

The Literariness of Red Tape: Civil Service Periodical Fiction in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain

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Introduction: Public Servants in British Fiction

In the 1924 essay »Some Public Servants in Fiction«, civil servant and author Humbert Wolfe observed that a »great hush« had descended on the British civil service following the mid-century interventions of writers such as Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, as late-Victorian and turn-of-the-century novelists failed to capture the evolution of the »wan lounge in offices« into the »sinister figure of the bureaucrat«.¹ Recent scholarship has done little to alter the bleak picture painted by Wolfe in what remains one of the most thoroughgoing surveys of British civil service fiction, despite renewed interest in »novels of state« (Goodlad) and »office novels« (Jenkin-Smith).² Indeed, the historian Patrick Joyce, who eulogises continental literary representations of public administration, declares that »the British state seems to have produced a far less penetrating literature on the subject«.³ However, there are significant lacunae in this search for public servants in British literature, given that scholars have focused almost exclusively on the genre of the novel. As the present essay will demonstrate, a

very different picture emerges when one considers short fiction published in civil service magazines. Such periodical fiction clearly lacks the gravitas of »the civil service novel« à la Dickens or Trollope, but as a body of literary work produced by civil servants, it opens a fascinating window into the administrative and literary culture of British officialdom.

The first British civil service periodicals appeared in the nineteenth century, beginning with colonial reviews such as »Oriental Herald and Colonial Review« founded in 1824, and followed by domestic periodicals such as »The Civil Service Gazette« and »The Civilian«, founded in 1853 and 1869 respectively. The emergence of this type of publication in the nineteenth century may be understood as a product of the crystallisation of the civil service as a body of full-time salaried civil servants at this time. Over the latter half of the nineteenth century, the civil service underwent a process of modernisation informed by the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report, which proposed that greater professionalisation could be achieved through the introduction of entry exams.

The decades around the turn of the twentieth century saw not only an increasingly rapid expansion of the civil service, but also the appearance of a number of new periodicals aimed at state officials (e.g. »Civil Service Times« and »The Postman's Gazette«) alongside periodical publications geared towards prospective civil servants (e.g. »the Civil Service Aspirant« and »Clark's Civil Service Exam Guide«).⁴ These civil service periodicals have received relatively little scholarly attention as objects of study in their own right. However, significant contributions to the study of British civil service periodical culture have been made by Laura Rotunno, in a 2011 article that examines the post office journal »Blackfriars Magazine« (1885–1890), and by Helen Glew, in a 2017 essay on the feminist civil service periodical »Opportunity« (1921–1940).⁵ Drawing on these foundational studies, the present article investigates the literary dimension of British civil service periodical culture.⁶ I follow Rotunno and Glew in focussing on a single magazine, examining the fascinating example of »Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine« (1911–1996), the official organ of the Assistant Clerks' Association, which was formed in 1903. In order to delineate the literary culture that developed in the textual space of this trade union magazine during its first decade, the present article will first examine the ways in which civil service literature and literariness were conceptualised by contributors to the journal and then explore the themes and literary practices that define »Red Tape« fiction.

The Assistant Clerks' Association

»Red Tape« was one of several civil service trade union periodicals to appear in the early twentieth century. The magazine was established as a part of the Assistant Clerks' Association's efforts to improve its members' wages, working conditions, pensions, and avenues for promotion. In essence, as the inaugural editorial put it, the magazine aimed to bring attention to the state's »exploitation of cheap labour«.⁷ Civil service clerks had been slow to unionise, resulting largely from the »fragmentary character« of the civil service, which had been remarked upon already in the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report.⁸ Indeed, despite the overall trend towards centralisation and rationalisation at the turn of

the century, the civil service remained organisationally segmented and culturally heterogeneous. As B. Walker Watson puts it in an essay in the September 1913 issue of »Red Tape«:

*The Service is not an organic whole. It is made up of a host of unrelated grades, recruited independently in varying manner, some peculiar to certain departments, others common to them, each possessing its own traditions, each leading a separate and often jealous existence. It is a house divided and sub-divided against itself.*⁹

From a unionising perspective the cultural and organisational dividedness of the clerical civil service represented a major obstacle, in that the civil service unions that were established were driven to compete with each other in order to grow stronger and improve the lot of their members.

The non-integrated and intensely hierarchical structures of the service also resulted in a degree of uncertainty regarding the professional identity of the civil service clerk. As Michael Heller notes, this confusion stemmed fundamentally from the ambiguity of the terms »civil servant«, the application of which could be delimited in various ways, and »clerk«, which was not sufficiently »elastic [...] to cover the panoply of uses to which it was applied«.¹⁰ Moreover, the civil service was very much a caste system in which sharp distinctions were made between executive and clerical ranks:

*This was [...] the period of »Upstairs, Downstairs«, when class distinctions were still widely accepted and it was natural for the Oxford and Cambridge men in the First Division to think of Assistant Clerks, many of whom came from poor families and had not completed secondary education, as belonging to a different order.*¹¹

Indeed, the generic tag of »civil servant« elided the aforementioned socio-economic and structural cleavage of the civil service, engendering dissonances in the administrative culture of the period. Crucially, the harsh conditions of the civil service clerks were obfuscated not only by the white-collar nature of the

profession, but also by the fact that the upper tiers of the civil service consisted of Oxbridge alumni, which created a conception that the civil service as a whole was a respectable and gentlemanly domain. These organisational tensions were compounded by the gradual introduction of female civil servants during this period, a process which was seemingly resisted by many Assistant Clerks but which accelerated during WWI when a large number of women filled in for male clerks who entered the army.

Professional identification was further complicated by the clerical grading system. The late-nineteenth-century structural reorganisation of officialdom, prompted by the 1875 Playfair Commission on the Civil Service, turned the clerical civil service into a »dual labour market«, with a body of departmental clerks that was split into a higher tier – Second Division Clerks – and a lower tier – Assistant Clerks, Women Clerks and Boy Clerks.¹² Importantly, whilst the introduction of this system of cross-departmental grades stratified the clerical civil service, it also placed clerks throughout the service on common pay scales, thus creating shared interests across departments. An unforeseen consequence of the Playfair Commission's recommendations was, therefore, the acceleration of civil service unionisation.¹³ And yet, whilst the creation of all-Service grades aided the formation of unions, these unions were hamstrung, as noted above, by the competing interests of the different grades. As the official magazine of the Assistant Clerks' Association, »Red Tape« sought to dissolve such tensions, creating a sense of shared professional identity across both grades and departments. Indeed, the editorial of the October 1913 issue proclaimed that »from the outset our endeavour has been to produce a general Civil Service magazine«, thus underlining a sentiment that is implicit in the journal's subtitle, »A Civil Service Magazine«.¹⁴

