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From “vulgar” and “impossible” to “pre-eminently readable”:

Richard Marsh’s critical fortunes, 1893-1915

By Minna Vuohelainen

This paper examines the critical fortunes of Richard Marsh (1857-1915), a bestselling author of horror, crime, sensation, comic and romantic fiction. The paper charts the changing tone of reviews of Marsh’s work as the author’s popularity increased, his publication pattern stabilised, and his publishers became more respectable. The focus of the paper will be on critical responses to Marsh’s work in high-cultural reviews such as the Academy and the Athenaeum, which have been sampled as indicative of conservative views. The paper argues that after the publication of Marsh’s bestselling novel The Beetle: A Mystery in 1897, a clear shift is noticeable in reviews of his work from a dismissive attitude towards genre fiction to an appreciation of a recognised name within the niche market for sensational and romantic popular fiction. The paper charts this process of winning critical recognition for genre work, exploring the reasons for Marsh’s shifting critical fortunes. In the process, it also traces the likely reception of other popular writers of the period.

I: “He is prodigious”: Richard Marsh, popular author

In November 1900, an anonymous critic in the *Academy* considered the rising fortunes of a group of writers jokingly termed the “Yarning School.” Characterised by the “faculty of beginning a story anywhere and continuing without art or insight, but with reckless invention,” the Yarning School was responsible for “romances which will beguile a railway journey, or even form the stay-at-home pabulum of millions.” While admitting “the innate genius for telling a story” which defined the “Yarning School” to be “a fine gift,” the reviewer regretfully concluded that “these are fat years for the yarners.” Following the 1870 Education Act, millions of newly-literate consumers were demanding cheap, light reading, such as the literary products of the “Yarners,” for “shallow learning

[...] multiplies novelists and ensures readers [...] are satisfied [...] with] the crude literary fare which is supplied to them so lavishly.”¹

Among the “Yarners” named and shamed were popular writers such as Guy Boothby, William Le Queux, Fergus Hume, Hume Nisbet, and George Manville Fenn. Above all, however,

There is Mr Richard Marsh: he is prodigious. The tradition current in the receiving department of this office that he publishes a new novel every Tuesday is an exaggeration. We do not believe that, working at top pressure, Mr Marsh writes one novel a month. But [...] he comes near to this figure.²

In “a year of unexampled depression in the book trade,” the writer states, “Mr Marsh has got into his stride and he throws off a story with an abandon – we might add, an abandonment – that is refreshing.” Scorning the “delectable plot[lines that] probably flashed upon Mr Marsh while his ticket was being punched on the top of a ’bus,” the reviewer was nonetheless forced to conclude by admitting that “Mr Marsh is [...] on terms with his readers; for him the rest is mechanics, and for them it is excitement.”³

Richard Marsh (born Richard Bernard Heldmann, 1857-1915) was one of the bestselling popular authors of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. From the time that his first work under the pseudonym appeared in 1888, Marsh accurately gauged the tastes of his audience. His earliest work mostly falls into the gothic and crime genres, but by the end of the century, he had branched out into sensation and romantic fiction. Apart from seventy-six volumes issued by sixteen different publishers (figure 1), the prolific and professional Marsh published short and serial fiction in a number of regional newspapers and weekly and monthly fiction magazines, the most important of which was the *Strand Magazine*.⁴ This paper examines the ways in

¹ Anon., “Yarning School,” 423-24.

² Anon., “Yarning School,” 423. The author of the article produces a list of seven Marsh titles from 1900, with a note that the list is “possibly incomplete.” In fact, Marsh published *eight* volumes in 1900. However, the year was exceptional for him, and, as discussed below, his average annual output was three volumes.

³ Anon., “Yarning School,” 423.

⁴ See Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh*.

which Marsh's critical fortunes changed over the course of his career as a published novelist, from his first novel in 1893 to his death in 1915, as his popularity increased, his publication patterns stabilised, and his publishers became more reputable.

II: "Vulgar" and "impossible": early reviews, 1893-97

Reviews of Marsh's early work were generally somewhat curt, mirroring the low cultural status of the aspiring author and his publishers. Marsh's first seven novels, issued between 1893 and 1897 by four publishing houses, suggest that he may have found it difficult to get his novels accepted by publishers of repute: these early novels were published by firms that he mostly did not use later in his career, and their physical quality was poorer, their price lower, and their publication pattern less regular than those of his later volumes.

Marsh's first two novels, *The Devil's Diamond* and *The Mahatma's Pupil*, were issued in 1893 by Henry, a small publisher of miscellaneous literature, including travel, local interest, fiction, and gentle middle-class humour. Issued at the price of 3s.6d. in hard pictorial covers, *The Devil's Diamond* and *The Mahatma's Pupil* were not a bad start for an aspiring novelist; in their topical concern over the occult and theosophy, they were very much of their time. While Henry may not have had the resources to advertise Marsh's fiction extensively, the novels that followed in 1895 and 1897 saw Marsh progress onto the lists of three major late-nineteenth-century publishers of up-to-date genre fiction, C. Arthur Pearson, William Heinemann and Ward, Lock.

Heinemann was a new, enterprising publisher mainly of scholarly texts,⁵ who also carried popular fiction, most notably by Hall Caine, which guaranteed the financial viability of his business.⁶ One of the first successful publishers of 6s. one-volume first editions, Heinemann was instrumental in overthrowing the three-decker novel in the 1890s.⁷ The most reputable of Marsh's early publishers, Heinemann was also the most notorious: while the firm published major fin-de-siècle authors including R.L. Stevenson,

⁵ St John, 4.

⁶ Fritschner, 152.

⁷ St. John, 29; Fritschner, 152.

Israel Zangwill, and Rudyard Kipling,⁸ it also flirted with literary scandal in the mid-1890s, when Sarah Grand's *Heavenly Twins* (1893) and Robert Hichens's *The Green Carnation* (1894) achieved notoriety.⁹ Marsh's *Mrs Musgrave – and her Husband*, a risqué story of hereditary homicidal mania and triple suicide, was published in 1895 in Heinemann's Pioneer Series, which also featured *The Green Carnation*, at the price of 3s. in cloth and 2s.6d. in ornamental paper wrappers.

Marsh's association with Pearson proved more profitable and less controversial than his connections with Henry and Heinemann. Pearson, who had been a clerk in the *Tit-Bits* office before starting his own company, was instrumental in revolutionising cheap journalism.¹⁰ Pearson's newspaper empire published a number of periodicals, including the *Tit-Bits*-inspired *Pearson's Weekly* and *Pearson's Magazine*, both of which Marsh contribute to. In 1895, Pearson issued Marsh's novella *The Strange Wooing of Mary Bowler* in his monthly 6d. Pearson's Library. Inside its soft pictorial covers, small print and a hundred-odd illustrations were supplemented with advertisements for jewellery, pottery, watches, and carpets, interspersed with text towards the end of the novel. While the novel's inclusion in this inexpensive series signified that Marsh was moving down the market, he also benefited from access to Pearson's mass audience and powerful advertising machinery. Marsh's relationship with Pearson is also indicative of his rising fortunes even in his early years as a published novelist: by 1897, Pearson was willing to issue Marsh's novel *The Duke and the Damsel* in stylish hard covers at 3s.6d. Indeed, the firm would in 1901 reissue *The Wooing of Mary Bowler* in similar pictorial boards in an attempt to cash in on Marsh's popular success.

Ward, Lock, Marsh's fourth publisher – and the only early contact to publish his new volumes after 1897 – was a middle-brow publishing house keen to popularise general and specialised knowledge that saw “wholesomeness”¹¹ as its aim.¹² However, Ward, Lock's catalogue reveals that the firm specialised in “cheap and educational”¹³ but up-to-date popular fiction by such writers as Arthur Morrison, H. Rider Haggard,

⁸ Sutherland, 288.

⁹ St John, 10-12.

¹⁰ Altick, 363.

¹¹ Living, 61.

¹² Living, 13, 67-68; see also Healey, “Ward, Lock.”

¹³ Healey, “Ward, Lock,” 321.

Rudyard Kipling, Guy Boothby, Arthur Conan Doyle, whose first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, was issued by Ward, Lock in 1887, and Oscar Wilde, whose novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the firm bravely published in 1891.¹⁴ Marsh's dealings with Ward, Lock date from 1897, when the firm issued his crime novels *The Mystery of Philip Bennion's Death* and *The Crime and the Criminal*. *The Mystery of Philip Bennion's Death* had been serialised in *Household Words* in 1892 and was, thus, not a new novel; Ward, Lock brought this locked-cabinet murder mystery out in 1897 as a shilling shocker in soft covers. By contrast, *The Crime and the Criminal*, issued by the firm later in 1897, can be seen as Marsh's first fully successful novel. This tightly constructed sensation novel was published at a respectable 3s.6d. in the hard red covers that became Marsh's standard look in the twentieth century, as well as at 2s. in pictorial boards.

Marsh's long fiction attracted reviews in upmarket periodicals from the start of his career. While high-culture reviews such as the *Academy*, the *Athenaeum* and the *Saturday Review* could not be expected to be appreciative of popular fiction, they have been sampled on purpose as indicative of the development of conservative views on Marsh's fiction. Reviews of the Henry volumes were generally somewhat dismissive if not wholly negative, mirroring the low status of the firm compared to that of the reviews. "There is no lack of invention in the book," the *Saturday Review* admitted of *The Devil's Diamond*, "though [...] the humour is deficient."¹⁵ The *Athenaeum* thought it "amusing enough" to "achieve popularity."¹⁶ *The Mahatma's Pupil*, similarly, was "not without ingenuity; but the reader must not look for wit."¹⁷ At 6d., *The Strange Wooing of Mary Bowler* was not deemed worthy of a review in upmarket journals, while *The Duke and the Damsel*, also published by the downmarket Pearson, was condemned as "vulgar" and "impossible" for genteel readers.¹⁸ Reviews of *Mrs Musgrave – and her Husband*, by

¹⁴ Sutherland, 659; Living, 66-68. Doyle felt that he had been treated very shabbily by Ward, Lock.

¹⁵ Anon., "New Books and Reprints," 526.

¹⁶ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3412, 343.

¹⁷ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3444, 586.

