In the August 21, 1858 issue of Household Words, Wilkie Collins attempted to identify and understand a new mass audience for serialized fiction. In his article, titled “The Unknown Public,” Collins wrote, “An immense public has been discovered: The next thing to be done is, in a literary sense, to teach that public how to read.” Yet discerning what type of education this might entail is no easy task, as the question of how Victorians read serialized fiction remains a topic of much debate and study today. Serial readers not only received information from the various contents of the Victorian periodical but also actively rearranged the ideas embedded within each periodical to reach a unified meaning from the reading experience. A term that encapsulates this active sense of Victorian serial reading is “tessellated reading,” in which the reader fits texts or pieces of texts together to create a mosaic of meaning. A tessellation is necessarily made up of multiple pieces; thus, the term “tessellated reading” emphasizes the multiple texts with which a reader engages in a periodical. To illustrate this reading practice, I turn to the role of Robinson Crusoe in Wilkie Collins’s serial novel, The Moonstone (1868).

The Moonstone was published in thirty-two weekly installments in All the Year Round from January 4 to August 8, 1868. Although the central object of the text is the titular diamond, another predominant object circulates in the text: narrator Gabriel Betteredge’s favorite book, Robinson Crusoe. Betteredge’s sentimental attachment to Robinson Crusoe can certainly not be doubted; he turns to his well-loved novel in times of need or crisis, praises its sometimes prophetic merits, and quotes from it frequently. Yet Betteredge’s treatment of the book, and his interaction with others regarding it, take on new meaning when considered in relation to other texts in the pages of All the Year Round, most specifically, advertisements.
Betteredge immediately establishes a connection with his reading audience by presenting himself as a reader. Though he places immense sentimental value on his favorite book, he cannot detach that value from the book’s value as a physical market object. The materiality of Betteredge’s Robinson Crusoe has largely been ignored in favor of his emotional attachment to the text, but I argue that the two are inseparable. Some scholars, like Lilian Nayder, explore Betteredge’s connection to Robinson Crusoe through the imperialist elements in each, but there is another facet to this attachment to Crusoe that is tied to the materiality of Betteredge’s favorite book.

Betteredge quotes directly from Robinson Crusoe seven times. His use of the novel is curiously unusual: every time he introduces a direct quote, he gives a specific page number. References to specific pages suggest Crusoe’s materiality as a book. The pages are inextricably tied to Betteredge’s belief in their wondrous, intangible effects. Often Betteredge also offers a qualitative assessment while introducing the quote: “Before I had occupied myself with that extraordinary book five minutes, I came on a comforting bit (page one hundred and fifty-eight)” or “Before I had been at it five minutes, I came to this amazing bit—page one hundred and sixty-one—as follows.” The combination of specificity in page number and consistently positive critique reads as a testimony to the quality of Robinson Crusoe as a product.

Perhaps nowhere else in the novel does Betteredge more embody this voice of product testimonial than at the end of the first chapter. Betteredge writes,

I am not superstitious; I have read a heap of books in my time; I am a scholar in my own way. Though turned seventy, I possess an active memory, and legs to correspond. You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as ROBINSON CRUSOE never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years—generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco—and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad—ROBINSON CRUSOE. When I want advice—ROBINSON CRUSOE. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much—ROBINSON CRUSOE. I have worn out six stout ROBINSON CRUSOES with hard work in my service. On my lady’s last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and ROBINSON CRUSOE put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.
Betteredge seems initially to be speaking of the sentimental and metaphorically medicinal value of *Robinson Crusoe*. Yet his conclusion is starkly fiscal: “Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.” The shift from sentiment to cash is perhaps not so abrupt, however, when we consider what language Betteredge emulates in this passage: the language of the testimonial advertiser. He begins his consumer testimony by establishing a sense of ethos, presenting himself as a learned man whose taste should be trusted and emulated. Next, he embodies the language of the cure-all popular medicine advertiser. No matter the symptom, *Robinson Crusoe* is the best medicine.

Betteredge’s language here mirrors the testimonials in a Keating’s Cough Lozenges advertisement at the beginning of the January 4, 1868 issue of *All the Year Round*, the same issue in which Betteredge’s testimony appears. The advertisement lists the many symptoms that Keating’s Cough Lozenges cure—“coughs,” “asthma,” “incipient consumption,” and “bronchial affections.” Accompanying this list are two testimonials from consumers, one of whom writes, “For many years I have been more or less troubled with a cough, but during last winter it became so bad that I could scarcely read aloud. Having taken other remedies . . . without obtaining relief, I tried your Lozenges, which are very palatable, and was agreeably surprised at the result of the trial.” Betteredge echoes this testimonial-as-advertisement approach, and readers of this issue of *All the Year Round* could tessellate meaning from the placement of the ad and Betteredge’s testimony. Connecting these two texts suggests Betteredge is not speaking purely from sentimental admiration for *Crusoe* but also from a commercial interest in how it fares as a product. His product, *Robinson Crusoe*, seems to be as curative and ephemeral as the lozenges. The book can be used and “worn out.” Like medicine, its work is temporary: to reach the metaphorical or spiritual value of the book, Betteredge must wear out the physical object. Even as he describes his emotional attachment to *Crusoe*, Betteredge cannot fully escape conceiving of the object as a physical commodity.

