

# How is Technology Repopularising Serial Publication? A Case Study of Wattpad

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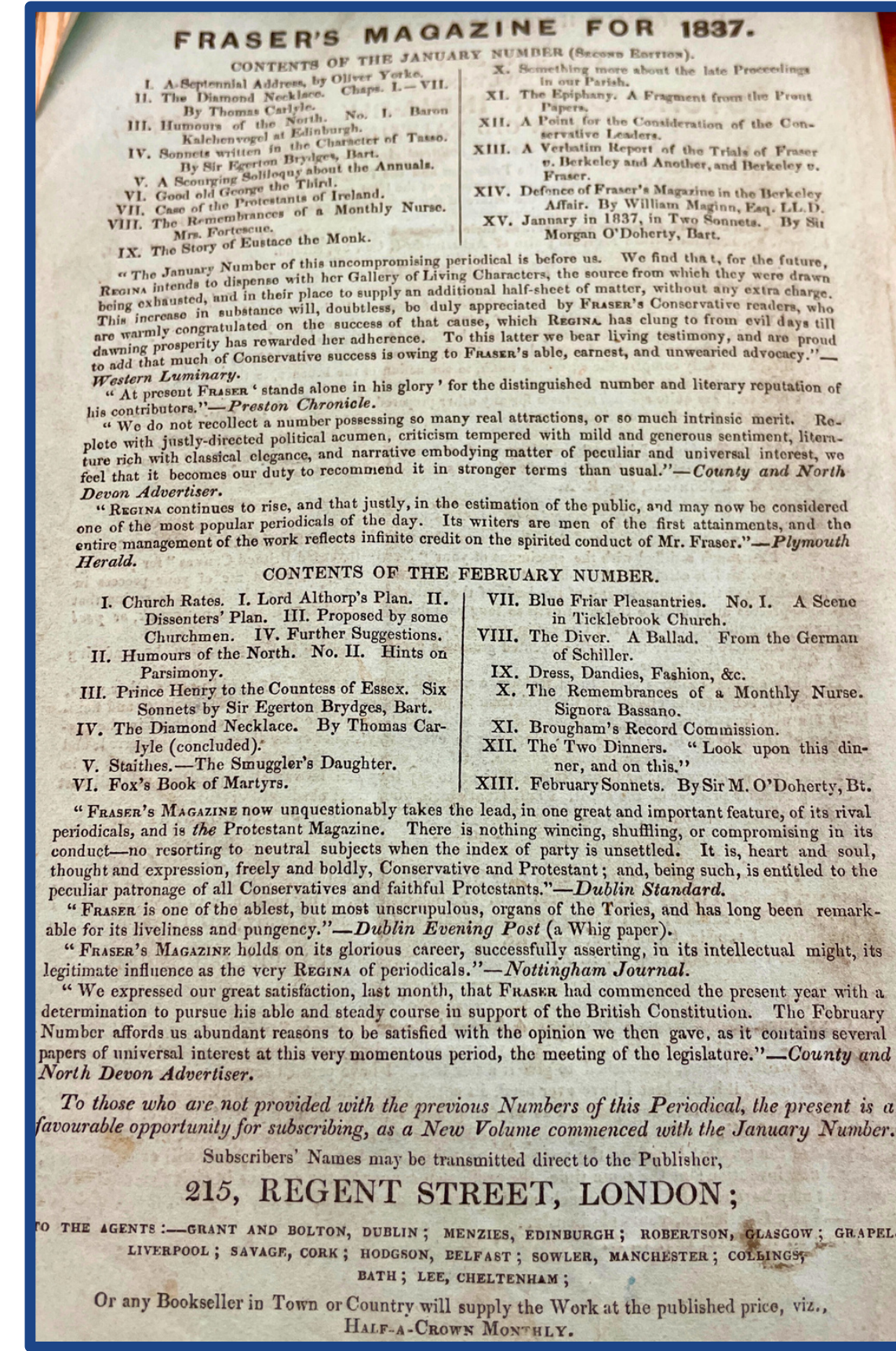
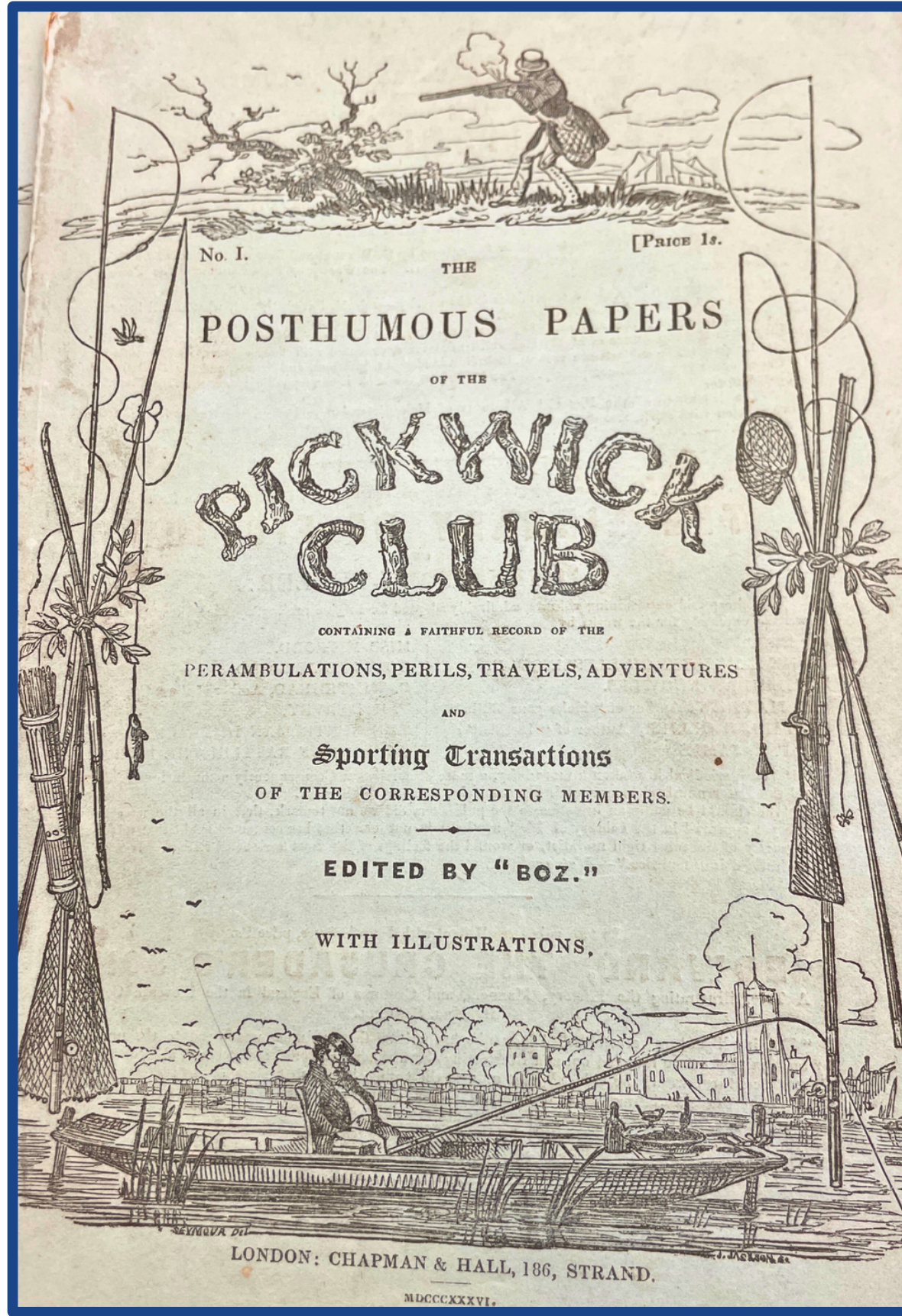


