

The Universal Review (1888-1890): Transformative Processes in Late-Victorian Journal Publishing

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ABSTRACT

De *Universal Review* (1888-1890) was een ambitieuze poging om een deel van de laat-Victoriaanse tijdschriftenmarkt aan te boren door binnen het genre van de 'review' een aantal innovaties in te voeren. De drijvende kracht achter het tijdschrift was Harry Quilter (1851-1907), schilder, journalist en fanatiek pleitbezorger van de eerste generatie prerafaëlitische kunstenaars. Quilter had geen enkele ervaring op het gebied van tijdschriftredactie, maar dat weerhield hem er niet van om uit eigen middelen een duur en rijkelijk geïllustreerd tijdschrift te starten dat, in tegenstelling tot de concurrentie, geen specifieke politieke of religieuze agenda had. Hij slaagde erin een groot aantal contribuanten van naam en uiteenlopende signatuur bij het tijdschrift te betrekken, waaronder inmiddels gecanoniseerde auteurs als Alphonse Daudet, Henry James, Leo Tolstoj en Guy de Maupassant. Het tijdschrift werd aanvankelijk gunstig ontvangen; er was met name veel lof voor de kwaliteit van de illustraties. Ondanks het grote aantal bijdragen van hoge kwaliteit kwam het einde van de *Universal Review* toch al snel in zicht. Dit artikel beoogt niet zozeer een analyse van de inhoud van het tijdschrift te geven, als wel van het samenspel van factoren dat leidde tot de ondergang van dit nog niet eerder onderzochte periodiek, mede in een poging meer zicht te krijgen op een aantal veranderingsprocessen die de tijdschriftenwereld in Engeland op dat moment onderging.

KEYWORDS

Late-Victorian, magazine, review, illustration, *Universal Review*

In the over-crowded late-Victorian journal market, the monthly *Universal Review* was by no means exceptional in being a short-lived experiment. Many a periodical was started at the time with high hopes of conquering a segment of the ever-expanding middle-class readership, only to find itself defunct within, at best, a couple of years. The *Universal Review*, too, lasted only from May 1888 until December 1890, but if it did not differ from some of its contemporaries in meeting an early demise, it did differ in terms of the scale on which it failed. The monthly *Universal Review* was one of the most ambitious experiments in late-Victorian journal publication, and introduced a number of interesting

innovations to the established review format. Moreover, its editor and sole proprietor, Harry Quilter (1851-1907), although by his own admission not much of a businessman, not only had a keen eye for publicity, but also managed to attract a great number of high-profile contributors to his journal. Why, then, did it fail, and fail so soon? This article will explore the rise and fall of the *Universal Review*, with a view to not only providing a more in-depth account of the journal and its history than has hitherto been available, but also in order to gain a clearer perspective on some of the transformative processes at work in the contemporary British journal market.¹

Since the *Universal Review* was very much a one-person operation, and since its editor, though once a prominent and vociferous participant in many literary and cultural debates, has largely been forgotten, it is on Quilter that this article will focus first of all. In his essay ‘The Universal Review. A Chapter in an Unfinished Autobiography’,² Quilter gives some insight into his life and career as this led up to the editorship of the *Universal Review*. After studying at Cambridge (‘billiards, rackets and metaphysics’), he dedicated his life to travel and adventure (‘I had crossed the China Sea with an Italian Circus company; been ill with fever from sunstroke in a Dâk Bungalow, endured a cyclone in a “ditcher,” and hunted a burglar in the Oriental Bank at Hong Kong.’)³ Keenly interested in art – his father was a well-known collector of water-colours by British artists –,⁴ he spent considerable time in Italy, where he ‘managed a good deal of desultory art study’.⁵ On his return to England, he studied for the Bar in addition to attending the Slade School of Art, starting himself off as a practising artist. In this capacity he was never particularly successful,⁶ and it was as a polemically inclined art critic that Quilter achieved the greatest prominence in the period before the launch of the *Universal Review*.

If Quilter is remembered at all nowadays, it is in the cocknified guise of ‘Arry’, one of the main targets of James McNeill Whistler’s sardonic wit in his *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* of 1890. The book provides a transcript of the famous Whistler-Ruskin libel suit of 1878,⁷ in addition to reprinting a selection of critical comments on Whistler’s work with replies from the artist himself, mostly published in *The World*. Whistler had both a personal and a professional bone to pick with Quilter. As art critic for the *Spectator* (1876-87) and *The Times* (1880-81),⁸ Quilter, a staunch follower of Ruskin, had been openly critical of Whistler’s work, in particular of the Venetian etchings Whistler had exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881: ‘As we [i.e. Quilter] have hinted, the series

¹ The only published overview of the history and contents of the *Universal Review* may be found in Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*. Westport, Conn. 1984.