The use of *Robinson Crusoe* in *The Moonstone* is more complex than it first appears: not only does the fictional Betteredge treat the novel as a commodity, but Collins invokes an actual commodity. The similar language of Betteredge and the Keating’s advertisement offers a sense of intertextuality between the different contents of the *All the Year Round* issue, but Collins stretches this intertextuality even further in the precise details that close Betteredge’s testimonial. Betteredge’s abrupt conclusion, “Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain,” is striking its adherence to typical advertising language of the period. Though the specificity of the book’s appearance and price could be interpreted as a Barthesian reality effect, the amalgamation of testimony,
price, appearance, and page numbers suggests something quite different. Betteredge, our fictional narrator, refers us to an actual book. The page numbers Betteredge cites suggest that Collins worked from one of two possible editions of Robinson Crusoe.

The first, published in 1866, is a Cambridge University edition produced by Macmillan & Company and edited by Cambridge scholar J. W. Clark. The second possibility appears to be an identical text, again published by Macmillan for Cambridge. The only differences are the absence of Clark’s name and the addition of a preface by Henry Kingsley. This edition was printed in 1868, the same year that The Moonstone ran in All the Year Round. The pagination of the two editions is the same, but Betteredge’s description of his book as “bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain” resonates more with the 1866 edition. This edition was bound in blue, though binding can often vary and is not the most stable marker of a book’s identity. More importantly, then, the title page of the 1866 edition includes an illustration, likely the picture to which Betteredge refers (see figure 1). The illustration, by John Everett Millais, depicts Crusoe reading the Bible. Betteredge, as a narrator reading, mentions an image in a book of another narrator reading. Betteredge’s reference to the illustration again offers a tessellated reading experience, as the similarity between Betteredge’s action and the image represented in the illustration mirror each other, tying the two texts together in the creation of meaning.

Further evidence that Clark’s edition of Robinson Crusoe is Betteredge’s copy is the price. Betteredge identifies his edition’s price as “four shillings and sixpence.” The price for the 1868 edition is commonly listed at three shillings, sixpence—not a match. However, a Macmillan advertisement from the November 24, 1866 issue of the Reader lists Clark’s edition, The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, at “4s. 6d.” The prices are the same. The October 31, 1868 issue of All the Year Round (which included the eighth narrative of The Moonstone) also listed the Clark edition at “4s. 6d.” for plain-cloth volumes, though “morocco plain” and “morocco extra” bindings cost seven shillings, sixpence and ten shillings, sixpence, respectively. The price of Betteredge’s copy of Robinson Crusoe is equal to the price of a Clark edition bound in cloth. The butler owns the least expensive edition. What are the implications of Gabriel Betteredge, a fictional narrator writing in 1848, referring to a real book that wasn’t published until 1866?

J. W. Clark’s 1866 edition belongs to a series called the Golden Treasury. This series emerged from The Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics, published in 1861 by Macmillan and edited by Francis Turner Palgrave. The goal of this first book was to establish a “true national anthology” of British literature, and Charles Morgan writes that “from the publishers’ point of view what followed the book was of even greater importance than
the book itself, for it was the origin of the whole *Golden Treasury Series*, which included such enduring volumes as Matthew Arnold’s selections from Byron and Wordsworth.” The Clark edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, then, was produced in the somewhat scholarly pursuit of establishing Daniel Defoe as a canonical British author. That Betteredge, a servant, would read a scholarly edition is strange, but the intent of the Golden Treasury series gives weight to *Robinson Crusoe* in *The Moonstone*. The two most pronounced objects in the novel are the Indian diamond, a testament to foreignness, and Clark’s *Crusoe*, a testament to Britishness. Unlike the Indian moonstone, however, the novel possesses the status of *real* commodity, indicating its dual nature as what John Plotz calls “portable property.” While it retains the metaphorical portability of Crusoe’s story, it also more directly indicates the object’s market value, creating a tension between sentiment and cash that resonates with that tension in the diamond itself. This edition was a real, buyable commodity for Collins’s readers.
Collins was certainly aware of the economic value of books. In a letter to one of his many publishers, Collins wrote, “If this [new work] succeeds, the publishers will recover their lost confidence in my previous works [No Name and Armadale]—and I may become once more a saleable commodity in the English book market.” Collins refers to himself as a “saleable commodity,” and though he may be using himself as a metonym for his books, this self-identification also indicates his understanding of his occupation as profitable. A May 13, 1867 letter explores this concept in greater detail. In this letter, addressed to All the Year Round editor William H. Wills, Collins explains his difficulty in establishing a proper pay rate for the writing of The Moonstone. He writes, “The other question, about the Serial story is not so easily settled. I ought to have remembered—when I suggested consulting the ‘No Name’ precedent—that the literary commodity purchased of me then was my time, and not the right of periodically publishing my book.” Collins distinguishes between two kinds of commodities he can offer: his time and his book, his process and his product. He continues with the assertion, “I am not quite sure that I can undertake the responsibility of asking terms, because my estimate this time cannot be based on facts and figures—and the Virginity of a new book is as difficult a thing to sell—(with or without benefit of clergy) as the Virginity of a new Girl!” Collins’s letter demonstrates a widely recognized trait of the popular literary figure: his attention to the business and commercialism of professional authorship. It also alludes to the tricky market navigation required by authors of serialized fiction. In late 1867, Collins had agreed not only to publish The Moonstone in Charles Dickens’s weekly journal All the Year Round but also to publish the work serially in America with Harper & Brothers, and in three-volume format with William Tinsley. Collins sold The Moonstone’s first run in three different ways to three different publishers, a shrewd business move by an author well-versed in Victorian publishing’s many profitable opportunities. Identifying the “virgin” book becomes decidedly more difficult. The letter indicates Collins’s anxiety about selling his book for the greatest profit, and that profit was certainly increased by advertising.

