Becoming Invisible: The Intern's View

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My internship on *19* began in the autumn of 2010, at the start of my second year as a PhD student in the Department of English and Humanities at Birkbeck, and I worked on two issues — Psychology/Aesthetics and The Victorian East End — with fellow interns Louise Hide and James Emmott, respectively. Internships last for a year, and there are always two interns working on *19* at any one time, with a new appointment every six months. This means there is always one intern who has worked on the previous issue and is able to teach the newcomer, and that each intern works on two issues. Knowledge has thus been passed in apostolic succession from the first issue in 2005 up to the present day. The first eight issues were in PDF form only, so, although *19* was, and always has been, an online journal, the articles had to be downloaded as PDF files. The move to both HTML and PDF versions, starting with the Transatlanticism issue (2009), predated my involvement, but was presided over by Heather Tilley, who, along with Louise Hide, also spent many hours patiently inducting me into the sometimes frustrating workings of our online publishing platform. After my internship ended, I left the editorial team briefly but rejoined it for the Pain issue (2012), since when I have helped out as editorial assistant, supervising the interns, and overseeing the copy-editing process to ensure that *19* style has been applied as consistently as possible. During this time, I have worked with Melissa Score, Emma Curry, James Machin, Beatrice Bazell, Alexis Wolf, and the current interns Kit Yee Wong and Flore Janssen.

From my first involvement with the journal I have always been amazed by the stellar line-up of guest editors and contributors it is able to attract. A quick flick through the contents pages of previous issues will confirm this. However, I also had a nagging feeling that the quality of the form was not doing justice to that of the content, for both the HTML and PDF versions. As one of my fellow interns noted, the PDFs — set in 12 point Times New Roman with 1.5 times line spacing — looked more like undergraduate essays than weighty academic articles. This could be easily fixed.

I developed an amateur's enthusiasm for typography during the latter stages of my PhD, when I decided to print my thesis in a typeface other than Times New Roman. There are many free typefaces available with Microsoft Word, and anyone searching for a new mode of procrastination could do worse than venturing down the typography rabbit hole. Eventually,

I decided upon Baskerville, included within my Word for Mac application. The original Baskerville typeface was designed by John Baskerville and was first used in a 1757 edition of Virgil. A year later Baskerville was appointed university printer at Cambridge.[1] Following his death, the typeface went out of fashion for much of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, I chose it for my PhD thesis as I thought it looked quite 'Victorian', and that the italic ampersand and the swash (this is a typographical term) beneath the capital Q were things of beauty.[2] However, I subsequently discovered that there were some advanced typographical features that were unavailable on the free typefaces that come as part of Word — old-style numbers, small capitals, ligatures, kerning — and that to access these one had to buy a professional typeface from a foundry. If the free typeface rabbit hole is labyrinthine enough, the world of professional typefaces can turn you into an obsessive. There are now, for example, countless versions of Baskerville, all slightly different, made by different foundries. After weeks of research on typography websites, I bought the family of Baskerville Original Pro typefaces from the Storm Type Foundry in Prague, together with a matching sans serif from the same foundry. To my untutored eye, at least, Baskerville appeared to bear similarities with the typeface used by *Victorian Studies*, and so I hoped my work would benefit from a subliminal association with the leading journal in its field. I subsequently discovered from Mary Bowden, Managing Editor of *Victorian Studies*, that the journal uses ITC New Baskerville Std. When we redesigned the PDFs for *19*, I recommended Baskerville Original Pro from Storm for the article body text. František Štorm, who, together with Otakar Karlas, designed this family of typefaces, explains that 'our aim was not so much to be reverently faithful to the original, as to preserve the spirit of the typeface and to breathe new life into it'. He goes on to fondly describe his new typeface as 'a worker in the service of literature [...]. Having worked on Baskerville's typeface for more than a year, when we see it now, it feels like meeting an old friend.'[3]