² Harry Quilter, ‘The Universal Review. A Chapter in an Unfinished Autobiography.’ In *Opinions on Men, Women & Things*. London 1909, 377-410.

³ Quilter 1909 (383).

⁴ William Roberts, ‘Quilter, Harry (1851–1907)’, rev. Kimberly Morse Jones. In [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#), Oxford 2004. This is the most comprehensive published account of Quilter’s life and career.

⁵ Quilter 1909 (382).

⁶ Roberts 2004.

⁷ For a condensed account, see www.tate.org.uk

⁸ Roberts 2004.

does not represent any Venice that we much care to remember: for who wants to remember the degradation of what has been noble, the foulness of what has been fair.’⁹ ‘Arry won’t have me’, Whistler mock-lamented in response in the *World* of May 17, 1882,¹⁰ and from thereon, for the rest of his life, he never wasted an opportunity to ridicule Quilter in print. No doubt, his aversion to Quilter was also fuelled by the fact that in 1897, Quilter, following Whistler’s bankruptcy, had purchased the artist’s White House in Chelsea, and had proceeded to re-decorate it drastically.¹¹

Given the artistic principles which provided the backbone to Quilter’s criticism, it is obvious that Whistler and Quilter could never see eye to eye. For Quilter, Whistler was to be ranged among the ‘modern pre-Raphaelites’, the rather inexact term by which he designated the proponents of the so-called aesthetic movement, which emphasized the primacy of aesthetic over moral values. The movement was famously lampooned in Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic opera *Patience*, with the effeminate aesthetic artist being portrayed as one who ‘walks down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in his medieval hand’. Quilter saw a conspiracy of three Oxford men – the poet Algernon Swinburne, the critic Walter Pater and the painter Edward Burne Jones – as the driving force behind this movement. In his controversial essay ‘The New Renaissance; or, the Gospel of Intensity’ of 1880, Quilter praises the original Pre-Raphaelite movement as ‘not only an original, but a thoroughly healthy one’,¹² while denouncing the proponents of its later manifestations – among which he included the father of the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris – in both literature and art as ‘breeding phases of art and poetry, which embody the lowest theory of art-usefulness, and the most morbid and sickly art-results.’¹³ Quilter’s espousal of conservative artistic values is summed up in the rousing call with which he ends his article, to refute the ‘sick indifference to the things of our time’, and the ‘spurious devotion to whatever is foreign, egocentric, archaic or grotesque.’¹⁴

Although his many contributions to the periodical press, especially during the late 1870s and 1880s, testify to his continued ability to find platforms from which to broadcast his ideas and opinions, these did not satisfy him. One of the main reasons for wanting to start his own platform, the *Universal Review*, was that he was ‘tired of being edited’:

I was tired of having to prove myself right whenever any fool liked to write to the editor accusing me of malice and favouritism, or ignorance, or carelessness, or wanton unkindness; I was tired of

⁹ James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. London 1892 [‘A New Edition’] (104).

¹⁰ Whistler 1892 (72).

¹¹ Ronald Anderson & Anne Koval, *James McNeill Whistler. Beyond the Myth*. London 1994 (239).

¹² Harry Quilter, ‘The New Renaissance; or, The Gospel of Intensity.’ *Macmillan’s Magazine* XLVII, September 1880, 391-400 (393). For discussions of the controversy this article caused, see Anne Anderson, ‘“Doing As We Like”: Grant Allen, Harry Quilter and Aesthetic Dogma.’ *Journal of Design History* 18:4, 2005, 335-355; ‘“Arry” Quilter and the “Gospel of Intensity”.’ *The Wildean* 27, 2005; Andrew Heywood, ‘The Gospel of Intensity: ‘Arry, William Morris & The Aesthetic Movement.’ *Journal of William Morris Studies* 13:3, 1999, 14-25; Lona Mosk Packer, ‘William Michael Rossetti and the Quilter Controversy: “The Gospel of Intensity.”’ *Victorian Studies* 7:2, 1963, 170-183.

¹³ Quilter 1880 (392).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (400).

having my little, and as I thought, harmless jests cut out whenever they interfered with the tone of the paper; I was tired of having to look at inferior picture galleries, and of struggling to make good copy out of impossible books on ‘Dutch Farming’ or translations of ‘Pindar.’¹⁵

So Quilter decided to make the move from being edited to becoming editor, and to start his own review, more or less – by his own self-mythologizing account – on a whim. As he was dictating an article to his secretary and finding it rough going, he suddenly interrupted himself by asking her ‘Shall we start a review?’ Her enthusiastic ‘Yes!’ was apparently enough to make him decide in favour of this new enterprise.¹⁶ The crucial question now was: which niche in the already overcrowded journal market was this new periodical going to fill?

