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To: Curran Fellowship Committee, Research Society for Victorian Periodicals
From: Stephan Pigeon
Re: Report on 2023 Curran Fellowship project, “Sub-Editorial Wages and Precarity in Journalism”

I am writing with gratitude to report on a June-July 2023 research trip made possible by your award of a Curran Fellowship.

The Curran Fellowship allowed me to travel from Canada to the United Kingdom and stay in London researching full-time for four weeks from 6 June to 5 July. While staying in London, I consulted material belonging to the Royal Literary Fund (RLF) at the British Library. The RLF is well known for granting financial support to authors, ranging from the celebrity to the obscure. The aid applications constitute a rich collection of disparate voices and circumstances that reveal the life and existence of journalists who dedicated their careers to the invisible but influential work of sub-editing.

Researchers are not permitted to take photographs of material in this collection. Therefore, I spent my time transcribing the contents of 41 RLF files whose applicants worked as writers and sub-editors in the newspaper and periodical press between 1832 and 1914. Each file represents the applications made a journalist (and sometimes their widows) to the RLF for funding. The number applications made by each applicant varies. Some applicants made a single application during their career and others made upwards of ten. Within these 41 files, I examined 99 separate applications to the RLF which total roughly 745 documents. I read the entirety of this material and transcribed the most relevant documents which now comprise of some 275 pages of typed pages.

The range of material I encountered in these RLF files was considerable. Applications made to the RLF included a standard form with valuable personal and career data about the applicant, a letter which details the applicant’s circumstances and distress, and at least two letters of recommendation (typically, applicants submit more than the minimum). The correspondence written by the applicant is especially valuable to my research. Applicants needed to demonstrate their literary qualifications. For the journalists that form the focus of my research, this meant detailing the extent of their careers and the publications to which they contributed. In many cases, the applicants explain the development of their career in newspapers and make a case for sub-editorial work as a legitimate literary contribution. Moreover, these applicants needed to demonstrate their privation. This material was especially heartrending with cases of applicants facing destitution, chronic illness, and inescapable debt. This material will be crucial to developing an understanding of the challenges that sub-editors and working journalists faced while earning a living from newspaper work.

The results of this research will form a chapter in my upcoming book, *Journalism from Below: Sub-Editors and the British Press System* which is under advance contract with the University of Toronto Press as part of their Studies in Book and Print Culture series. Sub-editors understood the value they brought to journalism production. However, as my research on the RLF files shows, newspaper and periodical management did not necessarily provide them with commensurate remuneration or job security. This chapter will consider how the people of the press positioned themselves and their journalism work as a kind of authorship. Press commentators routinely acknowledged that sub-editors were the hardest worked members of the press and that they held an enormous importance to newspaper production. However, despite their intimate journalism knowledge, editorial instincts, and value to publishing, it was rare for a sub-editor to ascend the ladder of journalism. This chapter brings that paradox into focus and reveals a fuller picture about the sub-editors who dedicated their careers to periodical publishing but received none of the praise, notoriety, or financial stability experienced by editors and proprietors. Key examples will include the cases of Alexander Ramsay (sub-editor to Charles Knight), Augustus Guest (sub-editors of the *Morning Chronicle*), James Hamilton Fyfe (reporter for *The Times* and sub-editor for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Saturday Review*), and Astley Henry Baldwin (sub-editor of the *Morning Herald* and the *Standard*). More broadly, this chapter also provides a comprehensive picture about the relations between sub-editors and other members of the press and explains how their occupation varied between regions and publications. I expect to complete the book project in 2025.

Additionally, I plan to develop a separate research article around an application to the RLF made by Henry Wood who was an assistant to Henry Mayhew. I expect that scholars of Mayhew will be interested to learn about Wood's contributions as the sub-editor of *London Labour and the London Poor* and his allegations against Mayhew of mistreatment and withholding of salary. My ambition is to apply for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Connections Grant to develop this project in cooperation with Mayhew experts in Canada. While this new research opportunity is in its very early stages, I expect that *Victorian Periodicals Review* may be an appropriate venue to publish this scholarship.

The Curran Fellowship has been instrumental in providing me the opportunity to investigate the RLF files in detail. I wish to express my gratitude once again to the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals for supporting my research on sub-editors in the nineteenth-century newspaper and periodical press. I look forward to the work ahead.

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