Image One: Front cover of *The Pickwick Papers* first volume (taken by Chloe Mee at UVic's Special Collections) Image Two: Back cover of *The Pickwick Papers* first volume (taken by Chloe Mee at UVic's Special Collections)

## British Victorian Serialised Novels

- Serialised novels were a 19th-century Victorian invention — instead of three-part volumes, each instalment was published according to a schedule
- This innovation coincided with exponential growth in mass print and appealed to the general public (“The Realistic”)
- Notable authors who used the serial format include: Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

- Dickens was selling 40,000 copies per issue of *Pickwick Papers* by volume 15 (“The Realistic”)

- The serial form promoted collaborative authorship between illustrators, authors, editors, and publishers
- Readers and reviewers responded to instalments, creating an informal feedback system that could change the novel’s plot
  - Bleak House* spontaneous combustion
- Serialisation promoted realist fiction and produced sensation fiction (Allingham)
  - Common features of sensation fiction include: romantic triangles, bigamous marriages, and heightened suspense

### Acknowledgements

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“*Like Dickens during his serial publication of Pickwick, Wattpad writers get feedback from readers, and may shape their stories accordingly*” (Margaret Atwood).

Wattpad’s online platform challenges standard publication by digitising text serialisation.

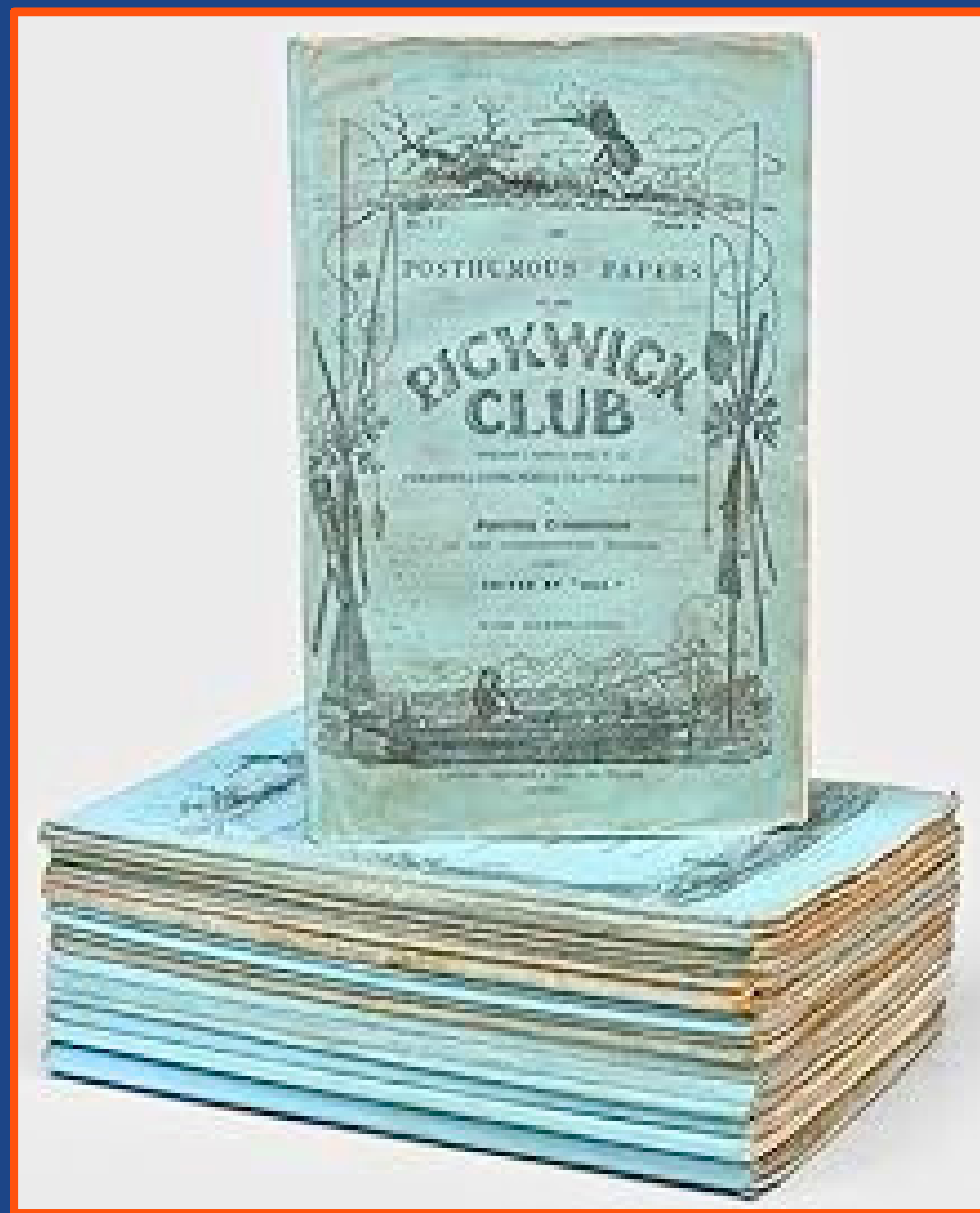


Image Three: A stack of *Pickwick Paper* serial volumes (Harrington)