Quilter identified the main characteristic of review literature at the time as ‘its dullness’. He noted that established monthly reviews which addressed the well-educated middle-class reader, like the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Contemporary Review*, and the *Fortnightly Review* tended to end up ‘lying disregarded on the club table’ due to limited areas of interest they addressed: ‘Parochial politics, controversial theology, scientific disquisition, intricate scholastic or social exposition’, etc. Why, Quilter asked, was there no room for music, painting (a topic obviously close to his heart), fiction, finance, sport, or drama in such publications? The answer, he speculated, had to do with the unhelpful division between review subjects and magazine subjects which held the periodical press captive. A topic such as sport would typically be covered in monthly shilling magazines such as *Macmillan’s Magazine* or the *Cornhill Magazine*, periodicals aimed at a mass-audience (i.e. middle class) readership, not at the comparatively high-brow audience addressed by established and more expensive reviews like, for instance, the *Nineteenth Century*. Another major difference between magazines and reviews was that the first were often lavishly illustrated, whereas the latter never were. What was needed, Quilter concluded, was a generalist journal which combined the best of both publishing formats, including illustrations, while making sure that its readership would not be restricted by tying it to any kind of specific ideology. The journal, in other words, was to be in every sense *universal*.¹⁷

In retrospect, Quilter’s project was even more daring than he may have realized. In the same year in which he conceived of his new journal, 1887, Matthew Arnold, the most authoritative voice in English criticism, famously coined the term ‘New Journalism’ to denounce the lowering of critical standards which he observed taking place in the contemporary British press.¹⁸ His specific target was the journalist and newspaper innovator W.T. Stead, whose approach as editor of the daily *Pall Mall Gazette*, was characterized by ‘a “popular” tone, an excessively dramatic reporting style, a lack of editorial responsibility and the transparent pursuit of profit.’¹⁹ In spite of Arnold’s

¹⁵ Quilter 1909 (379).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* (379-80).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (384-85).

¹⁸ Matthew Arnold, ‘Up to Easter.’ *The Nineteenth Century* 123, 1887, 629-43.

¹⁹ Kate Jackson, *George Newnes and the New Journalism in Britain, 1880-1910*. Aldershot 2001 (43).

protestations, the transformations inaugurated by Stead in the British press proved unstoppable. The epitome of New Journalism in its most popular – and populist – manifestation, the heavily illustrated weekly magazine *Tit-Bits*, was started in 1884, and soon managed to reach – and maintain – a circulation of 500,000. Squarely aimed at a mass readership, its main characteristics were ‘the concentration on drama, the publication of shorter, disconnected news items, and also the startling mode of advertising, prize contests and insurance schemes.’²⁰ According to T.P. O’Connor, however, the New Journalism differed first and foremost from the Old in the ‘more personal tone of the modern methods.’²¹ To start, like Quilter did, a new Review, a format typically associated with not-so-modern methods, at a time when the press was undergoing such large-scale transformations, was a risky undertaking indeed.

Quilter, however, was not afraid of risks, and he set about finding a publisher for his new journal. It did not take him long to reach agreement with William Swan Sonnenschein, an up-and-coming publisher who moved in progressive circles, and published, for instance, the first English edition of Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*, edited by Friedrich Engels.²² Sonnenschein appears to have been too wily a businessman to commit his firm to investing fully in this new journal. On February 6th 1888, Sonnenschein wrote to Quilter to inform him that he was willing to publish the *Universal Review* under the following conditions:

The production of the magazine should be undertaken by yourself, we making no commission hereon, but we should obtain for you the lowest trade estimates we could, and have no doubt they would be considerably less than if made direct to you. [...] The Magazine to be continued for no less than two years. [...] We should do our best to promote sales of the magazine, and in every way treat it as though it were our own venture.²³

Quilter must not have been entirely happy with this, since five days later, on 13 February 1888, Sonnenschein wrote back to him stating firmly that ‘we would rather not put any money into the new journal, at any rate at present’.²⁴ Quilter had little choice but to acquiesce, and two further requests on his part – to have the journal distributed free of charge, and to be given office space at the publisher’s premises – were also swiftly dispensed with by the wary Sonnenschein. The cool tone of his letters to Quilter suggests that there was no love lost between the two men, and as the *Universal Review* approached its early demise, Sonnenschein may well have congratulated himself on not getting further involved.