¹⁸ Anon., "Reviews," *Academy Fiction Supplement* 52 (27 November 1897), 115.

contrast, reflected Heinemann's notoriety. Condemned as "one of the books better left unwritten," the novel was deemed unsuitable for middle-class readers:¹⁹

We are afraid it would take more changes than any critic is bound to suggest to make *Mrs Musgrave and her Husband* (sic) anything that can be called nice in any of the historic senses of that valuable word. For grime-lovers it is grimy enough, and for crime-lovers "crimy" enough. Others, we fear, it will hardly please.²⁰

The most positive reviews were reserved for *The Crime and the Criminal* and acknowledged the skill with which the novel had been constructed: "It is an uncommonly able story of the dreadful type," the *Athenaeum* admitted, "the complications of the plot are decidedly ingenious."²¹ "Mr Marsh succeeds to the mantle of Charles Reade and the rest with an ingenious story of crime and detection,"²² the *Academy* agreed. "*The Crime and the Criminal* may not belong to a very high order of fiction," the *Speaker* concluded, "but of its kind it is good."²³ A sensational crime novel, *The Crime and the Criminal* was perhaps deemed less objectionable than Heinemann's story of degeneration, while the commercial backing of Ward, Lock won it greater critical attention than the low financial or cultural status of Henry and Pearson could secure.

In his examination of book prices in the period 1800-1919, Simon Eliot divides prices into three groups: the low (1d.-3s.6d.); the middle (3s.7d.-10s.); and the high (10s.1d. or above).²⁴ According to Eliot's calculations, based on figures in trade journals, the low-price group consistently accounted for more than 50%, often more than 60%, of the book market from the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ When taking into account literature only, the low-price group was even more important, accounting for approximately 70%

¹⁹ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3535, 124.

²⁰ Saintsbury, 108.

²¹ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3650, 487.

²² Anon. "Reviews," *Academy Fiction Supplement* 52 (2 October 1897), 79.

²³ Anon., "Fiction," *Speaker* (9 October 1897), 413.

²⁴ Eliot, 60.

²⁵ Eliot, 64-65.

of publishing from the 1870s.²⁶ An examination of Marsh's early volume-form publication reveals that he initially had to be satisfied with publishing his work in the low-price, often low-quality market that nonetheless reached a large audience. However, he continued to issue novels at an increasingly rapid rate and won his way from the lists of obscure publishers to those of commercially more viable, if also more populist, firms. In five years, then, Marsh had produced seven novels and made contacts with four publishers, was increasingly moving towards hardback formats, and was beginning to attract critical notice.

III: "A new thing in 'creeps'": *The Beetle: A Mystery* (1897)

The publication of the bestselling *The Beetle: A Mystery* in 1897 was a watershed in Marsh's career. The novel was initially serialised under the title "The Peril of Paul Lessingham: The Story of a Haunted Man" in *Answers*,²⁷ Alfred Harmsworth's penny weekly miscellany which had since its inception in 1888 reached a readership of half a million largely lower-middle-class readers.²⁸ When the novel was published in volume form in autumn 1897 by the religious publishing house Skeffington,²⁹ its target audience had changed: the price of 6s., though standard for one-volume first editions in this period, would have made the novel too expensive for the average reader of *Answers* who had acquired the entire serial for 15d. Marsh had never before approached the 6s. audience: as discussed above, the most expensive of his novels had been priced at 3s.6d. In keeping with the attempt to secure a new audience for the volume, the title of the novel had

²⁶ Eliot, 71-73.

²⁷ *The Beetle* was serialised in the penny weekly *Answers* between March and June 1897 (Vuohelainen, "Introduction," xii-xiii).

²⁸ Altick, 396; see also Bourne.

²⁹ Skeffington was a religious publishing house, and hence somewhat surprising a publisher for Marsh's horror story. Skeffington's catalogue mainly consists of devotional literature, but the firm also published some works by Marie Corelli. Marsh may have had connections with the religious publishing industry due to his early career as a writer of devotional boys' fiction under his real name Bernard Heldmann. According to the *Literary Year-Book*, Skeffington had "made a speciality of high class theological Church literature and sermons" until "turn[ing] its attention to miscellaneous literature, biography, fiction, and children's books" ("Directory of Publishers," *Literary Year-Book* 1897, 242). See also Healey, "William Skeffington," 277.

changed to *The Beetle: A Mystery*, accompanied by a striking cover design tailored to attract buyers at railway bookstalls, where purchasing decisions could be rushed and easily swayed by attractive cover art (figure 2). The attractiveness of the first edition was further enhanced by the inclusion of four illustrations by John Williamson, whose frontispiece was later used as a cover illustration. Apart from the dramatic black beetle on the cover of the Skeffington editions, this “really admirable portrait”³⁰ defined the novel for many early readers.

The Beetle, Marsh’s eighth volume, inaugurated his major phase of stories of the supernatural and crime. It proved his most successful piece of writing in every respect, though, ironically, he may not have made much money from his bestseller: his grandson Robert Aickman alleges that “Marsh sold *The Beetle* outright in order to keep his family for a week or two.”³¹ However, as the 1959 World Distributors pulp edition of *The Beetle*, based on the 1907 T. Fisher Unwin edition, attributes the copyright to “Richard Marsh,” Marsh may instead have sold the copyright for a period of ten years, after which the novel passed from Skeffington to Unwin; this would account for certain discrepancies in his publication pattern, discussed below. Marsh tried in vain to recapture the novel’s success throughout his later career, only to be remembered as the “Author of *The Beetle*”. While *The Beetle* cannot compete with the forty or more editions that some of Marie Corelli’s novels, for example, reached at the same time, it did achieve immediate high sales, featuring on the *Bookman*’s bestseller lists from December 1897 to May 1898, peaking at No. 6 in December 1897,³² and outselling its close contemporary and chief rival, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, well into the twentieth century. The first edition was an instant sell-out, with three more impressions following in October, November and December 1897.³³ Two further impressions came out in April and September 1898, while April 1900 saw the publication of the seventh edition, October 1901 the eighth and

³⁰ Anon., “Fiction,” *Saturday Review* 84, 501.

³¹ Aickman, 12.

³² “Monthly Report of the Wholesale Book Trade,” *Bookman* 13 (December 1897), 59-60; (January 1898), 116; (February 1898), 142-44; “Monthly Reports of the Wholesale Book Trade,” *Bookman* 14 (April 1898), 3-5; (May 1898), 31-33. *Dracula* only featured twice [“Monthly Report of the Wholesale Book Trade,” *Bookman* 12 (August 1897), 112; (September 1897), 140].

³³ Dalby, “Richard Marsh,” 82.

March 1903 the ninth; these were all 6s. editions, indicating continuing demand for the novel. The novel peaked again in 1907-08 after T. Fisher Unwin brought it out at 2s., with four more editions between August 1907 and September 1908. It continued to sell steadily in the twentieth century, with the fifteenth edition appearing in 1913, the twentieth in 1917, and the twenty-fourth in 1927.³⁴

Due to its popular success, *The Beetle* received a significant amount of critical attention. The most understanding reviews of the novel acknowledged “the admirable skill of the author’s workmanship,”³⁵ congratulating him on

[A] very ingenious book of horrors [...]. Mr Marsh has a lurid imagination, and has put together a narrative which should make the flesh of even the least susceptible reader creep. [...] Mr Marsh succeeds in producing that sensation of horror [...] which is a prime necessity in a story of this kind.³⁶

“Its horrors are the fantastic horrors of a nightmare,” the *Speaker* agreed, “but the skill with which they are presented to us is undeniable.”³⁷ The *Daily Graphic* agreed that

The Beetle is a book to read – not maybe when alone or just before going to bed, because it is the kind of book which you put down only for the purpose of turning up the gas and making sure that no person or thing is standing behind your chair – and it is a book which no one will put down until finished except for the reason above described.³⁸

The pleasures of voyeuristic horror are evident in the reviews, which confirm that the popularity of the *The Beetle* was due to Marsh’s ability to stir his readers’ fears but also

³⁴ Wolfreys, 11. In 1916, an Australian reader of *Pearson’s Magazine* listed *The Beetle* as one of a dozen modern novels that he believed “would live.” The tenth novel on the list, *The Beetle* is commended for its depiction of “the grotesquely horrible.” Ironically, of the twelve texts listed, only the final one, Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, is still read today (Anon., “Which Modern Novels Will Live?,” 279).

³⁵ Gull, 9.

³⁶ Anon., “Reviews,” *Academy Fiction Supplement* 52 (30 October 1897), 99.

³⁷ Anon., “Fiction,” *Speaker* (30 October 1897), 489.

³⁸ Anon., “New Books,” *Daily Graphic*, 4.

to his skills in titillating their fantasies: “The pursuit of the kidnapped Marjorie is really exciting,” opined the critic of the *Daily Chronicle*, “and the Beetle is as horrid as one could wish.”³⁹ The reviews emphasised the novelty of this “very objectionable scarabaeus,”⁴⁰ a truly “versatile insect,”⁴¹ that presented the reader with “a new thing in ‘creeps’ in the way of an old man with a woman’s body, a chinless and hairless face, and a knack of turning, when convenient, into a monstrous beetle, and walking up his acquaintances with gluey feet that stick at every step.”⁴² The novel, the readers were told by gleeful critics, “sets forth with hideous actuality”⁴³ how “[t]his amiable lady, whose appearance is so repulsive that nobody believes her to be a woman,”⁴⁴ “masquerad[es] about London in the disguise of an arab of doubtful sex.”⁴⁵ The notable similarities between *The Beetle* and *Dracula* were, interestingly, recognised by contemporary critics, some of whom appeared to prefer *The Beetle*: “Mr Bram Stoker[’s ...] was an effort of the imagination not easy to beat,” wrote the critic of the *Glasgow Herald*, “But Mr Richard Marsh has, so to speak, out-Heroded Herod. [...] The weird horror of the being [...] grows upon the reader, and, in fact, *The Beetle* is one of those ‘creepy-crawly’ stories [...] which it is difficult, if not impossible, to lay down when once begun.”⁴⁶ The *Speaker* agreed that “Mr Richard Marsh has evidently resolved to ‘go one better’ than [...] the ingenious author of *Dracula*, and to make the flesh of his readers creep as he recites a blood-curdling story of the most terrific kind.”⁴⁷

Such positive reviews were countered by some critical hostility. While recognising that “Mr Marsh has a certain skill in weaving a plot and sustaining a mystery,” the newly launched *Daily Mail*, for example, called the novel “sordid” and “vulgar” and queried why it was “absolutely impossible for a writer of sensational fiction

³⁹ Anon., “Opinions of the Press,” n.p.