The Literary Profile of a Civil Service Magazine

»Red Tape« took its politics from the Assistant Clerks' Association, yet the magazine was no mere mouthpiece for the union: it featured lively debates about civil

service and trade union matters, as well as book reviews, short fiction, poetry, comics, a correspondence column, and advertisements for civil service clubs and dances. Boldly proclaiming, »here is something new in Civil Service journalism«, the first editor, F. W. Saunderson, set out to »produce a readable, attractive magazine«, hoping that it would become »a welcome guest in the home of every Civil Servant, whatever his grade may be«.¹⁵ Stylistically, the editor's ambition was to rejuvenate the tradition of civil service periodicals, which had previously consisted of »deadly dull productions« and »the rags«.¹⁶ It seems that the magazine was highly successful in this respect. Echoing Saunderson, the historian Eric Wigham writes that »Red Tape« was »different from the few existing association journals, which were dull in format and prosaic in matter, and from independent publications like ›The Civilian‹ or ›The Civil Service Gazette‹«.¹⁷ Likewise, Bernard Newman describes »Red Tape« as »the most readable« British trade union journal of the period and as a magazine that came to serve a »valuable purpose as a Civil Service *cultural* organ«.¹⁸ The magazine was also an instant commercial hit. The first issue of 2,500 copies sold out on the first day, and the circulation of the second number was consequently increased to 5,000 copies, figures that were particularly impressive given that the membership of the Assistant Clerks' Association was approximately 2,000 at the time.¹⁹ The editorial of the third issue interpreted this widespread interest in the magazine as an »unmistakable sign that the sympathy and support of the whole body of Civil Servants [was] with the Assistant Clerks in their fight for the right to live«.²⁰ The sales figures also appear to confirm Saunderson's notion that a more colourful civil service magazine would be well received.

Poetry and fiction were especially prominent features of »Red Tape«, contributing greatly to the journal's attractiveness. Barring a dry spell towards the end of WWI, the first 100 issues of the magazine all included literary texts, which often nested among book reviews and editorial discussions of literary themes. Saunderson – who helped launch the journal and served as its editor until 1919 – had published a book of verse entitled »The Simple Folk« before taking the reins of »Red Tape«. He was aided in creating the journal's literary profile by fellow civil servant and author Harold Melvin.²¹ In other

words, the core editorial team consisted of »writer-officials«, to borrow a term coined by Ceri Sullivan.²² Sullivan describes the mid-nineteenth-century civil service as »impressively literary«, pointing to Anthony Trollope and Sir Henry Taylor as two examples of celebrated authors in the Victorian civil service.²³ Compared to their illustrious Victorian forebears, the writer-officials who contributed to »Red Tape« were by no means well-known authors – in fact, many of the literary texts featured in the journal were published anonymously or pseudonymously. And yet, »Red Tape« was »impressively literary« in a different sense: the journal had the character of a collaborative project which strove to nurture civil service literariness, chiefly by featuring civil service literature (fiction, poetry and drama) in its pages. In this way, »Red Tape« gave rise to a shared culture of literary expression that far surpassed any form of literary collectivity that existed in the Victorian civil service.

»Red Tape« editorials frequently championed the idea of a literary civil service, celebrating the figure of the writer-official and promoting individual authors in this capacity. The inaugural issue of the magazine proudly featured congratulatory messages from Shan F. Bullock, author of »Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk« (1907), and Austin Phillips, author of »Red Tape« (1910), under the headline »The Service's Two Novelists Write to Us«.²⁴ The praise and encouragement extended by these two writers to the newly launched journal indicates that the civil service could be a highly supportive milieu for writers; at the same time, the inclusion of these notes in the very first issue betrays an editorial attempt to present »Red Tape« as a part of a broader civil service literary scene. This editorial ambition distinguishes »Red Tape« from a journal like »Blackfriars Magazine«, in which there emerged what Rotunno describes as a highly »circumscribed« community of contributors.²⁵ By contrast, »Red Tape« positioned itself as a hub in a larger literary and journalistic network. It regularly republished literary pieces (mainly poetry) sourced from other civil service periodicals, giving due credit to those magazines. Here, Saunderson's editorials set the tone, engaging in a decidedly outward-looking form of literary networking and patronage. Likewise, »Red Tape« book reviews frequently called attention to new publications by civil servants. For instance, in the note

»A New Service Writer«, Saunderson lauded a »booklet of prose and poem« written by »one of the workers in the G.P.O.«.²⁶ Similarly, a review of F. W. Turner's »Esprit de Corps« announced that, »From the Post Office Savings Bank [...] comes a likeable little book of Civil Service sketches«.²⁷

The editor's emphasis on the literariness of the civil service is encapsulated in an inspirational November 1915 editorial that called for the journal's readership to utilise their uncommon literary and artistic talents:

*There is no profession which boasts so much vagrant cleverness and culture amongst its members as the Civil Service. From time immemorial the king's servant has been the patron and the amateur of the fine arts. An amateur, we take it, is a person who works for the joy of the working. Well, you who write, you who draw, you who have mastered the intricacies of verse, have you paid your footing in the Civil Service? Have you shown due gratitude for the opportunity which the Service gives you to gratify your tastes?*²⁸

Here, the editor not only congratulated colleagues on their sophistication, artistry and rich heritage but also, rather ambiguously, proposed that they should be grateful for the opportunities that their occupation provided. This position clearly contradicts the journal's messaging regarding the Assistant Clerks' poor working conditions and standard of living. Such a slippage or inconsistency may be read as a symptom of a more fundamental contradiction in the profile of this union magazine with literary pretensions. The literary focus of the journal might indeed be taken as evidence of the relative ease of the profession, reinforcing the public's stereotype of the »wan lounge in offices«, to repeat Wolfe's phrase.

The availability of spare time is, in fact, one of the factors that Sullivan highlights in seeking to explain the phenomenon of Victorian-era civil service literariness. Sullivan notes that Trollope once proclaimed (in a letter to a friend) that the profession gave him »ample time for other work« and that he knew »no basis for a literary career, so good as an appointment in the C service«.²⁹ More broadly, Sullivan contends that writer-officials are helped by the fact that »working in a public sector

bureaucracy is a creative and discursive process».³⁰ However, neither of these explanatory models are applicable in the case of »Red Tape« literariness. The clerks who contributed to the journal were low-income employees who worked long hours, performing strictly menial, as opposed to literary or creative, tasks.

The Assistant Clerks' routine work of copying documents may, of course, have enabled, or helped to inspire, literary forms of writing. One imagines that several poems and short stories contributed to »Red Tape« were drafted on office stationery during working hours. However, in investigating the literariness of »Red Tape«, it is necessary to go beyond media-theoretical observations about the alignment of literary and bureaucratic activities to also consider how the very idea of such an alignment shaped the cultural milieu of the clerical civil service. Here, a productive framework for understanding the literary interests of a turn-of-the-century clerk is established by Friedrich Kittler, who suggests that literature, and especially poetry, gained a new »function in the nexus of discourses« with the growing demand for skilled clerks and bureaucrats in the late-nineteenth century, in that poetry came to function as »an advertisement« for lower-level administrators, or, »poet-bureaucrats«.³¹ Faintly linked to literature through the text-centred nature of the occupation, a clerkship in a government bureaucracy held some form of promise for an aspiring writer. As a collegial self-publishing project, then, »Red Tape« sustained the idea that the clerical civil servant was well-placed to pursue literary ambitions.