²⁰ ‘Tit-Bits.’ In L. Brake & M. Demoor (eds), *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism*. Gent/London 2009 (630).

²¹ T.P. O’Connor, ‘The New Journalism.’ *The New Review* 1, 1889 (423).

²² F.A. Mumby & Frances H.S. Stallybras, *From Swan Sonnenschein to George Allen & Unwin Ltd*. London 1995 (21).

²³ Letter from Sonnenschein to Quilter, 6 February 1888, vol. 9, no. 408. The Swan Sonnenschein letterbooks are preserved in the Reading University Library.

²⁴ Letter from Sonnenschein to Quilter, 13 February 1888, vol. 9, no. 467.

Around the time of the publication of the first issue, however, the future of the *Universal Review* looked bright enough. Sonnenschein had warned Quilter that ‘the success of the undertaking would depend almost entirely on the names of the contributors you were able to secure’, and he must have taken the advice to heart.²⁵ On February 19th, for instance, he wrote to William Ewart Gladstone, the grand old man of English politics, asking him not only for an article for the first number of the *Universal Review*, but also for a brief audience with the aged politician in order to explain ‘the object and character of this new journal’.²⁶ His solicitations did not lead to the requested article for the maiden issue, but Gladstone did finally contribute to a symposium on the treatment of Siberian exiles.²⁷ On the whole, the list of contributors for the first issue demonstrates that Quilter had every reason to be optimistic about the success of his undertaking. The journal was inaugurated with a ‘Proem’ by the popular poet Lewis Morris; there was an article on ‘The State of Europe’ by the prominent liberal politician Sir Charles Dilke; seasoned journalist and feminist Eliza Lynn Linton contributed on ‘M. Zola’s *Idée Mère*’; foreign literature was represented by the publication of Alphonse Daudet’s ‘One of the ‘Forty’ (L’Immortel)’.

Crucially, there were also plentiful illustrations, printed on expensive, high-quality paper. In his piece on the genesis of the *Universal Review*, Quilter explains why he thought these of such importance:

The point at which I wished to aim was to keep the literature and the illustration on a footing of absolute equality, admitting, for instance, no illustrative work which was not of a certain artistic quality, and no literary matter which was simply intended to elucidate the illustration. It was my idea to put in each number two or three illustrations which should be of sufficient quality to stand alone, and the others were to be mainly for the purpose of brightening up the literary matter.²⁸

By inserting these two types of illustrations, Quilter wished to achieve the dual goal of providing his readers with ‘beautiful artistic art’ as well as facilitating the reading of the written articles. In itself, there was nothing particularly revolutionary about the combination of journalism and illustration. In their introduction to *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century*, Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor give a brief but revealing historic overview of the role of illustration in the nineteenth-century British press, pointing out the ‘ubiquity of image’ in journals and newspapers.²⁹ Writing in the final year of the century, veteran journalist Clement Shorter notes ‘the abundance of pictures illustrative of news’, and sketches the rapid progress of illustration in the weekly press from 1890

²⁵ Letter from Sonnenschein to Quilter, 6 February 1888, vol. 9, no. 408.

²⁶ Letter from Quilter to Gladstone, 19 February 1888, Gladstone Papers Vol. ccccxviii, Brit. Mus., Additional MS 44503, f.56.

²⁷ Harry Quilter et al., ‘Siberian Exile: A Symposium and a Protest.’ *Universal Review* 7, 1890, 1-22.

²⁸ Quilter 1909 (387).

²⁹ Laurel Brake & Marysa Demoor, ‘Introduction: The Lure of Illustration.’ In L. Brake & M. Demoor (eds), *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century. Picture and Press*. Basingstoke 2009, 1-13 (8).

onwards under the influence of technical advancements in the printing press.³⁰ However, while magazines and newspapers were more and more lavishly illustrated, this was not the case for the traditional, serious ‘review’ like the *Contemporary Review* or the *Nineteenth Century*, which remained staunchly unpictorial. Keenly alert to contemporary developments in the press, Quilter decided that the time had come for a truly innovative publication: a review maintaining a perfect balance in the quality and status of writing and illustration.