In addition to an understanding of the book as commodity, Collins understood the importance of promoting his product. On July 11, 1868, Collins wrote a letter to William Tinsley, who published The Moonstone in three-volume format just as the novel was nearing its final serial installments in All the Year Round. Collins addressed the disappointing library subscription figures of the three-volume Moonstone:

Both you and I might have good reason to feel discouraged, if this List indicated anything more important than the timidity of the Libraries—and possibly the poverty of the Libraries as well. As things are, we have only to wait
a few weeks—until the book has had time to get talked about. I don't attach much importance to the Reviews—except as advertisements which are inserted for nothing. But the impression I produce on the general public of readers is the lever that will move anything—provided the impression be favourable. If this book does what my other books have done, in the way of stimulating the first circle of readers among whom it falls—that circle will widen to a certainty. It all depends on this . . . This book, let us hope, will be another example of that sort of legitimate sale [like *The Woman in White*] which springs from a genuine demand.¹⁹

Collins’s letter suggests several things, most prominent among them Collins’s belief in word-of-mouth promotion. He claims that the key to *The Moonstone*’s profitability lies in “stimulating the first circle of readers among whom it falls,” a principle so important to Collins that he underlined it emphatically. He evidently took this concept quite literally; in a July 1, 1867 letter to his mother, Collins described the reaction of his mentor and editor, Charles Dickens, upon first reading a manuscript version of *The Moonstone*. Collins writes, “You will be glad to hear that Dickens is delighted with my new story. He thinks the old man excellent—and he predicts that this will be the most successful book I have ever written. . . You may imagine, from this, what the effect will be on the General reader.”²⁰ Dickens’s reaction to *The Moonstone* indicates or foreshadows the reaction of the “General reader.”²¹ His enthusiasm as the first reader can spread to that “first circle” of general readers, who in turn can share their enthusiasm with an even wider circle. Collins believes that his initial readers, though few in number, can act as advertisers of his work, and that the novel’s popularity will then spread by osmosis as readers refer the book to their friends and family. Betteredge engages in this same word-of-mouth promotion in his testimonial and his constant suggestions to both the reader and characters within the narrative to read *Robinson Crusoe*.²²

Collins’s letter to Tinsley also elucidates the potential for advertising that Collins recognizes in published reviews of his work. He refers to book reviews as “advertisements which are inserted for nothing.”²³ Unlike the word-of-mouth advertising of general readers, the success of which depends upon positive opinions, the evaluation of a professional reviewer is meaningless to Collins. The book review, be it positive or negative, acts as advertisement merely by giving attention to the work by naming it in print. Collins recognizes that the simple mention of a book in print acts as advertising, a concept that applies to *Robinson Crusoe* in *The Moonstone* as well. In this way, *Crusoe* works as advertisement at both the public and private level. Betteredge establishes a connection with the reader, suggesting and implying often that one should read *Crusoe*. He tells his readers, for example, “I next applied the one infallible remedy—that remedy being,
as you know, ROBINSON CRUSOE.” Betteredge’s repeated mention of Crusoe embodies Collins’s beliefs about attention in print as free advertisement. This advertising function is reinforced by traditional advertisements in the pages of All the Year Round. Advertisements that echo Betteredge’s language or promote his edition of Robinson Crusoe strengthen the relationship between Betteredge’s testimony and advertising. Yet Betteredge’s assessment of Crusoe is more than a book review “inserted for nothing” because it is part of a narrative that is intricately connected to other texts in the periodical. Understanding Robinson Crusoe as an advertised commodity, then, is not only a result of studying Collins’s opinion of advertising his own works, but it is also an outcome of a tessellated reading of All the Year Round. In other words, while the author may construct this intended meaning, the reader may also tessellate it.

