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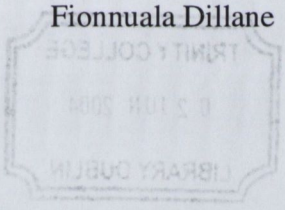
Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Mid-Victorian Periodical Press

Fionnuala Dillane



A thesis submitted to the School of English
at the University of Dublin, Trinity College,
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

October 2003

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by a Government of Ireland Scholarship from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, and by a Teaching Studentship from the Broad Curriculum Programme at Trinity College, Dublin. Both have been greatly appreciated.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Nicholas Daly, for his encouragement, his constructive criticism and broad scholarly perspective.

Thank you also to Prof. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Prof. Nicholas Grene and to the current Head of the School of English, Dr. Stephen Matterson for their support and advice.

Thanks to the always courteous and helpful staff at Trinity College Library, especially to the crew in Early Printed Books.

For an inspiring introduction to the Victorian Age as an undergraduate, I will always be grateful to the late Dr. Pat Sheeran, and to Dr. Elizabeth Tilley at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

The sense of community that my fellow postgraduate students have so generously given has been crucial to me in the course of this work. For practical help, and more importantly in the long run, for their invaluable friendship, thank you in particular to Ronan Kelly, Jenny McDonnell, Niamh Pattwell, Emilie Pine, Brendan O'Connell, Carol Stewart, Noreen Doody, and Garrett Fagan, and to Jim Shanahan, not least for the Stoneybatter days. I am especially grateful to Ronan and Carol for their helpful commentary on final drafts of this work.

The Mornington Singers have provided glorious distraction and constant encouragement, special thanks to Siân Harris, Stafford Bagot, Tom Wylie, Rosemary Collier, Orla Flanagan, and to Philip Shields.

To Carol Goulding, Niamh Doheny, Sinéad Curtis, John McAuliffe, Nancy Long, Ita Harnett, Ramona McLoughlin, Maeve Curtis, Colette Coughlan, and Ciara Smyth, I'd be lost without your enduring friendship, gracious support and sterling company. Thanks especially to Niamh for her insightful reading of final drafts; and to Carol for knowing when I needed a break, and for all the everyday things.

To my sisters, Deirdre, Aileen and Noreen, and to Hayden, I am thankful for your loving encouragement, your example, and your humour. And for perspective and joy, thank you Lochlann.

My greatest debt of appreciation is to my first and best teachers, my parents, Maureen and Séamus Dillane. For your capacious love, faith, and continuing interest in our education in the broadest and best sense, this work is dedicated to you with gratitude and with love.

For my mother and father

and in memory of my uncles,

Rev. Eamonn Canon Dillane (1929-1998)

Patrick F. O'Shaughnessy (1953-2002)

Summary

Before she became 'George Eliot,' Marian Evans worked for over ten years in the periodical press. This thesis clarifies the nature and the significance of that work from 1846-1857. Dismissed in critical and biographical accounts as relatively unimportant apprenticeship years, this period is always overshadowed by the later writings of the renowned novelist. When addressed at all, for instance, typically her journalism and her serial fiction are removed from their contexts in the contingent environment of the periodical and raided for articulations of the novelist's manifesto. This is to misrepresent fundamentally her periodical work: her use of popular modes such as melodrama have been suppressed and the novelist's so-called realist credo has been over-emphasised; the full extent of Evans' contributions to nineteenth-century literary culture, namely her work as an editor, has remained obscure; and the significant influence of the periodical press on the construction of her narrative and public personae has mostly gone unnoticed.

This study offers the first comprehensive account of the field of the cultural production in which 'George Eliot' was embedded through a detailed examination of Marian Evans' engagement with the powerful and pervasive periodical industry as an editor, periodical essayist and serial fiction writer. It builds on the interdisciplinary turn in nineteenth-century studies that has begun to acknowledge the influence of the periodical press as a dominant force in literary culture. And in doing so, I suggest the need to revise the writing history of this emblematic figure of the Victorian age that for too long has been over-determined by the sole focus on the novelist, George Eliot.

Accordingly, I begin by demonstrating the influence of the essay and review traditions on the nineteenth-century periodical article which suggests that over simplified readings of periodical material as the transparent representation of a writer's views distorts our understanding of both the genre and the individual writer. My subsequent chapters on Evans' work as an editor at the *Westminster Review*, on her career as a professional journalist for a number of mid-century periodicals, and on her serialisation of *Scenes of Clerical Life* in *Blackwood's Magazine*, all elucidate the writer's appreciation of the shaping force of genre, market and audience on the

production of any text. This competitive market environment that demands the periodical writer must entertain as well as instruct leads Evans to establish a duplicitous relationship with her audience that is most conspicuous in her successful pseudonym, 'George Eliot.' It also suggests that the layered complexity of her writings derive from the strategies conceived by the Marian Evans to balance individual opinion with the often overwhelming corporate claims of the commercial press. The thesis concludes with Evans' own turn against the manipulative periodical and publishing industry in her last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, that sees the writer attempting to rescue a more enduring legacy than that offered by fleeting public favour or, as she sees it, the ephemeral periodical press.

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Introduction

Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Mid-Victorian Periodical Press

I do not portray being; I portray passing . . .
my history needs to be adapted to the moment.

Michel de Montaigne, 'Transience'

In July 1862 in the *Cornhill Magazine*, Fitzjames Stephen proclaimed confidently: 'Journalism will no doubt occupy the first or one of the first places in any future literary history of the present times, for it is the most characteristic of all their productions.' Crucially, he concludes that 'a newspaper is beyond everything else a commercial undertaking. Whatever else it does or omits to do it must pay or stop . . . This principle ultimately determines the character of all periodical literature whatever.'[1] Stephen's remarks appear curiously self-reflexive, coloured as they are by the recent gossip surrounding George Smith's extravagant contract with George Eliot for the serialization of *Romola*, the first part of which appeared alongside Stephen's article in the same number of the *Cornhill*.

Before the best-selling novelist became famous enough to attract the interest of speculators like Smith, Marian Evans worked for over ten years as an editor and writer for the periodical press. During this time, she learned to appreciate the demands made by the commercial marketplace on the written work that are implicit in Stephen's remarks. However, there are no full-length studies of her writings in the context of nineteenth-century periodical literary practices despite her lifelong involvement with the ubiquitous publishing form of the age. Marian Evans' first significant engagement with the literary world was through her editorship of the prominent mid-century journal, the *Westminster Review*, from 1851-54. She began her professional career as journalist writing for various periodicals from 1851-1857 and her first commercial fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, was

[1] [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'Journalism,' *Cornhill Magazine* 6 (July 1862): 53.

published in serial form in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* over eleven months in 1857. These writings will be the subject of this thesis. I will show how Evans' work as a journalist, editor and serial fiction writer before 'George Eliot' was conceived, demonstrate her understanding of both market and audience. Consequently, in her various journalistic roles, Evans developed narrative strategies and narrative personae to respond to the demands of her literary environment. The popular success of the novelist is better understood once Marian Evans' significant awareness of the complex cultural industry in which she worked for over ten years is elucidated.

Evans' *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879) shares generic features with her early journalism but it is deliberately antagonistic to the writing environment that marked the first third of her working life. The venomous condemnation of periodical practices and the publishing industry in this last work recalls the split between the artist genius and the jobbing journalist that Evans longed to widen throughout her career to guarantee critical acclaim and posterity, although that aspiration is only ironically and bitterly invoked in *Impressions*. More ironically, however, critical assessments of the great novelist persist in taking the separatist stance of the blustering Theophrastus. As a result, George Eliot's roots in the commercially driven press have been consistently suppressed, and crucial aspects of the writer's oeuvre, like her use of popular modes such as melodrama, are generally dismissed in studies of her work. The full extent of her contributions to nineteenth-century literary culture, namely her work as an editor, has remained obscure, and the significant influence of the periodical press on her writing has mostly gone unnoticed.

Fitzjames Stephen was wrong to predict the dominance of journalism in future literary histories of his time. Not until relatively recently has any significant attention been given to systematic studies of the nineteenth-century periodical press. The particular dismissal of Evans' involvement with periodical literature is reflected in this broader neglect. Research over the past thirty years has demonstrated, however, that the nineteenth century in Britain was uniquely the age of periodicals, with the circulation of journals and newspapers wider and more influential than that of books in Victorian society. Organisations such as the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, for example, have significantly increased our awareness of the roles of individual editors and

journalists, newspapers and periodicals and, more generally, the importance of the periodical press in Victorian literary and cultural history.[2] In a response to this shift towards a broader appreciation of what constitutes nineteenth-century literature, the journalism of writers from Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope, to lesser figures such as Mrs Oliphant, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and George Henry Lewes has been examined in book-length studies or re-assessed in editions of their work, especially in the last decade.[3] Marian Evans' non-fiction writings and her work as an editor, however, have yet to enjoy such particular attention. There is no collected edition of her journalism, some of her shorter journalistic pieces have never been republished, and the first complete bibliography of her non-fiction writings appeared only in 2002 as part of William Baker's and John Ross' larger bibliographic project.[4]

'We care about George Eliot now because of her novels,' George Levine declares in his introduction to the recent *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*;[5] it is hard to dispute this claim and an uninteresting task to attempt it. The territorial definitions imposed by genre, however, often throw up false barriers between various aspects of any writer's work that occlude the fact that these aspects inform each other in more productive ways than the particular bias towards particular genres at any given historical moment allows. Given her lifelong attention to writing forms and to audiences, I suggest

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[2] J. Donn Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, eds., 'Introduction,' in *Periodicals in Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration* (London: Mansell, 1996), 3. See especially the pioneering essay by Michael Wolff, 'Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals,' *Victorian Periodical Newsletter* 13 (September 1971): 23-38 and the significant collection, *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982); See also J. Donn Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

[3] See for example, Michael Slater, ed., *Dickens' Journalism*, 4 vols. (London: Dent, 1994-); Rosemary Ashton, ed., *Versatile Victorian: Selected Critical Writings of George Henry Lewes* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992); Richard Pearson, *William Makepeace Thackeray and the Mediated Text: Writing for Periodicals in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Mark Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines: Gendered Issues in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs. Oliphant: A Literary Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie, eds., *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[4] William Baker and John C. Ross, eds., *George Eliot: A Bibliographical History* (Delaware and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2002).

[5] George Levine, 'Introduction,' in *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3. The most recent collection of essays on George Eliot's work, this volume includes chapters on George Eliot and her Publishers, on Philosophy, Gender, Politics, Religion, Science, her early and later novels but there is no detailed consideration of her work as an essayist, a periodical writer, a poet or a translator.

that Evans' early work is important among other things, for the way that it privileges the relationship between message and medium, for the evident fluency with which the writer shapes her material to suit its context, and for the carefully constructed authority of her public personae. These skills are central to her later success as a novelist and can be seen to derive from the early years of her working life when attention to audience response in the commercial market of the nineteenth-century press determined to a significant degree the tone, content and presentation of a writer's material. In this overtly competitive environment, Evans consistently demonstrates her appreciation of the 'horizon of expectations' of her audience, as Hans Robert Jauss put it later, indicating with this metaphor the inescapably dialectic aspect to any literary production. 'A literary work,' he explains, 'even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics and implicit allusions.'[6] This thesis suggests that it is in her work as a journalist and editor in particular that Evans' negotiation of corporate expectation and individual assertion is most dramatically demonstrated. Her practices as a journalist laid the pattern for a complex and duplicitous relationship with her public throughout her writing life, most conspicuously manifested in her use of the pseudonym 'George Eliot'.

It is her novels, however, as Levine attests that have understandably enough overwhelmingly shaped our conception of the writer. These works have been analysed according to a phrase she herself used in 1876 as 'experiments in life'.[7] They are studied for their representation of dominant scientific, religious, sociological and cultural issues at mid-century, given the writer's serious engagement with such issues throughout her life. Her work is driven, it has been argued, by her desire to test or to articulate philosophical theories on art and morality. An eclectic intellectual, her novels have been presented variously as the embodiment of Comtism, Positivism, Romanticism, Liberal Humanism, Agnosticism, Bourgeois Conservatism, Philosophical Radicalism or various

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[6] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,' *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 23.

[7] To Dr. Joseph Frank Payne, 25 January 1876, *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols., ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-86), henceforth, *GEL*, 6: 216.

combinations of all of these.[8] Following the post-stucturalist dismantling of the author-function and integrity of the subject, deconstructive readings in the nineteen-seventies by Hillis Miller among others, signalled a shift in emphasis away from such centripetal readings structured around single ideological positions variously ascribed to the writer, to reveal a more fractious, evolving body of work.[9] The implication, in Chase's work, for instance, that the self-questioning and contradictory nature of George Eliot's longer novels in particular was unconsciously inscribed in the texts, however, did little justice to Marian Evans' very knowing engagement with the complexity of language and the instability of interpretation registered early in her work as a translator, editor and journalist.

Also since the seventies, Feminist and Psychoanalytic approaches, purposefully reclaiming the female writer as subject of their studies, have tended to locate these fractures and inconsistencies in the life as alternatively reflected or suppressed in the text. Depending on the point of view taken, George Eliot provokes anger for her supposed condoning and replicating of patriarchal values or admiration for her subversive championing of female complexity. Most significantly, the balanced revisionist feminism of critics such as Elaine Showalter, and later, Gillian Beer, Jenny Uglow and Rosemary Ashton, has cautiously reminded us of the impossibility of reducing the writer to a simplified political or ideological position.[10]

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[8] For example, see Martha S. Vogeler, 'George Eliot and the Positivists,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (1980): 406-31 for her advocacy of scientific positions; F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), champions Eliot as a great moralist; Brian Spittles, *George Eliot: Godless Woman* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), as a non-believer; K. M Newton, *George Eliot, Romantic Humanist: a Study of the Philosophical Structure of her Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1981), as a Romantic Humanist; Daniel Cottom, *'Social Figures': George Eliot, social history and literary representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), as a typical bourgeois conservative.

[9] See J. Hillis Miller, 'Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*,' in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1975): 125-43; Cynthia Chase, 'The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*,' *PMLA* 93 (1978): 215-27; D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and more recently, J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[10] For psychoanalytical approaches to George Eliot's work see Ruby V. Redinger, *George Eliot: The Emergent Self* (London: The Bodley Head, 1975); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 443-535; second-wave feminism's distrust of Eliot's conservatism is rehearsed and redressed in Zelda Austen's overview, 'Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot,' *College English* 37 (1976): 549-61; See also Elaine Showalter, 'The Greening of Sister George,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (1980): 292-311; Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, (Sussex: Harvester, 1986); Jenny

In the last thirty years, enabled by the pioneering work of Gordon S. Haight on the seminal biography of the novelist, on Evans' letters, and John Chapman's diaries, and more broadly driven by a general movement towards gender studies, post-colonial, cultural materialist and new historicist positions, George Eliot criticism, it has been pointed out, has become predominantly historicist.[11] Since 1990, two new editions of Evans' long neglected non-fiction writings have been published along with the very first edition of her journals, giving some indication of not only the buoyancy of the George Eliot market but the definitive turn towards a more interdisciplinary approach amongst Victorian scholars.[12] In this climate, the formalist accounts of George Eliot's early champions, Barbara Hardy, Joan Bennett and W. J. Harvey, have been extended in the nineteen-eighties by the work of scholars such as Gillian Beer, George Levine, Sally Shuttleworth and Suzanne Graver. These latter combine attentive formal readings of the texts with detailed consideration of the writer's intellectual context, and examine in particular the influence of nineteenth-century scientific discourses in the language and narrative structure of George Eliot's texts and in the constant evolution of her writing.[13] In the last decade or so, this interdisciplinary turn has produced three dominant trends in Eliot criticism. Often at its best, her work is incorporated into generalist accounts of the period that resist the focus of single author studies for broader thematic historicist discussions such as Leah Price's *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: from Richardson to George Eliot* or Kate Flint's *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination.*

Uglow, *George Eliot* (London: Virago, 1987); Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Penguin, 1997).

[11] Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (1968; London: Penguin, 1985); *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols., ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-86); Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman with Chapman's Diaries* 2d ed. (London: Archon Books, 1969); *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. John Rignall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 73. See 65-76 for a useful and pointed summary of critical trends in George Eliot studies in the twentieth century.

[12] A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren, eds., *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1990); Rosemary Ashton, ed., *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), henceforth, *Journals.*

[13] Beer and Levine demonstrate the importance of Darwinism and the language of science to mid-century culture and to Eliot's work; Shuttleworth focuses more specifically on theories of organicism while Graver looks at the discourse of natural history. See Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1983); George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Tradition and Fictional Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Increasingly, George Eliot's writings are analysed in comparative studies with European intellectuals – *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer*; *George Eliot and Goethe*; *George Eliot and Schiller*. The other main approach examines how her work relates to specific individual disciplines – *George Eliot and Music*; *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (legal history); *George Eliot and the British Empire* (post-colonial).[14]

In what can be read as a response to these latter movements in nineteenth-century scholarship, Nina Auerbach has somewhat scathingly diagnosed the fracturing and splintering of George Eliot into her component parts by her various critics. Auerbach calls for an approach that does justice to the writer's 'richly mixed tones', that moves away from the type of critique that sees George Eliot's novels as 'statements of belief' rather than 'stories about belief'.[15] This move makes sense because Marian Evans never provides us with a clearly defined statement of belief by which we are supposed to read her fiction. And thankfully so, since it would make for diagrammatic and dull story-telling. The push to pin down George Eliot to a specific agenda or creed further belies the continuous metamorphosis and formal experimentation that mark her writing life. To account for this writing life, in all its 'richly mixed tones', this thesis suggests that a

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[14] Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Nancy Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Gerlinde Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot and Goethe: An Elective Affinity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998); Deborah Guth, *George Eliot and Schiller: Intertextual and Cross Cultural Discourse* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Beryl Gray *George Eliot and Music* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Bernard Semmel *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Nancy Henry, *George Eliot and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); See also Alison Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Daniel Vitaglione, *George Eliot and George Sand* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Kathleen McCormack, *George Eliot and Intoxication: Dangerous Drugs for the Condition of England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001); Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); John Rignall, ed., *George Eliot and Europe* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997); Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy: Literary, Cultural and Political Influences from Dante to the Risorgimento* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001); For more generalist accounts, see Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture in Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); or for the turn from science to medical science in the 1990s, see Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lawrence Rothfeld, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Jill Matus, *Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[15] Nina Auerbach, 'The Waning of George Eliot,' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25 (1997): 353.

logical place to start is by addressing the richly mixed nineteenth-century periodical culture from which she emerged as a professional writer.

The periodical was socially and culturally pervasive by mid-century and, as its name suggests, it is always implicated in its historical moment. It has a capacious multi-generic identity that demands equal attention be given to the specific formal aspects of individual texts within individual volumes. However, the dominant approaches to mid-century periodical literature typically neglect the question of genre.[16] Characteristically, arguments for the centrality of Victorian journalism to studies of the age, based on cultural materialist approaches to the texts, emphasise its significance in a social and cultural context. Such arguments pointedly redress the perceived bias of traditional Victorian scholarship towards author-based criticism and, as Laurel Brake puts it, 'the high ground of aesthetics'.[17] In her introduction to a study of nineteenth-century journalism, Brake suggests that traditional criticism privileges formal or biographical approaches to texts because of a persistent and out-dated faith in the coherent subject and in individual genius. Innovations and formal experimentation are adjudged to prove the artist's aesthetic ability. Despite post-structuralism, New Historicism and so on, the 'make it new' cry of modernist criticism is still dominant, Brake argues, and it presupposes an artistic autonomy which fails to properly account for corporate and contextual factors. Brake's objections are anticipated broadly in Pierre Bourdieu's description of the field of cultural production that challenges both Kant's 'disinterested' concept of a universal aesthetic and the possibility of artistic autonomy from external factors.[18] Bourdieu argues that the existence of the writer is inseparable from the *literary*

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[16] Kevin Gilmartin's *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) is a recent notable exception. Gilmartin's very specific focus on the Radical press at the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, means it is not directly relevant to this work. Similarly, Lee Erickson's *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialisation of Publishing 1800-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) sets out to demonstrate the 'economic connections between literary forms and market conditions' (3). Though he offers some general characteristics of the periodical essay from the early part of the century and provides a useful discussion on the economic impetus behind the movement between genres – from poetry to essay, essay to serial novel – his study does not address the nineteenth-century form of the periodical essay in terms of its genre history, which is crucial to an understanding of Evans' periodical writings, as I will argue in my first chapter

[17] Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1994), xi.