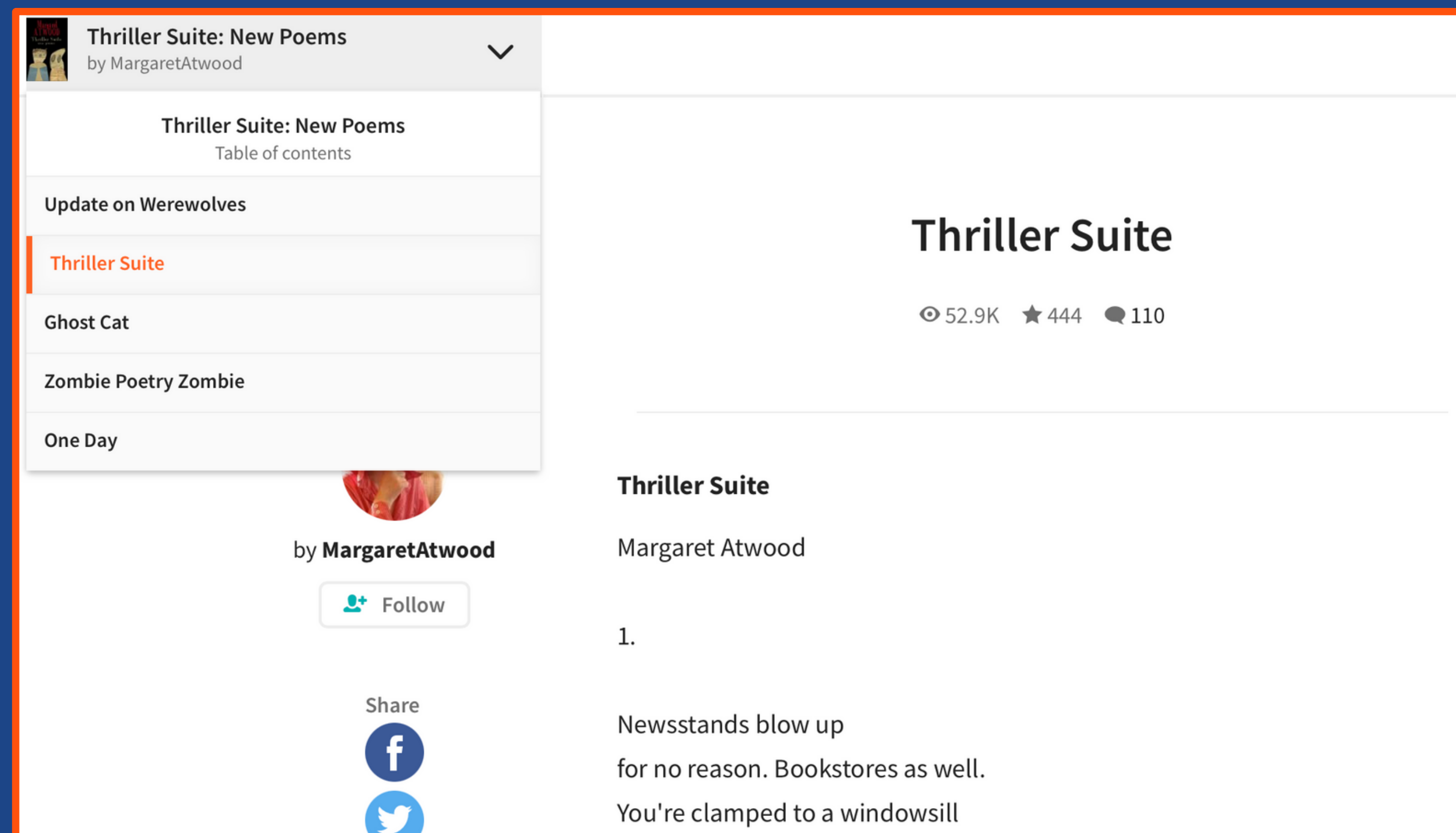


Image Four: A screenshot of Margaret Atwood’s *Thriller Suite: New Poems* on the Wattpad desktop interface (“Screenshot of Atwood’s”)

## Wattpad

Quick Statistics (“Wattpad HQ”):



Scan here to access Wattpad’s home page!

- 90 million users
- Users average 60 minutes per website visit
- 45% of users are aged 13-17, 40% are 18-30
- Romance and fanfiction are the most popular genres

- Wattpad is an online platform that creates the social author and encourages social readers (“Ramdarshan”)
  - Stories average 45 instalments per text, leading to more website visits (“Ramdarshan”)
  - Users comment on paragraphs and vote for chapters
- Users are “prosumers” who shape a story through their participation (Linkis)
- The online platform provides a “democratic literary culture” (Linkis)
  - 41% of popular authors publish under pseudonyms (“Ramdarshan”)
- Margaret Atwood avidly supports Wattpad, comparing its functionality to Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers* and publishing work on the site (Linkis)
- Writers can publish their work for free, but they receive no compensation for their labour (Eyre)
- The site algorithm manipulates user experience (Parnell)