An imagined community of civil service writers

»Red Tape« appears to have served the Assistant Clerks' Association very well, strengthening the union and extending its reach. Wigham notes that the journal came to function as »the medium through which members and officials talk[ed] to each other and the outside world«.³² This community-building dimension of »Red Tape« was, as already indicated, especially important given the civil service's status as »a house divided and sub-divided against itself«. This is a facet of »Red Tape« that may be understood in terms of Michael Heller and Michael

Rowlinson's exploration of how corporations have been »imagined as communities through periodicals such as company magazines«.³³ Crucially, in this type of journal, where little distinction is made between producers and readers, the discursive space tends to have a levelling effect that is conducive to a sense of unity.

The literature featured in »Red Tape« participated in the imagining of the civil service community. Notably, certain stylistic traits in the literary sketches featured in »Red Tape« reflect the aforementioned unifying or levelling dynamic. Given the terminological confusion regarding the term »civil service clerk« and the fractured nature of the workforce, the function of nomenclature in »Red Tape« fiction is particularly revealing. In these sketches, the protagonists – who are almost invariably male, clerical civil servants – are generally given an initial presentation that includes name, rank, and departmental affiliation. For example, Thomas Ripley's »Faust Up-To-Date (A Fantasy)« begins with the following introduction: »Richard who was a Boy Clerk in a Government Department [...]«.³⁴ Similarly, a story by the pseudonymous writer Skimmer announces that: »Thomson is a first-class clerk in H.M. Craniometrical Department [...]«.³⁵ However, once the protagonist's position within officialdom has been stated, the grade and department of the protagonist tend to fade into the background, having little bearing on the development of the narrative (arguably reflecting the fact that Second Division Clerks, Assistant Clerks and Boy Clerks largely performed the same tasks and occupied the same office spaces). »Red Tape« fiction thus represents a site where office politics is allowed to dissolve into a form of pure identification. Through a generality that facilitates identification, the male protagonist of the typical »Red Tape« literary sketch comes to embody the clerical civil service as such, a generic feature which seemingly served to consolidate the imagined community of civil service clerks at the expense of female civil servants.

In a celebratory note on the publication of the bound first volume of »Red Tape«, David Milne, President of the Assistant Clerks' Association, proclaimed that the journal had helped bring the Assistant Clerks together, proclaiming that they had »achieved corporate expression« in its pages.³⁶ This viewpoint raises numerous questions regarding the role of *literary*

writing as a means of imagining or constructing civil service communality. Was the journal's emphasis on literary expression conducive to a sense of belonging or was it potentially alienating for certain readers? In other words, might the magazine's vanguard of writers, flanked by other writer-officials, have formed a separate sense of group identity – an imagined community of civil service writers – potentially detrimental to the formation of a broader sense of community within the civil service?

The idea of a choice community of writer-officials is developed in a 1914 »Red Tape« sketch by Washington J. O'Donohoe entitled »An Essay in Libel«, which provides an evocative, albeit probably highly fanciful, account of the magazine's editorial staff. The story follows a prospective contributor to the magazine who »blunder[s] into a meeting of a »Red Tape« advisory committee« that is made up of core »Red Tape« writers, including Auberon Quin, David Milne, and Harold Melvin – the latter described as sitting in his »new laurels, right proud of contributing to »Red Tape«, »Punch«, and all the six-penny magazines«. ³⁷ There is a dreamlike quality to the depicted scene, in which Quin produces a »bundle of unread MSS« that the committee then proceeds to light up and smoke, a bundle containing a text submitted by the protagonist, who is watching the proceedings from the shadows, with a »memory of [earlier] contributions slaughtered«. ³⁸ This flippant, and rather self-indulgent, masochistic fantasy of cruel rejection by fellow civil service writers effectively exalts Melvin and company as a powerful literary clique. Significantly, Saunderson, the magazine's actual editor, is not amongst the writers included in this fictional committee, possibly reflecting the fact that his editorship was not made explicit in the journal, an anonymity that may be viewed as having provoked O'Donohoe's fantasies of domineering rule-by-committee. However, without a clear understanding of what O'Donohoe, or the journal's readership at large, will have known about the journal's editorship, it is hard to gauge whether O'Donohoe's satirical account of the »advisory committee« should be taken as an indication that Saunderson was in fact aided by a cabal of civil service authors, or whether the story simply represents O'Donohoe's projection of what literary civil service fraternity might look like, namely an elitist literary coterie.

The Civil Service Sketches

In addition to caricaturing Milne, Melvin and Quin, O'Donohoe's playfully libellous sketch addresses a rather contentious issue, namely the idea that the literariness of »Red Tape« was at odds with the journal's unionising aims. During the editorial meeting that O'Donohoe portrays, one of the members of the advisory committee bemoans »the amount of propaganda matter that filled the last number of the magazine«, to which another member responds with a »protest against the amount of light literature that has recently crept into the magazine, to the utter exclusion of articles calculated to rouse the fighting spirit of the men«. ³⁹ Whilst this vision of an editorial clash between unionising and literary ambitions is clearly comedic, the underlying contention is that the literariness of »Red Tape« was hampering its efficacy as a union journal. Unsurprisingly, O'Donohoe's sketch was published together with an editorial disclaimer ironically stating that »[t]he foregoing is published as an awful instance of what the immature imagination can evolve from inadequate data«. ⁴⁰

Indeed, from the journal's inception, Saunderson sought to ensure that the literary texts featured in the magazine aligned with the union's goals. Saunderson's editorials frequently called for writer-officials to turn their attention to pressing collegial issues, and, typically, one of his book reviews concluded: »One word only we would add. What does our anonymous author think of the Post Office? We should like to know«. ⁴¹ This appetite for literary texts dealing with civil service matters informed the journal's editorial policies as well, as was noted in the fourth issue of the magazine:

During the few short months which »Red Tape« has known we received offers of short stories, essays, sonnets, ballads, elegies, carols, and even epics on any and every subject under the sun—excepting the Civil Service. Now, »Red Tape« is definitely and simply a Civil Service journal, and having but 16 small pages at our disposal we have determinedly and consistently put away from us the temptation to take the easy and attractive path which leads to a meaningless jumble of miscellanea. Surely, the field is wide enough. Why, the man with eyes to see could not spend half-an-hour in the average Government

Department without experiencing bitter regret that Dickens is dead. Look about you, good writers, and when you have looked let us share your laughter.⁴²