[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 3-5, 41-2.

field. 'To speak of "field"', he explains, 'is to recall that literary works are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws.'[19] Bourdieu usefully outlines the implications of this 'theory of the field' in his collection of essays, *In Other Words* (1990):

> A theory of the field [leads] both to a rejection of the direct relating of individual biography to the work of literature (or the relating of the 'social class' of origin to the work) and also to the rejection of the internal analysis of an individual work or even of intertextual analysis. This is because what we have to do is all these things at the same time.[20]

While it is important to be alert to the over-dominance of formalist and biographical readings of texts in literary scholarship, I would argue that it is crucial to incorporate these factors into any historical study as Bourdieu's 'theory of the field' suggests. The formal categories – the essay, the novel, the poem – are at once outside of history as nominated modes and deeply historical or historicised in their expression in time: that is, formal innovations and alterations identify the text as a product of its specific social, cultural context. Lee Erickson argues this point from another angle: 'because genre is a history of literature's self-imitation, the history of literary forms demonstrates that literature is materially and economically embedded in the reality of publishing history.'[21]

The 'high ground of aesthetics' to which Brake, among others, condemns formal criticism underplays the way in which such criticism can inform materialist approaches to texts. There is the related danger of denying authorial agency altogether, which leads to the suppression of the strategies by which individual authors navigate the factors of form, tradition, and their particular cultural and historical moment. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides a dynamic model that allows for agency denied by over-determined materialist or structuralist models of analysis: it describes the way in which the

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[19] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 163.
[20] Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 147.
[21] Erickson, *Economy of Literary Form*, 8.

individual's acquired knowledge and understanding when operating within the cultural field 'confers on this knowledge a genuine constitutive power'.[22]

The social and cultural context then, while often under-emphasised in considerations of the journalism written by canonical Victorian figures, should not be over-emphasised at the expense of authorial agency or considerations of the way in which individual genres develop or change. Examination of the formal properties of Marian Evans' periodical writing in this study reveals a synthesis of both the 'essayistic' and 'review' traditions in her fictional and non-fictional texts. These traditions, which will be outlined in my first chapter, are manifested most obviously in the ways in which texts attempt to strategically manipulate their audiences and strive to maintain the dual purpose of any periodical article – to instruct and to entertain. Such features are naturally central to the periodical's pitch for a paying market at mid-century.

Privileging neither the cultural materialist or late Marxist notion of the artist who is entirely and inescapably determined by her economic and social environment, nor the romantic ideal of the independent figure transcending and transforming her historical circumstances, this study argues for the need to situate Marian Evans in between these polarities. Because the vast majority of criticism on Evans focuses almost exclusively on the individual genius of the novelist George Eliot, this project concentrates on providing the dimensions characteristically overlooked by such author-centred studies – specifically, the early development of both the authorial voice and its sense of audience.[23]

Alexis Easley and Dallas Liddle have recently drawn attention to the consequences of Evans' work in the periodical press for the development of her fictional narrators. Coming to opposing conclusions about the influence of her journalistic persona on her later narrative voices, their work nonetheless marks a significant moment in George Eliot studies when attention is diverted from the monumental figure of the

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[22] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 467.

[23] Some recent studies have addressed this rhetorical aspect to George Eliot's work but none credit or even sufficiently note the role of the periodical in the shaping of her authorial persona. See Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Janice Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience: Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot at Mid-Century* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982); J. Russell Perkins, *A Reception History of George Eliot's Fiction* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1995).

novelist.[24] Both Liddle and Easley return to George Eliot but I deliberately avoid that turn back to the novelist in this thesis. For too long, 'George Eliot' has eclipsed the work of Marian Evans in the periodical press. However, this period from 1846-57 before the emergence of her pseudonymous self, provides a locus for those fractures in George Eliot's writings that have so preoccupied her critics. These are numerous, and include, for instance, the persistent tensions in her work between entertainment and instruction of her middle-class audience; sensational plot-driven story-telling and the didactic impulse of the moral tale; the real and the ideal in artistic representation; public celebrity as a popular novelist and private respect as an intellectual; the writer earning a living by securing the most lucrative deals possible, and the dutiful teacher following a vocation. Evans' association with the nineteenth-century periodical industry is crucial in this regard since the formation of reading audiences, the emergence of the novel as a legitimate art form, and the professionalisation of writing as a respected career all have roots in the development of the nineteenth-century periodical as the dominant cultural force of the age. It is no coincidence that the writer who became the dominant literary figure of her time began her writing life in the periodical press.

Evans' sense of her audience derives from her work as an editor and as a journalist as I will demonstrate in chapters two and three. The ways in which this sense informs her fiction writing, however, is clear only when her first fiction is examined in context. As I will argue in chapter four, such an approach helps to illuminate the reasons behind her assertion of her own authority within the narrative of the three scenes of clerical life in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and her attempts to circumscribe her own readers within that text. Recent studies of nineteenth-century periodical fiction have signalled a number of intertextual frameworks that help to describe periodical serial fiction as the epitome of the 'social text'. Each serial instalment can be examined in the context of the periodical unit; with reference to individual articles in each issue; with reference to the connection between social issues in the fiction and social issues in the periodical journal;

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[24] Dallas Liddle, 'Mentor and Sibyl: Journalism and the End(s) of Apprenticeship in George Eliot,' *Victorian Institutes Journal* 26 (1998): 5-39; Marie Alexis Easley, 'Victorian Women Writers and the periodical press: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot' (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1998); Alexis Easley, 'Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,' *Women's Writing* 3, no. 2 (1996): 145-60.

and with reference to the illustrations.[25] Versions of this model have informed recent assessments of the role of the periodical in literary history through the nineteenth century.[26] Such studies generally work to illuminate the layers of intertextual contexts summarised above. My difficulty with such an approach is that very often, the connections that emerge in the predominantly content-based analysis of the individual articles in any one periodical can proliferate beyond any useful synthesis. Spread out over eleven instalments, examining *Scenes* in this way would disperse the significance of the periodical context in a mass of thematic correspondences.

This study is more author-focused. It is about Evans rather than primarily about an analysis of the periodical climate in which she wrote. Marian Evans is not used here as a 'case study' which 'grounds theoretical considerations of the periodical as a cultural form,' as asserted of Trollope in a recent study of his association with nineteenth-century magazines.[27] While emphasising the inseparability of the writing from its environment, I want to acknowledge more specifically, the *writer's* debate with that environment implicitly conveyed in Evans' troubled relationship with the business of writing for specific audiences. Rather than developing readings of individual periodicals and the shared subject or content focus of different genres, my approach aims more broadly to address stylistic continuities and discontinuities between articles in individual publications, as demonstrated by the work of Marian Evans and her contemporaries. The reading environment, the business environment, the demands of genre tradition in any given historical moment, and the connections among these are examined for the ways in which they shape the individual writer's work. In this way, it is hoped to overcome the limitations that are imposed in single genre-driven assessments without making arguments based on similarity of subject matter across different genres.

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[25] See for example, Robert L. Patten, 'Dickens as Serial Author: A Case of Multiple Identities,' *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, eds. Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 137-54; Lyn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context,' *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, eds. Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990), 3-18.

[26] See for example Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Mark Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines: Gendered Issues in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

[27] Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines*, 3.

In turning from the novelistic bias that has determined Eliot studies, my project shares the questioning of the monolithic status of the novel that has also marked late twentieth-century Victorian studies. John Sutherland's contribution to this approach since his *Novelists and Publishers* (1976), along with John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson before him, and many critics since, involves the reading of texts within a complex interaction of contexts. Such readings suggest a number of commonsense positions: that the author's work is shaped by her biography and cultural and social environment; that the text is the material and ideological result of economic pressures on author, publisher and the trade; that the way the work is presented (part publication, serial, one volume, three-decker) affects its construction and reception and reputation; that the work is never a finished or discrete product but always a form in process.[28]

Carol Martin's pioneering study *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (1994) follows this revisionist line on the novel, providing the only substantial account to date of Evans' serial fiction. Martin focuses in particular on the ways in which Evans shaped each instalment to fulfil the demands of serial publication form while extending serial techniques to incorporate her own ideas of the moral function of fiction. She provides a vivid and illuminating picture of contemporary responses across a broad range of periodical publications to Evans' serial fiction as it was published. However, her approach, she acknowledges, 'attempts only to *suggest* the context of the periodicals in which her first two serials, *Scenes* and *Romola* appeared'. This partial contextualisation results in an incomplete sense of the significance of the periodical environment for Evans' writings, which I hope this study will begin to redress.[29]

Hilary Schor has recently called attention to the need to provide a more complicated, 'thick description' of the novel's history. To define it by distinguishing its difference from Romantic poetry (as periodisation of literary history inevitably does) fails to account, for example, for the continuing links between the novel and the early

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[28] See for example, John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957); John Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (London: Macmillan, 1995); *Thackeray at Work* (London: Athlone Press, 1974); 'Lytton, John Blackwood and the Serialisation of *Middlemarch*,' *Bibliotheck* 7 (1975): 98-104.

[29] Carol Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 293, n., 20. Emphasis added.

nineteenth-century periodical essayists, or the important shaping effects of mongrel productions such as Dickens' *Sketches by 'Boz'*. Contrasts with the Victorian poets or with the social programme of the non-fiction writers such as Carlyle and Ruskin serves only to keep the fiction writers 'sealed off from extra-novelistic contamination'. And the isolation is false. The novel, Schor sensibly points out 'has a more disruptive history than both novel lovers and critics propose and poses more difficult problems of form and meaning'.[30] Schor's short account addresses the ways in which Dickens sought to bury his indebtedness to the popular Newgate novel and to melodrama in *Oliver Twist* to claim an original and distinct place for his work. Thackeray, on the other hand, more realistically demonstrates his awareness that the novel can have no existence outside commodity culture. As a result, the novelist has no place outside of culture from which to criticise it or objectively analyse it – such questioning is done from within.[31] Within the context of the clearly commercial multi-genre periodical environment, these issues of cross-genre fertilisation and intertextual debate are even more clearly brought to the surface. And their influence on the making of the novelist 'George Eliot' is crucial.

Because Evans spent nearly twenty years of her writing life editing out her connections with the periodical press, however, arguments for the significance of her journalistic work face particular difficulties. As I suggest in the following chapters, for various reasons often motivated by gender, social and cultural biases which were current at mid-century, she is at times an elusive subject. Her programmatic self-distancing from the taint of trade, as practiced by so many of her fellow writers occurs just at the period when the profession of writing was gaining ground as big business, precisely because it was so obviously a 'business' (Dickens is an obvious exception here). In an effort to rescue the idea of the independent artist from the corporate body we see that as Evans deliberately targeted a specific reading market, at the same time, she attempted to represent her work to her audience as something more than the sum of popular forms on which it drew heavily – that it was above mere commercial relations. Commercially

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[30] Hilary Schor, 'Fiction,' in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 324, 325. Schor signals the 1830s novels' indebtedness to the periodical noting the dominance of footnotes in fiction from this period, Schor, ibid., 326.

[31] On this topic see Miller, *Novels Behind Glass*; Judith L. Fisher, *Thackeray's Skeptical Narrative and the 'Perilous Trade' of Authorship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); David Payne, 'The Serialist Vanishes: Producing Belief in George Eliot,' *Novel* (Fall 1999): 32-50.

popular modes such as melodrama are at once invoked and mocked in her first successful work, the series of clerical scenes in *Blackwoods*. It is an uneasy and not always successful alliance.

Other obstacles impeding the effort to provide Clifford Geertz's 'thick description,' are widely acknowledged by Victorian scholars. Publishers' records have not always survived the century or they are often insufficient in detail. It is impossible to get a full and authentic history of nineteenth-century reading audiences since biographical material for readers, writers, editors and publishers is often missing or lacking. As a result, much of the effort at mapping the field of cultural production or the *habitus* of an individual writer like Evans proceeds with a combination of what textual evidence there is and inference. The fact that Evans' journals before 1854 are no longer extant and, for example, that there are no full publishing records for the *Westminster Review* as there are for *Blackwood's* means that the period of her life in which she worked as an editor has had very little attention. Chapter two provides the only sustained analysis thus far of Evans' editorial work and how it shaped her understanding of the market in which the writer had to manoeuvre.

Because my work is focused on a reassessment of Evans' engagement with the material aspects of her literary culture in the *first* decade of her working life, I do not address Evans' poetry. Furthermore, though many of her poems appeared first in magazines, they were not so deliberately targeted at specific publications. In this respect, her poetry is not like the writing under discussion here. Nor is there an extended consideration of Evans' second magazine serial, *Romola*. Written in the early 1860s, the serial has already been examined both as serial fiction and in the context of the *Cornhill*.[32] *Romola* is unlike *Scenes of Clerical Life* for more reasons than the fact that it was the only work of Evans' not published by Blackwood. It was not initially written for publication in the *Cornhill*; it was not originally conceived as a serial. And though Evans undoubtedly adapted the material to the serial format, with considerable effort and at some cost to her health and to her pocket, as Martin has outlined, nonetheless, the work was never intended to meet the expectations of a *Cornhill* audience, unlike *Scenes*.

[32] See Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction,* 123-81; Mark Turner, 'George Eliot v Frederic Leighton: Whose Text is it Anyway?,' in *From Author to Text: Re-reading George Eliot's* Romola, eds. Caroline Levine and Mark Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 17-35.

Blackwood knew this, and noted of the work, 'I have no doubt it will be a fine thing but it was doubtful in my mind how far it would bear being given in fragments in the Magazine and certainly it would not suit the readers of the *Cornhill*.' Evans' critics knew this, the *Globe and Traveller* explaining in 1863: 'A more surprising thing than pine-apple for the million was the publication of "Romola" in a shilling magazine. We read it there with mingled admiration and doubt of its being the right thing in the right place.'[33] In this work, as my conclusion points out, she anticipates the split between writer and readers at the turn into the twentieth century that saw Joyce addressing his bleak, unsettling urban stories to the readers of the *Irish Homestead*, and Conrad's account of a disturbed complex coloniser, *The Heart of Darkness*, appearing in what was, by the end of the nineteenth century, an avowedly imperialist magazine, *Blackwood's*.[34]

Fellow serial writer and *Cornhill* contributor Anthony Trollope advised Evans when writing *Romola*, to keep her audience in mind: 'Do not fire too much over the heads of your readers. You have to write to tens of thousands, and not to single thousands.'[35] But Evans was clearly aware of her *Cornhill* audience and took a definite step in this work to set out her independence from this popular market, moving her story away from her acclaimed midlands pastoral setting to Renaissance Italy, moving away from the conventional scenes and safe subject matter that made her a best-seller to produce what is probably her most unread fictional work. In her explanation of this deliberate shift in intention to her friend Sara Hennell, Evans leaves us in no doubt about her growing dissatisfaction with the industry to which, to an extent, she was irrevocably bound. Just after it began serial publication, she explains of *Romola*:

> Of necessity, the book is addressed to fewer readers than my previous works, and I myself have never expected – I might rather say *intended* – that the book should be as 'popular' in the same sense as the others. If one is to have freedom to write out of one's own varying unfolding self, and not be a machine always grinding

[33] Blackwood to Joseph Langford, 25 May 1862, *GEL*, 4: 38; *Globe and Traveller* (London), 21 September 1863, cited in Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, 137.
[34] Three of Joyce's *Dubliners* stories first appeared in the *Irish Homestead* in 1904; Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was first serialised in three parts from February to April in *Blackwood's* in 1899.
[35] 28 June 1862, *GEL*, 8: 304.

> out the same material or spinning the same sort of web, one cannot always write for the same public. I forewarned the proprietor of the *Cornhill* on that point . . .[36]

Following the phenomenal success of *Adam Bede* (1859), the steady sales of *Scenes*, (1858), *Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861), and finally with the 7000 pounds from Smith for month by month instalments of *Romola*, by 1862, Evans was financially secure. This meant that she was also increasingly independent of the market which had fostered her initial success, but which, with a book a year, unsurprisingly left the author feeling as if she had been turned into a machine, like the presses churning out print, 'always grinding out the same material'. *Impressions* provides us with her most vehement protestation against this system, which, like *Romola*, indicates the professional writer's attempt to separate herself from the public and the press that gave her a profession.

Our understanding of George Eliot's literary evolution is transformed by an examination of Marian Evans' work in the context of nineteenth-century periodicals. Evans' chosen publication formats, her experimentation with literary forms, the concomitant refusal to form a stable literary philosophy, and her life-long obsession with the ephemerality of the body and the text in a secular, material world have first expression in these initial phases of her working life as essayist, editor, and serial writer. Margaret Beetham has recently pointed out: 'Despite its importance in print culture, literary scholars have not considered the periodical as a genre with its own history.'[37] The critical neglect of Evans' work from 1846-57 is clearly part of a more general dismissal of the periodical industry until recently as a significant cultural and commercial force in the development of literature and of reading audiences in the nineteenth century. It is perhaps the conjoining of these aspects of culture and commerce that troubles our still deeply-rooted loyalty to the idea of the individual genius of the artist and the independence and integrity of aesthetic ideals which Evans herself sought to promote from the early 1860s. Though such Romantic notions of the artist and the work persist in much of George Eliot's writing, this thesis argues that in her earliest work as an editor

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[36] 14 July 1862, ibid., 4: 49.

[37] Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), 6.

and as a periodical journalist, Marian Evans displays an awareness of the inseparability of both commerce and culture in the production of any literary text. The writer emerges from this synthesis and not, as is so often implied, like some fully formed Minerva at the age of 37 as the novelist 'George Eliot.'

On 19 December 1878, Mary Ann Evans had to attend court to prove George Henry Lewes' will. Apart from the copyright to his books, Lewes left everything to 'Mary Ann Evans, spinster.' Preferring to be known as Mrs. Lewes since 1854, known everywhere as George Eliot, a name that sold, legal procedures demanded she swear under oath that she was in fact, 'Mary Ann Evans, spinster.' A month later, so that she could reclaim 5000 pounds of her money from Lewes' account – to establish a Cambridge Studentship in Physiology in his name – Evans changed her name by deed poll to Mary Ann Evans Lewes. She incorporated rather than abandoned the name she brought from Coventry to begin her working life in London.[38] It is to Mary Ann Evans Lewes that this study turns to offer another type of reclamation. My subject is the writer who existed before the name 'George Eliot' was invented, the writer who has been obscured, I argue, by the famous novelistic persona, but whose history is crucial to our understanding of that foremost name in Victorian literature. For these reasons, throughout this thesis, I will refer to Marian Evans – the writer's adopted London name.

[38] On these two events, see Ashton, *George Eliot*, 368.

Chapter One

'Essaying to be': The Nineteenth-century Periodical Essay and the Problem of Genre

I now come to speak of that sort of writing which has been so successfully cultivated in this country by our periodical Essayists, and which consists in applying the talents and resources of the mind to all that mixed mass of human affairs, which, though not included under the head of any regular art, science, or profession, falls under the cognizance of the writer and comes home to the business and bosoms of men.

William Hazlitt, 'On the Periodical Essayists'

Georg Lukács famously compared the essayist to the literary equivalent of John the Baptist, one who 'goes out to preach in the wilderness about another who is still to come'.[1] Marian Evans, the periodical writer, is most often dismissed in accounts of George Eliot's life as this precursor of the novelist whose sandals she is unfit to untie. The self-inflicted check-mate described by Lukács as the typical fate of the essayist whose function becomes redundant following the arrival of the greater prophet, recognised through the essayist-precursor's descriptions, has come to characterise accounts of Evans' early writing. The essays are filed away under the dismissive category of apprentice pieces. The essayist is condemned to the critical wilderness and addressed only for what she has to say about the theories and teachings of her majestic novelist self who was hailed by some as the greatest prophet of her age. Even Thomas Pinney, editor of the seminal collection of Evans' critical writings, concludes his introduction with the rather deflated observation:

[1] Georg Lukács, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay' (1910), *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), 16.

> George Eliot's powers as an essayist and reviewer can add nothing to her reputation, but her articles display, in lesser measure, the same intelligence and breadth of view that we have learned to appreciate in her novels. This is praise enough.[2]

That Evans' periodical writings are most often ignored or undervalued is not entirely surprising when considered in the context of the wider critical neglect of the essay form in general and the nineteenth-century periodical article in particular. This neglect can be explained in terms of the problem of genre.

The essay, to use the most familiar term, is most often represented as a mere finger exercise, a rehearsal, a simplified entity which shows signs of the more complex novel form latent within. At the root of the marginalisation of non-fiction periodical writings is the difficulty commentators face in clarifying this work as literature, journalism, criticism, or philosophy – as Hazlitt observes, it is not 'under the head of any regular art, science, or profession'.[3] Its champions argue that it is condemned to the wilderness because of the impossibility of taming this particular species.[4] So diverse are versions of the nineteenth-century periodical essay, so various the traditions in different countries, that attempts to theorise the genre are comparatively rare and often problematic. It remains an 'invisible genre' in literary history.[5]

This chapter traces the genre history of the periodical article. Histories of the essay typically focus on major masters of the form – Montaigne, Bacon, Johnson, Hazlitt, Lamb, James – and seldom address the particular nineteenth-century versions that

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[2] Thomas Pinney, ed., *Essays of George Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 10.