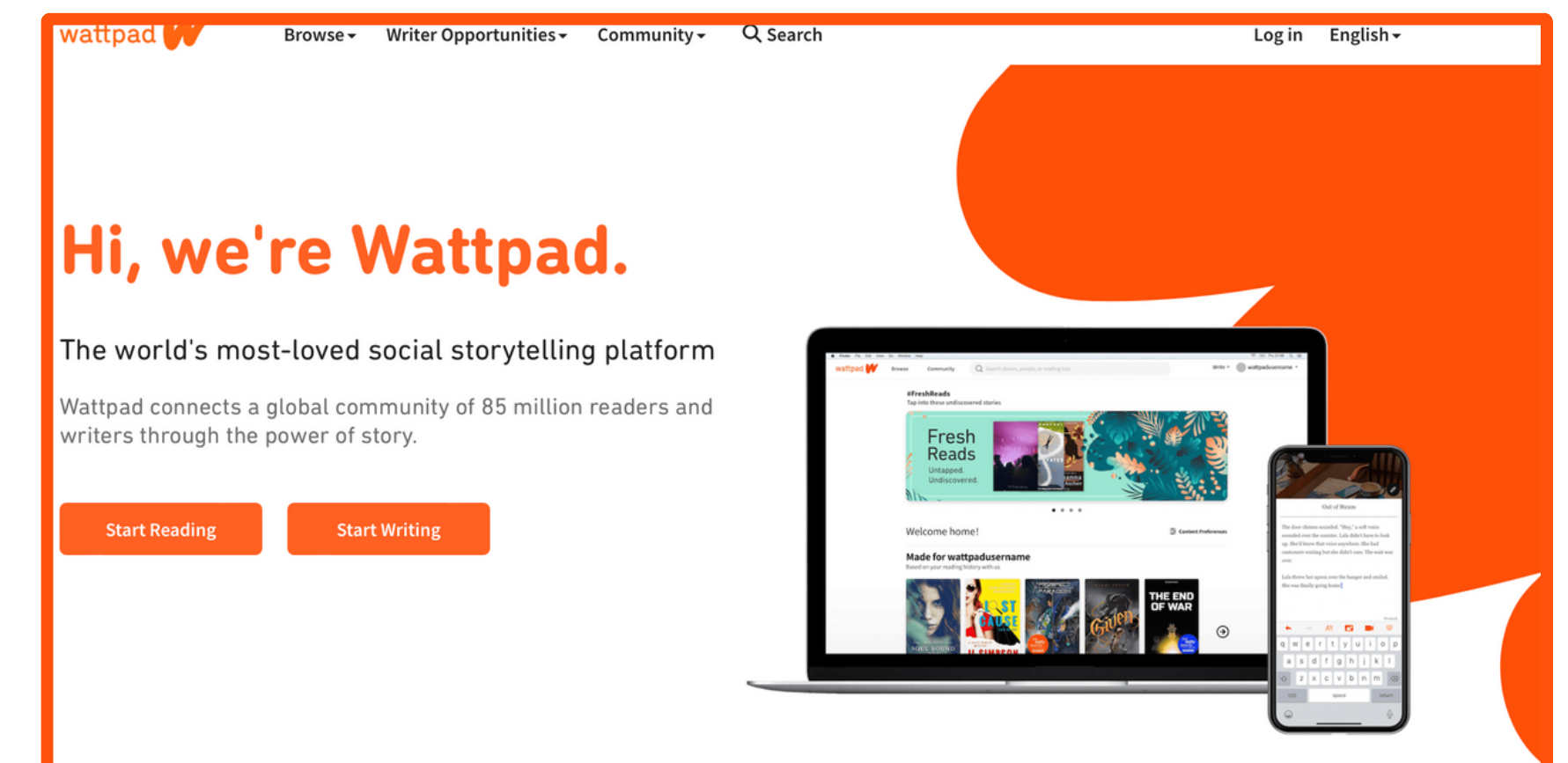


Image Five: Screenshot of Wattpad’s welcome page on desktop (“Screenshot of Wattpad”)

## Implications

- Wattpad’s serial format allows texts to be shaped by its readers; its platform functions similarly to British Victorian serialised novels
- The techno-cultural platform structure of Wattpad disrupts the publishing industry; publishers see statistics of what readers want (Parnell)
- Serial texts, including those on Wattpad, can produce certain textual features: plot-driven, cliff-hangers, emphasis on repetition
- Wattpad’s social media platform helps new authors enter the publishing space, such as amateur writers or minority voices (“Ramdarshan”)
- Wattpad stories have become successful print publications and movie adaptations, like *The Kissing Booth*
- Instead of being associated with “bad” writing, Wattpad should be known for its innovation and close community