The journal would, in other words, refrain from publishing assorted literature, only accepting texts dealing with civil service themes. This commitment to publishing civil service literature is encapsulated by the numbered »Civil Service Sketches« that appeared in the journal throughout the first decade of its existence. Many of these sketches were in actuality only tangentially linked to the civil service; notably, the pseudonymous writer Auberon Quin supplied a steady stream of pulp fiction with titles like »The Civil Service Receives a Valentine« and »The Civil Servant Takes a Country Cottage« that only addressed civil service matters very obliquely, if at all.⁴³

However, the editorial rationale was clear: literature was given a central place in the journal primarily because it was deemed a productive mode of grappling with and dramatising the issues that the Assistant Clerks' Association was seeking to address through unionisation. That is not to say that the poetry and fiction in »Red Tape« simply served to »hammer home the message« of the union, as has been suggested by Heller with regards to the role of literature in clerical union journals more broadly.⁴⁴ The journalistic aim, as outlined in the manifesto-like first editorial, was to interrogate and shed light on complicated civil service issues, and to revise widespread misconceptions about civil servants:

[W]e want to be the means whereby the man in the street may gain a clear and a truthful idea of what the Civil Service really is like to-day. There is a Civil Servant in the popular mythology who is about as unlike the real thing as one man well may be unlike another. That creature of the popular fancy is a man dignified and leisurely. He earns a large salary by the performance of work, little in bulk it is true, but vast and varied in its nature and importance. In a room, thickly carpeted and richly furnished with heavy oak or gleaming mahogany, he sits controlling the nation's affairs. [...]

That is the Civil Servant as he exists in the popular mind. Let a young man describe himself as a Civil

Servant, and though he may be a Sorter, a Postman, or even an Assistant Clerk, straightway to the mind of his hearer there springs the picture of leisurely culture we have indicated. But the last Civil Servant of that school died with Queen Victoria. And his successor? Well, what his successor is like, how he exists and moves and has his being, what his troubles are, and what he is doing to remove them, these things will be our subject-matter as month by month we place »Red Tape« in your hands.⁴⁵

The aim was, in other words, to contest and modify the popular image of the civil servant.⁴⁶ In a later editorial, Saunderson reiterated that the mission of the journal was to describe what it was like to be a clerk in the civil service, and particularly to supply »[a] vision of the reality and the greatness and the dignity of the corporate work which is being done, a sense of the living human element behind the convention and the sordidness«.⁴⁷ The magazine would provide such a vision of the clerical civil servant through a form of auto-ethnographic writing best exemplified by the »Civil Service Sketches«. These literary sketches served to capture the »living human element« of the service, to repeat Saunderson's phrase. They also functioned as a form of collegial self-representation and self-exploration. As noted above, Saunderson's editorials frequently encouraged civil service writers to interrogate complex issues concerning their professional identity. Thus, the February 1915 editorial spoke of the necessity of elucidating »the fundamental and all-too-little-regarded question as to what the actual status of the Civil Servant may be«.⁴⁸ Likewise, the editorial of the October 1912 issue declared that there was »a great work for »Red Tape« to do in making the Civil Service aware of itself«.⁴⁹ It was, in other words, not only the public that needed to re-evaluate its notions about its civil servants but also state functionaries themselves.

The »Civil Service Sketches« tended to depict the day-to-day experiences of clerical civil servants in and out of office. This type of narrative may be traced back to Victorian British literature and springs particularly from Trollope's 1857 civil service novel »The Three Clerks«. It overlaps with the genre of clerical fiction that has been described by Jonathan Wild as emerging in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁰ However, Wild's edifying

overview of clerical fiction focuses primarily on novels dealing with business clerks, and elides the question of the specificity of literary representations of civil service clerks, the distinctiveness of which needs to be considered in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of these minor genres and subgenres.

Drawing on Wild's study of clerical literature, Nicola Bishop provides the following summary of this genre:

Clerical fiction explicitly focuses on the experiences of a central clerk-figure, providing a realist description of a humdrum, yet often pathos-filled, experience of urban office work and family life in the suburbs. The central thematic concerns of the genre include the increasing mechanization of office work, the instability of social status, financial difficulty, suburban snobbery, domesticated masculinity, and the desire, often on the part of aspiring writers, to leave clerical careers.⁵¹

This characterisation of clerical fiction is largely applicable also to »Red Tape« civil service fiction. However, as Wolfe observes, civil service fiction, at its best, is interested »at first hand in the effect upon actual persons of conditions [...] in a Government office«.⁵² In other words, clerical civil service fiction cannot be viewed simply as a subgenre of clerical fiction, since it evolves from the civil service clerks' specific conditions, which differ markedly from those of business or mercantile clerks in terms of working practices, office politics, career opportunities, and their relationship to the public.

According to Wolfe and Sullivan, civil service fiction is defined by a distinctive set of aesthetic and narrative challenges, including, as Wolfe notes, the fundamental problem that »the art of Government does not fit easily into the ordinary human passion for vivid conflict«.⁵³ Indeed, frustrated with Victorian authors' half-hearted attempts to write civil service fiction, Wolfe ponders whether »there is something in the public service which refuses to be reduced to terms of life and art«.⁵⁴ Similarly, Sullivan observes that »[a]uthors who deal with public institutions must find out how to make administrative systems interesting to a reader, how to embody abstract public values, and how to make an absence of individualism seem heroic«.⁵⁵ The sketches in »Red Tape« reflect and respond to these challenges

to some extent, but, through their thematic and stylistic diversity, they also contradict Sullivan's rather prescriptive delineation of what civil service fiction »must« do.

There is also the question of the distinctiveness of *periodical* civil service fiction. As already noted, the sketches published in »Red Tape« differ from the novels examined by Wolfe and Sullivan in that they were directed first and foremost to a readership consisting of fellow civil servants. »Red Tape« fiction was also incorporated into a fairly streamlined journalistic project headed by an editor who combined literary pretensions with a trade union agenda. Moreover, as a monthly magazine, »Red Tape« enabled writers to borrow each other's themes and develop each other's ideas in a joint exploration of civil service matters. It is thus especially rewarding to approach the study of »Red Tape« fiction as a collegial endeavour, taking particular notice of thematic commonalities and stylistic interplay between texts contributed by different authors.

Sartorial Themes in »Red Tape« Fiction

The dialogic and well-nigh collaborative dimension of »Red Tape« fiction is on display in three pieces published in April, July and November of 1915 that addressed the sartorial culture of the civil service. These three texts exemplify »Red Tape« authors' interrogation of complex issues pertaining to the professional identity of civil servants. The first of the three sketches highlights the economic burden that the civil service dress code placed on the lower grades; the second sketch discusses how the introduction of a civil service uniform would affect the different grades; and the third sketch plays with the idea that civil servants were reviled by the press and by the general public for dressing extravagantly amid wartime rationing.