⁴⁰ Anon., “The World of Books,” 3.

⁴¹ Anon., “New Books,” *Daily Graphic*, 4.

⁴² Anon., “Fiction,” *Saturday Review* 84, 501.

⁴³ Anon., “New Books,” *Daily Graphic*, 4.

⁴⁴ Anon., “Fiction,” *Speaker* (30 October 1897), 489.

⁴⁵ Anon., “New Books,” *Daily Graphic*, 4.

⁴⁶ Anon., “Literature: Novels and Stories,” 9.

⁴⁷ Anon., “Fiction,” *Speaker* (30 October 1897), 489.

to make a story exciting without introducing murder and bloodshed.”⁴⁸ The *Athenaeum* found *The Beetle* “prolix” and “much too long.”⁴⁹ The *Saturday Review*, while acknowledging that Marsh “does occasionally succeed in making the flesh creep,” yet thought that “[m]ore often he misses fire. The author has neither Poe’s command of terror nor Mr H.G. Wells’s of plausibility. One feels the thing to be egregious at every step. Nevertheless, it is good reading, so far as it goes.”⁵⁰ Despite such criticism, reviews of *The Beetle* were overall more positive than those of Marsh’s previous novels. This may be explained by the appeal of the novel itself, as well as the positive expectations raised by *The Crime and the Criminal* earlier in 1897. Skeffington’s reputation as a respectable religious publisher may also have had an impact on the critics. Furthermore, the publication of *Dracula* in June 1897 may have paved the way for Marsh’s novel in volume format, and Skeffington’s acknowledgement of the similarities between the two novels suggests that the publishers were hoping to benefit from a vogue for the occult.

IV: From “purely popular” to “pre-eminently readable”: critical responses, 1898-1907

Marsh’s fiction began to attract more positive reviews in the afterglow of *The Beetle*. He was increasingly commended for his easy style, skilful plot construction, humour and innovativeness in devising fresh situations. However, this shift only became permanent once Marsh had fully established his reputation as a popular author in the ten years following the publication of *The Beetle*. The immediate aftermath of *The Beetle* was characterised by an impressive show of energy which peaked in 1900, a year in which Marsh published eight volumes. Although *The Beetle* had been a resounding success, the years following its publication were crucial for Marsh in terms of sustaining and building on the promise of his bestseller. This decade following the publication of *The Beetle* was, subsequently, transitional in Marsh’s career and witnessed important changes in his contacts within the publishing industry, in the physical quality and price of

⁴⁸ Anon., “The World of Books,” 3. Ironically, the reviewer seems unaware that the novel had previously been serialised in *Answers*, another Harmsworth publication.

⁴⁹ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 3650, 487.

⁵⁰ Anon., “Fiction,” *Saturday Review* 84, 501.

his volumes, in his production patterns, in the type of fiction that he produced, and in his critical reception.

In the period 1898-1907, Marsh considerably broadened his acquaintance with the publishing industry by seeking out new opportunities with a number of firms: Marsh's thirty-seven volumes of fiction in this period were issued by eleven different publishing houses. Marsh may have published his work through so many firms for a number of reasons. Firstly, his production levels throughout his career were too high for a single publisher. In his *Autobiography*, Anthony Trollope writes about the "terrible condemnation and scorn pronounced" by a publisher towards "a fertile writer of tales" who "had spawned upon them (the publishers) three novels a year!"⁵¹ Trollope warns would-be writers to be mindful of the "quantity of matter"⁵² which "the novel-readers of the world can want from the hands of one man."⁵³ Marsh, whose annual output peaked at eight volumes in 1900 and averaged at *three* (figure 3), was probably wise to issue his work through various publishers catering for different niche audiences: this technique ensured that Marsh's volumes would reach different audiences, diminishing his risk of flooding the market. Secondly, as a commercial writer Marsh was in search of the best deal. In this period, he tried a number of publishers he would never work with again. It may be that Marsh disliked Hurst & Blackett,⁵⁴ Digby, Long,⁵⁵ and Anthony Treherne because he quickly discontinued his transactions with them; he must at least have been able to gain better terms elsewhere. Alternatively, some firms may not have accepted other samples of his work due to poor sales or the unsuitability of the material offered, as may have been the case with Grant Richards, a comparative intellectual heavyweight

⁵¹ Trollope, 323, 110.

⁵² Trollope, 173.

⁵³ Trollope, 273.

⁵⁴ Hurst & Blackett specialised in fiction by female writers but also published popular male writers such as H. Rider Haggard. See Sutherland, 315; Schmidt, 155-58.

⁵⁵ Digby, Long, characterised as "[g]eneral publishers, distinguished by a number of very remarkable works in fiction," issued two collections of Marsh shorts, *The Aristocratic Detective* (1900) and *Between the Dark and the Daylight* (1902) ("Directory of Publishers," *Literary Year-Book* 1897, 228).

among Marsh's publishing contacts, who in 1900 published *A Second Coming*, Marsh's episodic narrative of Christ in contemporary London.⁵⁶

More frequent contacts must, by contrast, have been willing to accept Marsh's fiction and offer him reasonable remuneration. These contacts reflect the generic breakdown of Marsh's fiction. The adventure specialists Ward, Lock continued to issue some of Marsh's crime fiction in this period, presented in suitably dramatic covers; Skeffington, the publishers of *The Beetle*, issued further volumes reflecting the company's interest in mystery fiction.⁵⁷ Other occult titles were published by F.V. White, who between 1898 and 1901 brought out an annual Marsh volume.⁵⁸ Although *The House of Mystery* (1898), *In Full Cry* (1899), *The Goddess: A Demon* (1900), and *The Joss: A Reversion* (1901) did not form a uniform series, their annual publication pattern and attractive cover art suggest that they were calculated to appeal to a niche audience. James Bowden, a publisher of seaside comedies, novels of stage life, and light fiction, issued a miscellaneous set of volumes including *Tom Ossington's Ghost* (1898), the follow-up to *The Beetle*; *Frivolities* (1899), a collection of light comic shorts; and *The Woman with One Hand and Mr Ely's Engagement* (1899), a volume containing two very different novellas.

The period 1898-1907 also saw Marsh establish relationships with publishers he was to work closely with for the rest of his career, notably Methuen and John Long. Marsh's first contact with John Long, a "[g]eneral publisher, making a speciality of fiction,"⁵⁹ was in 1898, when the firm issued *Curios: Some Strange Adventures of Two Bachelors*, a whimsical collection of the adventures of Pugh and Tress, two antique collectors. One of Marsh's most frequent business partners, Long issued nine Marsh

⁵⁶ An imitation of Stead's *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1894), *A Second Coming* was an attempt to cash in on the year 1900. Marsh's sole religious work may have suited Grant Richards, the publisher of A.E. Housman. See Brockman, 272-79.

⁵⁷ The *Literary Year-Book* lists Marsh as one of Skeffington's key authors in 1898, alongside Marie Corelli, Guy Boothby and A. St John Adcock ("Directory of Publishers," *Literary Year-Book* 1898, 192).

⁵⁸ F.V. White was a publisher of popular fiction. Authors affiliated to the firm included Guy Boothby, Fergus Hume, Bertram Mitford, and William Le Queux, all apparently once widely read but now forgotten popular authors of crime and romance.

⁵⁹ Long also published such popular authors as Coulson Kernahan and Mrs Lovett Cameron ("Directory of Publishers," *Literary Year-Book* 1898, 183).

volumes in the period 1898-1907 and a total of sixteen in 1898-1920. Three of the nine volumes published in 1898-1907 were collections of short stories, the rest being romances with a criminal twist. The first Long volumes, *Curios*, *Ada Vernham*, *Actress* (1900) and *The Magnetic Girl* (1903), are attractive examples of genre fiction with their pretty pictorial covers, occult and criminal elements, and slightly risqué subject matter. From *Miss Arnott's Marriage* (1904), Marsh's fourth volume for Long, his work for the firm became standardised in appearance, forming a uniform set in plain red covers with gilding to front and spine. At the same time, Marsh's work moved generically towards the sensational thriller.

The extent of Marsh's dealings with Long suggests that the partnership was mutually satisfactory. However, contemporary articles in the *Author* indicate an alternative explanation. In 1907, Stella M. Düring criticised Long's business habits,⁶⁰ and in 1911 another writer condemned Long's "remarkable agreement[s]" as unfair to writers: not only did Long offer exclusive contracts for ten novels, the firm also presented authors with incorrect calculations as to costs and advertising fees and only paid a royalty after a year,⁶¹ when "[m]ost publishers will inform an author that a book is dead at the end of six months, and all publishers will inform an author that the ordinary novel is dead at the end of twelve months."⁶² It is, thus, possible that Marsh did not write *ten* volumes for Long in 1898-1909 because he found the connection profitable but because he had signed a contract that obliged him to do so. This seems particularly likely as after 1909 Marsh only published one more volume through Long before his death.

Marsh's second permanent contact, Methuen, published ten Marsh volumes within this ten-year period, and a total of eighteen between 1900 and 1918. Founded in 1889, Methuen was another house to take advantage of the collapse of the three-decker,⁶³ issuing a mixture of educational and fictional texts that reflected the interests of its founder, a classical scholar and author of school textbooks.⁶⁴ However, Methuen's list boasted many of the most popular authors of the day, including Marie Corelli, E.F.

⁶⁰ Düring, 175; Hubert Wales defended Long in *Author*, 238.

⁶¹ Anon., "A Remarkable Agreement," 160-63.

⁶² Anon., "A Remarkable Agreement," 161.

⁶³ Griffiths, 211-12.

⁶⁴ Sutherland, 431.