[3] William Hazlitt, 'On the Periodical Essayists,' *Lectures on the English Comic Writers, Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 5: 84.

[4] See for example, Claire De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism and the Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London: Routledge, 1988); Lelia Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); O. B Hardison Jnr., 'Binding Proteus: An Essay on the Essay,' and R. Lane Kauffman, 'The Skewered Path: Essaying as Unmethodical Method,' in *Essays on the Essay*, ed. Alexander J. Butrym (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 11-28; 221-40; Ted Larry Pebworth, 'Not Being, But Passing,' *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 17-27; Richard M. Chadbourne, 'A Puzzling Literary Genre: Comparative Views of the Essay,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 133-53, where the essay is termed 'an exasperatingly hybrid and amorphous literary form,' ibid., 133.

[5] Good, *The Observing Self*, ix.

dominated periodicals. Histories of nineteenth-century journalism rarely enter into considerations of the essay or review traditions that inform all periodical publications. These oversights are surprising when the pervasiveness of the genre in the Victorian age, more usually see as the era of the novel, is taken into account. Addressing both the essay tradition that has its roots in the work of Montaigne and Bacon, and that of the review which emerges during the course of the eighteenth century, this chapter considers the difficulties that arise in attempts to characterise periodical form. I will show how these related essay and review traditions both converge in the nineteenth-century periodical article and how Victorian journalism is significantly informed by these competing influences. Moreover, I will demonstrate how the moral and instructive tone of nineteenth-century periodical writings is located in the studied objectivity of the eighteenth-century review and the important associated tradition of dissent literature, while the more intimate aspect of this work is seen to derive from the anti-scholastic tradition epitomised by Montaigne's writings.

Other forces shaping the evolution of the nineteenth-century periodical article can be traced more firmly to its own particular historical context. The escalation in the promotion of specialised scientific writing and learning towards the end of the eighteenth century is reflected broadly in the counter-tendency of acknowledged non-experts to develop a more personalised or familiar tone to their essayistic writings. The German tradition, for example, is notable for its efforts to stem the splintering of disciplines into specialised schools with its version of the critical essay as poetic form.[6] Evident in the emerging novel genre, the familiar narrative voice was incorporated into the tradition of essay writing for general periodicals from which the serial story and the multi-volume novel emerged. In addition, the gradual commodification of the essay form in the developing, competitive periodical markets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant that the periodical writer was increasingly obliged to balance the demands of his paying audience for both entertainment and information. Accommodation of these

[6] See Chadbourne, 'A Puzzling Literary Genre,' 142. For further on the influence of German literature on Marian Evans, see Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Anthony McCobb, *George Eliot's Knowledge of German Life and Letters* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Salzburg Universität, 1982); Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot and Goethe.*

demands was all the more acute through the nineteenth century as reading audiences became more diverse and the market for novels and periodical literature expanded.

Approaching periodical writing from a generic point of view, as Fredric Jameson has observed elsewhere, allows for the 'co-ordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin dichotomies of the history of forms and the evolution of social life'.[7] In addressing the various and often contradictory strands of influence that contribute to the evolution of the periodical article, I argue that a more fully integrated analysis of the contextual factors shaping Marian Evans' journalism is possible. By outlining both the generic and social-historical aspects to the cultural field in which Evans' first written work emerges, this chapter establishes the need for an approach to Evans' entire body of work that considers her own engagement with the material realities of her publishing environment. As further chapters will demonstrate, the powerful shaping force of context on text, and the writer's struggle and negotiation with her environment in the production of individual works both provide for a significant revision of our understanding of the work of George Eliot as well as Marian Evans.

'The Essay-like review or The Review-like essay'

The periodical absorbs all other genres. As a result, it is not easy to formulate exact definitions of the periodical article, nor is clarification of that much-used term, 'periodical journalism' a straightforward issue. A number of basic assertions, however, can be made. Periodicals at mid-century – weekly, monthly or quarterly – as distinct from daily newspapers, consist of a mixed bag of forms. Poetry and fiction feature in the more popular, family-oriented productions. Fiction consists of serial instalments of novels, such as Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*, individual short stories, like Mrs. Oliphant's 'A Christmas Tale,'[8] or linked series of stories that range from Thackeray's 'Roundabout' papers and Dickens' 'Sketches' by Boz, to Evans' three scenes of clerical life. Non-fiction writings for periodicals are variously categorised by

[7] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1983), 105.
[8] *Cornhill* 6-9 (September 1862-January 1864); *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 81 (January 1857).

editors and commentators alike as essays, reviews, articles, book reviews, travel pieces, occasional pieces, or miscellaneous notes. They include short notices or longer accounts of individual writers, lectures, plays, musical events, and recent publications on various subjects from theology, to history, science, and art. The longer contributions are most often called essays or articles, though they too are ostensibly reviews of the texts that invariably head the piece. In 'The Modern Essay,' Virginia Woolf signals that this capacious if untidy range is just one of the dilemmas faced by commentators on the form:

> The family [of essays] is widely spread; and while some of its representatives have risen in the world and wear their coronets with the best, others pick up a precarious living in the gutter near Fleet Street. The form too admits variety. The essay can be short or long, serious or trifling, about God and Spinoza, or about turtles and Cheapside.[9]

Both length and publication forum determine reactions to this hybrid and hazy form. Critics tend to privilege leading 'essays' in quarterlies in particular over shorter so-called 'review' articles because of their length. Classification of Marian Evans' journalism is a case in point, the former crowned with canonical status in her oeuvre, and the latter, mostly written for weeklies, condemned to a precarious marginal existence, some shorter pieces never even resurfacing in reprints. In their edition of Evans' writings, *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, for example, A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren divide Evans' non-fiction into essays, reviews, translations and letters.[10] Extracts from her Ilfracombe journal, the 'Prospectus' for the *Westminster Review* of 1852 and her 'Notes on Form in Art' (1868) are included in the 'Essay' section with the eight 'major essays' from the *Review*. In a 'note on the text' Warren explains briefly the reasoning behind the format of their presentation and selection of George Eliot's critical writings:

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[9] Virginia Woolf, 'The Modern Essay,' *The Common Reader* (London: Penguin, 1938), 210. This article provides another example of the problem of nomenclature: collected in the *Common Reader* it is assigned the status of essay and distinguished from the more ephemeral journalism written throughout her life; the piece, however, is a review of Ernst Rhys' collected edition, *Modern English Essays* in five volumes. Rhys' volumes contain articles by Richard Holt Hutton, Mark Pattison and others originally written as review articles to be published in the nineteenth-century periodical press.

[10] A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren, eds., *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1990).

> In this edition we have treated her essays as a discrete body of work in which she was, as A. S. Byatt remarks . . . 'clearing the ground' and have therefore separated them from her book reviews, which are, with rare exceptions, responses to individual works. Eliot's revision of some of her essays for publication for book form towards the end of her life (*Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, 1884) indicates that she too regarded the essays as qualitatively distinct work.[11]

Rather than clarifying the terms of reference for Evans' critical writings, this explanation increases the confusion. The suggested distinction here between 'responses to individual works' and 'essays' is a false one and not just, as Warren suggests, because ostensible reviews often move beyond responding to individual texts. Evans' most quoted article, 'The Natural History of German Life' is an essay according to the Penguin, and 1884 editions, though it is what Thomas Pinney in his introduction would term a 'spacious review'.[12] Unlike her 'Silly Novels for Lady Novelists' for example, most of this 'essay' is taken up paraphrasing Riehl's texts, though a brief critical consideration of Riehl's scientific methodology is offered towards the end.[13] And though Byatt and Warren take their precedent from what is presented as Evans' own implied distinction between essays and reviews, her article on Lecky's 'Influence of Rationalism' in the 1884 edition of her miscellaneous writings is included in the 'Essay' section, while Byatt and Warren place it with her reviews. In their explanatory note on the text it is described as 'her last piece of work as a reviewer'.[14] The idea, then, that Evans herself saw her essays as qualitatively distinct is only partially observed. In fact it seems that essays are often defined as such because they are quantitatively rather than qualitatively different. Most 'essays' are between thirty and forty pages long. Her other critical writings are anything from one or two pages to sixteen pages in length, as in the Lecky article – hence perhaps the reluctance on Byatt and Warren's part to call it an essay.

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[11] Ibid., xxxvii.
[12] Pinney, *Essays*, 2.
[13] [Marian Evans], 'The Natural History of German Life,' *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 51-79; 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856): 442-61, both reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 107-39; 140-63.
[14] Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 502.

The instability in definitions is not a twentieth-century editorial phenomenon. As this chapter will show, from the time of Montaigne, the modern essay has by its nature resisted categorisation. Efforts to classify types of non-fiction writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century testify to this difficulty. Indebted to both the modern essay and the review traditions, periodical articles in particular tend to be claimed as either essays or reviews. In 1855, commenting on the *Edinburgh Review*'s contribution to periodical literature during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Walter Bagehot sought a compromise and invented the compounds – 'the essay-like review' and 'the review-like essay' – to distinguish between the types of articles that dominated the *Review*'s pages. These writings he suggested were different from the 'essay-like criticisms' of his own day. The methods by which we identify these categories, however, are not at all made clear.[15] More recently, Joanne Shattock has tackled the same issue focusing on the 'essayist' and the 'reviewer.' The reviewer, she explains, was

> the explicator, the summarizer, the analyst, the critic who detected errors and weaknesses, who pointed out main lines of argument and made conclusions. In its most idealistic form this method presented the critic as a self-effacing servant of literature who drew attentions to a new work or author, but who on the whole kept his personality hidden.

By contrast, the essayist, or writer of review-like essays,

> used the book or books under review as an excuse for a discourse on a subject which interested him. As well as the exhilarating freedom which the essay offered, the opportunities for self-promotion and self-display were a temptation. Egocentrism was a charge which was easy to make against the essayist.[16]

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[15] Walter Bagehot, 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers,' *Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St. John-Stevas (London: The Economist, 1965-86), 1: 312. First published in *National Review* 1 (October 1855): 253-84.

[16] Joanne Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers: The Edinburgh and the Quarterly in the Early Victorian Age* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), 112. See chapter 5, 'The Essay-like review and the Review-like essay,' 104-24.

Walter E. Houghton, basing his assessment on Bagehot's 'double terminology,' presents a similarly conceived distinction between what he saw as the traditional review and the essay-like criticism, deemed part review, part article. When there is a movement 'out and in, away from the book and back to it' the article is an essay-like review; when the books 'are not so much as mentioned. . . . This is the review-like essay.'[17] These definitions seem clear cut until they are actually applied to writings in periodicals or newspapers. In Evans' case, for instance, her short piece on *Antigone*, classified as a review under Shattock's and Houghton's definitions, should perhaps more properly be called an essay, though its length disallows an extended 'discourse' on the subject which Evans addresses: the falseness of an over-simplified opposition between the real and the ideal, the individual and the social world, religion as a private issue and as a form of state control.[18] The inclusion of a book title at the heading of this article is clearly redundant since no attempt is made to address the specific text, *The Antigone of Sophocles: Text with Short English Notes for the Use of Schools* (Oxford, 1855). This was a common practice: articles supposedly motivated by new publications or new editions of texts listed at the head of periodical contributions were often token inclusions that made the form look familiar. As Shattock reports of *Edinburgh* contributors: 'Brougham cheerfully admitted that his contributions were not "reviews" at all. They frequently arrived with the heading left blank, followed by instructions for the insertion of a speech or pamphlet in order to conform to the format of the other articles. . . . William Whewell observed it was a "convenient and blameless practice" provided no false implications were made with regard to the work placed at the head of the article.'[19] In 1833, a young John Stuart Mill outlining the criteria for his new 'Review' exposes the flagrant misapplication of the 'review' label: 'The plan is to drop altogether every kind of lying; the lie of pretending that all the articles are *reviews*, when more that half of them are not.'[20]

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[17] Walter E. Houghton, 'Periodical literature and the articulate classes,' in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 6.

[18] [Marian Evans], 'The *Antigone* and its morals,' *Leader* 7 (29 March 1856): 306, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 363-66.

[19] Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers*, 112.

[20] John Stuart Mill, *The Earlier Letters of J. S. Mill 1812-48*, ed. Francis E. Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 202.

The essay label is used with similar ambiguity. As in her account of Riehl's work, Marian Evans' so-called 'essay' on Heine written for the *Westminster Review*[21] provides little sustained critical analysis, consists mainly of extended quotation and summary, and notes 'main lines of argument' in contemporary criticism of Heine's work and character. It seems to fulfil the function of Shattock's reviewer, the 'self effacing servant of literature' who draws attention to a new author but on the whole keeps himself hidden.

Problems faced in categorising periodical articles – the term 'article' is used by Evans in her correspondence to refer to both 'essays' and 'reviews'[22] – are of course related to wider debates on the value of periodical literature as a cultural form. These debates centre on opposing the creative art of essay writing with the trade of journalism, as suggested in Woolf's polarisation of the coronet-wearing artist and gutter-press-man. Based on the perception that it is original and opinion-forming in subject matter and more innovative in construction, the 'essay' is deemed to be of more literary value than the derivative and formulaic review. The paragraph-long account that summarises the central argument of the historian's or scientist's latest publication is of course significantly different from the subjective exploratory meditations on London by Addison's spectator or Montaigne's discourse 'On Friendship' for instance. Even short summarising 'notices,' however, in the partisan nature of editorial lines, in the genre-driven obligation to inform and entertain, in the selection of material, and in the essentially subjective choice of 'central' arguments, there is some indication of the shared features of both the review and the essay traditions. There is a craft to both, and skill too in the presentation of what is essentially the subjective judgement of the reviewer as objective assessment.

Neither is the problem of categorisation unique to the periodical article. As indicated in my introduction, the loose baggy monster, the novel, is not a monolithic form. From the emergence of the term in the eighteenth-century to describe fictional writing, it has proved to be an unstable and a capacious generic marker. The 'novel' was seen to be synonymous with the Romance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is

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[21] [Marian Evans], 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine,' *Westminster Review* 65 (January 1856): 1-33, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 69-106.
[22] See *GEL*, 1: 370; ibid., 2: 18, 31, 32, 57, 61, 89, 93, 95, 97.

dependent on classical modes such as tragedy and comedy for rhetorical devices and incorporates established structured formats such as the letter. Much like the other 'recently arrived' form, the periodical article, it escapes easy definition.[23] Part of the difficulty is no doubt related to the very fact that neither novel nor article has the long critical history of drama or poetry. Unlike these modes, from their inception the periodical article and the novel were deeply implicated in emergent bourgeois capitalism given that their rise to prominence in literary culture coincides with the transformation of publishing into a mass-market business.[24]

The sectioning of periodicals into intellectual, entirely non-fictional, quarterlies, middle-brow monthly and weekly miscellanies, and purely sensational penny magazines suggest broader divisions based squarely on such commercial lines. These divisions in many ways dictate the reception of material in a periodical irrespective of the particular genres that combine to make up each periodical issue. Whatever is published within its pages, whether essay, review, poem, short story, or serialised fiction, publication format – pricey quarterly or penny magazine – will determine the reading experience to some degree since individual forms are adapted to suit individual publications.

Perhaps then, in considerations of the essay form, there has been too much emphasis on attempts to classify or theorise the mode at the expense of studying how the form is manifested in particular historical contexts. The push towards neat classification with its set rules and structures encourages an approach that transcends the somewhat chaotic changeable circumstances of the 'social' text, to use Jerome McGann's expression, but suggests too, a discomfort with the material circumstances of composition.[25] The classificatory tendency possibly indicates a failure of historical imagination in the escape to immanent permanent formulae. Formal analysis of any

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[23] See Marthe Robert, *Origins of the Novel*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 3-46. On the use of the term 'novel' see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 112-13; Mikhail Bakhtin notes the Romantics perceived the novel as 'mixed genre' that incorporated poetry and prose. See M. M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 42, n., 1. Bakhtin argues for the novel as the genre that absorbs all other modes.

[24] See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1968), 9-61; George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) offers an extended historical consideration on the background to the novel.

[25] See Jerome McGann, *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

genre, however, can address at once both 'the history of forms *and* the evolution of social life' as Fredric Jameson reminds us and thus provide the means towards a more comprehensive investigation of individual articles in the light of these 'twin dichotomies'.[26]

An investigation of the periodical article's connections to its original models – the modern essay of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and the eighteenth century review is useful in this regard. The formal features of both the essay and the review can be seen to inform the periodical article as both traditions converge in the nineteenth century.

'Je n'enseigne poinct, je raconte': The essayist raconteur and the instructing reviewer

To speak of the essay and the review as separate traditions is already somewhat misleading since what is termed the review is clearly a type of essay, though many of its characteristic features are deemed to be diametrically opposed to the modern essay pioneered by Montaigne. The essay is supposedly subjective, open-ended, individualised, intimate in tone; the review is objective, usually more limited in length, generalised to heighten the sense of objectivity, and detached in tone as a result. These oppositions are suggested in Montaigne's claim in 'On Repenting' (1588): 'Je n'enseigne poinct, je raconte' – 'I am not teaching, I am relating.'[27] In the dictum, Montaigne suggests the essential features of the essay and introduces the persistent distinction between the essay and the review in terms of intention and function. The essayist observes and relates; the reviewer instructs and provides answers.

The paratactic essay by its very name implies that it is more exploratory in form and more individualised because of its characteristic subjective voice and the apparently

[26] See n., 7. Or as McKeon puts it, 'the study of genre is a "historical approach" to literature because it understands literary categories in their contingency.' See Michael McKeon, 'Genre Theory,' in *The Theory of the Novel: An Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 1.

[27] Michel de Montaigne, 'On Repenting,' *Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), bk. 3, 909.

haphazard selection of subject matter. The French root of the word is typically invoked to explain the open-ended, often inconclusive nature of this type of writing: *essayer* – to attempt, to experiment, to try out. The etymological origins emphasise the uniqueness of each effort at essay writing and give currency to the genre's semi-autobiographical status first asserted by Montaigne in his claim that his *Essais* embodied his essence and was therefore, 'the only book of its kind in the world'.[28] The review, by comparison, is deemed functional and formally predictable and as a result questionable as a creative art form.

Montaigne purposefully dissociates himself from traditional learning in 'On Repenting.' His essays were the antithesis of systematic, institutionally-bound thinking which sought its form and formal authority in the weight and example of traditional models of learning. The anti-scholasticism at the root of the emergence of the modern essay is associated with Renaissance scepticism. Rejecting the authority of accumulated wisdom, the essayist presents his knowledge purely in terms of his own experience. Both the act of inquiry and the written form are driven by subjective comprehension – the 'Que-scais-je?' of Montaigne's famous phrase that places the individual at the heart of the process as author and authority. The authority, however, is always contingent since the essay by its nature is sceptical of even its own assertions. Inconsistencies and contradictions are part of its 'rhetoric of discovery'.[29] These features of the essay, their unresolved tension and internal inconsistencies, are typical of mid-nineteenth-century articles in general and of Marian Evans' journalism in particular as we will see in chapter three.

Michael J. Hall sees a direct link between the newly emerging essay form in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the explorations, geographical and scientific, of the Renaissance: 'Truth is no longer something acquired by assimilating received views but something which one must seek out for oneself and experience, like an explorer charting new lands.'[30] In literary and philosophical terms, then, the *Essais* of Montaigne introduced an unorthodox challenge to traditional models of scholarly expression and

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[28] Montaigne, 'On the Affection of Fathers for Their Children' (1592), 433.
[29] Michael L. Hall, 'The Emergence of the Essay and the Idea of Discovery,' in *Essays on the Essay*, ed. Alexander J. Butrym (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 86.
[30] Ibid., 78.

argument. 'Doxa' which Christopher Prendergast observes, is an 'essentially conservative and conserving force' because 'it participates in the production of a stable economy of signs and meanings through the perpetual recycling of the ready-made' is undermined by the sceptical questioning of the essayist and irregular form of the essay.[31] Prendergast is challenging Roland Barthes' depiction of *mimesis* here as an orthodox and conserving force. Prendergast, by contrast returns to the origins of the term and outlines its radical and disruptive qualities as noted by Plato, and argues for the persistence of some of these qualities in the nineteenth-century novel. The disruptive or radical aspects to the nineteenth-century periodical article can be linked similarly to its original form. The essay is radical and even destructive in its original conception. In his own influential essay on the essay, Theodore Adorno addresses the aesthetic implications of such unorthodoxy: 'the essay's innermost formal law is heresy.'[32]

Since the development of essay – as well as the novel – coincides with the rise in 'heretical' individualism this is not surprising. The privileging of individual interests in nascent capital economies that replaced feudal systems was accompanied by the breakdown in traditional religious authority. Ian Watt summarises:

> Capitalism brought a great increase in economic specialisation; and this, combined with a less rigid and homogeneous social structure, and a less absolutist and more democratic political system, enormously increased the individual's freedom of choice. For those fully exposed to the new economic order, the effective entity on which social arrangements were now based was no longer the family, nor the church, nor the guild, nor the township, nor any other collective unit, but the individual: he alone was primarily responsible for determining his own economic, social, political, and religious roles.[33]

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[31] Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12.