Sartorial matters were frequently thematised in literary sketches featured in »Red Tape« during the 1910s. At this time, there was a relatively strict civil service dress code which served the dual purposes of upholding the prestige of the profession whilst also visually differentiating the various grades. Newman writes that:

Departmental rules stipulated that officers were expected to maintain »a certain degree of respectability«. For Second Division Clerks this was interpreted as a rock coat and top hat. Most Assistant Clerks could not budget beyond a lounge suit and a bowler – though some managed to ape their supervisors.⁵⁶

Assistant Clerks were indeed forced to budget carefully; as historian Eric Wigham observes, their wages were »insufficient to maintain the respectability required by them«.⁵⁷ Given the discrepancy between the Assistant Clerks' income level and the sartorial expectations of their employers, it is unsurprising that »Red Tape« frequently featured advertisements from retail shops that offered »West End tailoring at City prices«, a slogan that highlights the double bind that ensnared these poverty-stricken officials.⁵⁸ The idea that the clerical grades belonged to a respectable, gentlemanly profession was, in other words, not quite a figment of the public's imagination: this image was to some extent foisted upon the lower grades by their own departments. Indeed, the departmental dress code that enshrined the notion of the respectability of the profession arguably helped to obfuscate the fact that the civil service encompassed both high- and low-income employees.

Saunderson rarely used the language of class struggle, but his editorials nonetheless sought to raise class consciousness by emphasising the low wages and poor working conditions of the lower clerical grades. This focus on the financial pressures of clerical grades provoked complaints from certain readers. In one such case, Saunderson responded as follows: »Our correspondent's feeling is natural, every man blushes at such conditions, but wrapping them up will serve no purpose«.⁵⁹ The correspondent's antagonistic response to the magazine's coverage of civil service issues indicates that certain clerks valued the veneer of respectability that the civil service afforded them. In this respect, the white-collar dimension of the civil service represented an obstacle to progress for the Assistant Clerks' Association, given the perception that a respectable profession should refrain from unionising, an idea that was challenged frequently in the magazine.⁶⁰

Much of the drama and humour in the »Civil Service Sketches« revolves around the discrepancy

between civil service clerks' petit bourgeois values and their strained finances. In these short stories, as Heller puts it, »the desire to establish and maintain a respectable home was continuously juxtaposed to the impossibility of doing so on the income the Assistant Clerk in the Civil Service actually obtained«.⁶¹ This conflict is visible not only in accounts of the Assistant Clerks' domestic lives but also in the portrayal of their troubled relationship with clothing. Tellingly, the first of the »Civil Service Sketches«, »The Civil Servant Buys a Hat« by Auberon Quin, is an angst-ridden tale about the act of bargaining (unsuccessfully) with a hatter.⁶² Such stories betray anxieties about sartorial expenses, as well as a sense of uncertainty regarding the civil service clerks' professional identity. This is the main theme of »A Young Man's Fancy«, a short story that was most likely authored by Harold Melvin (the piece is signed »H. E. M.« and stylistically resembles some of his other contributions). »A Young Man's Fancy« playfully addresses the Assistant Clerks' struggle to economise without looking scruffy. The narrator begins by declaring that,

It is a mistake for a Civil Servant to employ a good tailor. At least it is a mistake for the mere plebeian, the Assistant Clerk and Second Division kind of Civil Servant—the man behind the gum. Of course, the young men from Oxford and Cambridge who enter the Service in order that they may have leisure in which to go thoroughly into this matter of clothes are different. Somebody has to maintain a sartorial standard for the guidance of mankind[.]⁶³

This opening passage describes the financial and sartorial gulf between the service's upper and lower tiers. The partial retraction of a statement made regarding the civil service as a whole, which is then said to apply only for a certain »kind of Civil Servant«, introduces the issue of terminological ambiguity and misidentification.

The unnamed first-person narrator presents himself as a frugal civil service clerk who, like most of his colleagues, is anything but »dressy«, his appearance suggesting that he buys his clothes »at Rummage Sales«.⁶⁴ His friend and fellow clerk Smithers, on the other hand, makes the aforementioned mistake of employing a good

tailor, and »as a result he never looks the part«. ⁶⁵ In fact, new members of staff tend to mistake Smithers for a visitor, »[a]nd in case he might be related to the Chief Clerk, they call him ›Sir‹«. ⁶⁶ This form of misrecognition points to the ways in which style of dress served as an identity marker within the civil service, both in terms of class and in terms of civil service grades. Crucially, Smithers' profligacy not only upsets the departmental order, but it also places him in grave financial difficulties. The unnamed narrator decides to intervene and manages to talk Smithers into returning one of his suits. However, this errand backfires drastically; instead of improving Smithers' finances, the visit to the tailor's shop ends with both clerks buying new suits. The sketch concludes with the narrator having discovered the delights of high-end tailoring – he luxuriates in the suit that has arrived »delicately swathed in tissue paper and packed in a beautiful cardboard box« – but also having discovered the unwelcome consequences of this form of expenditure: his partner begins to suspect him of »leading a double life« and his »official chief« decides against raising his salary. ⁶⁷

Civil service sartorial culture is also dealt with in the spoof scientific treatise »The Question of Uniforms«, which was published just a few months after »A Young Man's Fancy«. This was not one of the »Civil Service Sketches« but was instead introduced with the following note: »The Editor receives another amazing letter from his old contributor, Professor A. Mear. Pifla, B.L.«. ⁶⁸ The pseudonymous Professor Pifla (a play on the word »piffler« meaning a talkative fool) had already featured in »Red Tape«, credited as the author of »What's Wrong with the Service?« and »Lusus Naturae«, with the latter piece providing a typological account of the species of »that little known and much misunderstood animal, the Civil Servant«. ⁶⁹ In the new mock-epistolary text, Prof. Pifla continued his civil service investigations by considering the merits of a proposal to introduce a civil service uniform. A uniformed civil service would seem to create a bureaucratic aesthetics manifesting the idea of the civil service as a dispassionate and frugal institution. However, whilst the spectre of bureaucratic homogenisation lurks behind the author's treatment of the subject of uniforms, this is not a central topic in the text. Instead, »The Question of Uniforms« explores various socio-cultural effects that the introduction of

civil service uniforms might have in the workplace and beyond.