Benson, S. Baring Gould, H.G. Wells, Edna Lyall, Anthony Hope, and Rudyard Kipling, attracted to the company by its promise of financial rewards, notably “a royalty of 10 percent on the first five hundred copies and a minimum of 12 ½ percent thereafter.”⁶⁵ Methuen may, thus, have been a more profitable contact to Marsh than Long. Marsh’s first volumes for the firm were the short-story collections *The Seen and the Unseen* (1900), *Marvels and Mysteries* (1900), and *Both Sides of the Veil* (1901), which contain much of his short supernatural fiction inside their attractive covers but, nonetheless, branded Marsh as a writer of genre fiction. From the publication of *The Twickenham Peerage* (1902), the volumes anticipate the uniform appearance of red covers with gilt lettering also adopted by Long in 1904. At the same time, their subject matter began to move towards sensational romance.

The decade following the publication of *The Beetle* reveals Marsh as an increasingly professional popular writer working to secure and maintain a market share and useful publishing contacts. By the end of the period, these efforts had paid off: not only had Marsh achieved the permanent partnerships with Methuen and Long but the status of his fiction had changed, too, as evidenced by the price, advertising potential, appearance, and critical reception of his work. From 1899, all of Marsh’s volumes were priced at 6s., the standard price of one-volume first editions in this period. He had, thus, risen from Eliot’s low-price group of literary production to the mid-price group. According to Eliot, the mid-price group accounted for approximately a quarter of the market from the mid-century and nearly 30% of all literature between 1895 and 1905.⁶⁶ However, while 6s. was now the standard price for one-volume first editions, the low-price group still accounted for approximately 70% of all fiction published at the end of the nineteenth century. Marsh had, thus, progressed from that large band to the more select group of authors whose fiction was published in the mid-price category and aimed at the middle classes. While gaining in status, he had perhaps lost in the size of his readership, although more expensive formats also carried a greater profit margin.

⁶⁵ Griffiths, 212.

⁶⁶ Eliot, 64-65, 73.

Joseph McAleer writes of the importance of advertising in fostering sales of popular fiction.⁶⁷ Following the publication of *The Beetle*, Marsh's name began to carry commercial value. In this period of Marsh's career, his back catalogue began to be significant enough for advertisements for earlier novels to be inserted into the latest volume. Because such advertisements were placed opposite the title page, readers could not escape seeing them as they began a new novel. In the publishers' catalogues, often inserted at the back of the volume, Marsh's name began to feature prominently alongside some of the leading popular authors of the day, while his earlier volumes were made available as reprints in publishers' "libraries," series of cheap reprint fiction produced for readers unable or unwilling to purchase a 6s. first edition.⁶⁸ Marsh's early long fiction had, as discussed above, been issued in cheap editions, but from 1899 all his volumes were initially priced at 6s. and only issued at a lower price once the 6s. market had been exhausted.

John Long published a number of such "libraries," aimed at a variety of audiences. These included the hardback Haymarket Novels, which duplicated the pagination of the first edition at the price of 2s.6d., and the Shilling Net series, in which "none but the most popular and saleable books [were] included."⁶⁹ These hardback reprints, aimed at lower-middle- and middle-class readers, were designed to look respectable in a parlour bookcase. Long's library of Sixpenny and Sevenpenny Net (Cloth) Novels was a cheaper hardback series of small red pocket editions printed on poor-quality paper. While they could easily be carried on public transport, their hard covers and gilt spines ensured their display value in a lower-middle-class household.⁷⁰ Long's cheapest library was the Sixpenny (Paper) Copyright Novels, which featured colourful paper covers and two columns of very small print on poor-quality paper. These editions, which with their large page size resembled the monthly 6d. magazines,

⁶⁷ McAleer, 24-25.

⁶⁸ McAleer, 26-27. Very popular novels would take longer to become available in reprint formats, while unpopular novels were never reprinted at all. *The Beetle*, for example, was only made available in a cheap reprint in 1907.

⁶⁹ Advertisement, *Ada Vernham, Actress* (London: John Long, [c. 1911]). Marsh's Shilling novels included *Ada Vernham, Actress* and *Mrs Musgrave – and her Husband*.

⁷⁰ In the twentieth century, this series included *The Magnetic Girl*, *The Garden of Mystery*, *A Woman Perfected*, and *The Romance of a Maid of Honour*.

crammed full novels into a little over a hundred pages and printed advertisements within the text itself. Many Marsh novels were available in this series into the 1920s, indicative of their continuing appeal after his death (figures 4-5).⁷¹ Chief among Methuen's "libraries" were the 3s.6d. Fleur de Lis Novels, which reprinted novels in crown octavo soon after their initial release,⁷² and Methuen's Shilling Novels in gilt cloth. From 1902, Methuen also published a Sixpenny Library in soft covers.⁷³ The variety of such libraries guaranteed the availability of Marsh's fiction to the largest possible audience. However, impecunious or thrifty readers had to wait for the 6s. edition to run its course before gaining access to the cheaper reprint.

In this period, Marsh's first editions attained a uniform appearance in cloth octavo. Until the early years of the twentieth century, Marsh's novels featured attractive cover art with colourful pictorial boards and dramatic lettering (figure 6). The pictorial covers of the early volumes loudly declared them to be genre fiction, and they may have appealed to juvenile as well as lower-middle- and higher-working-class readers. By the end of the period, however, Marsh's books had assumed a uniform appearance as plain red covers with gilding to front and spine replaced dramatic pictorial boards (figure 7). These uniform editions were issued by different publishers, so that the products of Long and Methuen, for example, appeared physically similar. Jonathan Wild writes of the value of gold lettering and cloth binding in marketing a work to suburban audiences,⁷⁴ and, arguably, this uniform style was indicative of Marsh's improving fortunes and rising status: with their plain red covers, Marsh's novels were no longer being marketed as genre fiction, suggesting that he was an author of some repute, his fiction worthy of being collected into a set. The uniform red covers laid claim to a higher literary standard and a more sophisticated readership than the dramatic covers of the earlier genre fiction; with their gilt spines, they would have formed an attractive set in middle-class drawing-room bookcases. The plainer covers further suggest that sales of Marsh's fiction no longer depended on the standard of its cover art: the author's name had instead become the main

⁷¹ Novels published in this format included *Miss Arnott's Marriage*, *The Magnetic Girl*, *Ada Vernham*, *Actress*, *Curios*, and *Mrs Musgrave – and her Husband*.

⁷² This series reprinted *Marvels and Mysteries* and *The Seen and the Unseen*.

⁷³ Griffiths, 212. In 1904, *The Joss*, acquired from F.V. White, was reprinted in this series. Methuen appears to have acquired the rights to Marsh's novels from White.

⁷⁴ Wild, 66.

attraction that would be recognised by potential readers regardless of the appearance of the cover.

The decade following the publication of *The Beetle*, then, reveals Marsh as an increasingly professional and successful popular author, an interpretation supported by an examination of reviews of his fiction. Interestingly, the volumes published by Methuen elicited a greater number of more positive reviews than those by Long, perhaps reflecting Methuen's higher cultural status. The reviews from the beginning of the period were, on the whole, more mixed than those from its end, reflecting a growing recognition of Marsh's name. While praising Marsh's work as well-written, the early reviews also condemned it as genre fiction. Thus, while the stories in *Curios* (1898) were commended as "very tolerable specimens of the story-teller's art; [...] written with taste and skill," their subject matter was criticised as "hardly good enough for the care expended on them by the writer."⁷⁵ *Tom Ossington's Ghost* (1898), similarly, was described as "well written, remarkably well illustrated, and very readable," but "[i]t is a pity the book does not belong to a better class of fiction."⁷⁶ *The Goddess: A Demon* (1900) "reflects credit on the imagination of the author," "has merit as a shocker, and [...] is fairly well written"⁷⁷ but would also make "capital reading for Margate," a scathing comment from the snobbish *Academy*.⁷⁸ The *Athenaeum* commended *The Seen and the Unseen* (1900) for "the invariable excellence of composition shown in the writing," "the writer's style [being] unusually pleasant and lucid"; this, however, was "remarkable in a volume which deals with subjects of purely popular interest."⁷⁹ *Amusement Only*, similarly, "will wile away an idle half hour or so agreeably, if edification or artistic pleasure or intellectual subtlety be not looked for."⁸⁰ The *Athenaeum* agreed that the collection would help "the railway traveller" to pass "two hours or so [...] pleasantly [...], if he is not exigent about his literature."⁸¹ The early reviews also contained a good deal of criticism, some of it

⁷⁵ Anon., "Short Stories," *Athenaeum* 3711, 828.

⁷⁶ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3687, 817.

⁷⁷ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3798, 179.

⁷⁸ Anon., "Notes on Novels," *Academy* 59 (11 August 1900), 112.

⁷⁹ Anon., "Short Stories," *Athenaeum* 3802, 309.

⁸⁰ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 19, 199.

⁸¹ Anon., "Short Stories," *Athenaeum* 3824, 171.

related to Marsh's prolificacy. "Mr Marsh exhales novels; no pun or offence intended,"⁸² the *Academy* joked, "We do our best to keep up with Mr Marsh. [...] We have begun to take quite a sporting interest in Mr Marsh, and ask ourselves anxiously – 'Can he manage twelve in the year?'"⁸³ Critics also attacked failings in Marsh's craftsmanship, commenting on the "forced [...] humour" of *Frivolities* (1899),⁸⁴ "the sordidness of the events and the circumstance" in *Ada Vernham, Actress* (1900),⁸⁵ and the lack of "a certain plausibility and shading [...] in the introduction of the supernatural"⁸⁶ in *Both Sides of the Veil* (1901).

The tone of the reviews altered in the early twentieth century, when Marsh began to be praised for his "real craftsmanship" and "workmanlike manner"⁸⁷ which had assured him "success in storytelling within a certain groove of sensationalism."⁸⁸ The reviews focused on his constructive skills, his easy style, and his innovativeness in devising fresh situations. "Mr Marsh is capable of conceiving and presenting a fantastic story with cleverness," the *Athenaeum* commented on *The Twickenham Peerage* (1902), a novel "handled with freshness, and with a humorous realism which is quite convincing."⁸⁹ *A Metamorphosis* (1903), "an entertaining story of the rattling sensational kind," was cited as "a striking example of the modern amplification and glorification of what used to be called the 'shilling shocker.' [...] [T]he author has been prodigal with his material, and [...] his book should please the most grudging purchaser."⁹⁰ *A Duel* (1904) "seems barely to fall short of a really high standard. The theme is original, the language vivid, the characterization striking; [...] [T]he book contains a good deal of bright and pleasant writing, and entirely avoids the unpardonable sin of dulness (sic)."⁹¹ Marsh's openings were compelling: *Miss Arnott's Marriage* (1904) "opens with a bang,"⁹² while

⁸² Anon., "Notes on Novels," *Academy* 59 (13 October 1900), 310.