Converting Consumers: Reading Robinson Crusoe as Fetish

To understand Betteredge’s impetus for advertising Robinson Crusoe, we must briefly turn from the reading practices of Victorian serial readers to the reading practices of the narrator himself. Betteredge’s belief in the curative powers of Robinson Crusoe stems from his assertion that the book functions in magical or prophetic ways. Betteredge reads the novel at random, opening the book to whatever page feels right and quoting the passages he finds there. This tendency to quote illustrates Plotz’s concept of quotation as a form of portability—spreading texts “across historical, authorial, national, and, not least, generic boundaries.” Betteredge’s quotations also demonstrate how he reads Robinson Crusoe discontinuously, like a Bible. In his article, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible,” Peter Stallybrass argues that the book or codex became central to Christianity, and Western tradition more broadly, in the Middle Ages. Unlike scrolls, which forced a person to read continuously through a text, the hinge and page functions of a book “led to the cutting up of the bible into specific, usable parts.” The Bible could be read discontinuously or indexically. The distinction between discontinuous and tessellated reading is a distinction between the number of texts read. In both reading practices, the reader actively shapes meaning by choosing which passages to read, in what order, and how to connect those passages to each other. But unlike the readers of The Moonstone, who connect passages from multiple texts in All the Year Round, Betteredge connects passages from a single source, Robinson Crusoe. He reads discontinuously, searching for passages that relate to a specific concern. However, Betteredge often presents this search as unintentional or as the will of providence. This further separates Betteredge’s reading practice from that of readers of The Moonstone in All the Year Round. Unlike tessellated reading, which requires the agency of the
reader in drawing connections between texts, Betteredge places (or at least appears to place) agency in the hands of a divine source separate from himself. His very first sentence displays a treatment of *Crusoe* as Bible: “In the first part of *ROBINSON CRUSOE*, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find it thus written.” The syntax of “find it thus written,” rather than identifying an author, parallels the language of religious texts (“it is written”), whose authors are divine and unnamed.

Betteredge’s discontinuous reading also contributes to the network of *The Moonstone* by tying the text to Robinson Crusoe’s own reading practices. Stranded on an island, Crusoe takes out some tobacco and a Bible and says, “Only having open’d the Book casually, the first Words that occur’d to me were these, *Call on me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me.* The Words were very apt to my Case, and made some Impression upon my Thoughts at the Time of reading them.” Betteredge’s *sortes biblicae* approach to *Robinson Crusoe*, then, resonates with Crusoe’s own discontinuous reading practices. To make this connection between Betteredge and his idol, a reader must tessellate, drawing together the similarities between the narrators in both texts. Here, the reader’s understanding of *The Moonstone* is enhanced not only by tessellating texts within *All the Year Round* but also by moving outside the periodical. Recognizing the correlation between Betteredge and Crusoe requires familiarity with Defoe’s text. Success in understanding Betteredge’s relationship to Crusoe, then, depends upon whether the reader has done precisely what Betteredge urges every reader to do: read *Robinson Crusoe*.

Betteredge’s desire to have everyone read *Crusoe*, the impulse behind his constant testimonial advertising, suggests that he treats the book as a fetish. This fetishization is often framed in religious language. Betteredge seeks to “convert” his readers to *Crusoe*, and he uses testimonial advertising in attempting this conversion. Yet this fetishization of *Robinson Crusoe* cannot be separated from its commoditization. *Crusoe* may be a religious experience, but one must buy it first. Peter Logan argues that fetishism is a relative term depending not on a single person but on a relationship between the fetishizer and others. Fetishism “contains three points: (1) an object of some kind, real or imagined, (2) an ‘insider’ who attributes supernatural qualities to the object, and (3) an ‘outsider’ who contradicts the insider and reasserts the simple materiality of the object.” These three elements make up the fetish, fetishist, and critic, respectively. *Crusoe* is the fetishized object; as the fetishizer, Betteredge attributes magical or spiritual qualities to the book. He believes the book prophesizes events in his own life. For example, when the three Brahmins approach the Verinder estate, a host of characters assess the danger of the situation. Betteredge, meanwhile, turns to *Robinson Crusoe*:
In this anxious frame of mind, other men might have ended by working themselves up into a fever; I ended in a different way. I lit my pipe, and took a turn at ROBINSON CRUSOE.

Before I had been at it five minutes, I came to this amazing bit—page one hundred and sixty-one—as follows:

“Fear of Danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than Danger itself, when apparent to the Eyes; and we find the Burthen of Anxiety greater, by much, than the Evil which we are anxious about.”

The man who doesn’t believe in ROBINSON CRUSOE, after THAT, is a man with a screw loose in his understanding, or a man lost in the mist of his own self-conceit! Argument is thrown away upon him; and pity is better reserved for some person with a livelier faith.

The passage illustrates that Betteredge views Crusoe as something to “believe in,” an object with the supernatural power to foresee and reflect on its reader’s situation. Betteredge’s assertion that a nonbeliever who ignores his solid evidence must have a “screw loose in his understanding” indicates the narrator’s tension or frustration regarding those critics who remain outside the fetish.

The multiple narrators of The Moonstone allow the reader not only to see Robinson Crusoe from Betteredge’s perspective but also to see the butler’s fetishization of the book from the perspective of figures outside the fetish, such as Franklin Blake and Ezra Jennings. Betteredge’s interview with Jennings in the Fourth Narrative of The Moonstone (an extract from Jennings’s journal) demonstrates this exact tension between the insider and outsider of a fetish, the believer and nonbeliever. Jennings describes Betteredge’s disappointment and shock upon learning that Jennings had not read Robinson Crusoe since childhood. Betteredge retrieves his own copy to enlighten Jennings, who notes that the “dirty and dog’s-eared book . . . exhaled a strong odour of stale tobacco.” Jennings, an outsider to the fetish, recognizes only the book’s materiality (and quite a different materiality from Betteredge’s commodified Crusoe attractively “bound in blue”). Betteredge’s cathartic and spiritual mixture of reading and smoking, for Jennings, leaves behind only a displeasing odor. In addition, Jennings presents Betteredge as a bit of a loon; the old man mutters exclamations to himself as he retrieves his book. These negative observations place Jennings distinctively outside the magic spell of Crusoe. He remains outside this spell despite Betteredge’s attempts at conversion or advertisement (“and to what remedy did I apply? . . . to This Book!”), noting only that the smell of stale tobacco grew “stronger than ever.” The odor apparently grows with Betteredge’s enthusiasm. Betteredge’s surprise turns to curt displeasure, as he excuses himself from a man unwilling to “buy” the curative properties of Crusoe. Betteredge’s testimony to Jennings is both a
failed attempt at conversion to the fetish and a failed advertisement of the product to an uninterested customer.