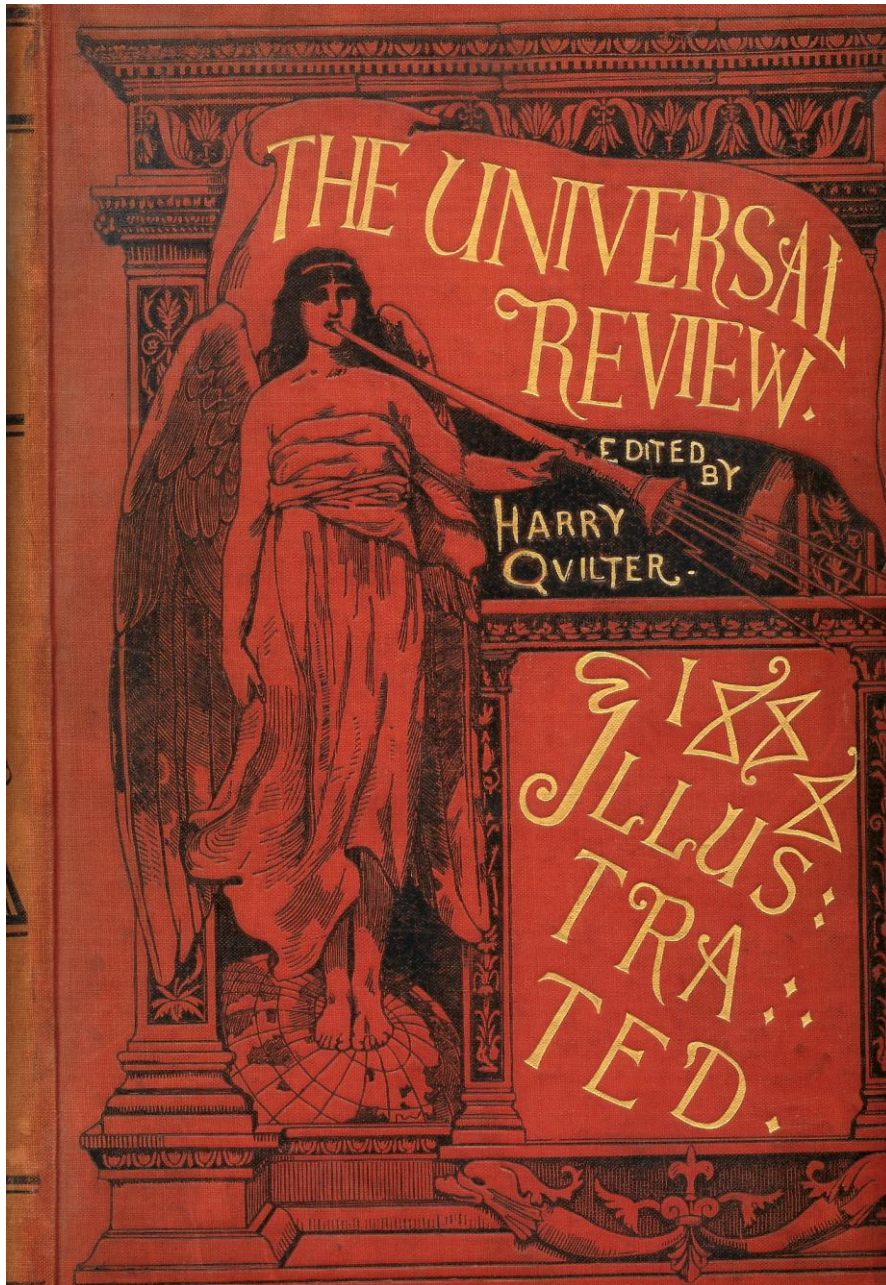


Fig. 1: Universal Review: cover of the 1888 volume

³⁰ Clement Shorter, ‘Illustrated Journalism: Its Past and Its Future.’ *Contemporary Review* 75, 1899, 481-95.

As an unambiguous indication of the importance the editor attached to pictorial art, each issue of the *Universal Review* opened with a full-page image. Not surprisingly, given his artistic allegiances, Quilter showed a marked preference in his choice of illustrative material for the 'pure' style of the first generation of Pre-Raphaelite artists. In the course of the *Universal Review's* eight volumes, graphic work by Edward Burne-Jones, John E. Millais, Dante G. Rossetti and Frederick Sandys appeared in its pages, alongside that of younger artists like Walter Crane and Laurence Housman, who worked in the Pre-Raphaelite mode. Clearly, while Quilter may have claimed a major degree of 'universal' objectivity for his journal, the illustrations served to no small extent to advance the editor's personal aesthetic agenda.