⁸³ Anon., "Notes on Novels," *Academy* 59 (17 November 1900), 468.

⁸⁴ Anon., "Short Stories," *Athenaeum* 3743, 125.

⁸⁵ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 18, 127.

⁸⁶ Anon., "Short Stories," *Athenaeum* 3853, 283.

⁸⁷ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3958, 310.

⁸⁸ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3945, 716.

⁸⁹ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3905, 279.

⁹⁰ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3958, 310.

⁹¹ Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 4023, 761.

⁹² Anon., "New Novels," *Athenaeum* 3992, 557.

the beginning of *The Girl and the Miracle* (1907) was “almost the best we have come across in this sort of book for a long time.”⁹³ In *A Spoiler of Men* (1905), “Mr Richard Marsh has brought into play his customary constructive talent and florid imagination, the result being a tale that is pre-eminently readable.”⁹⁴ Described as “much better written than the average of such things,” the novel “show[s] considerable ingenuity in devising situations.”⁹⁵ Marsh’s characterisation, too, was praised as above average in popular fiction: Marsh “pays more attention to characterization than most writers who practice this craft”⁹⁶ and “has more appreciation of shades of character than some other leaders in the same field.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, Marsh’s style was praised for its lucidity: “Mr Marsh [...] makes his sensation without degrading the English language,”⁹⁸ the *Athenaeum* noted. His fiction, “written in sound English, and [...] free from glaring lapses of taste and from glaring departures from probability,”⁹⁹ was commended for its “clear, but journalistic” style.¹⁰⁰

While Marsh’s literary standing improved following the publication of *The Beetle*, the period 1898-1907 also saw him attain financial security from his work. From 1901, Marsh’s publication pattern settled into a remarkably predictable pattern of three volumes per year, usually including at least one short-story collection. While Marsh had to publish on a regular basis to earn his living, he was by the early twentieth century earning high enough a price for his fiction to be able to live on the profits from three annual volumes.¹⁰¹ This figure may be usefully compared with the years immediately prior to 1901: in 1900, Marsh had published eight volumes, in 1899 three, in 1898 five,

⁹³ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 4168, 297.

⁹⁴ Anon., “Novel Notes,” *Bookman* 28, 69.

⁹⁵ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 4043, 492.

⁹⁶ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 4168, 297.

⁹⁷ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 3945, 716.

⁹⁸ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 4064, 366.

⁹⁹ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 3958, 310.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 3945, 716.

¹⁰¹ It would seem that these payments did not decline later on in Marsh’s career, since he continued to issue three volumes a year until his death in 1915, after which there was a flurry of publishing activity as publishers cleared their desks of novels that Marsh had completed before his death. Although it is hard to estimate his income accurately without contractual material, Marsh is likely to have at least approached the £1000 mark in the Edwardian years.

including a joint collection of short stories by a number of authors, and in 1897 four. In 1893 and 1895 he had issued two annual volumes, but each year had been followed by one in which he published none. Thus, Marsh's early years as a published novelist were characterised by a difficulty in getting his long fiction into print, perhaps even of producing it; yet as early as 1891, Marsh gives his occupation as "author" on his census return.¹⁰² From 1897, Marsh's ability to get his work printed improved considerably and, at the end of the century, he published prodigious amounts of fiction in volume format. This may have been because his creativity was at its height and the words came easily; however, it is also likely that Marsh had to work hard in this period to support his growing family and his unconventional lifestyle.¹⁰³ While he came dangerously close to flooding the market, he was able to supply quality genre fiction just when his name was on the public's lips due to the success of *The Beetle*.¹⁰⁴ Marsh was, thus, able to capitalise on his temporary popularity and establish his name permanently.

V: "A master of his craft": critical recognition, 1908-15

The process of consolidation which had characterised Marsh's career in the period 1898-1907 continued in the years preceding his death. At the beginning of this period, Marsh wrote less than ever before, issuing two annual volumes in 1908, 1910 and 1911

¹⁰² 1891 England Census, RG12/835/5/105/16/61. This may suggest that Marsh was writing extensively but failing to get his fiction published. It is unlikely that he can have earned enough from his short fiction alone to support his family in 1891.

¹⁰³ Marsh's expenses were high in this period: the 1901 England census shows that four of his five children had been sent to boarding schools (RG13/626/13/200/20/133; RG13/912/St Johns College/67/6/1; RG13/940/43/167/3/10). Aickman implies that Marsh had an unconventional lifestyle, frequenting sports events, restaurants, the theatre, and the opera, and travelling abroad for at least a quarter of the year (14). Aickman hints that Marsh, a man of "insouciance, determination, and popular magnetism," was growing tired of his wife Ada, "a strident, garrulous, garish woman [... with] no sense or capacity for judgment, especially about herself" (17). "I have spent a large portion of my life abroad," Marsh states in "'Gayety' Abroad" (282).

¹⁰⁴ Marsh's fiction appeared on the *Bookman's* lists of books in demand throughout this period. See "Monthly Reports of the Wholesale Bookselling Trade ('Books in Demand')," *Bookman* 18 (July 1900), 105-06; "The Holiday Season and the Book Trade," *Bookman* 18 (September 1900), 166-67; "Wholesale Reports of the Bookselling Trade," *Bookman* 20 (September 1901), 172-73.

and sustaining or surpassing the level of remuneration he had reached in the previous period. However, it is also possible that in these years Marsh was finally earning royalties from *The Beetle*, which had in 1907 passed from Skeffington to T. Fisher Unwin who brought it out as a 2s. reprint. As noted above, the copyright may have passed back to Marsh at this point. Apart from these exceptional years, Marsh continued to publish three volumes a year until the end of his life.

Marsh had some further dealings with Digby, Long, Ward, Lock, John Long and Methuen after 1908.¹⁰⁵ More importantly, however, he gained in Chatto & Windus, T. Fisher Unwin, and Cassell three new regular business connections, which to an extent supplanted his previous contacts with, in particular, John Long. Marsh had first dealt with Chatto & Windus in 1905 when the firm published his sensational crime novel featuring a mad chemist, *A Spoiler of Men*. Between 1913 and 1915, Chatto issued three Marsh novels with a legal or judicial twist. One of the leading fin-de-siècle houses, Chatto & Windus were instrumental in overthrowing the three-decker and were known as a company sympathetic to writers' needs.¹⁰⁶ Advertising themselves as “[g]eneral publishers, universally known by the immense variety of their works in fiction,”¹⁰⁷ they had also introduced American authors, for example Mark Twain, to Britain, and issued reprints of fiction by Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins and Ouida.¹⁰⁸ In the year preceding his death, Marsh also began to work for T. Fisher Unwin, a company associated with prominent female authors such as Olive Schreiner, Ethel M. Dell, Vernon Lee, and Ouida, as well as with H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, and Ford Madox Ford.¹⁰⁹ Two relatively new firms, Chatto & Windus and T. Fisher Unwin again belonged to a group of innovative publishers who benefited from the increased demand for popular fiction in this period.

¹⁰⁵ In 1909-20, Long issued a further seven Marsh volumes, but five of them were posthumous, and Marsh's estate may have offered his manuscripts to the most easily accessible publisher after his death. Methuen brought out another six volumes, two of them posthumous.

¹⁰⁶ Schneller, 111.

¹⁰⁷ “Directory of Publishers,” *Literary Year-Book* 1897, 227.

¹⁰⁸ Sutherland, 118-19.

¹⁰⁹ Codell, 306-08.

The long-established Cassell, however, was Marsh's major new contact. From 1909, Cassell issued an annual volume by Marsh, as well as acting as his literary managers.¹¹⁰ Established in 1850, the firm had its origins in the temperance movement and the attempt to lure people away from the public house by means of entertaining but improving reading matter.¹¹¹ By the turn of the century, Cassell had become a large firm with 1200 staff, seven periodicals, and a family readership. Its authors had included R.L. Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins,¹¹² but in the 1890s the company had fallen behind the times.¹¹³ Marsh was drafted in as part of a campaign in the early twentieth century to secure the help of up-to-date popular authors in order to revive the firm's fortunes.¹¹⁴ Cassell published seven Marsh volumes in total, but considering that the first of these only appeared in 1909, the partnership must have been mutually satisfactory.¹¹⁵ Marsh only released novels best classified as popular romance through Cassell, featuring such unashamedly sentimental titles as *The Interrupted Kiss* (1909) and *Love in Fetters* (1915), representative of his navigation towards the genres of popular romance and romantic thriller in the second half of his career.

Marsh appears to have attained a degree of stability in his professional practice in the final years of his career. His level of production had settled at three volumes a year, earning him a sufficient income. He had identified half-a-dozen publishing houses which would welcome his fiction: John Long, Methuen, Chatto & Windus, Cassell, T. Fisher Unwin, and Ward, Lock were his main publishing contacts at the end of his career. His fiction was issued at the standard price of 6s., and later in cheap popular editions, either in hard boards or in paperback. In appearance, his volumes had progressed from the colourful boards of the early genre fiction to the more sedate gilt cloth covers that would look respectable in middle-class drawing rooms.

¹¹⁰ From 1910, the *Literary Year-Book* gives Marsh's contact address as "c/o Cassell & Co., Ltd., Ludgate Hill, E.C." [Anon., "Authors," 242].

¹¹¹ Feather, 104; Nowell-Smith, 16.

¹¹² Nowell-Smith, 85, 130-31; Sutherland, 109.

¹¹³ Nowell-Smith, 176, 204; Anderson, 78.

¹¹⁴ Nowell-Smith, 204.

¹¹⁵ The Cassell volumes failed to follow the uniform style of the novels published by Methuen and Long. Cassell issued Marsh's novels in hard covers of various colour.