Betteredge’s recognition that nonbelievers exist often compels him to attempt conversions to the belief in the curative properties of Robinson Crusoe. Such attempts illustrate the dual natures John Plotz identifies in Victorian novels: private and public, singular and multiple. Betteredge’s belief in Crusoe is at once a private, personal conviction and a public admission of such to his readers. He attempts both private conversion of single characters—most notably Franklin Blake—and public conversions of his reading audience. Yet Betteredge’s duality in this regard mirrors the duality of the object itself; Betteredge treats Crusoe as both commodity and fetish. It contains both fiscal and spiritual worth. For example, Betteredge tries to convert Franklin several times. In an early attempt, Betteredge explains, “I felt quite at my wits’ end how to console him, when it suddenly occurred to me that here was a case for the wholesome application of a bit of ROBINSON CRUSOE.” But when he brings his beloved book to Franklin, the young man tosses it aside and “flounder[s] into his German-English gibberish on the spot.” Franklin will not give up his “German” belief system to embrace Crusoe. Like Jennings, he is a disinterested consumer. At the close of the novel, however, Betteredge believes he has found success. He discovers a passage about Crusoe’s wife expecting a baby and reads it to Franklin. Betteredge joyously shares the reaction with his readers: “‘Betteredge!’ says Mr. Franklin, with equal solemnity, ‘I’m convinced at last.’ He shook hands with me—and I felt that I had converted him.” Betteredge presents this exchange as both the conversion of Franklin to the fetish of Crusoe (he now believes in its spiritual, curative properties) and the conversion of Blake from potential customer to actual buyer of Crusoe as commodity.

Betteredge’s attempts to convert his readers differ from his attempt to convert Franklin Blake. For Franklin, Betteredge’s testimony focuses on the spiritual value of Robinson Crusoe. For readers, however, Betteredge also addresses the fungible value the book, an addition that reflects the readers’ positions as potential customers of the actual Clark edition. Perhaps this explains why Betteredge’s more sustained discussions of Crusoe occur in his narration rather than in conversation with other characters. He often addresses his readers directly, though their identity may shift depending on his mood or topic. In one moment, he writes, “She had just as many faults as you have, ma’am,” and at another, “Study your wife closely.” The shifting identity of his audience suggests that Betteredge works to appeal to a wide and varied group of readers. He hedges his bets most often by using the universal “you.” Early on Betteredge establishes a confidential relationship with his readers. For example, when Franklin asks Betteredge what
he wants, the narrator responds not to Franklin but to the readers: “What did I want? I didn’t tell HIM; but I’ll tell YOU, in confidence. I wanted a whiff of my pipe, and a turn at ROBINSON CRUSOE.” This confession reads almost like an insider’s tip for discerning customers. Again, a double assumption is at work, for although Betteredge promises he gives this insider information “in confidence,” in actuality, it is printed in the pages of All the Year Round for thousands to see. This direct address to the reader, and others like it, is Collins’s glorified word-of-mouth in action. Should Betteredge succeed in converting readers to the fetish, he has simultaneously widened the circle of potential consumers of the product.

Shifting the Tiles: Navigating Tessellated Texts

Given the testimonial nature in which Betteredge presents the novel and the fact that the edition is a real, buyable commodity for Collins’s readers, it is possible to read the role of Robinson Crusoe in The Moonstone as a kind of Victorian product placement. Although targeting audiences seems very much a development of the twentieth century, it has definite roots in the Victorian period, as Emily Steinlight explores in her article, “‘Anti-Bleak House’: Advertising and the Victorian Novel.” Steinlight discusses the interdependent relationship between serial fiction and print advertising, arguing that an advertisement in a serial novel may “easily find its way into literary form” and that “in addressing themselves either to the reader, to the text, or to Dickens himself, the figured commodities in advertisements imply that the reader may be interpellated by the address of a thing.” In the case of The Moonstone, Betteredge seems to interpolate on behalf of the Clark edition of Robinson Crusoe. Similarly, Jennifer Wicke argues that advertising and fiction do not have the rigid distinctions that one might assume. This common assumption emerges from an inaccurate belief in separate origins. Wicke suggests that rather than being antithetical, advertising and fiction possess a dialectical relationship and are “cultural kindred.” Print technology established the opportunity for the creation of advertising, and advertisements originally appeared in printed fiction, “at home in the book.” In addition, Wicke claims that nineteenth-century developments in advertising meant that “modern ‘reading’ can only arise in the dialectical space opened up between novel and advertisement.” Both Steinlight’s and Wicke’s arguments suggest that Robinson Crusoe’s dual role in The Moonstone as advertisement and fiction is a natural, non-paradoxical outcome of the relationship between texts in Victorian serialized fiction.