[32] Theodore Adorno, 'The Essay as Form,' *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, ed., Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 23.

[33] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 63. In selecting the writers spearheading these changes, along with the philosophers Descartes and Locke, Watt names Addison and Steele, periodical journalists, Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, periodical journalists and novelists, and Bacon, essayist and philosopher. For a revisionist account of his premises which address the points Watt overlooks, namely the role of the aristocracy and the Romance, see Michael McKeon, 'Generic Transformation and Social Change: Rethinking the Rise of the Novel,' in *The Theory of the Novel*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns

It is to be expected, then, that in Watt's depiction of the novel's 'novelty' – its challenge to 'literary traditionalism', its emphasis on individual experience 'which is always unique and therefore new', its formlessness (compared to the ode for example), its 'closeness to the texture of daily experience' – we are reminded of characteristic features of the essay, especially as it appears in the ephemeral periodical.[34]

The dominance of the capitalist mode was almost complete in the industrialised economy of nineteenth-century Britain, the age of the periodical. The term 'individualism' became current in this environment where literary forms had increasingly cultivated a mode of interiority that is turned outward in narrative testament – the novel epitomises this mode but it is an integral feature too of the periodical article, especially in the chatty camaraderie of *Blackwood*'s 'Noctes Ambrosianae' or Thackeray's 'Roundabout Papers' in the *Cornhill*. But it is evident too in the address to the reader so typical of most periodical articles.[35] The technique recalls the work of the master essayist and sceptic, Montaigne, who announces in his address to the reader at the beginning of his *Essais*: 'Here I want to be seen in my simple, natural everyday fashion, without striving or artifice: for it is my own self that I am painting.'[36]

When their literary histories are recalled the differences between the review and the essay seem obvious. The opposition between the *raconteur* and the *enseigneur* is repeatedly invoked in that persistent debate contrasting art and science that inevitably surfaces in attempts to explicate the essay genre. The creative essay is made distinct from the scholarly article or the critical review in a replaying of their literary origins. The opposition, however, is unsustainable. The review tradition has its origins in the encyclopedic projects such as the *Journal de Sçavans* (1665), which provided annual abstracts of every text published in France and in its original form seemed to embody an entirely opposite function to that of the non-systematic and anti-traditional essay. Taking publications like the *Journal* as their model, eighteenth-century monthlies set out to

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Hopkins University Press, 2000), 382-99. McKeon focuses on generic and social instability in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries from which the novel emerged and to which it responded.

[34] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 13, 14, 23. For further details on the links between the origins of the novel and the essay see De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, 11-27; Good, *The Observing Self*, 9-10.

[35] This point will be developed in more detail in chapter four.

[36] Montaigne, *Complete Essays,* lix.

provide an objective recording of accumulated knowledge on a variety of scholarly subjects: an essentially conservative and conserving project, one might say, epitomising the 'doxa.' But as recent histories of eighteenth-century periodical literary practice demonstrate, the number of publications burgeoned through the course of the century with the increased efficiency in production methods, the expansion of wealth and the development of literacy levels.[37] In consequence, newly emerging monthlies such as the *Monthly Review* (1749) the *Critical Review* (1756) and later *The Analytical, British Critic* and *English Review*, as their names suggest, were less defined by the early abstract models. They were more discursive and battled for audiences in this increasingly competitive market by claiming superior summaries or commentaries. In this environment, encyclopedic projects like that of the *Journal* were no longer viable. Editors now selected texts under review in the monthlies; selection implies the use of criteria, and so the ideological biases of periodical publications became more transparent. These periodical pieces had a double purpose: the periodical mediated between the texts and the audience, and justified that mediation on the basis of an ideologically-driven rationale that sought to conserve or promote particular social, cultural, political and moral standards.

The essay or the review, then, when offered in the market place, is never simply about the presentation of facts or formulating logical arguments. The reviewer is not a scientist and irrespective of content, all article writers are aware of the need to captivate an audience. In her *Common Reader* Virginia Woolf insists that the 'principle which controls [the essay] is simply that it should give pleasure. . . . Everything in an essay must be subdued to that end.'[38] The form's close relationship with the market-place is implicit in this order and it anticipates Adorno's claim that 'luck and play' are essential to the genre.[39] Lukács, like Adorno, emphasises the formal aspects of the genre over the content. 'Science affects us by its contents' he explains, 'art by its forms; science offers us facts and relationship between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies.' Less

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[37] See Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the* Edinburgh *1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978); J. A. Downie and Thomas N. Corn, eds., *Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth -Century Periodicals from* The Review *to* The Rambler (London: Frank Cass, 1993).

[38] Woolf, 'The Modern Essay,' 210.

[39] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form,' 4.

obliquely, he claims the essay as a creative art, arguing that from the Greeks and Romans to the German Romantics it is self-evident that 'criticism is an art not a science.'[40]

Theorists of the essay genre from Lukács and Adorno, and more recent commentators such as Graham Good and Claire De Obaldia all address this issue of non-fiction's status as creative act or instructive account. The debate is an important one for scholars of creative writers such as Eliot, Dickens, Thackeray, and Woolf among many others. The sidelining of the non-fiction or criticism of these writers clearly stems from the perception of this work as less creative, less original and therefore less open to aesthetic analysis. The tendency to directly associate the novelist with the critical commentator or essayist derives from the belief that the critical article consists of a transparent representation of the writer's artistic vision – the scientist's code, the teacher's handout. It presumes the article only instructs and that instruction involves the simple transfer of information. Despite increased sensitivity – or hyper-sensitivity – to the rhetorical nature of all language, from Nietzsche's sceptical interrogations of language's inherent subjectivity to post-structuralism's insistence on the unstable nature of all linguistic utterances, analyses of articles by well-known literary figures in miscellaneous periodicals targeted at a variety of audiences, remain almost untouched by developments in contemporary criticism.

As 'literature in potentia,' the essay as well as the review are perceived as inferior products.[41] The periodical article then, is sentenced to an existence on the margins of both philosophy and literature, and writings in this form by novelist or poets are regarded as support material for the dominant genres. The partial analysis of nineteenth-century writings and the concomitant neglect of the tradition to which these writings belong stems from a critical bias towards the article's content and subject matter over form and aesthetic. Time and time again, as we will see in proceeding chapters, the predominant use of Marian Evans' journalism – presenting her writings as representative of George Eliot's artistic manifesto – is the result of an over-identification between the work of

[40] Lukács, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay,' 112, 110.
[41] De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, 5.

George Eliot the novelist and the *content* of her articles in the *Westminster Review* or the *Leader*.[42]

This question of art or science, however dominant in debates about the essay, in the end holds little interest for critics such as Lukács since it barely touches upon what he explains as 'the essence of the question: What is an essay?' Eschewing the tendency to arrive at a comprehensive conclusion to this question, Lukács asks the basic sensible questions that need to be applied to each individual piece of non-fiction writing to fully comprehend both its function and its effectiveness: 'What is [its] intended form of expression and what are the ways and means whereby this expression is accomplished.'[43] We become less concerned with attempts to define what constitutes an article, less swayed by the neatness of classification, and we ask instead: what does an article *do*?

From writer to reader: symbolic capital and the commodification of the genre

Our analysis of the genre turns then to the written work's purpose in its historical context. Bourdieu addresses this point more specifically in his preface to *Distinction*: 'the mode of expression characteristic of production always depends on the laws of the market in which it is offered.'[44] To understand the form, and to understand the significance of the essay or review *as* form, with all the attendant implications for developing an aesthetics of the genre, it is necessary to consider the development through time of the market in which the genre was offered and transformed. The art/science debate on the nature of the essay, as well as the opposition of the essay and the review also become historicised by this process.

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[42] For example, Gordon S. Haight, 'George Eliot's theory of fiction,' *Victorian Newsletter* 10 (Autumn 1956): 1-3; Richard Stang, 'The literary criticism of George Eliot,' *PMLA* 72 (1957): 952-61; Robert G. Stange, 'The Voices of the Essayist,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (1980): 312-30; Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*; Simon Dentith, *George Eliot* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986); David Richter *Narrative/Theory* (London: Longman, 1996); Rosemary Ashton, ed., *George Eliot: Selected and Critical Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[43] Lukács, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay,' 111, 112.

[44] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, xiii. See also Bourdieu, 'The Economics of Linguistic Exchange,' *Social Science Information* 16 (December 1977): 645-68.

To secure a paying audience in a newly affluent society with a growing bourgeois readership, the eighteenth-century Review, engaged in what Jon Klancher terms a specific 'discursive colonialism' by which it constructed the 'society of the text.'[45] The seventeenth-century patronage system meant that writers produced their work for a known and limited community of readers. In contrast, according to Habermas, Klancher and others, eighteenth-century periodicals sought to create like-minded audiences with their pitch to their readers to become writers and interpreters themselves for the publications they consumed in clubs and coffee-houses. The idealisation of the periodical as a portable coffee-house in the first volume of *The Bee* emphasises this sense of 'imagined community':

> Men of all ranks and of all nations, however widely disjoined from each other, may be said to be brought together here to converse at their ease. Without ceremony or restraint, *as at a masquerade, where, if a propriety of dress and expression be observed, nothing else is required.* A man, after the fatigues of the day are over, may thus sit down in his elbow chair, and together with this wife and family be introduced, as it were, into a spacious coffee house, which is frequented by men of all nations, who meet together for their *mutual entertainment and improvement.*[46]

The double function or purpose of the periodical, and consequently of the individual pieces that make up the content of each issue emerges here. Firstly, access to the world of the 'coffee-house' is determined by the reader's willingness or desire to follow the dress code: it is a masquerade, or as Bourdieu puts it, a 'game of culture'. 'Culture,' he notes, 'is at stake which like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it.'[47] Willingness to belong to the

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[45] Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences 1790-1832* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 24-5; On the periodical's role in creating the public sphere in the eighteenth century, see especially Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (1962; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

[46] 'On the advantages of Periodical Performances,' *The Bee* 1 (1790-91): 10-14, cited in Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, 23-4. Emphasis added.

[47] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 12, 250-1.

community of the text means that you learn to speak its language. This obligation binds both readers and writers, and importantly for the question of genre, it does not discriminate between length, style or form of periodical texts: it applies both to the writer of the extended article and the paragraph-long book review. The desire to play the game in the first place is explained by Bourdieu's model as the desire of the newly economically affluent bourgeois to acquire social wealth. Bourdieu explains that 'symbolic capital' is earned by the 'acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability.'[48] The periodical thus offers the means to such 'wealth' for the middle-class man in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Consequently, the periodical's second purpose becomes clear: the act of reading will be mutually entertaining and improving. The reader both shares and learns to share in the community understanding of what constitutes an entertaining piece, and the mutual legitimising of specific moral codes. The political motivation behind the structuring of these reading audiences has been made obvious in the editorial policies adopted by those stewarding individual journals. Smollet's *Critical Review* sought to establish itself as the voice of a cultural élite by setting itself up 'to police the boundaries between the classes'. In his preface to the *Critical Review* in 1761, the editor emphasises its writers' commitment to 'exert their best endeavors for the regulation of taste and the honour of criticism'.[49] As histories of reading audiences of the time suggest, however, this task became even more difficult in the nineteenth century.[50]

Through the nineteenth century, England witnessed the transformation of its social and political structures. The manifold aspects to these radical changes can only be briefly suggested here but among many other things, these changes contributed to the escalation in the printing and publishing trade. They include the extension of the education system at all levels to reach a greater part of the population, the growth of markets due to the expansion of industry at home and the Empire abroad, the concomitant increase in the standard of living for the book-reading middle-classes, and the organising

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[48] Ibid., 291.
[49] Cited in Donoghue, *The Fame Machine*, 25.
[50] See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*; Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers*; Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public:1800-1900*, 2d ed., with a foreword by Jonathan Rose (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998).

of workers agitating for legislative reform through written pamphlets and journals. Periodical literature, the ubiquitous form of the age, became both an organ for and cipher of this transforming environment. It was no longer possible to posit as an audience the coffee-drinking public gentleman who educates his family, however illusory the figure undoubtedly was for the eighteenth-century writer. Always a fantasy, the notion of a predictable, definable 'ideal' reader became increasingly impossible in the nineteenth century. The shift in social codes, the changing political landscape and the development of wider markets meant that reading groups became more diverse and the business of writing, more professional.

Periodical literature becomes central to an understanding of reading audiences, and therefore of authorship, in the early part of the century. As Klancher argues, 'the periodicals and their myriad writers gave us a new way to see how "making audiences" meant evolving readers' interpretative frameworks and shaping their ideological awareness'.[51] The periodical then finds its market and its authority through the dual process of self-fashioning and cultural inscription. It makes its audience by representing it to itself, by acting as its representative voice and it naturalises its own authority by appealing to its self-constructed model. Thus recent accounts of nineteenth-century literary history have reconstituted our picture of reading audiences by departing from the usual privileges accorded to the ideal relationship between the 'great writer and the singular sensitive reader'. Instead, we look for what Klancher calls the 'panoptic view' that deals in the harsher vocabulary of 'consumption, supply and demand'.[52] Any effort to characterise the journalism of 'great writers' of the century, these reading histories suggest, must necessarily be informed by such material concerns. Furthermore, the wider lens makes room for the work of the more anonymous periodical writers, not crowned with the canonical coronet, who consistently reached a diverse and growing readership

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[51] Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, 12.

[52] Ibid., 4, 13; See also Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten, eds., *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); N. N. Feltes, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Andrew Blake, *Reading Victorian Fiction: The Cultural Context and Ideological Content of the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Gilmartin, *Print Politics*; Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form*; Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*; Miller, *Novels Behind Glass*.

through the periodical thus contributing to the making of English reading audiences, and therefore to the making of English writers.

In its movement from the seventeenth-century book form of Montaigne and Bacon to the more market-driven nineteenth-century periodical, then, the essay evolves into a popular and pervasive social and cultural indicator. As the audience for this writing expanded from the lower aristocratic or powerfully wealthy men of Montaigne and Bacon's time, to the eighteenth-century bourgeois gentleman and the 'unknown public'[53] of the nineteenth century, the form itself changed. However, it also became correspondingly more effective as a force *for* change, a point neglected by Erickson and Gross, which emphasise its role in conserving the social status quo.[54]

The influence of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century dissent culture on the development of this 'moral' dimension to the English Review tradition has been well-documented in relation to the eighteenth-century reviews. The influence of this 'literary culture of non-conformity',[55] to use N. H. Keeble's phrase, on nineteenth-century periodical writings receives only passing comment in reading histories of the time.[56] The pedagogic or reforming essay which is indebted to this tradition, however, became increasingly dominant in the nineteenth-century periodical, and typified the ways in which the periodical article became the focus for both conservative and radical polemicists. Richard Altick notes how the printed word was the 'chosen weapon of aggressive proselytising religion' and 'simply by making the printed word more available [in tracts and pamphlets for the most part] the religious literature societies stimulated the spread of literacy.' Indeed, he estimates that by 1861 the Religious Tract Society had an annual output of around twenty million tracts, and produced over a hundred periodicals.[57] Though much of the work of these religious groups would have fallen on deaf ears, the pervasiveness of their tracts and pamphlets – in essence forms of the essay themselves – no doubt influenced the development of a dissenting or overtly moralistic periodical

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[53] Wilkie Collins, 'The Unknown Public,' *Household Words* 18 (1858): 217.
[54] See Erickson, *Economics of Literary Form*, chapter 3; John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: English Literary Life Since 1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), chapter 1.
[55] N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Non-Conformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987).
[56] See note 52.
[57] See Altick, *English Common Reader*, 101.

literature. Robin Gilmour has argued that Evangelicals (both Established church and non-conformist) constituted the 'first modern pressure groups'. He cites G. O. Trevelyan, Macaulay's biographer, in support: '[they were] the pioneers and fuglemen of that system of popular agitation which forms such a leading feature in our *internal history* during the past half century.'[58] The effect of such pamphleteering on more mainstream publications is suggested in the reprinting in the periodical press arguments that appeared as pamphlets or vice versa: George Moore's polemic against censorship of culture, *Literature at Nurse*, had its first airing in two *Pall Mall Gazette* articles, while the arguments of Barbara Bodichon's pamphlets on women's education and women and the law in mid-century England were repeated in the *English Woman's Journal*.[59] The genuine constitutive authority of the essay was demonstrated in the development of this literary culture of non-conformity in the periodical press.

Though often dismissed for its extreme polemic, or ridiculed for its association with such social unacceptables as the middle-class reforming religious spinster like the interfering Miss Clack in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), this pamphlet and tract culture also championed instructive reading habits. Having developed wide reading audiences, this culture had a considerable impact on the material produced in periodicals. Its influence can be seen in the short instructive articles on health, food, the value of sobriety, or exercise, or the dangers of gambling, for example that pervade periodicals. In competition with religious movements, yet also contributing to the educative slant of periodical articles, The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, chaired by Lord Brougham, from its inception in 1827 actively sought to increase readership among the working classes with its cheap instructive pamphlets and publications. The utilitarian efficiency of the project is evident in its phenomenal reach. The Society's *Penny Magazine* achieved a circulation of 200,000 and it opened a market large enough to take a

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[58] Cited in Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: the intellectual and cultural context of English Literature 1830-1890* (Essex: Longman, 1993), 9. Emphasis added.

[59] George Moore, *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals* (London, 1885), reprinted from 'A New Censorship of Literature,' *Pall Mall Gazette* 40 (10 December 1884): 1-2; Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the most important Law concerning Women* (London, 1854), *Submission to the Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the State of Popular Education* (London, 1858), partially reprinted in 'Female Education in the Middle Classes,' *English Woman's Journal* (June 1858): 217-27 and in 'Of those who are the property of others and of the great power that holds others as property,' *English Woman's Journal* (February 1863): 370-81.

number of imitators such as *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*.[60] These magazines comprised relatively short simple informative articles on aspects of biology, physics, natural history, mathematics and so on. The almost universal moral tone of nineteenth-century literary criticism is clearly not unrelated to the enormous market for publications promoting specific religious moral codes. More particularly, the effects are seen in the rhetorical vocabulary that dominates consideration of literature and the arts.[61] Accordingly, the central formal features of the essay and review play into a variety of specific reading environments that emerged throughout the nineteenth century. These extra-literary social, political and cultural factors operated, often unwittingly, to ensure the pervasiveness of the periodical article at this time.

Nineteenth-century advocates of the value of reading, motivated as they were by the belief that an educated society resulted in a more cohesive and stable society, took as their main target the nineteenth-century *family* in marked contrast to the eighteenth-century individual *gentleman*.[62] The ubiquitous ideal of Victorian security and stability, the family gathered to read around the hearth, was widely promoted by all interested parties. While the influential religious groups advocated family readings on Sunday in particular as a worthy way of spending the Sabbath, the more utilitarian societies valued the same practice as a productive and instructive leisure activity. Brought into the family circle and maintaining that circle, the reading material was presented almost as an additional member of the family. And here again, the intimate, conversational and sympathetic voice of the essayist suited ideally the version of the form constructed by Victorian society. Its brevity and variety of subject matter added to its suitability and popularity as family reading material. The titles of popular periodicals of all types provide obvious indicators of the way the market followed and promoted this cosy scene-setting: *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, *The Family Herald*, *The Family Friend*, *The Family Tutor*, *Household Words*, *Home Circle*, *Sunday at Home*.

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[60] See R. K. Webb, 'The Victorian Reading Public,' *Universities Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (November 1957): 35. The circulation of *Chamber's* at mid-century is estimated at 90,000.

[61] This point will be addressed in greater detail through chapters three and four with specific reference to the critical vocabulary of Evans' journalism and the narrative persona and use of melodrama in *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

[62] What constitutes an acceptable level of education, of course, varied considerably depending on gender, class, profession, and geographical location.