The new design for the PDF versions was introduced in the Space issue (2013) after many days, if not weeks, of tweaking the format. The first easy decisions to make were to reduce the size of the body text from 12 point and the leading (the space between lines) from the 1.5 times we had used in the past. This latter may be the standard spacing for the submission of student essays and PhD theses, but I know of no academic publication that uses such a wide spacing. One of my bugbears about

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[1] James Mosley, 'Baskerville, John (1706–1775)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, September 2013 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1624>.
[2] The italic ampersand can be seen in the thumbnail image next to my entry in the table of contents to this issue.
[3] 'Baskerville Original Pro', *MyFonts* <http://www.myfonts.com/fonts/storm/baskerville-original-pro/> [accessed 6 October 2015].

many academic publications is that the line length is often too long to be read comfortably. This is especially important for academic material as the content itself can be very dense, without this difficulty of content being exacerbated by that of form. *PMLA* circumvents this by adopting a double-column format, resulting in a line length of 40–45 characters; *Victorian Studies*, one of the better laid out journals, uses a line length of 70–75. Most standard works on typography suggest that line length should fall within the range of 45–90 characters, but we aimed for 70–75, in keeping with *Victorian Studies*.[4] Setting the line length dictates the margin width, which was correspondingly wider than in the old version. I then discovered that professional typographers often use the golden ratio (approximately 1.618) in determining the dimensions of the text block. This ratio was used (apocryphally, at least) by the builders of the Parthenon, and many examples are to be found in the natural world. Given that the width of the text block was fixed by the line length, we could use the golden ratio to fix the height, which in turn would determine the size of the upper and lower margins. One of my other typographical discoveries was that if these margins are the same size, the text block seems to sink towards the bottom of the page. In order to correct for this optical effect, we made the bottom margin slightly bigger than the top. (Try it — it really does make a difference.) Once we were satisfied with the layout of the body text, the other elements — article titles, section headings, indented quotations, headers, and footers — fell into place. One other major change we made to the PDF versions was to move from endnotes to footnotes. This is an issue that will divide opinion — proponents of endnotes will argue that placed thus, the notes do not distract the reader from the main article. However, in the absence of any major dissension, I decided to move to footnotes in order to avoid the irritation of having to constantly flick between the main article and the notes some pages further on.

So much for the PDF versions. The HTML versions of the articles still required some work, but reformatting them would mean making changes to the style sheets that determine how the website looked, and this was way beyond my area of competence. However, the journal has recently come under the umbrella of the Open Library of Humanities and is now published by the associated Ubiquity Press, an open access academic publisher. This gave us access to the necessary web design skills that have allowed us to improve the layout of the articles tremendously. For the HTML versions, Ubiquity chose the Merriweather serif typeface for body text, which also provides for a limited number of advanced typography features, such as old-style figures. Another key benefit of moving to Ubiquity

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[4] A must-read is *Butterick's Practical Typography* <http://practicaltypography.com> [accessed 3 October 2015].

has been the marked improvement in the display of images, which can now be placed within the article itself rather than at the end.

As a style guide, the journal uses the standard MHRA publication (3rd edn).[5] Most Birkbeck students are familiar with this and it is widely used in academic publishing in the humanities. Using MHRA style means that we standardize on '-ize' rather than '-ise' spellings, on single quotation marks rather than double, and on the Oxford comma. The use of the latter can provoke heated debate, as a cursory Google search will confirm. With each new issue, our knowledge of the requirements and gaps in the *Style Guide*'s recommendations grows too. One of the first difficulties I encountered — and something that all Victorianists will encounter, whether they realize it or not — is how to differentiate between a magazine and a journal. This matters because MHRA references magazine articles in a different format to that of journal articles. We can all spot the difference between *Victorian Studies*, say, and *Private Eye*, but how do we classify nineteenth-century publications such as the *Saturday Review*? The second edition of the *Style Guide* did not make this clear, so I wrote to the MHRA and asked for guidance to be included in the third edition, which they did. In this, magazines are defined as 'periodical publications other than scholarly journals' (p. 68). This certainly still leaves room for debate, but, rightly or wrongly, we interpret this as meaning that the *Saturday Review* is a magazine and we reference it as such. Any scholars of nineteenth-century print culture who are reading this and disagree should write to the MHRA and explain why.