The sensation novel, at the height of its massive popularity in the mid-1860s, began to directly influence approaches to advertising. Sensation fiction sought to appeal to an audience’s sense of excitement and lent itself to
serialization: each installment could end with a cliffhanger, all but ensuring that readers would purchase the subsequent issue to find out what happened next. A letter from William Tinsley demonstrates readers’ enthusiasm for *The Moonstone*, a particularly successful sensation novel:

During the run of “The Moonstone” as a serial there were scenes in Wellington Street that doubtless did the author’s and publisher’s hearts good. And especially when the serial was nearing its ending, on publishing days there would be quite a crowd of anxious readers waiting for the new number, and I know of several bets that were made as to where the moonstone would be found at last. Even the porters and boys were interested in the story, and read the new number in sly corners, and often with their packs on their backs.44

Sensation fiction’s success hinged on its ability to thrill and surprise. Traditional advertising, meanwhile, was largely straightforward and informational, void of sensation and affect. The growing popularity of sensation fiction rendered most traditional advertising ineffective; it was not the kind of reading people would notice. Advertisers responded to this by mimicking the form of sensation fiction. In an 1862 *Leisure Hour* article, one journalist argues that this new advertising approach had “taken its form and pressure from a certain description of popular literature, which, being got up for the delectation of a class who read for excitement rather than for instruction, aims at the production of startling sensation.”45 Here the boundaries between fiction and advertisement are loosened, and ideas from one are borrowed for the other. The *Leisure Hour* journalist calls this approach “sensational advertising,” which he subdivides into four types. The first three—“erudite” advertising, poetic advertising, and “calamitous” advertising—all function by embodying the language of sensation novel writers.46 The last type, however, does not merely borrow from another discourse but moves to another discourse.

The fourth and final type of sensational advertising identified in the *Leisure Hour* article resonates most strongly with *Robinson Crusoe’s* role in *The Moonstone*. The journalist claims, “A fourth phase of the advertising art is one in which the ‘sensation’ is not effected by the advertisement, but the advertisement is beneficially affected by a foregone sensation.”47 It is not the language of the advertisement but its placement that matters: “A plain advertisement is drawn up in moderate language; instead of inserting it in the advertising columns, the printer, for a consideration, agrees to insert it along with the current news of the day, so that the most cursory reader of the paper shall stumble on it whether he will or no.”48 Advertisements move into non-traditional spaces to ensure that potential customers read them. Some advertisers were so concerned with embedding their work in appropriately sensational news items that they would provide “news”
for newspapers if none was readily available. The journalist remarks that one wholesale pill-dealer retained a “litterateur” on staff to “concoct startling paragraphs” just in case “there is nothing in the current news of a sensational kind, which would aid in fixing the contents of the puff in the reader’s memory.” This move ensured that readers who might skim over pieces of a periodical, such as the advertisements, in favor of more interesting or engaging items, must still tessellate those advertisements into their reading experience. In fact, by moving these advertisements into new domains, like so many tiles in a mosaic, advertisers effectively tessellated meaning for the reader.

Although Collins’s treatment of Crusoe is not so manipulative as this form of sensational advertising, there are definite parallels. The “outside” space of The Moonstone from which Crusoe moves is the issues of All the Year Round in which Collins’s serial installments were published. Macmillan advertised Robinson Crusoe in All the Year Round in the typical location reserved for ads: the pages after the table of contents and before the contents proper. Advertisements in All the Year Round were minimal, especially for a Dickens publication. Macmillan book advertisements appear in the journal a total of thirty-three times through the periodical’s thirty-six-year run, beginning with an ad in the February 23, 1867 issue. The October 31, 1868 issue of All the Year Round contains an advertisement for the J. W. Clark edition of Crusoe. The advertisement is unusual in that by this time the edition had been largely replaced in advertising spaces with Macmillan’s newer Kinglsey edition. There are no later notices for the edition; all Macmillan Crusoe advertisements in later issues of All the Year Round promote the 1868 Kinglsey edition instead. This outdated Clark edition advertisement seems almost to exist in response to the book’s appearance in The Moonstone. Robinson Crusoe, it seems, was so portable as a commodity that it moved between the pages of Dickens’s journal, from advertisement to serial novel and back to advertisement. It also moved, no doubt, from fictional reference to actual purchase as readers were swayed by Betteredge’s emotional testimonials.

Like the sensation advertising of the wholesale pill-dealer who embedded advertisements in news stories, Collins’s Crusoe advertisement depends on the principle of association. As the Leisure Hour journalist argued, “It is next to impossible for the reader who has read the records of the robbery and the murder to dismiss from his mind the hair-dye and the pill with which they are brought into juxtaposition.” To remember one is to remember the other. When the reader recalls the exciting account of the robbery, he must also recall the advertisement next to it. The two are blurred together; their borders are indistinct. This associative memory applies to Collins’ readers as well. Betteredge is rarely present without his Robinson Crusoe; he mentions the book by name forty-one times. Better-
edge is therefore identified by and associated with Crusoe, as the review of The Moonstone printed in Athenaeum demonstrates: “We fancy we should recognize old Betteredge if we were to meet him, even without a copy of ‘Robinson Crusoe’ in his hand!” Lee Erikson observes that repetition of this nature was a mnemonic device or “tag” necessary to the genre of serial fiction. It aided the reader in remembering characters from week to week. Steinlight notes that the discourse of advertising also utilized these “repeated tags.” Embedding the advertisement within the main text collapses the boundaries between the two. In The Moonstone, then, the repetitive act of association connects serial fiction and advertisement. To remember the narrator is to remember his favorite—and purchasable—novel.