The Casuist and the Companion

The periodical text thus operates to create a sense of 'society.' The radical reforming pieces offer alternative social visions and the conforming doctrines reinforce the discourses of propriety and stability. The naturalising of its own particular doctrines or social codes, central to the 'making of an audience,' is achieved by the periodical writer in part through the construction of a disinterested editorial and commentator's voice which does not draw attention to the process of its own invention. Jon Klancher notes this feature of the genre but does not develop it. Such pervasive naturalised exchange, crucial to what Bourdieu terms 'cultural capitalism,' he remarks, is a mode that must be 'inscribed in language as well as in social relations, in prose style as well as in publishing institutions'.[63] On the other hand, the intimate, companionable, honest testament of the essayist is equally persuasive in its independence and truthfulness. The periodical article's mixed heritage of review and essay traditions is central to the process of constructing a reading audience. The effect is realised in part through the use of apparently transparent prose. The prose writer, essayist or reviewer, aims at all times for absolute clarity and for full comprehensibility – unlike the more allusive writing of the poet.

In *The Day-Star of Liberty*, Tom Paulin observes that William Hazlitt co-opts this feature of the essay in his assertion of a 'new poetics of prose' in the early part of the nineteenth century. The need for clarity is linked by Hazlitt to the essay's function – the search for truth. No ornamental rhetorical flourishes must distract from this purpose. He opposes the truth-telling claim of prose to the fiction of poetry in his commentary on Scott and Byron, overstating his case somewhat to argue that non-fiction prose, as Paulin puts it, is an 'especially difficult and taxing aesthetic genre.' And in making his case for a poetics of prose, Paulin adds, Hazlitt is also making the case for criticism to be recognised as an art form. Hazlitt supports his claim with reference to the stylistic

[63] Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, 33.

features of the genre, with especial reference to the use of clarifying analogy and metaphors which are accumulated to compound the purpose of truth-telling.[64]

In his lecture 'On the Periodical Essayists', however, Hazlitt presents a much more ambiguous account of criticism which he sees as epitomised in Samuel Johnson's moral essays. The work of the 'moral' critic Johnson is set up as the antithesis of the personal essayist's and Hazlitt is scathing of the former:

> The mass of intellectual wealth here heaped together is immense, but it is rather the result of gradual accumulation, the produce of general intellect, labouring in the mine of knowledge and reflection, then dug out of the quarry, and dragged into the light by the industry and sagacity of a single mind. . . . Johnson's style both of reasoning and imagery holds the middle rank between startling novelty and vapid common-place; neither ideas nor expressions are trite or vulgar because they are not quite new. . . . His subjects are familiar but the author is always upon stilts.[65]

In opposition to the figure of the critic, Hazlitt describes the essay stamped with the personality of its author – those written by Burke or Goldsmith's 'citizen of the world.' For the greater part of the lecture he focuses on the father of 'personal authorship,' Montaigne, and his English disciples, Addison and Steele. The bias towards the personal essay is a long-standing and still persistent feature of periodical criticism. It should be noted, however, that Hazlitt views neither Johnson's moral pieces nor the 'review' type of essay that is implicit in his description of Johnson's method as anything other than essays. Rather the 'character' of Sir Roger de Coverley or Bickerstaff, 'gentleman and a scholar, a humourist, and a man of the world; with a great deal of nice easy naivete about him,' epitomise the best the form can offer for Hazlitt.[66] He leans towards the fictional elements of essay writing rather than the instructive or pedagogic and in this again points

[64] Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 154, 156.
[65] Hazlitt, 'On the Periodical Essayists,' 92-3.
[66] Ibid., 88-91, 88.

to the mixed heritage influencing the development of the periodical article and its dual purpose – to entertain and instruct.

This raises the question of appropriate tone. In establishing the authority to justify taking up the position of commentator and to convince of the accuracy of judgement, the periodical writer is obliged to construct a mediating voice that is at once of its audience and apart from it. This voice is linked to the instructive aspect of dissent preaching and converting, noted above, but it also has roots in the early essay tradition. Graham Good provides a suggestive sketch of the essayistic figure that emerges from the work of Montaigne and Bacon onwards:

> Detached and skeptical of his environment . . . his implied rank is middle-class . . Like the *hônnete homme* of French seventeenth-century literature, the ideal essayist should be disinterested, his outlook uncoloured by any particular trade or profession but [he] should be fascinated by details of all kinds which makes him a good observer.[67]

Though not noted by Good, the essayistic figure bears a striking resemblance to the ideal reader and interpreter embodied in Coleridge's influential idea of the clerisy, later to be championed in the Victorian age by critics such as Matthew Arnold. The balanced neutrality of the essayist leaves him on the margins of society even though the position means his judgement is central to his social group. Bacon adopted Montaigne's method in English prose according to Robert Adolph since he codified the French habit of 'exact observation, sharp definition and clear classification' with 'courageous skepticism'.[68] Such objective assessment is the hallmark of genuine criticism – at least, it is its projected aim. There is a close association then between the critic's assessments and the essayist's observations. This association is reinforced by less well-known etymological roots for the word *essai*. Claire De Obaldia traces an earlier meaning of the word to the Latin *exagium* meaning 'weighing an object or an idea, examining it from various angles but never exhaustively or systematically.' Hardison offers a contribution from the Norman

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[67] Good, *The Observing Self*, 10.
[68] Robert Adolph, *The Rise of Modern Prose Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968), 18.

French, *assier* – 'to try or test as in the quality of mineral ore', or as in modern English, 'to assay.'[69] Unintentionally recalling Hazlitt's Johnson labouring in the mine, De Obaldia's definition incorporates intellectual scepticism, and non-partisan assessment which never pretends to be the last word on any topic or to offer comprehensive judgement. This attitude is often explicit in reviews of texts in periodicals for example, where the limited space is repeatedly invoked by reviewers to point to their awareness that their commentary offers only partial insight.

However, from its modern conception, the essay engaged its audience predominantly because of its unique *conversational* style that deliberately countered the more traditional oratorical writing strategies and stands in contrast to the notion of critical detachment. From Montaigne to Lukács the subjective voice dominates. The modern essay often goes so far as to take the form of a letter to a friend. The relationship between the essayist and his reader is thus presented as one of friendship. Good summarises: 'the essay presupposes an independent observer, a specific object and a sympathetic reader.'[70] The periodical article of the nineteenth century often functions under the same presuppositions. The readers, having purchased the magazine or journal are all willing participants in the game of culture. The writer, not wanting to alienate his audience, engages in a similar charade of friendship. O. B. Hardison notes more particularly the essay is an 'exercise in self-fashioning' citing Emerson's pun 'I dare: I also will essay to be.'[71]

The purpose of such illusion-making is neatly summarised by Michael Hall in his account of the essay and offers a suggestive link with the assumed authority of the middle-class essayist of the mid-century periodical. Montaigne declares himself openly, naturally before the reader, Hall observes, because, 'he hopes to remove the barriers between author and reader but he also wants us to *lower our critical resistance*, to forget ourselves for a moment and enter into the private world of the author. The sincerity, the honesty of his observations, like the roughness and openness of his style must be seen as

[69] De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, 2; Hardison, 'Binding Proteus,' 12.
[70] Graham Good recounts that Montaigne gave the death of his best friend, Étienne de la Doètie, as his main reason for beginning his writings since it provided a way for continuing their conversations. The 'truth' then that is offered by the essay is a 'mix of anecdote (pointed for effect), description (selective) and opinion (perhaps changing).' See Good, *The Observing Self*, 13, 4.
[71] Hardison, 'Binding Proteus,' 25.

part of the art which conceals art or study.'[72] Hazlitt, voicing the turn from specialised scientific discourses to the more intimate literature of sensibility explains that the work of art 'must carry [the writer] out of himself into the feelings of others'.[73] This illusion of intimacy is commonly cast in terms of a sympathetic bond between writer and reader that anticipates much of the critical commentary on mid-nineteenth-century novelists. As we shall see, it has especial resonance for debates on George Eliot's so-called 'doctrine of sympathy.'

The nineteenth-century periodical's authority to define the relationship between the writer and the reader and society is legitimised by the reader who sacrifices his individuality to engage with the rules of the social game. The better essayists, of course, claim this authority with apparent effortlessness that creates the comforting illusion of intimacy and complicity. All periodical writers, however, are writing in a tradition that aspires to justify its function in terms of its persuasive power. Such authority validates both the criticism presented and the rhetorical devices by which audiences are maintained or entertained.

Marian Evans was learning to negotiate this field of cultural production long before George Eliot was invented to continue the task. When she began writing her first fiction, 'Amos Barton,' Evans was a full-time writer of periodical articles. Her article on the poet Young in the *Westminster Review* along with the *Belles Lettres* and 'History, Biography and Travel' section of the journal appeared in the same month as the first part of 'Amos'. In publishing the story as a serial in *Blackwood's* she continued working as a full-time periodical writer. The continued critical neglect of the fact that 'George Eliot' was writing for periodicals has delimited our understanding of the narrator in Evans' early fiction by its novelistic bias. The narrator of the 'scenes' shares traits with the essayistic persona as described here; traits that emerge in Evans' journalism and in the articles of her fellow *Blackwood's* contributors. Throughout all her writings Evans' narrative personae naturally seek to educate and entertain. David Carroll captures the essayistic and review roots of Evans' 'George Eliot' in his description of her typical

[72] Hall, 'Emergence of the Essay,' 81-2. Emphasis added.
[73] Hazlitt, 'An Essay on the Principles of Human Action,' *Characters and Shakespear's Plays*, *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), I: 3.

narrator as both casuist and companion.[74] The narrative voice echoes the intimate and moral tones of Montaigne and the eighteenth-century figures of Roger de Coverley, Bickerstaff, the 'rambler' and the 'spectator'. Along with the dissenting voices of the eighteenth-century sermon and pamphlet traditions underscoring her clerical tales in their overt moral tones, her narrator embodies the confluence of traditions that shaped the periodical article in the nineteenth century.

The next two chapters, which address Evans' work as an editor and as a professional journalist, demonstrate her practical engagement with the demands of a complex commercial literary culture. Individual articles that make up individual periodicals are addressed as social texts, influenced by and influencing the horizon of expectations of the mid-nineteenth-century reader. In her work as an editor, in particular, we witness Evans' own attempts at essaying to be part of the London literary coterie that would take her forever from the social and political conservatism of midlands existence. We see too the ways in which her own unorthodoxy is held in check by the demands and limitations of the mid-nineteenth-century publishing environment in what was to be the beginning of her life-long struggle with individual self-expression and corporate claims.

[74] David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5-6. Though his study is brilliantly grounded in historical and cultural thought of the nineteenth century, Carroll pays little attention to the ways in which both the casuist and companion are embedded in the material culture of the periodical press.

Chapter Two

'The character of Editress': Marian Evans at the *Westminster Review*

The journalists are now the true Kings and Clergy; henceforth Historians, unless they are fools, must write not of Bourbon Dynasties, and Tudors and Hapsburgs; but of Stamped Broad-sheet Dynasties and quite new successive Names, according to this or the other Able Editor, or Combination of Able Editors, gains the world's ear.

Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*.

In his *Autobiography*, Anthony Trollope remarked of his occasional stints at journalism for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Fortnightly Review*:

> I have to acknowledge that I found myself unfit for work on a newspaper. I had not taken to it early enough in life to learn its ways and bear its trammels. I was fidgety when any word was altered in accordance with the judgement of the Editor, who, of course, was responsible for what appeared. I wanted to select my own subjects, not to have them selected for me; to write when I pleased, – and not when it suited others. As a permanent member of staff I was no use, and after two or three years I dropped out of the work.[1]

From autumn 1851 to January 1857, Marian Evans worked predominantly in the periodical press.[2] Unlike Trollope, she began her working life in the press as co-editor of the *Westminster Review* with its owner, the publisher John Chapman. From late 1854 to 1857 she was a professional journalist writing mostly for the *Westminster* and the mid-century radical newspaper co-founded by George Henry Lewes and Thornton Hunt, *The*

[1] Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography* (1885; London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 201.
[2] Apart from a period of transition between Spring and Autumn 1854 when she completed her translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* and traveled around Germany with George Henry Lewes.

Leader. Though like Trollope she wrote occasional pieces for the *Pall Mall* and *Fortnightly* in her later life as a well-known novelist, Evans was well accustomed to the 'ways and . . . trammels' of the periodical publishing industry having experience of the life of both editor and contributor before the fiction writer George Eliot was conceived.

That Evans was a professional woman of letters familiar with the world of publishing by the time she wrote her first fiction is universally acknowledged in critical and biographical accounts of George Eliot's life. The particular ways in which these facts are relevant to the writer, however, have never been articulated. The significance of the period when she worked as an editor from 1851-54 is usually presented in terms of her increased contact with London's intellectual coterie through her residence in John Chapman's house at 142 The Strand. Emphasis inevitably falls on her close relationships, first with Chapman, then Herbert Spencer and then George Henry Lewes. Accounts of her editorial work, competing with such a turbulent and transforming period in her personal life, are perhaps understandably reduced to background paragraphs. Though she is included in passing references, Barbara Onslow's recent *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, for instance, does not count Evans among the editors she considers in detail. To date, Evans the editor has never been the subject of sustained analysis in article, book or dissertation form.[3]

Gordon Haight's ground-breaking biography, his nine-volume edition of the George Eliot letters and his edition of Chapman's diary provide the most substantial information about the workings of the *Westminster* and Evans' time there, though her editorial duties are not considered terribly important. Haight notes that Evans wrote very little for the quarterly in her first three years and concludes:

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[3] Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 2000). See Ashton, *George Eliot*, 77-110; Uglow, *George Eliot*, 44-81, for the most recent detailed and vivid treatment of this period of Evans' life. See Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), 152-59, for the most focussed descriptive account of her editorial role. All three give fuller attention to the personal drama unfolding at this time. Two early studies of the *Westminster Review* provide important information about the running of the periodical, Sheila Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot and the *Westminster Review*, 1852-60' (MA thesis, University of Birmingham, 1963); Rosemary VanArsdel, 'The *Westminster Review*, 1824-57 with special emphasis on literary attitudes' (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1961). VanArsdel mistakenly identifies articles written by others as the work of Evans.

> Marian's part in the *Westminster* 1852-4 was *limited* to advising on the choice of authors and subjects, editing the articles with cuts and rearrangements where necessary, careful proof-reading, and supervision of the letter press.[4]

Trollope recognises that the disadvantages of his late entry to journalism made him unfit for press-work; these next two chapters will argue that Marian Evans' early career as an editor and as a journalist were formative in her working life. The very details of this work noted above and more or less dismissed by Haight, are precisely what make these years interesting and important for the writer. Evans' time as an editor emerges as a distinct stage in her literary history if we look behind that phrase, 'professional woman of letters,' so regularly invoked to characterise this period of George Eliot's life but so seldom considered as anything other than the novelist's apprenticeship years.[5] This chapter will argue that in providing the writer with her first public stage, her first professional role, Evans' time as an editor had a crucial shaping force on her understanding of ways in which the needs of genre, market and audience converge in the production of any written text. It will demonstrate how Evans responded to these needs by developing a particular editorial persona that suited the male-dominated business in which she was operating. It suggests too, though, the very practical ways Evans sought to overcome the limitations of her professional status in the assertion of her control over the letterpress of the influential journal.

Marian Evans never again tried her hand at the editing profession once she left the *Westminster Review* in 1854. Travelling abroad with Lewes, she had set herself outside even her radical London circle. George Combe, with whom she had established a regular

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[4] Haight, *George Eliot*, 98. Emphasis added. See also Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman*.

[5] Valerie Dodd's *George Eliot: An Intellectual Life* (London: Macmillan, 1990) is a notable exception here. Dodd seeks to look behind that label 'intellectual,' so casually ascribed to George Eliot, to chart the specific details of the writer's intellectual history. She argues compellingly for the formative influence of such nineteenth-century thinkers as Bentham, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Mill, Saint-Simon, Feuerbach and Comte on Evans' thinking in the two decades before she began writing fiction. Asserting its parameters as a history of ideas, however, Dodd does not engage so much with the material context of Marian Evans' intellectual and professional development, which I argue here, is crucial to the formation of 'George Eliot.' Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, *George Eliot* (Boston: Twayne, 1985) also provides a revealing account of these times that does not dismiss them as mere apprenticeship years and instead shows how they contributed significantly to her intellectual development.

and productive correspondence while editor of the *Review*, famously questioned both her mind and her background following her 'elopement,' wondering if there was 'insanity in Miss Evans's family; for her conduct, with *her* brain, seems to me like morbid mental aberration'.[6] The authoritative mediating position constructed by the efficient editor in the early 1850s was no longer possible, even as it was no longer desired by Evans. And once it was over, she never commented explicitly on this phase of her life. Her correspondence and the *Westminster Review* itself are the two main resources that help to indicate the significance of this aspect to Evans' career. As this chapter will demonstrate, the former clarifies the extent of her role in the production of the journal and her growing awareness of the demands of any literary production ideologically and economically. I will argue that the individual numbers of the periodical – the issues edited by Evans and those from the years before and after her time at the *Review* – demonstrate explicitly and implicitly Evans' conception of the role of an editor and her ability to fulfil that role at a leading mid-century quarterly. Her detailed understanding of the ideological, commercial and material dimensions to the publishing industry at mid-century gives some indication of how the future fiction writer learned to assert her control over this environment in her later life.

In his recent study on the influence of periodical culture on Thackeray's writings, Richard Pearson situated Thackeray at the cusp of the emergent mass production of literature – the novelist, he argues embodies the transition from the romantic individual artistic genius to the cog in the Victorian literary machine.[7] Cultural materialists, emphasising this latter image, have a tendency to remove the artist altogether in analyses of the dominant feature of this mass produced literature – the newspaper and magazine industry. Editors, writers and readers are all unavoidably interpellated by their cultural moment in such a model. A consideration of Marian Evans' professional life, I suggest, presents the opportunity to cut through the extremes of both exceptionalist and over-determined views of the artist. The writer emerges in a less rigidly defined but more

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[6] George Combe to Charles Bray, 15 November, 1854, *GEL*, 8: 129. Having already pronounced her the most able and intelligent woman he had ever met two years previously, the amateur phrenologist's defensiveness at what he saw to be his misjudgment of Evans' social and moral propriety, lead to many such outrageous comments from a bruised Combe.

[7] Pearson, *W. M. Thackeray and the Mediated Text.*

dynamic position between the two poles. It is not a diluted version of both ideas of the individual writer but a synthesis of competing agendas that are imposed on the artist and renegotiated by her both literally and imaginatively. In this way, though it is rarely pointed out, she is like Thackeray and Dickens. As we will see, Evans' work as an editor introduced her to the demands of individual artists, the corporate body, and the reading public, which she quickly appreciates are never independent of each other – a crucial insight for the future professional writer.

Unlike her immediate predecessors at the *Review*, J. S. Mill (1836-40) and William Hickson (1840-51), Evans did not contribute regular articles to the journal while editor. Apart from a few short contributions to its contemporary literature section and occasional pieces for the *Leader* in the spring of 1854, her creative energies were focused on the production of each issue of the quarterly periodical.[8] This chapter then is peculiarly non-literary in its focus for a study of 'George Eliot'. Evans' professionalism emerges in the actual form the *Westminster Review* takes from 1852-54: in the way it changes from the journal produced under its previous editors, in the way it sets itself apart from its competitors, and in the way it adapts features of its rivals' productions. Evans' hand is seen in the reorganisation of the *Review* into a significant forum for critical commentary on contemporary literature, religion, science and politics, in the indexing and headlines used for every article to guide the reader through the journal, and in the selection and arrangement of articles. Throughout her letters to friends and contributors, her awareness of the need to balance the expression of individual opinion with deference to corporate demands is consistently evident. Important for her later life as an author is the picture that emerges of the editor of this *Review* who ensures that contributors are financially rewarded, who is unafraid to intervene in their work, but is conscious too of the limitations of her editorial role; who is more of a pragmatist than an idealist, a business woman as much as an intellectual, and writing is presented here not just as a form of teaching but as a trade. This work, along with her two years as a professional journalist

[8] She began translating Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841) as her association with the *Westminster Review* was waning.

are what made Evans a 'professional woman of letters'. If the label is to mean anything, we must consider what exactly Evans did to earn it.

'The character of Editress'

Among other things, Evans' work as editor of the *Westminster Review* has been overlooked because of the confusion about her position at the periodical. It is difficult to define conclusively the borders between her role and Chapman's. Variously described by twentieth-century commentators as 'assistant', 'editorial assistant', 'assistant editor', 'co-editor' and 'editor', the exact nature of Evans' function and influence is not easily determined, and its importance is typically elided by the almost universal habit of labeling this time from 1851-57 her 'apprentice' years to the world of letters. The term, signifying a training period that prepares and makes the 'professional,' invites us to pass over this period of development for the productions of the post-apprenticeship years. When applied to Evans' work at the *Westminster*, however, the term 'apprentice' is misleading: it fails to distinguish between her work as an editor and her work as a periodical journalist. And though like all apprentices Evans did not receive fair payment for the work done – in fact she received no salary at all it seems, just bed and board at Chapman's home – Evans was not trained by a professional periodical editor and was not Chapman's 'assistant.' Correspondence between Evans and Chapman and the *Westminster*'s contributors from 1851-54 reveal that Evans co-edited the *Review* with Chapman. As owner and publisher of the journal, and more experienced in literary publishing, Chapman clearly had the authority to over-rule Evans but as we will see, it was because Chapman allowed himself to be led by Evans in many ways, that the journal became an influential publication at mid-century.

