⁵ See the *Northern Echo*, from 26 August 1876, p. 3.

³⁵⁶ W.T. Stead, *M.P. For Russia*, I, p. 259.

Understandably, the veteran Gladstone was apprehensive about becoming involved in the atrocity campaign. It had, after all, as its driving force, a young and unpredictable newspaper editor who, though talented and courageous, was frequently prone to passionate hysterics and lacked the restrained, political composure that Gladstone valued. However, Gladstone *was* moved by Stead's impassioned prose in the *Northern Echo* and shared his moral earnestness. Moreover, his political brain was also quick to discern the political advantage both he and his party might gain by associating himself with the movement, and he effectively allied himself with the agitation in the September of 1876 with the publication of his pamphlet, the *Bulgarian Horrors and the Questions of the East*.³⁵⁷ Its powerful climax finished: "We may ransack the annals of the world, but I know not what research can furnish us with so portentous an example of the fiendish misuse of the powers established by God...No government ever has so sinned."³⁵⁸

In reality, *Bulgarian Horrors* was little more than a re-stating of Stead and MacGahan's editorials and reports, and what Gladstone himself had previously written on the Eastern Question.³⁵⁹ It nonetheless stole much of the thunder of the *Northern Echo*, which hitherto had been the most important agent in the development of the crusade.³⁶⁰ This may explain why Stead's critical role in the campaign, eclipsed as it was by the Grand Old Man's timely entrance into the fray, goes largely unnoticed. Nonetheless, it was Stead, "more than any other who supplied the great national movement...with a voice, a method, and a direction."³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ J.O. Baylen, 'Madame Olga Novikoff: Propagandist', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 10 (1951), p. 260.

³⁵⁸ W.E. Gladstone, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, (London: John Murray, 1876) p. 63.

³⁵⁹ Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, p.173.

³⁶⁰ Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, pp. 49-50.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Stead, however, was happy to assume the lesser role of “practically Mr. Gladstone’s lieutenant.”³⁶² “Achilles may sulk in his tent,” he declared in a leader entitled, “Gladstone to the Front!”, but when “the most powerful of all living Englishmen” comes forth, “all recognise his supremacy.”³⁶³ Moreover, it had long been Stead’s most earnest hope that Gladstone would step in and take up the Bulgarian gauntlet, and he now triumphantly proclaimed the movement’s new leader in pages of the *Northern Echo*:

Mr. Gladstone has justified, and more than justified our most sanguine hopes. He has fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, our loftiest anticipations. At the most important crisis of modern European history, Mr. Gladstone has risen to the full height of the situation, and expressed words of sustained eloquence, which have much of the terrible earnestness of the Hebrew Seer, the Anathema of Humanity upon the devastators of Bulgaria... At this moment, Mr. Gladstone is the real ruler of the land.

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Gladstone’s pamphlet was followed a few days later with an impassioned speech at Blackheath before an admiring and vociferous, but rain-drenched crowd. In the audience, was Stead, his enthusiasm unabated by “the drip from a thousand umbrellas.”³⁶⁵ Years later, in the *Review of Reviews*, he rekindled the emotions of that day:

As I came up from Darlington, which had honourably distinguished itself by the promptitude and vigour of its protest long before Mr. Gladstone had spoken, I watched the sun rise over the Eastern fens and thought that I had seen a day dawn destined to be for ever memorable in the annals of human freedom. A strange new sense of the reality of the romance of history came to me, a feeling that I was that day to take, however humble, a part in a meeting that linked the prosaic present to the great days of old. Mr. Gladstone seemed but the last of a long line of national heroes, stretching through the Lion Heart and Hereward and Harold and Alfred to the purple haze of Arthurian romance. I was only twenty-seven, and it was the first occasion I had ever been at the centre of things.³⁶⁶

³⁶² W.T. Stead, ‘The Crusade of Peace’, *Review of Reviews*, 19, 1899, p. 130.

³⁶³ *Northern Echo*, 7 September, 1876, p.2.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ W.T. Stead, ‘Mr. Gladstone’, *Review of Reviews*, 5, 1892, p. 352.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

But it would not be the last: for, this first taste of the burgeoning power of the press and its ability to influence governments, would have a profound and lasting effect on Stead and would later serve to help him construct his ideal of government by journalism. Gladstone's impressive speech at Blackheath would also have a lasting impact. Gifted though he was with a powerful rhetoric of his own, Stead was acutely conscious of the oratory powers of his political hero. Even in his own lifetime, Gladstone's soaring speeches were famous throughout Europe, and as Stead later wrote, "only those who have been under the spell of the magician can rightly understand the hold which he exercises over his audience."³⁶⁷ Back at his desk in Darlington, after inserting apparently every word of Gladstone's speech into the columns of his paper,³⁶⁸ Stead looked back upon his experience in the *Echo's* daily leader: "Never did Mr Gladstone reach a higher level of sustained eloquence, never did he make a more magnificent attempt to touch the conscience of the peoples."³⁶⁹