Given the fact that his name as editor was hardly a guarantee for popular success, and that the appearance of a new review was not in itself an earth-shattering event, Quilter had to find a way to create sufficient noise for his periodical to be noticed. First of all, he had several hundreds of posters printed which, he had to conclude, were 'absolutely wasted money'. Quilter later reflected that, unless it was possible to do so on a grand scale, and to make posters appear in all the crucial places, advertising on hoardings made no sense whatsoever. Railway stations potentially offered the most eye-catching locations, but monopoly-holder W.H. Smith would not allow any say in the specific placement of posters, so that they might still go entirely unnoticed. A more radical approach was needed, and at the suggestion of a friend, Quilter took the unusual decision to invest a considerable sum of money ('three figures of pound sterling') into a full-page advert in the *Times*. He was rather disconcerted to find that he would have to design and compose the copy for the advert from scratch himself, but finally solved this problem by simply spreading the repetition of the journal's title, contents, and some choice slogans ('The Universal Review will not be dull') across the newspaper's six columns. The advert appeared in the *Times* on May 16th, 1888, one day after the publication of the *Universal Review's* maiden issue.³¹

Quilter's unprecedented publicity stunt did not fail to produce the intended effect: magazines and newspapers across Britain carried notices of the new journal. As Quilter put it: 'half the London evening papers mentioned it, and the provincial papers followed suit next morning.'³² In fact, not only was the *Universal Review* frequently mentioned, it also succeeded in attracting a great deal of praise. As for the London evening papers, the *Pall Mall Gazette* concluded that 'if the standard of the first number is maintained, the *Universal Review* will soon take a place for itself as the English monthly magazine *de luxe*.'³³ The anonymous *Pall Mall Gazette* journalist noted that the new journal's chances of survival were enhanced by its appearing in the middle of the month, rather than in the beginning. Traditionally, monthlies would reach their readers shortly after 'magazine day', the penultimate day of the month when monthlies would be made ready for

³¹ Quilter 1909 (397-402).

³² *Ibid.* (402).

³³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday, 16 May 1888, issue 7227.

distribution.³⁴ By deviating from this pattern, the *Universal Review* would possibly stand a better chance of getting noticed. The *Pall Mall Gazette* notice also commented on the quality of the illustrations as ‘decidedly superior to the general run of such things in the country’. As for the literary matter, however, a somewhat ominous note is struck: ‘the actual articles given in this number are of a kind familiar to all magazine readers’. Likewise, the provincial *Glasgow Herald* commented positively on the journal’s ‘imposing’ exterior, but the literary content, though ‘a goodly programme’ is not characterized as in any way different from what other reviews have to offer.³⁵ It was clearly not going to be easy for the *Universal Review* to distinguish itself in this area from its competitors.

Quilter also quickly found out that dealing with his literary contributors was far from plain sailing. Although he later claimed that he had started the *Universal Review* out of a sense of frustration with editors who meddled with his own work, this clearly did not stop him from interfering with the work of his own contributors, who, in turn, did not take this lying down. As a consequence, he soon found himself publicly embroiled with two of his early contributors, the politician Lord Pembroke and the Reverend H.R. Haweis. The *Pall Mall Gazette* reported how ‘In his first number he incurred the anger of Lord Pembroke for cutting an article down.’ Even more controversially, ‘In his second number he incurs that of Mr. Haweis for “lightening up” an article by alternate pictures of priests, mashers, and “tights”.’³⁶ The article in question, entitled ‘The Parson, the Play, and the Ballet’, had appeared in the June issue of the *Universal Review*, and in it, Haweis had dealt with the dubious morality of the modern ballet. The Reverend was appalled by the illustrations Quilter had added, and voiced his anger in a letter to the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, denouncing the pictures as ‘revolting’ and wanting to know if this was ‘editorial justice’.

Newspapers around the country were quick to pick up the scent of this titillating controversy. The *Northern Echo* from Darlington positioned itself squarely behind Haweis, praising his ‘honesty of purpose’.³⁷ The *Birmingham Daily Post* took a more neutral stance, reporting that ‘magazine writers generally await Mr. Quilter’s reply.’³⁸ That reply was not long in the making. On June 21st, 1888, it appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and Quilter had no intention of mincing his words:

Now, if these be ‘revolting pictures’, what can be (on this subject) considered innocent ones? I deny absolutely, and as seriously as is consistent with the ridiculous triviality of the whole matter, that there is a single line in any one of these three drawings, or any suggestion made by them, which could offend even what my friend Mr. Wilkie Collins, in his admirable article, calls ‘the soft round object dear to British cant, the cheek of the young person’.³⁹

³⁴ ‘Magazine Day.’ In Brake & Demoor, *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism* (390).

³⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, Wednesday, 16 May 1888, issue 117.

³⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday, 20 June 1888, issue 7257.

³⁷ *Northern Echo*, Thursday, 21 June 1888, issue 5718.