Prof. Pifla begins by introducing himself, letting it be known that he is an »authority on Service psychology« and that he has »devoted more real thought to Service questions than (say) the House of Commons or the MacDonnell Commission«. ⁷⁰ Pifla then explains that, following popular demand, he has decided to launch an investigation into »the desirability or otherwise of a uniform for Civil Servants«. ⁷¹ The professor relates that he has canvassed opinions from various respondents and that the idea of a civil service uniform has met with almost universal approval, barring certain »aesthetically inspired« qualms. ⁷² The professor shares a letter received from one Penelope Tappington, a female typist who offers some advice concerning the style of the proposed uniform:

If we are to have a uniform be sure you get a lady on the committee [...]. If you don't you can quite see [...] that we shall be expected to wear some perfectly impossible horror—something that went out months and months ago. ⁷³

This facile play on gender stereotypes is typical of the teasing and somewhat dismissive treatment of female civil servants in »Red Tape« fiction of the 1910s. Tappington also sends Pifla a design for a uniform that she considers »smart«, an intricate pattern that the professor fails to decipher. ⁷⁴ Another letter comes from Osmund de B. Heaviside, a member of the Second Division, who welcomes the idea of uniforms provided that they are »properly graded«:

the object of a uniform is not to achieve uniformity but rather to enable the casual observer to distinguish the greater from the less. It is the sergeant's chevrons which makes it impossible for us to confuse him with the ordinary ranker. So let it be in the Service. Let the superior acumen and higher social standing of the Second Division man entitle him to some mark of distinction denied to the Abstractor, the Boy Clerk, the Messenger or the Cleaner. He does not ask for anything showy or pretentious. Excessive ornament would ill become a body so modest and retiring as the Second Division; a little gold lace, a pair of spurs, and perhaps a cocked

*hat would meet the need adequately enough, and surely no request could be more reasonable?*⁷⁵

This conceited character's rank-fixation is clearly a barb aimed at the immediate superiors of the Assistant Clerks, the Second Division. Indeed, Heaviside's craving for an ornamented uniform echoes the commentary in »A Young Man's Fancy« regarding the stratification of the different grades through style of dress.

Two of the professor's respondents are against the idea of a uniform. Horace Blogg – who proclaims himself a proud »member of the working class and a sound Social Democrat« – rejects the scheme, asking, »Why should these parasitic loafers share an honor that has always been the mark of a hardworking and deserving class?«⁷⁶ These grumblings speak to the question of negative stereotypes of state functionaries, as well as the fraught question of the clerical civil service's position in the class structure. Interestingly, Blogg's complaint is juxtaposed with an objection that comes from a well-to-do civil servant, who writes:

*I am opposed to the idea of a uniform, because it would involve revealing any Civil Servant to the public for what he is—i.e. a Civil Servant. Now the Civil Service is a pedestrian and inglorious vocation, and some of us, who are in the Service but not of it, have no desire to be known for what we are. Take my own case. I am a lively and socially ambitious young man. I was pitchforked into the Second Division owing to the fact that my mother imagined that I was the fool in the family. If it had been generally known that I work in a Government department my social ambitions would have been nipped in the bud.*⁷⁷

This respondent – Hawley Clutter-Buck – clearly wants to remain incognito as a civil servant, fearing that he would become »a social pariah in Bedford Park« if he were »compelled to wear a Civil Service uniform«.⁷⁸ The phrase »in the Service but not of it« again speaks to the contentious issue of professional identity formation, indicating that there were numerous modes of inhabiting the role of a civil servant.

»The Question of Uniforms« is cut short just as Prof. Pifla is about to divulge his own views on the topic of civil service uniforms: »I [...] now propose to

deal with the matter in my own way, giving due weight to the opinions quoted above, but eliminating as far as possible, the element of personal bias. In the 37 sections of the following essay will be found...«.⁷⁹ Even in the absence of this promised exhaustive treatment of the subject, the professor's survey voices a range of conflicting opinions, thus illustrating the complexity of the social fabric of the civil service and the contested nature of civil service reform.

Financial considerations are not addressed in »The Question of Uniforms« – which is rather surprising given that a uniformed clerical civil service would potentially have avoided the expenses of sartorial respectability – and the uniform question is never explicitly linked to the ongoing war. These different threads do however come together in a literary sketch entitled »Official Business« A Short Story of such a Dull Dog as the Service Knows too Well« by Eric H. Porter. This sketch, published in the November issue of 1915, takes up the theme of a civil service uniform:

The Habiliments Commission, as its name implies, deals with questions relative to clothing. Ever since it came into being, a generation ago (to satisfy a small band of Members, who in the House, were zealous advocates of Dress Reform), charged with the duty of inquiring into the practicability of enforcing the adoption of sandals and the abolition of hats and hose—ever since then the basis of its labors has broadened steadily.

The question most recently given a decent burial by interment within its offices was the proposal to provide Civil Servants with a dignified and distinctive uniform...⁸⁰

Written in a reportorial style, Porter's sketch blurs the line between fact and fiction, presenting the presumably fictitious Habiliments Commission (one of the many made-up government boards and departments that feature in »Red Tape« sketches, harking back to Dickens's infamous Circumlocution Office) as a product of the Victorian dress reform movement. This weaving together of fictive institutions and real-life movements has the destabilising effect of creating a pseudo-historical narrative of officialdom.

The aforementioned indeterminacy of Porter's sketch becomes particularly interesting given that the proposal for a civil service uniform is given a specific origin in this sketch. It is described as occasioned by a war-time turn in public opinion against officialdom. More specifically, according to Porter's reportorial narrator, inflammatory journalistic commentaries and unflattering popular representations have cast civil servants as dandies ill-equipped to manage the war effort:

It will be remembered that in that sprightly revue at the Melody Theatre, entitled »Come and Go!« figured a Civil Servant, one »Sinecure Sam«, resplendent in spats, buttonhole, monocle, and other things, who nightly delighted the audience with a song of his happy official routine and beguiled the evening hours away for London's war-weary raid-jaded millions by means of a mild flirtation with Miss Daphne Elaine as the versatile typist. In an article illustrated with charming photographs from the piece that well-informed weekly »Backchat« asserted with emphasis that it was a recognized fact that the style of Civil Servants' dress was a disgrace to the nation; now—in war-time—more than ever, it indicated the extravagant and frivolous habits of those who handle the public money, and on whom largely the nation's destiny must rest.⁸¹

This faux-reportorial sketch should clearly not be taken at face value – indeed, the multilayered pastiche is decidedly unequivocal. The idea that civil servants' attire was sufficiently eye-catching to provoke widespread resentment and distrust is, of course, somewhat hyperbolic, and Porter glories in the idea of the civil servant as the object of general fascination and scorn. Ultimately, however, Porter's caricature – the suave figure of »Sinecure Sam« – satirises and rejects the negative stereotyping of the civil servant in the popular press. At the same time, as seen with the example of »A Young Man's Fancy«, the extravagant civil service clerk living over his means is a trope not only in fictive popular revues but also in civil service periodical fiction itself. Tying this sketch back to the earlier story about retailers preying on civil service clerks subjected to demands of respectability, it seems, ironically, that

the lower tiers of the civil service might have appeared profligate in the eyes of the public precisely as a result of their very exertions to abide by the dress code.