The reviews of Marsh's fiction in this period continued to reflect his development into a fully professional writer, and, possibly, increasing acceptance of professional authorship in general. While the *Academy* appears to have lost interest in Marsh after his production levels fell short of a volume a month, the *Athenaeum* and the trade journal *Bookman* continued to review Marsh till the end of his career. By 1909, the critics' previous regrets that Marsh should write popular fiction had given way to "admiration of the way in which a master of his craft can hold us for a reading while to believe in the most extraordinary impossibilities."¹¹⁶ Most reviews emphasised Marsh's ability to offer fresh and exciting plotlines within his generic confines. Reviewing *The Interrupted Kiss*, the *Bookman* stated that "the author of the story is Mr Richard Marsh, which, *as most people know*, is tantamount to saying that the situations are treated with freshness and ingenuity" (my italics).¹¹⁷ The reviewer expects the reader to be familiar with Marsh's reputation and comes near to saying that his new novel does not really need a review in order to sell. Writing of *Live Men's Shoes* (1910), the same periodical termed Marsh

[O]ne of the most reliable of the numerous writers of sensational fiction. He seems always to be in a good temper, he writes with much swing and go, and he is up to all the tricks of his trade [...] We venture to believe that nobody can help being diverted by Mr Marsh's latest novel, which [...] shows no falling off from the standard which that author has set himself.¹¹⁸

Apart from "the constructive skill which we expect from Mr Marsh,"¹¹⁹ critics also commended Marsh's fiction for its wealth of incident. A "particularly lively example of the sensationalists' art,"¹²⁰ *The Man with Nine Lives* (1915) was, according to the *Bookman*, crammed full of "a wealth of wonderful happenings" and "an ingenious series of plots and counterplots, devices, and mysterious inter-relations."¹²¹ Reviewing the complex thriller *The Woman in the Car* (1914), "rather a favourable specimen of its

¹¹⁶ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 48, 118.

¹¹⁷ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 36, 46.

¹¹⁸ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 38, 91-92.

¹¹⁹ Anon., "Fiction," *Athenaeum* 4544, 561.

¹²⁰ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 48, 118.

¹²¹ Anon., "Novel Notes," *Bookman* 48, 118.

class,” the *Athenaeum* found that “Mr Marsh was in a particularly generous mood when he wrote this highly complicated story.”¹²² Critics also liked the fact that Marsh’s tales were not without humour: given his reputation as a writer of sensational fiction, the *Athenaeum* opined that “he ha[d] a surprising turn of wit.”¹²³ Elsewhere, the review added that “the melodramatic tales which Mr Marsh produces with so much rapidity and ease are none the less pleasing because they are more farcical than most stories of their kind.”¹²⁴

A clear shift is noticeable in reviews of Marsh’s work after 1908 from the earlier sneers at genre fiction towards an appreciation of a recognised name within the niche market for sensation fiction. In the final years of his career, Marsh appears to have attained a reputation as one of the leading providers of popular romances and thrillers, his name carrying a promise of a lucid style and of imaginative freshness within his chosen generic categories. “Few authors,” the *Strand* acknowledged in 1915 after Marsh’s death, “had a wider public than Mr Richard Marsh.”¹²⁵ In the final years of his career, then, Marsh appears to have attained a degree of stability in his professional practice. His production level and income had stabilised, he had established a number of useful contacts within the publishing industry, his fiction was issued at a standard price in respectable-looking editions, and his critical reception was largely appreciative. However, his shifting production patterns and critical fortunes since 1893 are also indicative of a general change in attitudes to professional authorship, popular genre fiction and mass readership at a transitional period which witnessed important social shifts, changes in educational and entertainment patterns, and efforts on behalf of professional authors.

¹²² Anon., “Fiction,” *Athenaeum* 4561, 289.

¹²³ Anon., “Short Stories,” *Athenaeum* 4455, 303.

¹²⁴ Anon., “New Novels,” *Athenaeum* 4243, 220-21.

¹²⁵ Marsh, “How I ‘Broke into Print,’” 573.

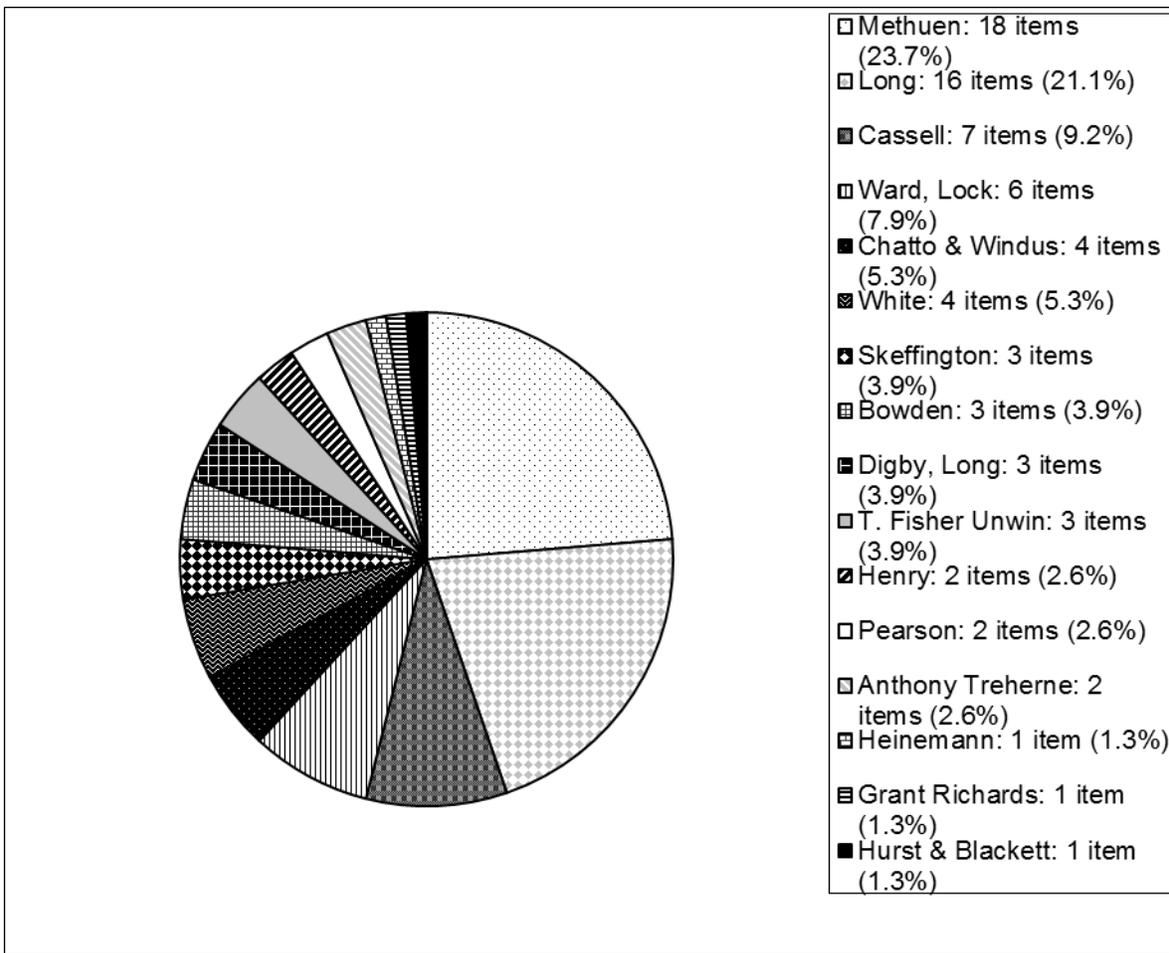


Figure 1: Richard Marsh and the publishers, 1893-1920.

In the course of his career, Marsh published his seventy-six volumes through sixteen different publishing houses. As this table demonstrates, he relied extensively on certain houses, particularly Methuen, John Long, Cassell, and Ward, Lock.

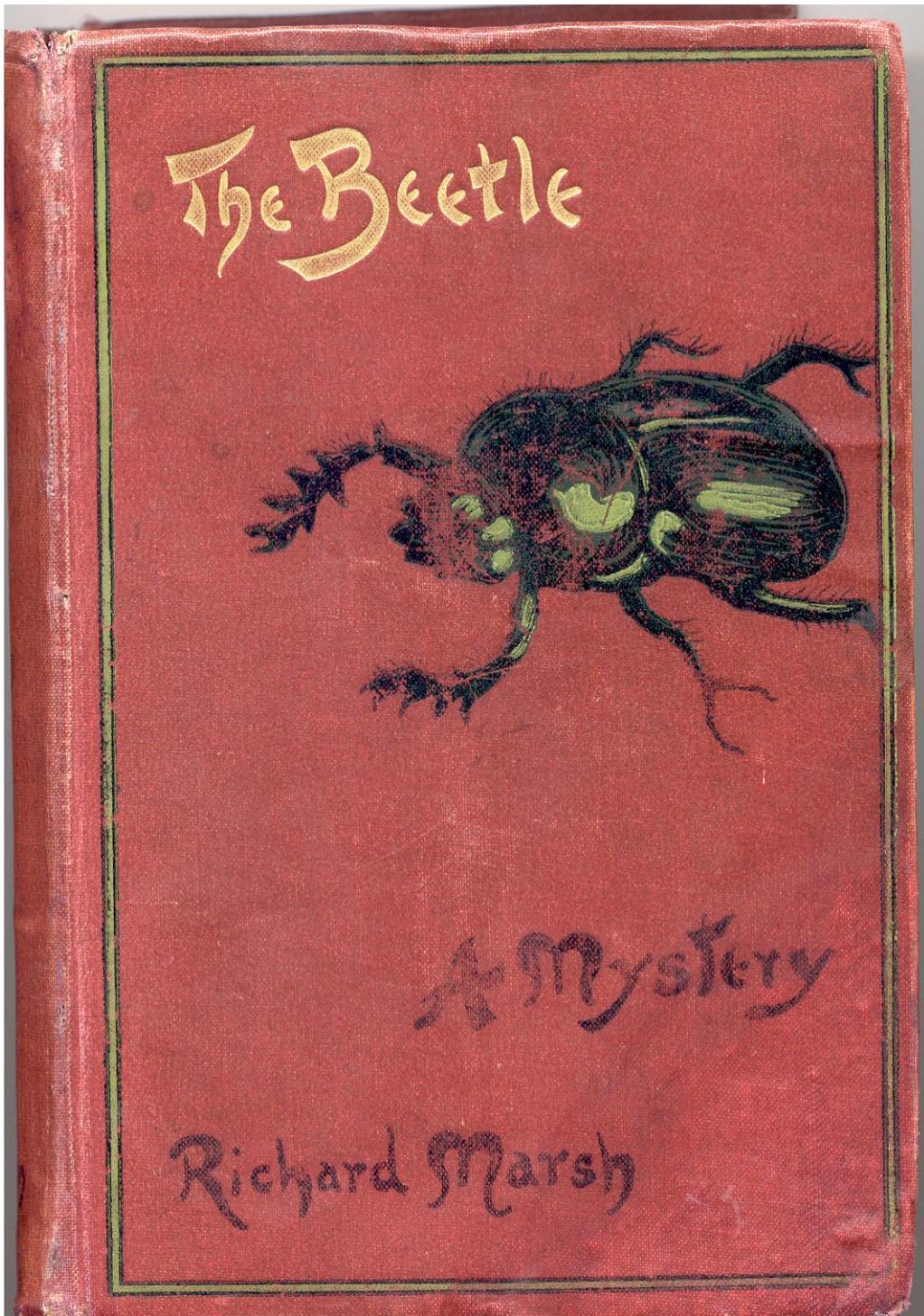


Figure 2: *The Beetle: A Mystery*. London: Skeffington, 1897.