John Chapman was an ambitious radical publisher, and he was well known in London literary circles at mid-century if not entirely well respected as a capable businessman. His pitch to prospective patrons for the new series of the *Westminster* included the reassuring information that he would not be editing the journal. In a letter to

Robert Browning, Thomas Carlyle recounts the visit of Chapman to his house soliciting a contribution to the first issue of the *Westminster* under Chapman's ownership:

> John Chapman, publisher of Liberalisms, 'Extinct Socinianisms,' and notable ware of that kind . . . really a meritorious productive kind of man, did he well know his road in these times; his intense purpose now is, to bring out a Review, Liberal in all senses, that shall charm the world. He has capital for 'four year's trial' he says; an able Editor (name can't be given), and such an array of 'talent' as was seldom gathered before.[9]

Chapman's acquisition of the *Westminster* has been recorded in various biographies of George Eliot, and most notably, in work by Gordon Haight, and by Shelia Rosenberg.[10] Of particular interest in this history is the way in which Evans defines her role at the *Review* as something distinct from what she repeatedly terms Chapman's 'nominal editorship' or his role as 'proprietor' of the journal. In these early exchanges between Chapman and Evans, it becomes clear that Evans worked as the 'able Editor' acknowledged in Carlyle's letter. Shortly after he negotiated to take over from Hickson, Evans wrote to Chapman about the job:

> With regard to the secret of the Editorship, it will perhaps be the best plan for you to state, that for the present *you* are to be regarded as the responsible person, but that you employ an Editor in whose literary and general ability you confide.[11]

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[9] Cited in Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot's Originals and Contemporaries: Essays in Victorian Literary History and Biography*, ed. Hugh Witemeyer (London: Macmillan, 1992), 91. Carlyle continues, 'an honest kind of man, with a real enthusiasm (tho' a soft and slobbery) in him,' sharply pinpointing the weakness in Chapman's character that showed the need for a more thorough and practical editorial hand. See Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot,' 44.

[10] Rosenberg is a long time champion of Chapman's place in the mid-century periodical press. She has argued that in his capacity as proprietor and editor of the *Westminster*, Chapman's role in promoting controversial issues central to nineteenth-century intellectual development is still underestimated. These oversights are explained in part by the persistent bypassing of the periodical in nineteenth-century cultural history. See 'The "wicked *Westminster*": John Chapman, His Contributors and Promises Fulfilled,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 225-46; See also Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot.'; Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman.*

[11] 9 June 1851, *GEL*, 8: 23.

Evans concludes, 'on these practical points, however, you are the best judge'. The remark can only be interpreted as either sarcasm or soothing exaggeration of Chapman's qualities since through the course of the letter she has explicitly directed Chapman with a series of specific orders on how to deal with prospective contributors and patrons, clearly not trusting at all to his judgement of 'practical points'. Again, on June 12 1851, she assures him, 'I am willing to agree to your proposition about the nominal editorship, or to anything else really for the interest of the *Review*.'[12] Since no one was to know of Evans' editorship, this can only mean that Chapman suggested that he be named as editor. The implication is that it was Evans, not he, who did the actual editorial spade work.

The front implied by Chapman's 'nominal editorship' is significant for two related reasons. It marks a significant development in Evans' duplicitous role with her audience as the 'character of Editress' as she described herself in a letter to a friend in 1853.[13] Her 'doubled' voice emerges first in her early writings for Charles Bray's *Coventry Herald and Observer* in the late 1840s and again in the 'invisible' role of translator of Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu* (1846).[14] This editorial 'character' prefigures the constructed mediating voice of her journalism and the narrator of her fiction. Gendered in her letters to friends and in correspondence with some contributors, but not in her editorial notes, the public persona becomes a neutral figure in her journalism, masculine in her early fiction and neutralised again in her later novels. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer observes astutely of Evans' letters from this time:

> When Marian Evans became George Eliot, she continued the official cover that had served her so well as editor, practicing her art in the double invisibility of writing for publication under a male pseudonym.[15]

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[12] Ibid., 1: 351.

[13] To Mrs. Peter Taylor, 1 February 1853, ibid, 2: 85.

[14] *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* was published by Chapman in 1846. Her name did not appear on the finished work. Evans had taken over the work from Rufa Brabant and spent two years translating its 1500 pages, receiving 20 pounds for her trouble, Haight, *George Eliot*, 53, 59. Her early journalism will be discussed in the next chapter.

[15] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Marin Evans: George Eliot Her Letters and her Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 169.

The public voice, if never a public *face*, emerges in correspondence associated with the *Review*, behind the mask of the unnamed neutral figures in the 1852 prospectus from the new editors, and in subsequent editorial interventions over the nine issues published between January 1852 and January 1854.[16]

Secondly, because it is intended to present the illusion that Chapman was editor of the *Review*, this fiction of nominal editorship again makes it difficult to define the extent of Evans' work at the periodical. This difficulty combines with a number of other obstacles: Evans' journal from this time is missing, the records of the *Westminster* have not been preserved, and since Chapman did not pay Evans a salary, no official record of her work ever existed. The editorial mask was a successful one then: the character of Editress has never been and can never be fully unveiled.

There are basic observations about her role that have been repeatedly asserted however: Chapman managed the financial side of the *Review*, often badly,[17] and Evans saw each issue of the journal through the presses. In her letters, Evans disavows knowledge of the journal's financial affairs, though she is always considering ways to increase its circulation. Evans' role was the day-to-day running of the periodical: corresponding with contributors, reading through unsolicited articles, proof-reading drafts, selecting and editing articles, arranging the layout of the journal. William Hale White, Chapman's assistant, has given us a glimpse of this life:

> 'I can see her now with her hair over her shoulders, the easy chair half sideways to the fire, her feet over the arms, and a proof in her hands, in that dark room at the back of No. 142.'[18]

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[16] The Propectus to the new series of the *Westminster* was published in the first issue, *Westminster Review* 57 (January 1852), iii-iv, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 3-7.

[17] See her letters 27 May 1852, 14 July 1852 in *GEL*, 2: 29, 44; Bel Mooney, 'George Eliot the Journalist,' *George Eliot Fellowship Review* 14 (1983): 77.

[18] William Hale White, *Athenaeum* No. 3031 (28 November 1885): 702. For a general overview of editors' functions in periodicals and newspapers at mid-century, see Joel Wiener, ed., *Innovators and Preachers: The Role of the Editor in Victorian England* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 1985).

It is important to move beyond this fondly remembered and often-quoted description, however, to examine the ways in which under her period of editorship with Chapman the quarterly was transformed in design and concept. These changes were determined by Evans' understanding that the individual articles and each issue as a whole should both entertain and enlighten. Her correspondence with contributors and to her friends reading the *Review* emphasises again and again her concern for her audience. However original in conception, an article failed if its form or style alienated its readers. A journal that simply amused was flippant and trivial. In a letter to George Combe in which she discusses the prospect of publishing a paper by an acquaintance, Evans explains:

> The greatest danger with respect to him would be the tendency occasionally rather to exhibit his own information than to instruct the reader and so to produce a striking article, instead of a popular and useful one.[19]

An audience is persuaded by a pragmatic and popular style rather than by introducing innovative subjects or new material, it is clearly implied. In an earlier letter to Combe she demonstrates her understanding of the article as a genre that combines both the essayistic and review features discussed in the first chapter as she explains her task as an editor. Each article, she implies, if well written, must be both speculative and instructive:

> An ordinary pilot will do for plain sailing, but we want clear vision and long experience when we set out on voyages of discovery. It is no small difficulty, in conducting a Review, to secure the right man for each subject, and when you think you have him, he often disappoints you – is not equal to himself, or your previous conception of his powers. And so it often happens that after very faithful editorial effort, the result is very poor.[20]

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[19] 16 July 1852, *GEL*, 8: 55.
[20] 8 April 1852, ibid, 41.

However placating the tone, the attention to detail and context that surfaces in this and other correspondence suggest the thoughtful and practical approach to her work. She is conscious of form, tone, purpose and audience, and how both editor and writer are responsible for shaping these features of the text.

Evans' long letter to John Chapman from Broadstairs in July 1852 provides the most detailed single account of her idea of the periodical's function, her particular ideological commitment to the publication, and her very practical level of engagement with the *Review*.[21] It also points to the conscious act of developing the journal to suit a wider audience, especially in her comparison of the quarterly with its rival publications. The letter provides a more revealing insight into the *Westminster*'s position in nineteenth-century periodical culture than the somewhat nervous prospectus that announced the new editorship. As Rosenberg has pointed out, so anxious was Chapman to ensure he received the financial and intellectual support of *Westminster* regulars, the prospectus was fettered by obligations to too many principles and so satisfied no one.[22]

The 1852 letter, in contrast, is a clearer setting out of Evans' early understanding of the demands of the commercial marketplace and indicates her own will to shape the *Review* into an economically viable, if not always ideologically cohesive product. It offers important insights too into her understanding of the relationships between an editor and her contributors, the contributors and the periodical and the periodical and its audience. The letter has a business-like yet familiar tone and it is obvious that Evans is in control of producing the individual issues. She orders Chapman to allow Froude an unusually long 26 pages for his article (which turned out in the end to be 31 pages) and reprimands him for telling James Martineau that J. S. Mill, Martineau's rival, was going to write for the October issue of the *Review*. Mill would 'flatly contradict' Martineau's point of view in the forthcoming article on Whewell's moral philosophy so the editor warns 'there was nothing for it but to announce contradiction on our title-page'. She asks Chapman not to 'suggest "Fashion" as a subject to any one else – I should like to keep it.' And apparently

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[21] 24-25 July 1852, ibid., 2: 47-50.

[22] See Rosenberg, 'The Wicked Westminster,' 229. For further detail see also Sheila Rosenberg, 'The financing of radical opinion: John Chapman and the *Westminster Review*,' in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University

then gives the subject over to Herbert Spencer, with whom she was trying to maintain a relationship despite his refusal of her love.

Evans goes on to demonstrate her recognition of the fact that a successful periodical is subject to market demands and that editors must bow to these demands, as must proprietors. This commercial pressure is made clear from her remarks on competing contemporary publications in her letters. Here, she tells Chapman that the *Leader* and *Athenaeum* had been delivered to her and notes that the *British Quarterly*, which had just published an advert in the *Times* promoting its next issue, remained their main rival: 'Its list of subjects is excellent. I wish you could contrive to let me see the number when it comes out'. Evans expands on this advantage over the more strictly philosophical and intellectual *Westminster*, rooted in the broader scope of the *Quarterly*'s subjects. She suggests to Chapman that they should undercut their competitors by developing their range of materials and tempting away their rival's writers: 'We have no good writer on such subjects [as Pre-Raphaelism in Painting] on our staff. Ought we not, too, to try and enlist David Masson, who is one of the *B*[*ritish*] *Q*[*uarterly*] set?'

The need to develop a more popular dimension to the *Review* at this time, which involved maintaining G. H. Lewes as a regular contributor ('Defective as his articles are they are the best we can get *of the kind*'), is recognized by Evans as her 'editorial compromise'. It is the only course open to both herself and Chapman since neither of them had the necessary financial security to maintain a journal directly representing their views and nothing else. Such a journal would be neither profitable nor competitive and in the vague terms Evans describes the imagined production, it seems she herself could never see such a publication realised in practice:

> the thought which is to mould the future has for its root a belief in necessity, that a nobler presentation of humanity has yet to be given in resignation to individual nothingness, than could ever be shewn of a being who believes in the phantasmagoria of hope unsustained by reason.[23]

Press, 1982): 167-92; Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman*.
[23] 24-25 July 1852, *GEL*, 2: 49.

Evans' point here is directed at James Martineau, the radical Unitarian who rejected the religion's core belief in rationalism and promoted free will founded on inner intuition rather than the evidence of reason. His dissatisfaction with the new *Westminster* was regularly articulated in letters complaining of its lack of commitment to his cause, and he opposed the suggested merger of his flagging *Prospective Review*, also published by Chapman, with the *Westminster* in 1853-4. The *Westminster* was deemed too eclectic in its range of material but that very eclecticism was a purposeful marketing tactic of the new editors and one of the features that made the new series successful.

Evans' first fiction often demonstrates more agreement with the outlines of Martineau's creed than is suggested by her grim reactionary dismissal above. The 'editorial compromise' here, however, is a clear articulation of Evans' more pragmatic rational side, and indicates that she did not subscribe fully to the views represented in the *Westminster Review* under her editorship. She is not, of course, unusual in this respect. Leslie Stephen, for example, was well known to distinguish his personal opinions from his professional editorial work at the *Cornhill* and expressed annoyance at the determined policy of the magazine's owner, George Smith, to disavow articles on politics and religion, 'the only subjects in which reasonable men take any interest'. Thackeray had similar difficulties with Smith's insistence on commissioning fiction writers when he was supposed to be chief editor of the magazine, and Charles Dickens despaired of Bentley's interference with his editorial role during his tormented years editing the *Miscellany*.[24] The changes Evans makes in the journal over the course of two years, however, suggest that to compromise did not leave her without authority. In the ways in which she helps to transform the *Review* then, she does not fulfill either of W. T. Stead's categories of mid-century editors noted in another context. She lacked the 'missionary' zeal he hoped for in editors, but neither was she one of the 'eunuchs of the craft'.[25]

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[24] Reported in F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 258; Pearson, *W.M Thackeray and the Mediated Text*, 198; Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 75-7.

[25] W. T. Stead, 'Government by Journalism,' *Contemporary Review* 49 (1886): 66. Cited in Wiener, *Innovators and Preachers*, xviii.

By refusing to align herself with any clearly defined ideological doctrine during her early years with the press, Evans was practicing a mediating strategy that defined much of her writing life. This mediating position is often cast in terms of a conservative meliorism that pleases neither traditionalists nor radicals and has come under attack for the snug space it allows the author to occupy. Feminist critics in the seventies in particular questioned the discrepancy between the practice and the politics of Evans' work. Pointing to the example of her life, much of the debate centred around her refusal to match the perceived comfortable middle-England 'universal' moral truths of her fiction with the facts of her radical uncompromising London lifestyle. As Zelda Austen bluntly put it:

> Feminist critics are angry with George Eliot because she did not permit Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* to do what George Eliot did in real life: translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse to marry until she was middle-aged, live an independent existence as a spinster, and finally live openly with a man whom she could not marry.[26]

But as Kate Flint observes more recently:

> It may well be misguided, in addition to being often disappointing to assess George Eliot by late twentieth-century – or, indeed, nineteenth-century – feminist standards. Her resolute even-handedness on very many issues, coupled with her determination to subordinate the claims of an individual to wider social demands, means that any such attempt continually comes up against contradictions.[27]

Flint is speaking of Evans' fiction in this assessment. The actual subordination of individual will to wider demands, however, was given a specific reality in her first public professional work as editor. The self-sacrifice echoes Evans' earlier submission to her

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[26] Austen, 'Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot,' 549.

[27] Kate Flint, 'George Eliot and Gender,' *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 163.

father's desire that she attend public church services, even as she privately avowed her disbelief.

Evans' writing has been criticised too for the ways in which she is seen to promote a typically conservative middle-class defensiveness that creates the terms of its own ruling authority from within its dominance of the publishing industry and, therefore, of intellectual life. Daniel Cottom, for example, has argued that the intellectual middle classes naturalise their own orthodox codes of behavior by asserting the voice in which the intellectual speaks as inherently and naturally authoritative and universal – an illusion constructed initially in Evans' case though the periodical press. In her role at the *Westminster Review*, Cottom claims, Evans begins to fashion this conception of the intellectual at the vanguard of a transforming society in which the authority of the former patrons of intellectuals, the aristocracy, has been eroded. Thus, he suggests, 'legitimacy no longer seemed the domain of an exclusive class. . . . To speak to society the intellectual now had to command a universal tongue.' His argument is based on the assertion that Marian Evans actively sought to separate the intellectual from society in order to maintain that distinctive authority of class. The growing mass readership that characterised the transformed landscape of nineteenth-century society 'freed' the intellectual to construct a role for himself as mediator or teacher that was not possible under patronage and as a result,

> when the audience's relation to the writers became sufficiently mediated, thus allowing it to appear as a completely abstract entity, it was easier for writers to believe that the audience had no reality in the production of their writing. They could imagine they addressed themselves only to the cause of unfolding truth.[28]

This view of Evans' involvement with the periodical press supports Cottom's broader arguments about the novelist's efforts to mystify both the function of art and the idea of the author in the Victorian age. Epitomising a certain middle-class hegemony then, Evans'

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[28] Daniel Cottom, *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History and Literary Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7-8.

work teaches her ideal audience to reinforce her own authority as a teacher, separate and infallible. George Eliot's novels are the focus for these criticisms, feminist and Marxist alike. Little to no detailed analysis is offered of either Evans' other writing or her work as an editor which I suggest here provides an important corrective to this one-dimensional view of the writer. Such theoretically-driven arguments do not consider the specific aspects to Marian Evans' career at the *Westminster Review* and what they can tell us of her relationship with her reading public: her conception of her function of editor or her constant renegotiation of how to achieve success with an audience at mid-century – how best to entertain and to instruct. There is no doubt that the Evans was an intellectual middle-class writer and that she edited a middle-class intellectual review. What those labels – middle-class and intellectual – mean, however, is more complicated than Cottom's stark polarization of the 'intellectual' and 'readers' allows. At mid-century, the middle-class was not a clearly defined or monolithic social grouping. Mary Poovey, among others, explains:

> The middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute and the emergence of oppositional formulations.[29]

The periodical press was obviously a site of contestation; a largely differentiated body of productions where journals sought at once to impose the truth of their particular convictions and amuse an audience. These dual purposes, socio-political and commercial, did not always sit comfortably together but they always combine in the targeting of any periodical at an audience. And above all else, the constantly fluctuating periodical market meant that the relationship between the periodical and its audience developed very unevenly and often in an unexpectedly dialogic fashion. Proprietors, editors and writers

[29] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London: Virago, 1989), 3.

were always both instructing and responding to readers, always both constructing and acknowledging shifts in their horizons of expectation.

The much-attested ephemerality of the periodical volume, not to mention the individual periodical article, provides appropriate parallels in this regard, not for Evans' so-called one-way ideological programming of her audience, but for the constant formal experimentation that marked her own writing life. Following the practices of successful business, Evans' formal gambles and reinventions from work to work mirror the process the *Westminster Review* adopted in its own renewal under Chapman and Evans: it strove to offer its audience both a sense of continuity and change. And, in stark contrast to Cottom's view of her role at the *Westminster*, this balance of continuity and change is determined in no small part by an acknowledgement of audience demands in the creation of any written text. This understanding of reader influence anticipates Jerome McGann's useful description of the 'social text': the product of the interactive network of associations that operate between writer and audience, and in this context, between writer, audience and editor. All inform the writing and reading of the periodical.[30] In an acknowledgement of M. Buloz's successful editorship of the popular and respected *Revue de Deux Mondes*, an obituary in the *Contemporary Review* entitled 'Editing,' outlined the practical means by which the editor plays his role in the formation of the dialogic social text:

> There is no more important sentence for an editorial phylactery than this – In order to be really abreast of the time, you must sometimes go boldly before it. Or, if there be another more weighty for his purpose it is that in the selection and juxtaposition of articles he prints, the laws of proportion, economy of treatment, light and shade, should be well attended to.[31]

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[30] See McGann, *Towards a Literature of Knowledge*, ix.

[31] [Unsigned], 'Editing,' *Contemporary Review* 29 (February 1877): 518.

Emphasis is laid on both the need for innovation and the need for appealing or familiar presentation. Evans was always conscious of both in her time at the *Westminster*, and after.

James Mill acknowledges this formula for success in an article in the very first volume of the *Review* in 1824.[32] His essay, the most controversial for its outspoken opinions on its rival quarterlies, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, is indicative of the sleight of hand necessary to manage this synthesis of continuity and change which allows for the success of any publication. In an ironic self-reflexive turn in this pioneering issue of the *Westminster*, Mill notes that any periodical publication can only introduce itself onto the market in familiar terms otherwise it will fail to reach an audience that will return to its pages, even while he hopes to move beyond these limitations with this new quarterly. As John S. Mill explains in a summary of his father's article:

> He began by an analysis of the tendencies of periodical literature in general; pointing out, that it cannot, like books, wait for success, but must succeed immediately, or not at all, and is hence almost certain to profess and inculcate the opinions already held by the public to which it addresses itself, instead of attempting to rectify or improve those opinions.[33]

This compromise is one that Evans the editor learned, and learned to manipulate, and one that George Eliot later adapted in the fictional strategies she developed over twenty years. And for Evans, it meant also that above all, the printed word should never become calcified in the repeated promotion of dogma. This flexible curiosity is reflected in the epigraphs to the new *Westminster*. Chapman and Evans traded the previous editors' epigraphs from Bacon and Locke for Shakespeare and Goethe. It is a telling exchange of belief in dry reasoned scholarship and doctrinal logic for imaginative analysis, Shakespeare's 'Truth can never be confirmed enough, though doubts, did ever sleep'

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[32] James Mill, 'Periodical Literature: *Edinburgh Review* Pt. 1,' *Westminster Review* 1 (January 1824): 206-49.