³⁸ *Birmingham Post*, Thursday, 21 June 1888, issue 9356.

³⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, 21 June 1888, issue 7258.

Not all readers of this letter were equally convinced of Quilter's innocence and good intentions. The anonymous commentator in the *Glasgow Herald* saw Quilter's treatment of Haweis as indicative of the former's tendency to use the *Universal Review* as a vehicle for expressing his own pet likes and dislikes: 'Mr Quilter's illustrations, foot-notes, and condensations are merely a polite version of "You're a brimstone idiot," "You're a scorpion," "You're a sweltering toad," "You're a chattering, clattering, broomstick witch."' ⁴⁰ Apparently, it did not take long for Quilter to establish a reputation as editor for himself, even though – or perhaps precisely because – he was a novice at the trade.

The air of controversy which surrounded Quilter does not appear to have hampered his ability to attract high-profile contributors. In terms of literary contributions – the category that would be most likely to attract the general reader – , a survey of the more than 160 authors whose work is represented in the *Universal Review* yields many now-canonical names, like Alphonse Daudet, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Guy de Maupassant and Leo Tolstoy. Exactly through which channels Quilter managed to secure their copy remains unclear, but it seems likely that the network of contacts he had acquired earlier in his journalistic career now stood him in good stead. It is revealing, however, that many of the major figures published in the *Universal Review* – including the ones mentioned above – appear in its pages only once. Hugely prolific author and critic Algernon Swinburne, for instance, contributed only a single poem, which was entitled 'Æolus', and appeared in the 1888 Christmas issue, after having fallen out with Quilter over the terms of his payment. ⁴¹ The novelist and poet George Meredith, at that time generally considered the grand old man of English letters, also only published a single poem, 'Jump to Glory Jane', albeit one of considerable length. Of course, the *Universal Review* may not have run long enough to establish long-term relations with prominent contributors, but at the same time it may also have been Quilter's inability to forge such relations and its reliance on incidental contributions that contributed to the journal's early demise.

The table below gives an overview of authors – excluding Quilter himself – who did make a more frequent appearance in the *Universal Review*. ⁴² Emilia Dilke and Eliza Lynton were both highly experienced and widely published journalists, whose names may be found in a wide range of periodicals of the time and for whom a generalist review like the *Universal Review* would make a natural platform. Arthur Verrall was a classical scholar and more generally known as a Cambridge lecturer than as a publicist, whose specific connection with the *Universal Review* remains unclear. Radical politician and freethinker Charles Bradlaugh held highly controversial views on such topics as birth-control and the abolition of the monarchy, and he may well have jumped at the chance to voice them through a journal aimed at a general rather than a partisan readership. The most conspicuous name on this shortlist is that of author and iconoclast Samuel Butler, poet, novelist, classicist

⁴⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, Monday, 25 June 1888, issue 151.

⁴¹ Letter from Quilter to Swinburne, 22 November 1888. This letter is in the Manuscript Department of the British Library, Ashley B.1968(5), f.118.

⁴² I am much indebted to Nina Vaccaro-Palkina, MA, for collecting this information.

and anti-Darwinian evolutionary thinker. With three articles on ‘The Deadlock in Darwinism’ (April, May, June 1890) Butler in particular used the *Universal Review* as an outlet for his Lamarckian evolutionary views. A note scribbled in the margin of a letter written by Butler to Quilter long after the *Universal Review* had folded indicates that he had offered his work to the editor for free, but not because he was motivated by any warm feelings for him: ‘[...] my acquaintance began and ended with the *Universal Review* articles, for which I took no money. I disliked Quilter cordially and did not like his wife much better – we dropped each other by mutual consent’.⁴³

Name	Contributions	Topics
Samuel Butler	7	art/literature/history/travel/Darwinism
Emilia F.S. Dilke	6	fiction/feminism
Eliza L. Linton	6	literary criticism/fiction
A.W. Verrall	5	classics/history/literary criticism
Charles Bradlaugh	5	Politics

Fig. 2: Overview of most frequent *Universal Review* contributors, excluding Quilter

It was Quilter himself, however, who was responsible for filling many more pages of the *Universal Review* than any other author. No reader of the journal could be left in any doubt that this was Quilter’s brainchild, and that he intended it to be read as such. Quilter took upon himself the lion’s share of the journal’s art criticism, using it as a platform for espousing his powerful dislike of new-fangled Whistlerian and impressionist aesthetics, which to him represented mere empty play with light and colour. Instead, he insisted on a return to the skilled and morally grounded realism of Gainsborough, Turner and Constable, a position which he continued to defend throughout the short history of the *Universal Review*. In one of his frequent editorial asides, he emphasized the legitimacy of his claim to authority in this field:

I may perhaps add here, without undue egotism, that I have some slight claim to that title [of a practical artist], although my painting and designing has been done of late years almost exclusively for the purposes of the study either of some technical art process or natural effect. It is only fair to state that the actual amount of technical work so directed has been considerable. For instance, of the sea alone I have in the last six years made at least two hundred oil studies (as nearly as many of landscape), and I have drawn for books, illustrated periodicals, decorators, architects, designed dresses, stage scenery, etc., and I have even found commercial people confiding enough to pay hard dollars for my work.⁴⁴

In areas in which Quilter had fewer claims to specialist expertise, such as literary criticism and politics, he was also not afraid to speak out. He frequently reviewed newly published literature, commented on the state of national and international affairs in his monthly editorials (‘The World in...’), and even involved himself in discussions about

⁴³ Marginal note in letter from Quilter to Butler, 20 July 1900, British Library, Add. 44040, f.113.

⁴⁴ Harry Quilter, Note to ‘Academic Teaching and Public Indifference.’ *The Universal Review* 5, 1889, 73.

such topics as the treatment of Siberian exiles. The ‘universality’ in the journal’s title could therefore to no small degree be seen as referring to the editor’s universal presence in its pages, a presence that determined much of the *Universal Review*’s identity.

In spite of its positive reception and of the role-call of distinguished authors the journal could boast of, the *Universal Review*’s decline set in not long after its inception. William Swan Sonnenschein’s letters to Quilter of October 1890 indicate that Quilter, in order to reduce costs, had unilaterally decided to lower the print run of the *Universal Review* from 1500 to 1000, leaving Sonnenschein unable to supply the booksellers: ‘There has been much trouble this month as to your inability to supply copies, & it is by no means over, many booksellers being still without copies for their distributors, who will drop their subscriptions if their sets are broken.’⁴⁵ Sonnenschein also complained that he did not have copies available to send to reviewers, and the demise of the journal now seemed inevitable: ‘The net amount of sales less return does not shew the minimum requirement of a monthly magazine.’⁴⁶ The surviving correspondence between Sonnenschein and Quilter indicates that both parties had to admit at this point that in terms of form, content, the *Universal Review* might have been better suited to the format of quarterly publication, along the lines of traditional reviews like the *Edinburgh Review*, rather than to the rigorous demands of the monthly rhythm. Less than two months later, all that was left for Sonnenschein to do was to compliment Quilter on his courage in starting such a risky endeavour: ‘At any rate you will have made a plucky attempt!’⁴⁷ The issue of December 1890 proved the *Universal Review*’s last.

As this article has attempted to demonstrate, the demise of the *Universal Review* was the result of a complex amalgamation of contributing factors. By Quilter’s own admission, his lack of business acumen combined with the fact that all expenses had to be paid for out of his own pocket, made the whole enterprise an ill-fated one to begin with. Swan Sonnenschein must have seen from the start what Harry Quilter did not: the *Universal Review* was so expensive to produce and distribute that only a run on copies and subscriptions might have made it sustainable. But then, at 2s/6d, the *Universal Review* was also too expensive for the general readership it was intended for, thereby precluding the level of sales the journal needed. Content-wise, the *Universal Review* was an uneasy hybrid: grafting features of the popular magazine and the New Journalism – plentiful illustrations, coverage of sports and drama, the personal editorial tone, etc. – onto the stem of a traditional high-brow quarterly review, with its lengthy articles, high-brow attitude and conventional lay-out, it did not succeed in projecting a unified identity to its intended readership. Moreover, Quilter crucially undercut his own alleged principle of ‘universal’, objective coverage by using the *Universal Review* from the start as an instrument for the expression of his personal – frequently quirky – ideas and opinions, without giving any particular thought to how this might affect the journal’s chances of success. Finally, those chances were not enhanced to begin with by the fact that at this stage in its evolution, the

⁴⁵ Letter from Sonnenschein to Quilter, [Date illegible], October 1890, vol. 16, no. 170.

⁴⁶ Letter from Sonnenschein to Quilter, 17 October 1890, vol. 16, no. 334.

⁴⁷ Letter from Sonnenschein to Quilter, 10 December 1890, vol. 16, no. 677.

journal market was becoming increasingly segmented, making specialization rather than generalization the key to success. However, although the *Universal Review* may not have proved a lasting success, it does deserve a place in periodical history, both for the overall quality of its contributions, and for the window it offers us on a number of transformative processes in late-Victorian journal publishing.

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