The cover of Skeffington's 6s. one-volume edition of *The Beetle*. A great black beetle scampers across a red background.

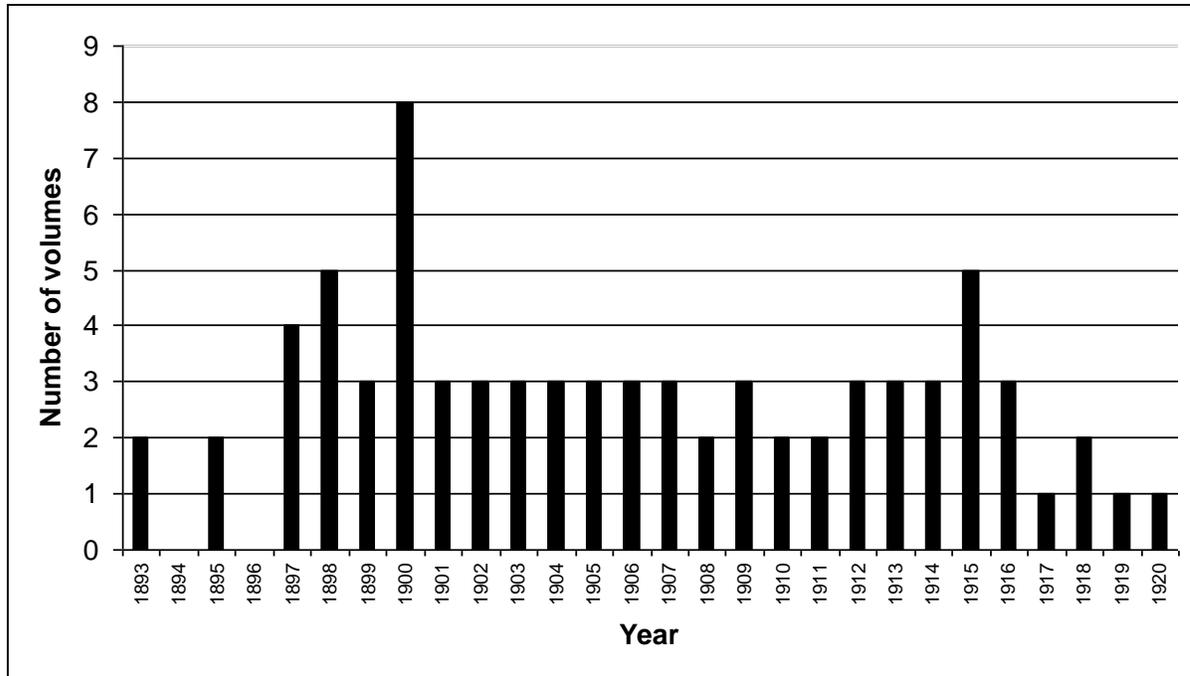


Figure 3: Richard Marsh’s volume-form publication, 1893-1920.

The beginning of Marsh’s career was characterised by productive instability. From 1901, his publication pattern settled into a remarkably even rate of production, with 1908-11 as a relatively quiet period. The peak in 1915 resulted from the author’s death.

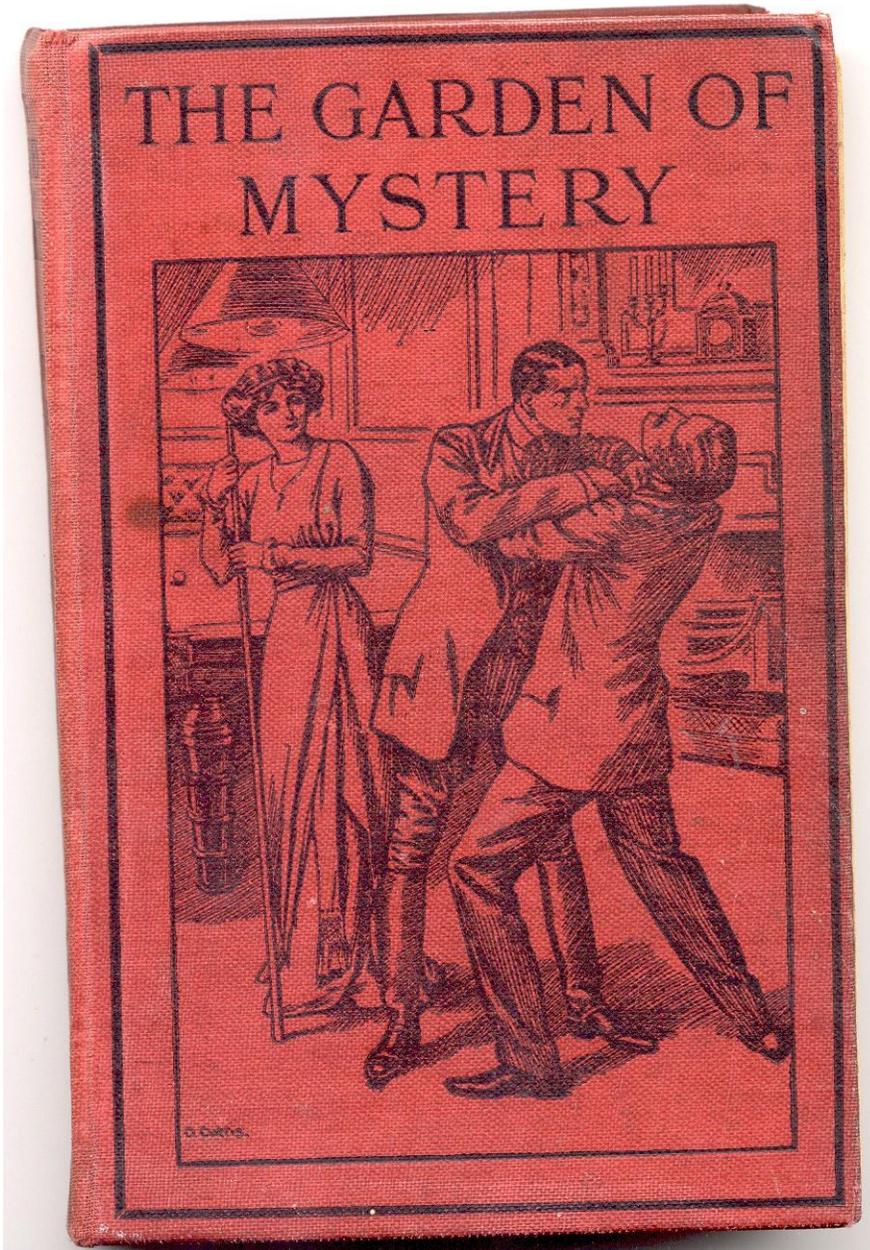


Figure 4: Popular edition, *The Garden of Mystery*. London: John Long, c. 1920.

John Long issued Marsh's novels in cheap but fairly attractive pocket editions at 6d. The dramatic cover, reproduced as the frontispiece, was designed to attract the purchaser.