In many ways this reflected Stead's own sense of moral mission and was an apt description of his now formidable rhetorical powers in the columns of the *Northern Echo*. In truth, Gladstone and the atrocity campaign made uneasy bedfellows. Whereas the main activists were driven by the journalism of Stead, Gladstone kept his own council on the Eastern Question, a council that tended increasingly towards moderation.³⁷⁰

Yet, despite the hopes of the activists, even Gladstone's lofty influence was not enough to push Disraeli into changing his Eastern Policy and, in the end, it was Russia who took up the gauntlet, by bringing "the whole force of Russia"³⁷¹ to the aid of struggling Serbia late in 1876. Russian volunteers had been fighting the Ottomans in Serbia since July, and the Russophile Stead, now welcomed the arrival of the rest of the Russian military, declaring that "negotiations will be

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 354.

³⁶⁸ See the *Northern Echo*, 11 September, 1876, p. 3.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, p. 174.

³⁷¹ *Northern Echo*, 1 November, 1876, p.1.

much simplified now that the Turks have to negotiate with a Russian revolver pressed close to their heads.”³⁷²

In many ways, Gladstone’s Blackheath speech was the summit of Stead’s campaign. Though he continued to hammer out leaders and articles on the Bulgarian atrocities, by October, 1876, he had begun to question Gladstone’s commitment to the atrocity cause, which, like the Grand Old Man himself, had begun to flag for want of enthusiasm and support.³⁷³

Nevertheless, the atrocity agitation was successful in many ways. Though Turkey was neither defeated nor held to account for the atrocities in Bulgaria and elsewhere in the Baltic region, the moral outrage generated by the agitation stopped Disraeli from coming to the aid of the Ottomans and, effectively, ended the Anglo-Turkish alliance. The campaign also reasserted Gladstone’s position at the helm of the Liberal leadership, and may well have enthused Russia to commit to the Bulgarian cause and help free the Balkans from further Turkish oppression.

For Stead, however, one of the real successes of the Bulgarian Atrocity agitation was a professional recognition, in that it brought his New Journalism to a wider stage and elevated him to higher political spheres. This showed, too, in the content of the *Northern Echo* itself, which, in the months and years following the Bulgarian campaign, increasingly reported more international news.

But circumstances were again about to dictate Stead’s future; on the strength of his service to the Liberal cause during the Bulgarian agitation, and later the Midlothian Election, Stead was recommended to *Pall Mall Gazette* proprietor, Henry Yates Thompson, who needed an assistant editor to help enliven the editorial style of his paper, then under the editorship of John Morley. In typical

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Atrocities*, p. 247.

fashion, and despite his provincial Nonconformist distrust of London as “the grave of all earnestness,”³⁷⁴ Stead considered the opportunity heaven sent:

It is in the hands of the Lord, and He knows better than I...Looked at from the standpoint of signs and leadings, it seems as if it were likely to be an effectual call...I would have more power in driving the machine of State and of reaching the ears of those who with tongue or pen reach others...When I see the devil so strong and his assailants so timorous and half-hearted I long to be in a place where I can have a full slap at him..³⁷⁵

The day to day content of the *Northern Echo*, with its attention to local issues and events, as well as its allegiance to Liberal party politics during election times, had given Stead a good grounding in the role of provincial newspaper editor. However, it was in the manifestation of human evils, such as the crimes of Mary Ann Cotton, the persecution of prostitutes and the genocide of innocents in war-torn Bulgaria, that really gave Stead a “glorious opportunity of attacking the devil,”³⁷⁶ as he put it. Such campaigns added a powerful moralising dimension to his brand of New Journalism and enabled him to invest his articles with ideologies that prevailed within the Nonconformist traditions in which he was brought up. But the same campaigns also brought in several features and issues that went on to typify the New Journalism.

In the Cotton murders, Stead introduced bold headlines, personal interviews and a dramatic narrative voice, reminiscent of *Pall Mall Gazette* campaigns like the “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.” His support for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, with its related issues of white slavery and prostitution, likewise paved the way for these New Journalistic crusades, while bringing Stead into contact with reformers like Josephine Butler.

It was, however, the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation that most defined Stead’s early career, since it was a campaign that he himself generated, maintained and orchestrated through to its conclusion. Through the rhetoric of the New Journalism and his orchestrating presence at a personal level, he not only played

³⁷⁴ W.T. Stead, quoted in Scott, *Life and Death*, p. 113.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 113-14 (*passim*).

³⁷⁶ Stead to the Rev. Henry Kendall, 11 April, 1871.

a pivotal role in bringing together the disparate political, social and moral elements of the crisis, but demonstrated his skill in reducing complex issues to simple narratives of good versus evil for the easier understanding of his public. It proved to be a powerful strategy, and one that he would employ to even greater effect in his New Journalistic campaign's at the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Conclusion

Stead was one of the most dramatic and controversial characters of the late Victorian period. As, arguably, the best-known journalist of his generation, he presents something of a paradox to historians trying to assess his role in the development of New Journalism. In many ways, this paradox could well have played a part in restricting serious scholarship on Stead's journalistic career and the over-emphasising of other characters, such as Matthew Arnold in the evolution of the genre.