In addition to advertisers, the editors, publishers, and authors of serialized fiction also used tessellated reading practices to their advantage, and Collins was no exception. Deborah Wynne claims that Victorian editors were “sensitive” to the connections readers made between texts in an issue, and editors often carefully selected and arranged materials with those possible connections in mind. For example, the installment of Collins’s No Name in which Magdalen apparently plots her future husband’s murder is followed by an article about women in prison. A connection made between the two texts might provide a clue, but in this case the connection is rather a “literary red herring” meant to mislead tessellating readers. During serial publication of The Moonstone, Collins had the unusual honor of guest-editing his own work at All the Year Round. Having complete control over the advertisements, articles, and arrangement of All the Year Round at this time, he was able to provide interconnected texts to enhance a tessellated reading (see figure 2). Lillian Nayder observes that the installment in which Betteredge identifies the Indian Brahmins as “murdering thieves” who move with “tigerish quickness” is paired with an article called “My First Tiger.” The article details a hunting expedition in Bengal, and its description of the native tour guide as wildly uncivilized in his chase after the wounded tiger resonates with Betteredge’s description of the Brahmins. Another particularly telling interaction between texts occurs in the issue containing the first installment of The Moonstone. This issue contains the prologue and first three chapters of Betteredge’s narrative as well as a poem titled “Treasure,” which immediately resonates with the diamond in Collins’s story. The poem describes two childhood friends who meet years later. One friend has pursued a life of material wealth; the other has instead chosen to become rich in sentimental and emotional attachments. This second man asks his friend, “Whose treasures shall the best endure— / Those of the rich man or the poor?” The question suggests anxiety about the material versus sentimental value in things, an anxiety reflected in Betteredge’s treatment of Robinson Crusoe as both a commodity and spiritual cure.
Figure 2. Visualization of tessellated reading of *The Moonstone* in serial form. Each text or piece of text functions as a tile which the reader arranges to form a mosaic of meaning. Images from *All the Year Round* and the 1866 Macmillan edition of *Robinson Crusoe*.
This tessellated reading of Victorian serialized publications points to the often porous boundaries between the “inside” and the “outside” of a text. Readers could collapse borders as they explored ways to connect various texts into some meaningful pattern. These collapsed borders make it easier for Macmillan’s advertising of Robinson Crusoe to transfer from outside The Moonstone to inside The Moonstone. The transfer works both ways. In an 1887 article for the Globe titled “How I Write My Books,” Collins explains how he incorporated an item from the newspaper into his novel The Woman in White:

This is what must be done, but I don’t see how to do it; no new idea comes to me; I and my manuscript have quarreled, and don’t speak to each other. One evening, I happen to read of a lunatic who has escaped from an asylum—a paragraph of a few lines only, in a newspaper. Instantly the idea comes to me of Walter Hartright’s midnight meeting with Anne Catherick, escaped from the asylum.

Yet again, borders between texts prove insignificant. This trait of Victorian serialized fiction, in which inside and outside dissolve into tessellated reading experiences, maps onto the other dual natures at work in The Moonstone.

On one hand, Robinson Crusoe in The Moonstone embodies the public address, the fiscal, the multiple, and the advertised. On the other, it embodies the private, the sentimental, the singular, and the fictive. Calling its inclusion in Collins’s work “product placement,” then, emphasizes these contradicting dual natures. Crusoe is a product in the most literal sense of the word: that which is formed from merging multiple elements together. It is both the “product” of Defoe’s mind (though Betteredge seems not to know the author exists; for him, it is the product of Robinson Crusoe) and a “product” in the marketplace. That it can be placed suggests an attention not only to location or arrangement, but as the word “placement” denotes, to the very act of this movement. Robinson Crusoe is portable, which allows it to move around the various texts of the periodical.

Crusoe’s placement within the text of The Moonstone distinguishes it from many other Victorian serial advertisements. Emily Steinlight writes of serial advertisements in the “Bleak House Advertiser”:

Unlike an advertisement for suits of clothes that vary by the season, the novel is a world apart. It transcends the time and place of its writing, and its apparent “timelessness” assures that its value does not lie in its ephemeral print medium, but in its apparent uniqueness and in its ostensibly universal and transhistorical appeal as literature. While the ads (which do not aspire to such tran-
ascendence and whose instrumental purpose is distinguished from the higher aesthetic objects of literature) may be excised without a second thought when the serial parts are sent off to the binder, not a word of Dickens’s novel can be lost in translation from serial to volume. 