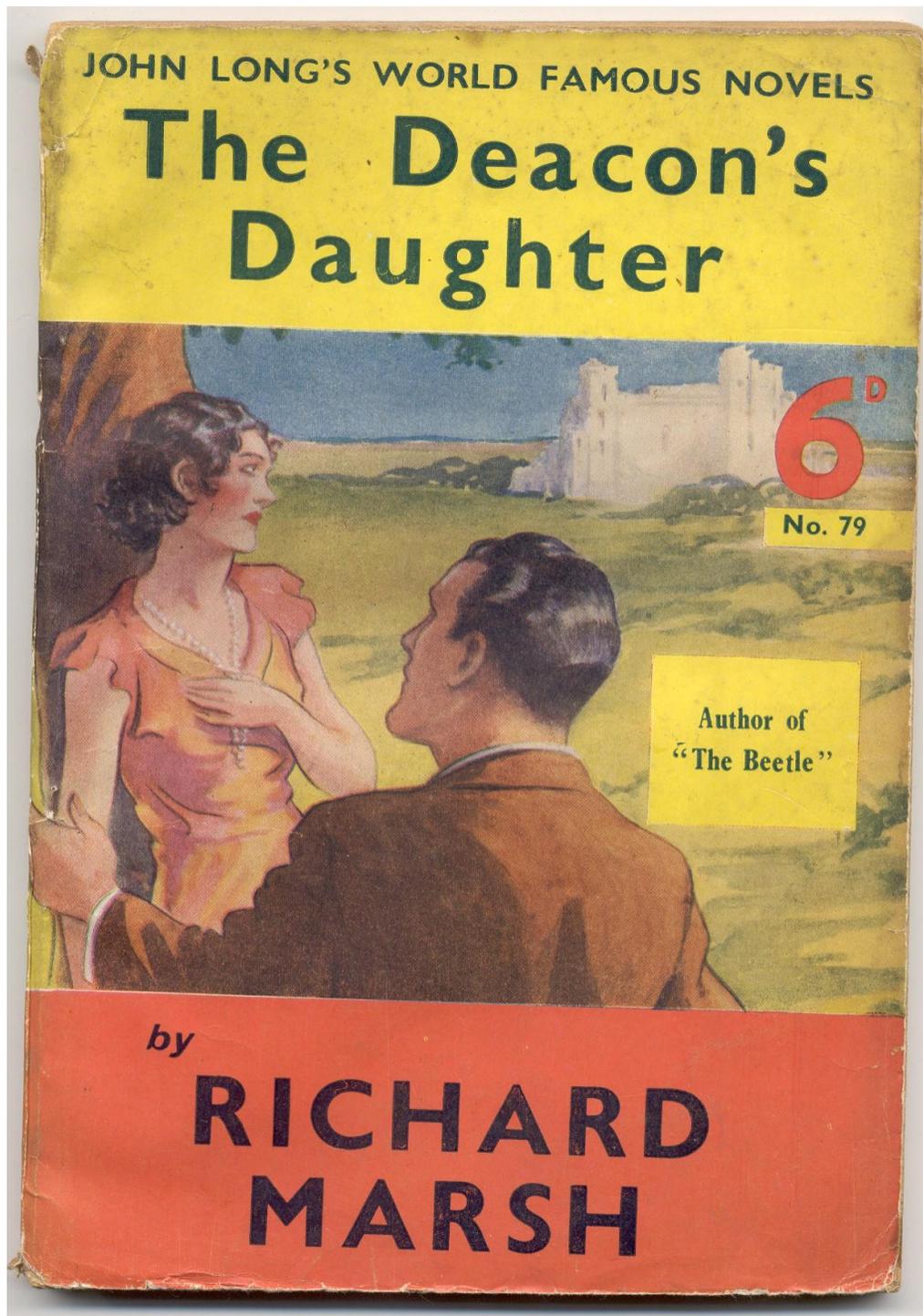


Figure 5: *The Deacon's Daughter*. London: John Long, (n.d.).

This paperback edition of Marsh's posthumous novel sells itself by its colourful cover, 6d. price, and the name of Richard Marsh, "Author of 'The Beetle.'"

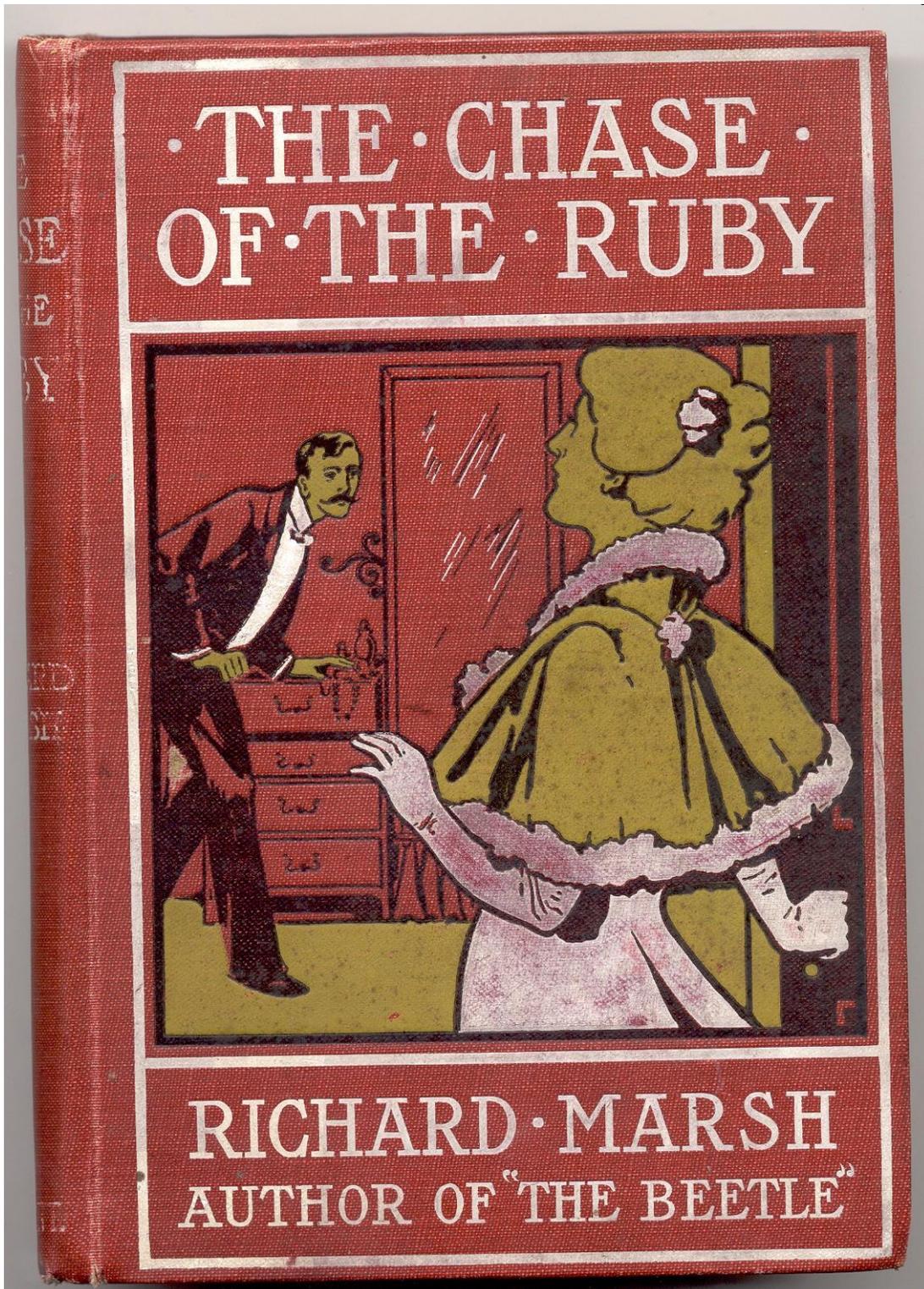


Figure 6: *The Chase of the Ruby*. London: Skeffington, 1900.

The cover of this Skeffington novel refers readers to *The Beetle*.

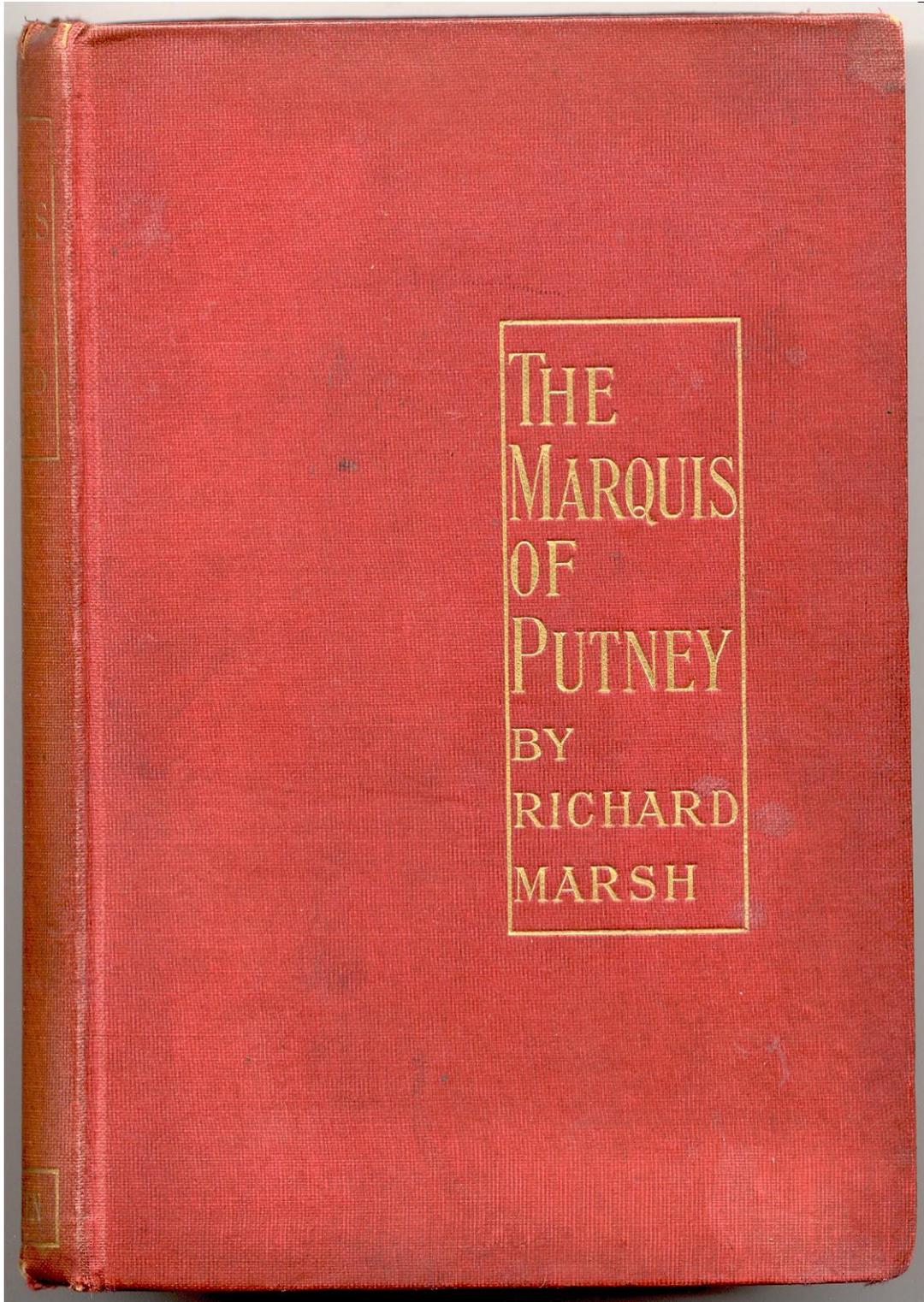


Figure 7: *The Marquis of Putney*. London: Methuen, 1905.

From the early twentieth century, Marsh's volumes assumed a uniform appearance of red covers and gilt text to front and spine.

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