In addition, MHRA recommends that the *New Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* (*ODWE*) be used to adjudicate on disputes over variant spellings. This is a marvellous publication and, together with the accompanying *New Hart's Rules*, should be standard issue to all new interns. It is particularly useful in instances of hyphenation, capitalization, and the spelling of foreign names and places. (It is interesting to note that 'copy-editor' is hyphenated, whereas 'proofreader' is not.) In the W. T. Stead issue (2013), for example, we had to standardize on various spellings of 'lifeboat' and 'life raft'. Some contributors hyphenated, some did not; some used two separate words, some a compound form. The *ODWE* gave a definitive answer: 'lifeboat' is one word; 'life raft' two. End of any discussion.

Every issue of *19* brings with it its own challenges, and is therefore useful in educating the interns and me in how to improve our copy-editing and our consistency in style. For example, the current issue has made us think much harder about how to reference tweets and blog posts. MHRA does now recommend a referencing style for these, but we have come up against edge cases for which rules must be invented and applied on the hoof. In the case of print publications, MHRA has evolved many sections and

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[5] The *MHRA Style Guide* is available as a free download at <http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/index.html> [accessed 3 October 2015].

pages which deal with the edge cases we sometimes encounter. However, the referencing style for online publications and social media is still in an inchoate state, and we have had to develop our own system, while staying within MHRA's broad schema. Whether we have got this right or wrong, please be aware that we have recognized and tried to think through the problems involved. In this issue, for example, Ben Winyard's article cites several comments added by readers of blog posts. In the reference, do we cite the author of the comment as well as the author of the blog? Maybe we should. But the comments threads of blog posts can be very complicated, with nests of comments and responses to comments. Do we therefore indicate that a comment is a response to a response to a response…? Where do we stop? In the absence of more guidance, and in the interests of tidiness, we have decided to identify only the original author and title of the blog post, stating the author of the comment within the text, and trusting that any interested reader will be able to find the relevant comment by a simple word search of the webpage.

This single example demonstrates how rapidly the terrain of academic publishing is changing. I find the typography of nineteenth-century books beautiful, even if I am not expert enough to identify the various serif typefaces used. But what will happen in web design? Websites are now being redesigned every year or so, and some sites — even only a few years old — appear remarkably ugly. Consider the several changes in system font used by Apple over the last few years, each touted as an improvement on the last. And what about the increasing number of devices on which websites are being read? More and more readers are accessing websites on mobile devices, each with slightly different form factors. I read about 'responsive design' and 'adaptive design', which optimize the readability of websites according to the type of device, be they phones, tablets, laptops, or desktops. We trust that our present publishers will design the style sheets of *19* in such a way that our articles are as readable on a phone as on a desktop.

The reputation of the journal (of any journal) depends on the contributions of several parties. For *19*, it is up to the general editor (with the guidance of the members of the Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies) to select for publication those proposals for themed issues deemed to be the most interesting and, hopefully, field-defining; it is up to the guest editors of each issue to invite those felt to be the most eminent available scholars in the field to submit articles; it is up to these contributors, together with the peer reviewers and guest editors, to produce the strongest possible submissions. This is the glamorous aspect of academic journal publishing — moving the frontiers of knowledge forward, defining a new field, or redefining an existing one. But there is a far less glamorous aspect, albeit one that I am convinced is as important

as it is unglamorous. This is the domain of the *19* intern: standardizing the capitalization of 'Napoleonic Wars' (or is it 'wars'?); adjudicating on the spelling of Sebastopol/Sevastopol; and formalizing the distinction between a blog post and an online article (different rules apply). If this is done well, the results are invisible to the reader. But the future reputation of *19* will rest as much on these efforts as on the more visible efforts of our editors and contributors. Future interns and I must strive to become more and more invisible.