By reading these three pieces side by side as contributions to an ongoing conversation about collegial concerns, I have sought to illustrate the manner in which »Red Tape« writers would riff on each other's ideas. The subtexts created through such thematic interplay would have greatly enriched the month-to-month experience of reading the journal. Likewise, this intertextual, well-nigh collaborative dimension of contributing to the journal must also have played a part in the attraction that »Red Tape« evidently held for writers in the civil service.

Conclusion: The Romance of the Civil Service

In the editorial of the October 1912 issue, Saunderson professed that he had »a deep and abiding sense of the romance of the Civil Service«, despite its many flaws.⁸² This notion of »the romance of the Civil Service« stayed with Saunderson throughout his editorship of »Red Tape« – indeed, he very nearly used the phrase as the title of his 1919 book »Government Service: An Essay Towards Reconstruction«.⁸³ In this treatise on the civil service (which contained a number of passages recycled from »Red Tape« editorials), Saunderson, who was no Prof. Pifla, took a decidedly romantic if not idealistic view of the civil service. At the same time, he reiterated the idea that the civil service was hamstrung by »a Civil Service myth«.⁸⁴ 1919 was also the year in which Saunderson handed over the »Red Tape« editorship to William B. Bird (who was only succeeded by Leslie Harrison in 1939).⁸⁵ In his capacity as editor, Saunderson had acted as a patron of writer-officials, publishing and publicising civil service literature in order to cultivate a civil service community of readers and writers. Many dozens of civil service sketches had been featured in the magazine during his tenure, stories which had shed new light on the life of a clerical civil servant. Yet, as indicated above, it may be argued that Saunderson's emphasis on culture and literature was entangled with the very civil service mythology that the journal set out to challenge.

It is indeed questionable whether Saunderson's editorial focus on the literariness of the civil service had much utility to the Assistant Clerks' Association, especially given the underlying tensions between the union's agenda and the editorial attempt to construct a more positive image of the civil service via literature. This topic merits closer attention, particularly with respect to the journal's evolution beyond the period that has been explored in the present article and also with respect to the working relationship between the magazine's editors and the Assistant Clerks' Association.⁸⁶ It would also be interesting to investigate how the influx of female clerks (and temporary staff) during and after the First World War shaped the ways in which civil service community was imagined through the discursive space of the journal.

As the present essay has demonstrated, civil service periodical fiction actualises a different set of questions than those that have previously been addressed in scholarship on civil service fiction, precisely because it is shaped by the specific conditions of civil service periodical culture. The literary tradition that develops in a civil service periodical like »Red Tape« evolves its own intertextual modalities and stylistic quirks, which are simultaneously a product of and a factor in its appeal to a predominantly collegial readership. Whilst the literary sketches examined in the present essay certainly appear to justify Saunderson's valorisation of periodical fiction as a productive mode of engaging with civil service issues, the present study has merely scratched the surface of civil service periodical culture. Not only are there an additional 50 volumes of »Red Tape« to dig into, but there are also, as already indicated, a plethora of other civil service periodicals to explore, including »Red Tape«'s politically radical offshoot magazine »Redder Tape« founded in 1972.⁸⁷ Future research might, for instance, follow Rotunno in looking at »Blackfriars Magazine«, which contained »literary reviews, discussions of art of all forms, and creative works composed by the postal workers« – or indeed follow Glew in examining the journal »Opportunity«, in which poetry was a semi-regular feature.⁸⁸ »Red Tape« was by all accounts the most colourful early-twentieth-century civil service periodical; and yet, Newman suggests that other civil service journals saw the success of »Red Tape« and »hastened to adopt the

new pattern, with varying degrees of success«.⁸⁹ In other words, Saunderson's magazine may have helped to spark a literary turn in civil service periodical culture. This indicates that further research on civil service periodicals would support the main finding of the present study, which is that British officialdom has produced a far livelier and far more complex literary response than has previously been recognised in scholarship on literature and bureaucracy.