[33] John S. Mill, *Autobiography* (1873; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 78.

typifying the shift from faith in the pursuit of absolutes to the uncertainty of a less definable world.[34] The contingency of context underlining this understanding of the quarterly's function always implied that the writer was constantly redefining and reinventing the ways in which he presented his material. The intellectual skepticism of her early years in Coventry is in this way reinforced by her early engagement with the publishing world and its audience as editor of the *Review*.

This combination of pragmatism and skepticism are evident in the way she vehemently defends the *Review*'s open policy and refuses to allow the journal to be annexed by partisan groups such as James Martineau's particular radical Unitarianism or Harriet Martineau's Positivism. It was obvious too in the compromising draft prospectus, put together by Chapman initially but drastically rewritten by Evans. The document raised the scorn of some targeted contributors such as James Martineau who made clear his displeasure at the perceived dumbing down of the journal's standards in a sarcastic letter to Chapman in 1851:

> You probably aim, and do well to aim, at securing the support of the large and increasing class of men of thoughtful but not regularly disciplined or largely cultivated mind, the class who may perhaps be most influential in determining the next future. Otherwise, – if you aim at conciliating the attention of the intellectual and scholarly class who are the main supporters of the 'Quarterly' and 'Edinburgh' I should doubt whether the Prospectus is quite the thing. It is very likely impossible to become the organ of the movement in party politics as it now exists,

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[34] Under Mill and Hickson, the *Review* opened with the following epigraphs: 'Legitimae inquisitionis vera norma est, ut nihil veniat in practicam, cujus non fit etiam doctrina aliqua et theoria,' Francis Bacon, *De Augementis Scientiarum*; 'Those who have not thoroughly examined to the bottom all of their own tenets must confess that they are unfit to prescribe to others; and are unreasonable in imposing that as truth [sic] on other men's belief which they themselves have not searched into, nor weighed the arguments of probability on which they should receive or reject it,' Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. The epigraph omits the indefinite article, 'in imposing that as *a* truth'. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 1997), Book IV, chapter XVI, p. 583. In January 1852 these Locke and Bacon were replaced by Shakespeare and Goethe's 'Warheitsliebe zeight sich warin; daß man überall daß Gute zu finden und zu schätzen weiß.' (Love of truth shows itself wherever you find good and know how to appreciate it.) The epigraphs are significantly different too from the *Edinburgh*'s blunt and almost threatening assertion of its public service duties: 'Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur,' Public Syrus.

> without descending to a lower literary level. The course of the 'Westminster' for a long time past has seemed to imply this, and there may be commercial wisdom in acquiescing to it.[35]

Evans indeed shows herself to be more concerned with commercial wisdom than philosophical influence at times, and specifically counters Martineau's efforts at colonising the journal. In her letter from Broadstairs she notes with no small biting sarcasm herself:

> If you believe in Free Will, in the Theism that looks on manhood as a type of the godhead and on Jesus as the Ideal Man, get [an editor] belonging to the Martineau 'School of thought,' and he will drill you a regiment of writers who will produce a Prospective on a larger scale, and so the *Westminster* may come to have 'dignity' in the eyes of Liverpool.[36]

She explains in a later letter to George Combe that the publication of Martineau's religious doctrines in the journal, though against her own personal pluralist philosophy, is a necessary part of the business of journalism: the *Westminster* must keep its doors open to all creatures and creeds, eschewing any notion of a simplified dominant universal language:

> Indeed, the admission of [Martineau's] theological views into the Westminster is a constant source of dissatisfaction to me. I see nothing for it, however, but that the Review should remain, at least for some time to come, a sort of Noah's ark.[37]

The decision to remain a 'sort of Noah's ark' for 'some time' was the sensible view of the editors who needed to create a suitable image for their remarketing of a journal with a comparatively long history. This history, as revealed in the correspondence of preceding

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[35] Cited in Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, 177.
[36] 24-25 July, 1852, *GEL*, 2: 48-49.
[37] 25 July 1852, ibid., 8: 60-1.

editors and in the form and content of the periodical itself, is the only means by which we can fully appreciate Evan's influence at the *Review* and provide a fuller account of the significance of this new editorship in 1852.

The Editors and the Editress: The *Westminster Review* 1824-54.

In 1852, the new editors of the *Westminster Review* inherited about 1000 subscribers, small for a quarterly, and disproportionate for the influence that it maintained among readers of the periodical press. It ranked alongside the two pioneering quarterlies of the nineteenth century, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, even though it claimed but a fraction of their readership.[38] Since its heyday under the editorship of J. S. Mill (1836-40), it had steadily been losing its audience – though it was never very big to begin with. By the 1850s, quarterlies generally were ceding ground to the more reader-friendly, cheaper and increasingly more numerous monthly magazines, such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *Bentley's Miscellany*. Unlike the quarterlies, most of these magazines published serial fiction, poetry and shorter, more varied miscellaneous articles. Weekly political and literary papers, such as the *Economist* and, later, the *Saturday Review* were also gathering audiences with their pointed, up-to-date pieces, weeklies having the obvious advantage in contemporaneity over the quarterlies. Joanne Shattock, however, has questioned the extent of the demise of quarterlies at this time and she lists a number of successful second-generation quarterlies founded between 1835-62.[39] The successful rejuvenation of the *Westminster* in 1852 does suggest that such publications still had a place in a market more and more saturated with weeklies and monthlies.

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[38] At mid-century, the *Edinburgh*'s circulation had fallen to approx. 7000 and the *Quarterly*'s to around 8,000. See Alvar Ellegård, 'The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain,' *Victorian Periodical Newsletter* 13 (September 1971): 13.

[39] Joanne Shattock, 'Spheres of Influence: the Quarterlies and their Readers,' *Yearbook of English Studies* 10 (1980): 95-104.

It is the task of the editor, as Shattock also points out, to maintain the distinction between quarterlies and their rivals to the advantage of the individual publication.[40] Consistency in tone and format is the crucial factor in this process, she argues. Such consistency, however, is not apparent in the *Westminster* partly due to its 'Noah's Ark' eclecticism emphasised in particular during Evans' time as editor. Unlike the predominantly Whig *Edinburgh* and the Tory *Quarterly*, for instance, the *Review* was not aligned with any political party by the 1850s. The *Westminster* disavowed political allegiances and though undoubtedly Utilitarian in its original conception it had changed tack throughout its history under a series of editors and proprietors. This uneven history is revealing: with its ever-shifting tone and format, the *Westminster* displays more clearly than rival quarterlies the influential role of editor on the periodical's form and on the articles that appear therein. In this way the *Westminster* sets itself apart from the characteristic qualities of quarterlies as described by Shattock: 'just as a major quarterly established from the outset an image, a style of reviewing, a tone, or a voice, so too did it establish and maintain throughout its history a style of editing'.[41] This may be true of the *Edinburgh* or of *Blackwood's Magazine*, for example, part of a family-run publishing business. The magazine had only five editors in all, all Blackwoods, from its first issue in 1817 to 1912. The *Westminster*, however, had a very different history. It was always an organ of radical but not revolutionary opinion and from its earliest years until its demise at the turn of the century, it championed reform – legislative, political, social, and educational. These aspects of the journal were maintained throughout its history but its editing practices and its format were sharpened significantly under Evans' and Chapman's stewardship as the editors displayed their increased awareness of the competitiveness of the market, of the need to entertain reading audiences, to hook new readers. As these next two sections will show, Evans' role in particular is crucial in this reshaping for the ways she courts and placates contributors, for the imaginative revamped format and for the marshalling of a significant contemporary literary review section.

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[40] Joanne Shattock, 'Showman, Lionhunter or Literary Hack: the Quarterly Editor at Mid-century,' in *Innovators and Preachers*, ed. Joel Wiener (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 1985), 166.
[41] Ibid., 163.

Founded in 1824 under the direction of James Bentham, the early *Review* was openly utilitarian in its philosophy. It was viewed as an organ of the Philosophical Radicals who were attempting to organise themselves into a political force supporting reform. Bentham was 76 when the first issue of the journal appeared and his party according to Carlyle, at its 'irremediable fag-end, so far in the rear of others as to fancy itself in the van'.[42] Articles emphasised Benthamite principles, consideration of literature and the arts was scarce and when included, it was limited to explaining, for example, the function of historical fiction or silver fork romances as social documents.[43] Though it quickly gained prestige in the market, early recognised alongside the wider-selling pioneering quarterlies – the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* – it was never marketed to reach larger audiences. Like the other quarterlies, it never published fiction or poetry in its pages – genres included in journals to secure the extensive family and female audiences. Its prestige came not from its sales figures but because it was an intellectual journal, and a quarterly; it cost the same as the already established prestigious quarterlies and advertised alongside them, and so shared in the already formed distinction quarterly publications claimed.[44] It had deliberately separated itself from the two major political traditions, however, and therefore from a ready-made readership. Its greatest influence came from the fact that it was aimed at an audience of reforming intellectuals and secured influential commentators to address this audience. Its success has been judged on its ideological position, from the standard of its contributors. Under Mill (1836-40) and William Hickson (1840-51), these contributors were identified by initials on the page adding to the weight of journal articles.

The introduction of signed articles was one of the most significant editorial changes instigated by Mill when he took over the flagging review in 1836. Hickson continued Mill's practice and half-way though his editorship, he brought to the *Review* a further consistency and stability it lacked under its previous editors in the form of regular

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[42] Cited in George L. Nesbitt, *Benthamite Reviewing: The First Twelve Years of the* Westminster Review *1824-36* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 23.

[43] See VanArsdel, 'The *Westminster Review*,' 1-30 and C. K. Ogden, ed., *Bentham's Theories of Fiction* (London: Kegan Paul, 1932) for further details.

[44] At six shillings per issue the *Westminster*, along with the *Quarterly*, the *Edinburgh*, the *British Quarterly Review* and the *North British*, was clearly aimed at an upper middle class intellectual audience.

publication.[45] Under Mill, the month in which the quarterly might be published was never established firmly. It was published once a quarter at regular intervals – April, July, October, January, until August 1838. From December 1838 until June 1846 it was published four times a year but failed to maintain a regular pattern over any two years. In this and other aspects of his editorship of the *Review*, Mill demonstrated his inability to maintain good business practices: a failing of which he was completely aware even from his earliest engagement as editor of the *London Review*. Robson and Robson suggest that Mill perhaps 'lacked the personal qualities, he certainly lacked the time, to make efficient management easy if not automatic'.[46] Mill's letters from early 1836 reveal some crucial inefficiencies: 'We advertised the number as out when it was not out' he remarks to Thomas Falconer his co-editor and cites Peacock's remark: 'The *London Review* comes out surreptitiously.' Some issues lacked an index; some contributors failed to receive copies. He concludes, 'We are the laughing stock of everybody who knows us for our way of doing business.'[47] In 1846 Hickson merged the *Westminster* with the *Foreign Quarterly* and from this time it established a January-October cycle. This cycle was maintained under Chapman's term with the *Review* and up until 1887 when, in an effort to regain a competitive edge it came out as a monthly magazine.

Regularity of publication is important to maintain an audience, especially in a market that is overrun with new publications as the periodical market was in the mid-nineteenth-century. Mill's difficulties in establishing a firm publishing pattern, which carried over into Hickson's editorship was a problem the new editors of the *Westminster* were keen to avoid. John Chapman, however, like Mill, had a tendency to advertise works that he had no guarantee would be ready for print, and sometimes failed to make them appear at all. He advertised Evans' translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* as part of his new radical quarterly publications series on 18 June 1853 before she had translated a word of the German original and, in addition, promised his subscribers an

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[45] While Mill allowed authors to use pseudonyms, Hickson insisted the initials used referred to the writer's real name. See Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot,' 19.

[46] Ann Robson and John P. Robson, 'Private and Public Goals: J. S. Mill and the *London and Westminster*,' in *Innovators and Preachers: The role of the Editor in Victorian England*, ed. Joel Wiener (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 1985).

[47] 27 January 1836, *Earlier Letters of J. S. Mill*, 293-4. Also cited in Robson and Robson, 'Private and

original work by Evans was also on the way.[48] Her annoyance at this premature advertising is clear in her correspondence, as is the fact that this was not the first time Chapman dealt with both authors and audience in a cavalier fashion. Evans was adamant that the public must not be misled by such false promotion, nor should the business be tarnished by a failure to meet its commitments. In December 1853 she writes to him in anger:

> You seem oblivious just now of the fact that you have pledged yourself as well as me to the publication of another work besides the Feuerbach in your Series. . . .
>
> . . . I bitterly regret that I allowed myself to be associated with your Series, but since you have done so, I am very anxious to fulfil my engagements both to you and the public. It is in this sense that I wish you to publish Feuerbach, and I beg you to understand that I would much rather that you should publish the work and *not* pay me than pay me and not publish it. I don't think you are sufficiently alive to the ignominy of advertising things, especially as part of a subscription series, which never appear.[49]

It was Evans, not Chapman, who ensured the early issues of the *Review* got to print each quarter, as suggested by her correspondence, by Chapman's chronic carelessness in this regard, and by his admission that the January 1853 issue barely made it to the press on time because Evans was back in Coventry for the funeral of her brother-in-law, Edward Clarke.[50] Her commitment and professionalism in this regard testifies to her early recognition of audience expectation, and the importance of cultivating a relationship with potential readers that is so crucial to the effect of her journalism and serial fiction as we will see in the next two chapters.

Mill blamed his failure to provide regular and consistent issues of the journal in part on his difficulties in securing contributors. Evans, aware of the importance of

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Public Goals,' 245.

[48] See *Leader* 18 June 1853: 600.

[49] 2 December 1853, *GEL*, 2: 130-1.

[50] 21 December 1852, ibid., 8: 68.

gathering together a group of eminent and regular writers for the *Westminster*, worked to ensure the periodical got and kept big names. She berated Chapman for potentially alienating Hickson during his negotiations to purchase the *Review* and by his precipitate circulation of the new prospectus. She was clearly fearful that Hickson might take some good will and good names from the new series. She advises him to placate James Martineau to ensure his cooperation and his contributions: 'Only tell him that contributors are to be well paid and I think that he will not refuse to be one of them.'[51] Evans' instincts were correct; Martineau became a regular writer from the first number of the New Series of the *Review* along with other significant commentators such as Froude, Mill, Herbert Spencer, Harriet Martineau, Lewes, and W. R. Greg.

Evans also played a vital role in grounding Chapman's ambitious but often unrealistic plans, like having Charlotte Brontë contribute to the periodical. In the early stages of preparing for the first issues, Chapman sent frantic missives from London, full of plans for potential articles by big names that never came to pass.[52] In contrast, she always settled on definite, prominent, experienced writers to feature in most issues.[53] She warns him away, for example, from the unreliable R. W. Mackay ('I would not trust him for an article absolutely wanted'); and was proved right when the proposed piece on English Protestantism failed to materialise.[54]

From the very beginning of her involvement with the enterprise, Evans did not hesitate to offer direct editorial advice to either Chapman or the well-established contributors the *Review* courted. Initially, she helped Chapman to draft letters, like the one sent to James Martineau requesting an article for the first number. Chapman's diary gives some insight into the process:

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[51] 9 June 1851, ibid., 24, 23.

[52] See *GEL*, 1: 356-7, 359 and Chapman's diary, in Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, 184, 195, 202, 205 for other instances of articles Chapman proposes that never appear.

[53] See *GEL*, 8: 73, n., 5, Haight cites the *Scotsman*'s review of the April 1853 edition: 'Altogether the number is a valuable one, and shows the *Westminster* to have enlisted a corps of writers capable of sustaining and increasing its revived reputation.'

[54] To John Chapman, 11 September 1851, *GEL*, 1: 359.

> I went to Coventry on Saturday and fully discussed the subject [of Martineau's article] with Miss Evans, after which I noted down the topics and mode of treatment to be adopted in the Article, which she embodied in a sketch for a letter with such modifications as she thought necessary, and from this material I shall write him our views on the subject, but I fear they will not be acceptable.[55]

The letter indicates the leading role the editors took at the beginning. And it stands in contrast to the more even-handed manner in which Evans dealt with contributors when writing independently of Chapman. It is a detailed piece: the 'future Editors of the *Westminster*' request that the proposed article, on Christian Ethics and Modern Civilisation, be free 'from conscious or unconscious predisposition to accommodate the phraseology of the Gospels and Epistles to the expression of modern ideas, or to use them with an esoteric meaning'. Chapman's blunt expression of his beliefs emerges in unsubtle assertions, such as: 'An article such as they desire would show that Jesus contributed no new element to ethics.' [56] After some hesitation from the prickly Martineau, and a falling out with Chapman over impolitic words and payment for work – which Evans claimed credit for resolving – the article appeared in the first number in January 1852. As Haight notes, though, despite causing the editors 'so much anxious correspondence,' it 'failed to please either conservative readers or freethinkers . . . who expected a slashing attack on orthodoxy,' in addition to being one third longer than the average article.[57]

There was some difficulty too in dealing with long-established contributors such as W. R. Greg. Using her Chapman/Editor cover she engaged in a number of exchanges with him, in letter and in person, requesting that he change the title for his essay on Charity in the January 1853 issue (following George Combe's suggestion who seemed to be acting as an unofficial reader of sorts for some articles in the *Review*) and asking him to alter an 'objectionable' passage on capital punishment, which he eventually did. Though he complied with the suggested changes and modified another problematic paragraph on Black Emancipation, Evans was not happy with the result:

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[55] Chapman's Diary, 27 August 1851, cited in *GEL*, 8: 25, n., 1.
[56] *GEL*, 8: 25-7.
[57] See her letter to Sara Hennell, 21 January 1852, ibid, 2: 4; Haight, *George Eliot*, 96.

> He is so unused to editorial suggestion or criticism and so unwilling to modify anything when it is once out of his hands, that there is no alternative but to let the article stand in its present unsatisfactory state or to reject it altogether. The whole matter is more vexatious to me than anything which has occurred once we had management of the *Review.*[58]

More than just pointing to problems with an established writer, the letter suggests that Evans was used to having contributors comply with her editorial advice, even when it apparently went against their better judgment. Herbert Spencer, for instance, complains in his autobiography that his proposed essay for the *Westminster* on the subject of writing style had its title changed to 'The Philosophy of Style': 'the change was not of my desiring, but resulted from the editorial wish to have something more taking than 'Force of Expression'. It seems like sound enough advice, however, Spencer continues:

> As I had been thus prompted to use too comprehensive a title, it was half amusing half annoying to hear from the editor after its publication, the criticism that the essay contained only the backbone of the subject. It was only the backbone of the subject with which I professed to deal, and which the original title covered.[59]

Her editing of Dr. Samuel Brown's article on atomic theory for the January 1853 issue similarly provoked the academic. Evans remains unruffled by his complaints, however, and is tellingly coy but commanding about the assertion of her editorial prerogatives explaining to Combe: 'He was extremely irate at certain omissions which my editorial obtuseness or self-sufficiency took upon itself to make.'[60]

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[58] December 1852, *GEL*, 8: 67. Haight observes that no reference to Capital Punishment appears in the final article. See ibid., n., 9. [W. R. Greg], 'Charity, noxious and beneficent,' *Westminster Review* 59 (January 1853): 62-88.

[59] Herbert Spencer, *Autobiography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1901), 1: 405. See 'The Philosophy of Style,' *Westminster Review* 58 (October 1852): 435-59.

[60] 18 February 1853, *GEL*, 8: 73.