Though this is may be the case for the “Bleak House Advertiser,” in which advertisements are located on separate pages, no easy excision of Robinson Crusoe’s advertisement in The Moonstone can occur. It is located within Collins’s text; it is Collins’s text. This is the peculiar challenge of understanding the function of Robinson Crusoe in Collins’s work. In its serial form, Crusoe acts as fetish and commodity for Betteredge and as product placement for serial readers. What happens to the advertising function of Crusoe when The Moonstone shifts from serial to volume form? Non-serial readers are unable to view Betteredge’s treatment of Crusoe in conjunction with similarly themed poems and articles, advertisements for the Clark edition of Robinson Crusoe, or testimonials for Keating’s Cough Lozenges. When The Moonstone is removed from its interconnected web of texts and ideas, there is certainly much that is “lost in translation,” perhaps most significantly the dual nature of Betteredge’s Crusoe as both fiction and advertisement. Without the context in which it was originally published, Betteredge’s attention to Robinson Crusoe reads as pure fetish, rather than the more complexly motivated desire to convince readers to “buy into” Crusoe as an actual commodity. Understanding the tessellated reading practices of Victorian serial fiction recovers Betteredge’s Crusoe from narrative trope or pure fiction and restores its dual nature and layered meanings, all of which combine to produce a complex understanding of the text that is reflective of the media, attitudes, and anxieties of its time period.

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NOTES

2. In 1861, James Pycroft argues of classical writing: “If you analyse the structure, you will find the words are like mosaic work: the sentences are rather tessellated than constructed; each word fitting admirably into its own place.” Pycroft, Ways and Words of Men of Letters, 17. What Pycroft applies to the structure of a sentence, here I apply to the structure of a Victorian periodical, as a mosaic of various texts that, when placed by readers in certain connections or patterns, creates meaning.
4. Ibid., 8–9.
6. Ibid.
10. “Macmillan,” Examiner, 31. Although all signs point to the 1866 J. W. Clark edition as Betteredge’s copy, one still cannot completely rule out the possibility that Collins is citing the 1868 Kingsley edition. The page numbers still match; one could consider the small image on the title page a picture (though it is a stretch); and due to bookseller competition, it is entirely possible that the more expensive Kinglsey edition might have been sold somewhere for four shillings and sixpence. Still, given that Collins began writing The Moonstone months before this edition was published, I am comfortable using Clark’s edition as Betteredge’s copy.
12. “Macmillan,” All the Year Round, 7.
14. John Plotz argues that objects in the nineteenth century were “dually endowed” with both a market value and a sentimental value. These objects possess both physical portability and “metaphorical” portability, through which cultural and social values may be circulated. Plotz, Portable Property, 2–3.
15. Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers, 172.
17. Ibid.
18. For more information on Collins’s publishing agreements for The Moonstone, see Baker, Gasson, et. al., The Public Face of Wilkie Collins. The second volume contains correspondence with Harper & Brothers and Smith, Elder. For correspondence with William Tinsley, see Baker and Clark, The Letters of Wilkie Collins, 309.
20. Meaning Betteredge. That Dickens, the master at incorporating advertising and literature, should like Betteredge the most is quite telling if we read Betteredge as the testimonial-advertiser of Robinson Crusoe.
22. In a June 30, 1867 letter to William H. Wills, Dickens writes, “I have heard read the first 3 Nos. of Wilkie’s story this morning, and have gone minutely through the plot of the rest to the last line . . . it is a very curious story—wild, and yet domestic—with excellent character in it, great mystery, and nothing belonging to disguised women or the like. It is prepared with extraordinary care, and has every chance of being a hit. It is in many respects better than anything he has done.” Quoted in Lehmann, Charles
Dickens as Editor, 360. This praise was short-lived, however, as a July 26, 1868 letter to Wills demonstrates: “The construction is wearisome beyond endurance, and there is a vein of obstinate conceit in it that makes enemies of readers.” Quoted in Lehmann, 386. Dickens’s change in opinion might be linked to personal disagreements between him and Collins at the time. For more information on their falling out, see Nayder, Unequal Partners.

28. Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, 95. Crusoe continues, “Tho’ not so much as they did afterwards.” The spiritual effect of reading the Bible wears off for him, just as the tobacco does. This notion that such reading can be used up appears again in the connection Betteredge makes between books and tobacco. He almost always reads Robinson Crusoe while smoking his pipe.
29. Marx’s commodity fetishism is a useful concept here, as Betteredge believes the spiritual or medicinal value of Crusoe is inherent in the book, rather than imposed upon the commodity by the consumer.
30. Logan, Victorian Fetishism, 8.
32. Indeed, the fictional documents that make up The Moonstone, which range from letters and written narratives to journal extracts and family papers, parallel the mosaic of texts in a Victorian periodical. Reading The Moonstone is always, to some extent, a tessellated experience.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 171.
36. Ibid., 172.
37. Ibid., 549.
38. Ibid., 52, 53.
39. Ibid., 34.
41. Wicke, Advertising Fictions, 3.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 2.
44. Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers, 170.
46. Ibid., 102–3.
47. Ibid., 103.
48. Ibid.
49. French pejorative term meaning “hack writer.”
“Sensational Advertising,” 103.

51. Macmillan was therefore a relatively new advertiser in All the Year Round by the time The Moonstone began its run in January 1868.

52. “Sensational Advertising,” 103.


54. Erikson, The Economy of Literary Form, 163.


57. The journal’s conductor, Charles Dickens, was abroad on a book tour, and its editor, William H. Wills, was ill after suffering a head injury. See Nayder, Unequal Partners, and Park, “The Story of Our Lives.”

58. Nayder, Unequal Partners, 182.


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