- 1 Humbert Wolfe: *Some Public Servants in Fiction*, in: *Public Administration* 2, pp. 39–57, at p. 50, 54.
- 2 Lauren Goodlad: *Parliament and the State*, in: John Kucich / Jenny Bourne Taylor (eds.): *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: 1820–1880*, Oxford 2011, pp. 444–460, at p. 447; Daniel Jenkin-Smith: *A Tale of Two Bureaucracies: The Formal Development of Mid-Nineteenth-Century French and British Office Novels*, in: *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 77/2-3 (2022), pp. 93–123.
- 3 Patrick Joyce: *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800*, Cambridge 2013, p. 3.
- 4 Laura Rotunno: *Blackfriars: The Post Office Magazine: A Nineteenth-Century Network of »The Happy Ignorant«*, in: *Victorian Periodicals Review* 44/2 (2011), pp. 141–164, at p. 144.
- 5 Rotunno, *Blackfriars*; Helen Glew: *Providing and Taking the Opportunity: Women Civil Servants and Feminist Periodical Culture in Interwar Britain*, in: Catherine Clay et al. (eds.): *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939: the Interwar Period*, Edinburgh 2017, pp. 362–373.
- 6 Rotunno and Glew provide brief but illuminating discussions of the role of literature in civil service magazines, but this is not the primary focus in their articles.
- 7 F. W. Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine* 1/1 (1911), p. 1.
- 8 Stafford. H. Northcote / C. E. Trevelyan: *Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service*. London 1854, p. 7.
- 9 B. Walker Watson: *Servile State Service*, in: *Red Tape* 2/24 (1913), p. 205.
- 10 Michael Heller: *London Clerical Workers, 1880–1914: Development of the Labour Market*, London 2011, p. 26.
- 11 Eric Wigham: *From Humble Petition to Militant Action: A History of the Civil and Public Services Association 1903–1979*, Aylesbury 1980, p. 25.
- 12 Heller: *London Clerical Workers*, p. 28.
- 13 Newman: *Yours for Action*, p. 15.
- 14 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 3/25 (1913), p. 1.
- 15 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/1 (1911), p. 1.
- 16 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/1 (1911), p. 1.
- 17 Wigham: *From Humble Petition*, p. 21.
- 18 Bernard Newman: *Yours for Action*, London 1953, p. 142.
- 19 Heller: *London Clerical Workers*, p. 191.
- 20 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/3 (1911), p. 1.
- 21 Newman: *Yours for Action*, p. 141. The cartoonist Henry Sayers, who drew the picture on the magazine's front cover, was also involved in some capacity.
- 22 Ceri Sullivan: *Literature in the Public Service: Sublime Bureaucracy*, Hampshire 2013, p. 81. For further discussions of Anglophone writer-officials see Amanda Claybaugh: *Bureaucracy in America: De Forest's Paperwork*, in: *Studies in American Fiction* 37/2 (2010), pp. 203–223; Jonathan Foster / Elliott Mills: *Bureaucratic Poetics: Brian O'Nolan and the Irish Civil Service*, in: *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 6/1 (2022), pp. 1–15.
- 23 Sullivan: *Literature in the Public Service*, p. 83.
- 24 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/1 (1911), p. 6.
- 25 Rotunno: *Blackfriars*, p. 157.
- 26 F. W. Saunderson: *A New Service Writer*, in: *Red Tape* 1/6 (1912), p. 16.
- 27 J. W. P. C.: *Book Review*, in: *Red Tape* 1/2 (1911), p. 15.
- 28 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 5/50 (1915), p. 20.
- 29 Sullivan: *Literature in the Public Service*, p. 86.
- 30 Sullivan: *Literature in the Public Service*, p. 1.
- 31 Friedrich A. Kittler: *Discourse Networks: 1800 /1900*, translated by Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens, Stanford/CA 1990, pp. 104–105.
- 32 Wigham: *From Humble Petition*, p. 20.
- 33 Michael Heller / Michael Rowlinson: *Imagined corporate communities: Historical sources and discourses*, in: *British Journal of Management* 31/ 4 (2019), pp. 752–768, p. 753.
- 34 Ripley Thomas: *Faust Up-To-Date (A Fantasy)*, in: *Red tape* 4/40 (1915), p. 82.
- 35 Skimmer: *I Spy!*, in: *Red Tape* 4/40 (1915), p. 60.
- 36 David Milne: *A New Volume on My Shelf*, in: *Red Tape* 2/13 (1912), p. 5.
- 37 Washington J. O'Donohoe: *An Essay in Libel*, in: *Red Tape* 3/35 (1914), p. 189.
- 38 O'Donohoe: *An Essay in Libel*, p. 189.
- 39 O'Donohoe: *An Essay in Libel*, p. 190.
- 40 O'Donohoe: *An Essay in Libel*, p. 190.
- 41 Saunderson: *A New Service Writer*, p. 16.
- 42 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/4 (1911), p. 2.
- 43 Auberon Quin: *The Civil Service Receives a Valentine*, in: *Red Tape* 2/17 (1913), p. 72; Auberon Quin: *The Civil Servant takes a Country Cottage*, in: *Red Tape* 2/19 (1913), p. 109.
- 44 Heller: *London Clerical Workers*, p. 191.
- 45 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/1 (1911), p. 2.
- 46 Heller notes that numerous clerical unions bemoaned the stereotypes held by a »relatively unsympathetic public«. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, p. 190.
- 47 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 2/13 (1912), p. 2.
- 48 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 4/41 (1915), p. 74.
- 49 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 2/13 (1912), p. 2.
- 50 Jonathan Wild: *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880–1939*, London 2006.
- 51 Nicola Bishop: *Ruralism, Masculinity, and National Identity: The Rambling Clerk in Fiction, 1900–1940*, in: *Journal of British Studies* 54/3 (2015), pp. 654–678, at p. 655.
- 52 Wolfe: *Some Public Servants*, p. 56.
- 53 Wolfe: *Some Public Servants*, p. 47.
- 54 Wolfe: *Some Public Servants*, p. 46.
- 55 Sullivan: *Literature in the Public Service*, p. 19.
- 56 Newman: *Yours for Action*, p. 5.
- 57 Wigham: *From Humble Petition*, p. 16. In the 1910s, according to Heller, the Second Division had a pay scale from £70 to £300, whereas Assistant Clerks £55 to £150 p.a. (Heller: *London Clerical Workers*, pp. 28–9.)
- 58 Wigham: *From Humble Petition*, p. 22.
- 59 Saunderson: *The Tape Machine*, in: *Red Tape* 1/6 (1911), p. 1.
- 60 E. R. Scovell: *Trade Unionism in the Civil Service*, in: *Red Tape* 5/49 (1915), pp. 16–17.
- 61 Heller: *London Clerical Workers*, p. 197.
- 62 Auberon Quin: *The Civil Servant Buys a Hat*, in: *Red Tape* 1/1 (1911), p. 4.
- 63 H. E. M.: *A Young Man's Fancy*, in: *Red Tape* 4/43 (1915), p. 118.
- 64 H. E. M.: *A Young Man's Fancy*, p. 118.
- 65 H. E. M.: *A Young Man's Fancy*, p. 118.
- 66 H. E. M.: *A Young Man's Fancy*, p. 118.
- 67 H. E. M.: *A Young Man's Fancy*, p. 120.
- 68 Anonymous: *The Question of Uniforms*, in: *Red Tape* 4/46 (1915), p. 172.
- 69 Anonymous: *Lusus Naturae*, in: *Red Tape* 1/6 (1912), pp. 5–7; Anonymous: *What's Wrong with the Service?*, in: *Red Tape* 3/30 (1914), pp. 100–102.
- 70 Anonymous: *The Question of Uniforms*, p. 172.
- 71 Anonymous: *The Question of Uniforms*, p. 172.
- 72 Anonymous: *The Question of Uniforms*, p. 173.

- 73 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 173.
- 74 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 173.
- 75 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 173.
- 76 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 174.
- 77 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 174.
- 78 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 175.
- 79 Anonymous: The Question of Uniforms, p. 175.
- 80 Eric H. Porter: »Official Business«: A Short Story of such a Dull Dog as the Service Knows too Well, in: Red Tape 5/50 (1915), p. 30.
- 81 Porter: »Official Business«, p. 30.
- 82 Saunderson, The Tape Machine, in: Red Tape 2/13 (1912), p. 1.
- 83 Saunderson: Government Service: An Essay Towards Reconstruction, London 1919, p. 5.
- 84 Saunderson: Government Service, p. 3.
- 85 Newman: Yours for Action, p. 139, 141.
- 86 After WWI, when the magazine was noticeably constrained by cash and paper shortages, the magazine began to grow both in size and in circulation. By 1934 its average size was 80 pages and by the 1950s it had gained a circulation of over 40,000. Newman: Yours for Action, p. 142.
- 87 Wigham: From Humble Petition, p. 190.
- 88 Rotunno: Blackfriars, p. 148.
- 89 Newman: Yours for Action, p. 141.

Abstract

This article examines the literary dimension of early-twentieth-century British civil service periodical culture, focusing on the trade union journal »Red Tape: A Civil Service Magazine«, founded in 1911. The article shows that literary sketches featured in »Red Tape« during its first years in existence not only highlighted the difficult working conditions of civil service clerks but also addressed complex professional identity issues and promoted collegiality amongst civil servants. By investigating the ways in which »Red Tape« fiction served as an exploratory form of corporate self-expression, the article begins to delineate the distinctive properties of civil service periodical fiction.

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Jonathan Foster recently defended his dissertation »Writing the State: Administrative Fiction in Long-Nineteenth-Century Britain« at Stockholm University. His research focuses on representations of state bureaucracy in anglophone fiction. He has co-edited a special issue of »The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies« on the author Flann O'Brien's role in the Irish Civil Service. He has also published articles dealing with literature and state administration in »Dickens Quarterly« and »Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik«.