Defining the New Journalism is problematic, in that the term is used widely to describe both the distinctive campaigning style of Stead's journalism and the more commercially-oriented, and in many ways, different New Journalism associated with O'Connor and Northcliffe. Even at the time, these two genres often defined themselves in opposition to one another and operated on fundamentally different motivational lines.

Nonetheless, many scholars have rightly observed that most of the classic features commonly associated with the typographical and textual innovations of New Journalism, such as crossheads, interviews, bold headlines, images and light tit-bit content, can all be found in one form or another in early forms of journalism from the mid-Victorian era and before. It is natural to question, therefore, what the New Journalism really stood for, and why it represents a distinctive stage in the history of the press.

This study has sought to address these questions by analysing Stead's journalism at two key stages of his remarkable career; firstly by looking at his most celebrated years at the *Pall Mall Gazette* and secondly at the less well-known years he spent editing the Northern Echo.

In the first of these sections, the way in which the concept of the New Journalism came into general discourse was analysed in new detail. It tracked the discursive

formation of this new concept and sought to demonstrate that, far from being called into existence by Matthew Arnold's article, "Up to Easter," the phrase and concept of New Journalism was generated by Stead himself.

By both creating and orchestrated the ensuing debate over New Journalism, he thereby elevated Arnold's passing comments into "one of the pet phrases of the hour." His skilful manipulation of this press debate was buttressed by three controversial and widely debated *Pall Mall Gazette* campaigns, all of which possessed at their core the New Journalism's power of narrative and debate.

This study has sought to argue that 1887 was, in many respects, a pivotal year; Stead's manipulation of Arnold's article and his dramatic crusades on behalf of Mrs Langworthy, Miss Cass and Lipski all helped to bring the idea of New Journalism into the public domain. However, the subsequent setbacks associated with the Cass and Lipski cases also played a key role in undermining the public's faith, both in the New Journalism and in Stead himself.

Stead's brand of New Journalism as practised during the 1880s had its own definable characteristics, in that it was motivated by a strong sense of social mission and divine election, both of which were not untypical of a Nonconformist background like Stead's. It adopted a sensationalist voice in which the stylistic features of fiction and melodrama were melded with factual reporting, while interviews reinforced the sense of immediacy and drama.

In some cases, like the Langworthy Marriage, he made increasing use of illustrations, and in most of the campaigns he made full use of dramatic cross-headers. He also published "extras" that served to bolster sales. In this sense, it could be argued that Stead was introducing many of the key features of commercial New Journalism that are more commonly associated with his successors.

The study has revealed that many of these new journalistic techniques had been developed in more embryonic form by Stead during his editorship of the Northern Echo. The latter part of this study has, therefore, sought to analyse these years, firstly by setting the launch of the paper in its local press and political context, and then by analysing three of Stead's key campaigns during the 1870s. This section has also sought to explain Stead's Nonconformist family background and the way in which his apprenticeship years at the new paper during the Northern Echo's political battles with Henry Spark helped hone his campaigning journalistic style.

His coverage of the West Auckland Poisonings offers a telling example of how Stead was already experimenting with many of the key features of New Journalism, including the use of bold headlines and powerful crossheads, but more significantly in his pursuit of lurid graphic detail and human interest. Interviews with Mrs. Cotton's neighbours were interspersed with facsimile letters from the accused woman and all of these re-worked in a special supplement. Equally, his courageous tackling of controversial subjects like prostitution also testifies to his early sense of a moral mission and his ability to arouse public indignation for what was, in effect, a taboo subject.

Stead's coverage of the Bulgarian Atrocities undoubtedly helped to generate his reputation, at both national and international levels. Horrified by MacGahan's graphic dispatches from the front, he used his own vigorous editorial voice to bring the drama to the attention of the British public in a way that few other editors were able to do.

Brake and others have rightly argued that the New Journalism was an unstable form that brought neither new nor sudden transformation to English journalism in the 1880s, but rather evolved slowly throughout the nineteenth century. This study has found evidence to support this interpretation by showing that Stead's 'apprenticeship' and career at the Northern Echo took many years to mature.

Like many journalists of the period, Stead was continually experimenting with new ideas, both at the *Northern Echo* and *Pall Mall Gazette*, and, in so doing, forged a distinctive style of journalism that, though, in many ways, not new to the English press, seemed to his contemporaries to be nonetheless revolutionary.

Key in this process was the pivotal year of 1887, when Stead took Matthew Arnold's passing reference to "new journalism" and, through the columns of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, generated an increasingly heated public debate around the subject of "the New Journalism" (now capitalised and given a new status). There can be little doubt that his three major campaigns on the Langworthy marriage, the Cass case and the trial and execution of Israel Lipski, served to bring the concept of "the New Journalism" into public consciousness. And, although it was a concept which Northcliffe, rather than Stead, would ultimately go on to define, he nonetheless, in a very real sense, brought the idea of the New Journalism into being.

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