Mike Ashley. *The Age of the Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines, 1880–1950*. New Castle, Del., and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2006. x, 308 pp. 132 illus.; US \$95.00; £45.00. ISBN 158456170X (US); 0712306986 (UK).

Serialized fiction, a staple of 19th-century periodicals, flowed from pens of authors as eminent as Dickens and Thackeray, who themselves doubled as magazine editors. The later advent of cheaper, mass-produced magazines, often priced at no more than six-pence, provided millions of readers with an abundance of popular fiction, nurtured authors of the stature of Stevenson, Haggard, and Conan Doyle, and may be said to have inaugurated a golden age of popular storytelling. In *Age of the Storytellers*, Mike Ashley describes the *Strand Magazine* (1891–1950) as the prototype for a proliferating, if highly imitative, genre of cheap, popular, general-interest periodicals that peaked in numbers, if not popularity, in the 1920s, but limped on into the post-war 1950s before succumbing to competing sources of entertainment. According to Ashley, “*The Strand* defines the era, for it ... established the pattern for its competitors, and it was the last of the original magazines to survive.”

The *Strand* and its early imitators followed predecessors such as the *Cornhill* and *Temple Bar* in adopting dignified names drawn from London's districts or landmarks (*Belgravia*, *Charing Cross*, *Holborn*, *Ludgate*, *Pall Mall*, *Savoy*). Others followed the pattern set earlier by *Chambers's*, *Cassell's*, *Macmillan's*, and the American *Harper's* by employing proprietors' names (*Chapman's*, *Fry's*, *Horlick's*, *Hutchinson's*, *Lambert's*, *Lloyd's*, *Longman's*, *Lovat Dickson's*, *Nash's*, *Pearson's*). Over the course of their evolution, however, “all-story” magazines, led by *The Novel* and *The Story-Teller*, grew to challenge the market dominance of general-interest titles, and contributed to a growing dichotomy of formats between “slicks” and “pulp.” Titles of many pulps sought to evoke a mood through attitude (*Gaiety*, *Happy*, *Jolly*, *Merry*, *Sunny*), or by invoking colour (*Black & White*, *Green*, *Red*, *Violet*, *White*, *Yellow*), or a playful mascot (*Black Cat*, *Butterfly*, *Magpie*). In addition to developing a coterie of fiction writers, the all-story magazines and their contributors, few of whom ever aspired to join the academic literary canon, defined the genres of modern, popular fiction, and reflected them in thematic titles (*Adventure-Story*, *Air Stories*, *Detective Magazine*, *Mystery and Detection*, *Romance*, *Tales of Wonder*, *Thriller*, *War Stories*, *Western Adventures*).

In Section 1, which is devoted to "Primary Magazines," Ashley has catalogued, described, and analysed a total of 144 titles – 70 of them at considerable length – titles devoted entirely, or at least in large measure, to fiction. Entries for the 70 "Primary" titles include their often complex publishing history, frequency, publishers, editors, format, cover price, variant editions (usually American), references (for further data or indexes), anthologies, holdings (significant backfiles; small ones only if the title is rare), collecting points (commonness or scarcity in the marketplace; notes on bindings), and notes on circulation where available.

Section 2 is devoted to shorter entries on 74 "Other magazines," in which fiction provided less than half their content, but was nonetheless a major source of audience appeal. These include a number of venerable titles, such as *Blackwood's*, *Chambers's*, *Cornhill*, *Macmillan's*, and *Temple Bar*, that sought to follow trends influenced by the successful example of *The Strand*. Although these 74 entries lack the depth of detail of publishing history and description of contents, they nonetheless provide a significant amount of information. Ashley's book is further enriched with 72 colour and 60 black-and-white illustrations; a useful 17-page chronology (from the first issue of *Boy's Own* in January 1879 to the last issue of *The Strand* in March 1950), a 16-page "Summary of Editors and Publishers" that serves as an auxiliary index; a bibliography of secondary sources; and a detailed index of all authors, editors, and magazines discussed in the text.

This remarkable reference book fulfills a long-standing need. More than a mere bibliography or finding aid, it is the product of meticulous literary detective work and scholarship. From the admirably concise, 16-page introduction, to the lengthy primary title entries, Ashley provides an extraordinary amount of content description and analysis, as well as biographical information about the writers, editors, and publishers. The book is densely packed with information presented in a clear and informative style. A fine example of *histoire du livre*, Ashley's *Age of the Storytellers* now joins the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* and its offspring, the *Waterloo Directory*, as an essential reference work on periodicals for all students of modern British "print culture."

MERRILL DISTAD
University of Alberta