Her editorial control was achieved partly by the way in which she used Chapman's 'nominal' editorship to manipulate gender prejudice while striking home her message. In this way she managed not to offend the pride of the men of letters who often required tactful leading. She writes to Sara Hennell of her efforts with the evasive Mackay: 'I have been using my powers of eloquence and flattery this morning to make him begin an article on the Development of Protestantism. He says 'Thank you' and asks me what books I recommend him to read.'[61] He remained unmoved, but she was more successful with others, such as George Combe, who provided crucial financial support for the chronically unstable *Review*. Her letters to him through 1852-3 are full of the type of diplomatic management Chapman lacked: she repeatedly plays down James Martineau's contributions, with which Combe would disagree, while stressing the need for variety in the periodical, directs Combe himself on headlines for his articles and pamphlets he might consider including in his contributions, and anticipates potential criticism by 'sharing' her opinions about problem articles with him.[62]

Though the manuscripts she marked have not been preserved, she makes reference to her editorial pencil throughout her correspondence with Chapman and her closest friends in particular. Her letters from this period are full of gossip about the writers and artists passing through 142 The Strand, theatre outings with Lewes or Spencer and, most persistently, half-mocking, half-serious complaints about the effect of her work on her health. The litany gives some sense of the nature of her occupation, her humour (and her constitution). 'I am bothered to death with article-reading and scrap-work of all sorts,' she writes to the Brays, 'it is clear my poor head will never produce anything under these circumstances'. As she reaches mid-June, two weeks before the 1852 July issue, the pressure increases: 'At 5 o'clock I felt quite sure that life was unendurable and that I must consider the most feasible method of suicide as soon as the revises are gone to press.' She laments to Bessie Parkes that 'theatre-going and proof-reading' have turned her 'spiritual eyes' dim. Having passed on 'editorial secrets' to Sara Hennell about the October 1852 issue, piqued with personal biases against Spencer, she concludes, 'there is a great, dreary

[61] 9 October 1851, ibid., 1: 368.
[62] Ibid, 33-7, 40-1, 43-50, 60-1, 65-76.

article on the Colonies by my side asking for reading and abridgement, so I can't go on scribbling' and towards the end of the month tells her she 'has been stamping with rage – nay swearing' all morning at the number of misspellings in the printed copy because a delay at the printers meant 'no revise of Greg's article or the two last sheets of the Review was seen – and that tiresome Mrs Sinnet pretends to correct her proof and leaves it as you see.' Inadequate work from contributors sends her into an animated fury in a letter to the Brays: 'I have been headachey and in a perpetual rage over an article that gives me no end of trouble and will not be satisfactory after all. I should like to stick red hot skewers through the writer whose style is as sprawling as his handwriting.' The following month, March 1853, she is 'tearing [her] hair out with disappointment' about the forthcoming volume, she concludes, 'In short, I am a miserable Editor.'[63]

From November of the previous year, as she became closer to Lewes and increasingly hampered by Chapman's management of his publishing firm, she began to feel miserable, claustrophobic and frustrated at her position in 142 The Strand. She resolved on a new course of action, which included distancing herself literally from the Chapman household by finding new lodgings. The physical move paralleled a mental shift away from Chapman and his business. In a sharp letter to Bray she denies responsibility for recent letters Chapman had sent out about the financial state of the *Review*:

> I must protest against being regarded as responsible for anything in the management of his affairs beyond the mere letter-press of the Review – and even that is not always what I will.[64]

Her correspondence in the early months of 1853 reveal in particular an awareness of the limitations of gender in its mixing of personal and public issues with a general sense of restlessness: because she is a woman, she cannot be an adequate editor; because women write such feeble representations of their lives they do not deserve the vote just yet;

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[63] *GEL*, 2: 31, 34, 36, 54, 57-8, 90, 93. Bel Mooney claims her use of slang like 'headachey' shows how much Evans had 'absorbed the style of journalistic London'. See Mooney, 'George Eliot the Journalist,' 79.

[64] 25 January 1853, ibid, 83.

because men are biased against women in the publishing world, she has to keep her editorial identity a secret from some contributors.[65]

The world of nineteenth-century publishing was, like most other public spheres, a masculine one. As Barbara Onslow's recent study demonstrates, 'Editorship of the most influential sectors of the press was virtually banned to women.' She quotes Harriet Martineau on the qualities needed to edit a new economic journal: 'undertaking a man's duty, I must have a brave man's fate.'[66] Despite growing dissatisfaction with her position at the *Westminster*, Evans nonetheless had successfully managed to occupy the role of Editor and effected changes in the highly influential *Review*, however covertly, with some flair and a canny business sense. We see from her correspondence that she was preoccupied daily with the 'letter-press.' She cut articles down to suit the space available in the *Review* when the occasion demanded and she excised passages that she deemed unnecessary, unclear or offensive – perhaps this is what happened to the Greg article. She makes Chapman aware of the need for a balance of tone in individual articles and an adequate variety of material in each issue. She writes of one contributor to Chapman, tactfully asserting her views and leading him to be diplomatic in turn: 'I don't rely on Mr. Bassen's capabilities. Still the article on Diplomatic Reforms might be good for something – only it is *absolute* that we must not engage to print it unconditionally. You must manage to let him know this very politely.'[67]

Christopher Kent has shown contributors' anonymity gave editors free reign to excise and add at will to submitted articles, noting the law was clear on this point, and it inevitably increased editorial authority.[68] It is impossible to ever know the precise level of editorial interventions at the *Westminster*, however. This is a blank spot that bedevils

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[65] See her letters to Charles Bray, 24 January 1853, and to Mrs Peter Taylor, 1 February 1853 ibid, 83, 85-86; and later, To George Combe, 28 November 1853, ibid, 8: 90.

[66] Onslow, *Women of the Press*, 18.

[67] 18 July 1852, cited in Rosemary Ashton, 'New Letters at the Huntington,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 54 (Spring 1991), 114-15. In this letter from Broadstairs, Evans notes among other things, the importance of avoiding a 'glut' of scientific articles in the January issue, a problem article 'in a sort of documentary form – drawn up like a legal agreement, rather than a Review article,' and the fact that it was 'a great bore' that she had no 'Review envelopes' with her for her official correspondence.

[68] Christopher Kent, 'The Editor and the Law,' in *Innovators and Preachers: The role of the Editor in Victorian England*, ed. Joel Wiener (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 1985), 111.

histories of nineteenth-century editors.[69] Some insight can be gleaned from Evans' editing of George Combe's pamphlet on Prison Reform, which she was later to abridge for the *Westminster*, however:

> You say in your last letter to me that you wish me to send a *proof* of your pamphlet to Sir James Clark and Mr. Perry. Will it not be better for me to correct the proof and supply the headings, to forward the corrected proof to you that you may add or cancel what you please and then to send a *revise* to Sir James and Mr. Perry? Again, will it not be desirable to *leave out of the Pamphlet* the list of books which will be prefixed to the article in the Review? I will take care to supply the necessary references and make the corresponding omissions in the text. I think the first page of the pamphlet will look more dignified on this plan.
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> . . . I fear that numerous *verbal* alterations will be inevitable in the proof. Print is like broad daylight – it shews specks which the twilight of manuscript allows to pass unnoticed.[70]

Most of her editorial interventions, however, are lost in the revised manuscripts that no longer exist, or remain hidden in the finished printed texts. Evans the editor is not entirely lost, though, however tucked away, as occasional letters reveal. She can be found too in the margins, in the *Westminster*'s case, literally in the margins or what are considered the marginal details of each issue and volume. Having claimed the 'letter-press' as her domain, attention to the layout and form of the *Review* during Evans' time at The Strand indicates her awareness of the now more widely appreciated fact that 'the reader in the nineteenth century was coming to inhabit an increasingly textual environment'.[71] Content alone would not guarantee success in this surplus market, consequently marketing and cosmetics become important in marking out individual productions from the crowd. Comparisons of

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[69] See for example, David Finkelstein, *The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 16-7, 71-90; Shattock, 'Showman, Lionhunter or Hack,' 161-83; Roper, *Reviewing before the* Edinburgh, 40-1; Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 14-5.

[70] 25 January 1854, *GEL*, 8: 93.

[71] Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, David Finkelstein, eds., 'Introduction,' to *Nineteenth-Century Media and the*

such features as the contents page, page layout, headlines and index of the new *Review* with the journal under previous editors and the pages of its rivals bring to the surface the *Westminster*'s assiduous attention to detail. Such details tell of a conscious play for audience and the realization of the need to distinguish the journal from competitors through the play of the text. In book publication, these details are agreed upon by author and/or publisher. In the case of periodicals, bigger publishing firms, such as *Blackwood's* would have a publishing team where specific staff members would be responsible for preparing the text following a clearly defined in-house style. In a smaller firm, like Chapman's, the division of labour is not so clear.

That said, there are a number of reasons to suggest that it is Evans' hand marshalling the material layout of the *Westminster* giving us a real sense of her understanding of her commercial environment and the importance of the 'social' text. Firstly, although Chapman also published the *Prospective Review* at this time (1845-55) there is no evidence of a uniform house-style in both publications. Much closer attention was paid to the look and to reader-appeal in the layout of the *Westminster.* Since Chapman was proprietor and nominal editor of the latter, this is hardly surprising. However, accounts of affairs at the Strand emphasise Evans' role in preparing manuscripts while Chapman busied himself with finances and with the broader aspects of his book selling and publishing trade.[72] His editorial interventions, we can presume were as 'nominal' as his named editorship. Furthermore, as we will see, following Evans' departure from the journal in Spring of 1854, there is a fall off in the attention to detail that distinguished the *Review* for a time. The format of a periodical, as Louis James has pointed out more generally, 'becomes a tone of voice, a way of conditioning our response'.[73] A comparative analysis of the material evidence of layout and indexing as well as the articulated editorial policies on anonymity and reviewing of previous editors will help to distinguish what has long been the subsumed and anonymous voice of Marian Evans at the new *Westminster.*

Construction of Identities (London: Palgrave, 2000), 3.

[72] See Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot'; Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman.*

[73] Louis James, '"The trouble with Betsy": Periodicals and the Common Reader in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England,' in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Sampling and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and

Making New Markets from the Margins: Marian Evans at the letterpress

From 1824-1851 there was little that was distinctive about the layout or design of the *Westminster* when compared with the years in which Evans oversaw the letterpress. Though the value of literature as a worthy topic for discussion fluctuated between Mill's and Hickson's respective stewardships, both editors maintained the original format to the journal established by the original editors: a number of articles followed by a Miscellaneous or 'Notes' section. Under Hickson, following the merger with the *Foreign Quarterly Review* in 1846, an additional 'review' space was added between the main articles and the Notes as the *Foreign Quarterly*, consisting mostly of extracts from literary texts.

The table of contents in the opening page, following the common practice of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, maintained the eighteenth-century Review format of listing titles of books 'under review' in each individual article – which were numbered 1-8 or 9 etc. The *Westminster* initially distinguished itself marginally from these quarterlies by not printing the *full* publication details of book titles on the table of contents page. This gave a less cluttered appearance to the first page the reader would encounter and it avoided the repetition of material when the full details were printed at the start of each individual article in the main body of the *Review*. Occasionally, both Mill and Hickson experimented with alternative designs for the table of contents page and some of these changes were eventually made an important regular feature in what was established as the New Series of the *Review* with Chapman and Evans.[74] In the late 1830s, for example, Mill occasionally presented the table of contents page, not as a series of book titles under review, but as a list of essay titles. In the 1836 issue, he abandoned the usual book-list format for a

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Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 351.

[74] Unlike previous editors, Chapman's *Review* was issued as a New Series; old series and new series numbers for individual volumes appeared on the title page though only the new series number featured in the bound volumes after the first two volumes. This change was intended to underscore the independence

subject-based contents page that he had established in the *London Review* the previous year. The more typical list of titles returns again in 1838 for a number of years until the mid-1840s when over the course of two volumes William Hickson established the subject-based contents page.[75] The step was a significant one. It implicitly acknowledges the development of the article as a genre; it is recognised as a form that is something more than the summary of recently published work. Along with the inclusion of the writer's initials at the end of each article, as was common practice under both Mill and Hickson, the article is presented as having essay-like qualities: it is both subjective and has a subject. Mill's letter to a prospective contributor to his new review explains his editorial policy in this regard:

> The Plan (Roebuck's and mine to which all have at once assented) is to drop altogether every kind of lying; the lie of pretending that all the articles are *reviews*, when more than half of them are not; and the lie of pretending that all the articles proceed from a *corps* who jointly entertain all the opinions expressed. There is to be no *we*; but each writer is to have a signature which he may avow or not as he pleases, but which (unless there be special reasons to constitute an exception) is to be the *same* for *all* his articles, thus marking him *individually* responsible and allowing his opinions to derive what light they can from one another. The editor answers only for adequate literary merit and a general *tendency* not in contradiction to the objects of the publication.[76]

This transformed table of contents format was a distinctive permanent editorial feature of the new number of the *Review*. Under Evans, each article was given a subject heading as in the fiction-based monthlies' contents lists such as *Blackwood's*.[77] The

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of the new editorial regime in the public eye.

[75] Vol. 47, part 1, 1846 has the compromise form of both subject-based headings and the inclusion of texts under review in the contents page. Part 2 cuts the contents page down to subject titles only. These changes were part of the settling down of format that followed from the merger of the *Review* with the *Foreign Quarterly* and included the establishment of a regular publication cycle noted already.

[76] 22 December 1833, *Earlier Letters of J. S. Mill*, 202.

[77] The *Prospective Review*, in contrast, like the *British Quarterly*, and the *North British Review* simply listed the titles of books in the contents page. Subject headings were provided only in the verso headlines

comparison with the popular traditional Scottish magazine is not an innocent one. The development of subject-based contents pages also demonstrates an awareness of the need to draw in a new audience by means of this more reader-friendly layout. The first page must encourage the reader, and in particular, the casual or potential reader, to continue reading. Through the nineteenth century, as the book buying public developed, so too did this market for the casual reader. The growing number of reading clubs, reading rooms, Mechanics Institutes and libraries transformed reading environments for the working and middle classes at this time. The casual reader who encountered a barrage of periodical publications each month in these public spaces, unlike the regular private subscriber, needed to be encouraged to continue reading from the first page.

Another important editorial feature of the new series of the *Review* under Evans' eye that responded directly to this need to encourage the reader, was the use of summarising headlines at the top of the recto or right hand page in each article. Mill had experimented with this form of presentation during the late thirties, but for the most part he followed the format that was typical to most periodicals of the time. Both the recto and verso headlines repeated the title of the article. If it had no title, as was common, then it repeated an adapted title from the list of books under review. For example, in the contents page of the *Quarterly Review* 1851-52, the second article lists four books with 'Kew Gardens' in the title, the fifth is the *Botanical Magazine 1787-1851*. In the twenty-nine-page article in the main body of the *Review*, 'Kew Gardens' appears at the top of both the right and left-hand pages throughout.[78] This layout was most typical in both quarterlies and monthlies and in individual publications, was often inserted by the printer, as Evans indicates of Combe's pamphlet on prison reform.[79]

The pioneering review of the nineteenth century, the *Edinburgh*, however, used the recto headline to provide summarising pointers that functioned to lead the reader through the text. These headlines were generally repeated in the index at the end of the

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of individual articles.

[78] See *Quarterly Review* 90 (December 1851): 34-62. *Blackwood's* and *Household Words* for example, a monthly and a weekly, followed this basic pattern and did not include summarising headlines in their articles.

[79] 'The printer has filled up the right hand headings with the general title. If you wish this to be replaced by a special heading, please to say so,' Evans to Combe, 22 February 1854, *GEL*, 8: 96. Haight notes that

issue. So for example Patrick Murray's twenty-page article on William Carleton's novels in the October 1852 issue had guiding headlines on the recto that summarise the content of the page.[80] Such headlines are an important feature of the reading experience. Hugh Williamson suggests their significance:

> Author and editor naturally have the final word in the provision of copy for headlines. But the typographer may do well to remind them that headlines properly planned can be a very useful guide to the reader.[81]

The index at the back of the bound volume provided the other 'useful guide' to the reader. In the *Edinburgh*, it characteristically offered a more expansive summary of the article than that offered by the headlines. Read in sequence, the index presented what were almost paragraph-long abstracts of the article. And each separate entry gave a sense of the general context of the review that was not apparent in the often vague headlines in the article itself. For example, the headline on page 401, the last in the Carleton article, simply gave the names of two characters from one of Carleton's books, 'Dominick and Vara'. In the index, pages 401-403 were covered in much more contextual detail:

> –Carleton's story of the 'Poor scholar' 396-402 and extracts – his 'Valentine McClutchet' 'Fardorogha, or the Miser,' 'Black Prophet' and 'Title Procter' 402 – remarks on his last work 'The Squanders of Castle Squander,' 402-403.[82]

In the opening issues of the New Series of the *Westminster*, with Evans in charge of the letterpress, very particular attention was paid to the way in which each article was presented to the reader. Following the *Edinburgh*, headlines were included in each article, but both the headlines and the index in the bound volumes were more structured and more

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no change was made, ibid., n., 8.

[80] [Patrick Murray], 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry,' *Edinburgh Review* 96 (October 1852): 384-403.

[81] Hugh Williamson, *Methods of Book Design: The Practice of an Industrial Craft*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 141.

[82] *Edinburgh Review* 96 (October 1852): 573.

purposeful than in the journal's Scottish counterpart. In the *Edinburgh*, because the articles have no titles, they are harder to locate in the index – especially when the index does not cohere with the adapted title that appears on the verso headline. For example, the Carleton article takes the title from the last of the four books listed, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. At the top of every verso page of the article, 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry' is printed as an acting headline title. In the index however, the article appears under the letter 'I': 'Irish peasantry, traits of, the review of Mr. Carleton's work illustrative of, 384.' In this way, the index does not work as well for the browser looking for information on Carleton, or for the re-reader.

The *Westminster* system was much more efficient. Because each article had a subject title, detailed reference to any subject was easily located in the index under that title. Unlike indices in, for example, *Blackwood's* or in weekly reviews such as the *Athenaeum*, the *Westminster* index did not provide extensive alphabetized single line entries on individual subjects such as 'Victoria', or 'wigs' or 'oranges' as these subjects appeared in different articles. Instead of such lists, the *Westminster* presented blocks of entries under each title, on the content of the individual article. In one way, the *Westminster* was deliberately separating itself from the weekly reviews that presented their material in their indices almost as installments of an encyclopaedia or dictionary. By focusing on discreet articles instead of a disparate range of subjects, the *Westminster* was acknowledging each article as an individual and distinct production. There are both ideological and commercial instincts motivating such presentations. As with the article titles in the contents page, it suggests that the articles published in the *Westminster* are more substantial and more independent of editorial interference: the content of the articles is not fragmented throughout an index and subsumed under an editor's vision of the journal as a reference handbook. Rather, each article is maintained as a unit. And, importantly, this again implies a sense of growing awareness of the periodical article as distinct genre. In *Blackwood's* or *Fraser's* for example, the details of a story or poem would not be scattered through an index.

Paradoxically though, the *Westminster* index and headline system, like that of the *Edinburgh*, provides clear evidence of the editorial hand guiding the reader though the

text. And in a working environment in which women had little room to maneouvre, the way in which Evans operates anonymously and almost invisibly in the margins of the texts she edits provides an interesting illustration of her ability to manipulate both commercial and cultural spaces. In the first issue of the new series, for example, Edward Forbes' piece on Shellfish[83] is strategically placed after the strong opening article on the topical subject of representative reform. The first article was a long one – over forty pages – and it provided a weighty, challenging, if sometimes ponderous opening to the journal. Forbes' article, in contrast, is light-hearted – not that you would automatically guess this from the title. However, the recto headlines offer breezy and encouraging tit-bits to the readers to lead them through the article: page 45 will tell us, we are promised, of 'the happiness of oysters'; page 49, 'oysters of ancient days'; page 51, entitled, 'A maligned mollusk' repeats old wives tales about the superstitions attached to the eating of oysters. The tone throughout is animated and amusing and the headlines capture this spirit, moving far beyond what often appears as the perfunctory duty to summarise material that follows, as in the *Edinburgh*. Significantly, for the reader glancing though the article, however, headlines also operate to *announce* this tone and establish for the reader the sense of how the article should be read.

The index offers further indication of the editor's conception of the function of both the individual article and the periodical. The light-hearted headlines make up most of the index, but in addition, the index includes several technical terms for shellfish and provides the page references in the article for information on the many varieties of shellfish. The editor realises and wishes to suggest simultaneously, that the piece will be read not just for amusement, but also to provide instruction. The reader wishing to be entertained will be encouraged by the headlines to keep reading and will not be put off by the appearance of scientific terminology he doesn't understand at the top of each page. The reader looking for information, will, like an attentive scholar, check the index and, finding knowledgeable references to particular types of molluscs, will not be lead to dismiss the shellfish article as an over-simplified piece written for the more general browser alone.

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[83] Edward Forbes, 'Shellfish their ways and works,' *Westminster Review* 57 (January 1852): 42-61.

Evans openly acknowledged her attention to such details of the text's production in her own '*Belles Lettres*' articles for the *Westminster* from 1855-57. In a critique of recent German publications, one of which lacks an index, she complains, for instance:

> We should like to engage all English critics whose voices can be heard in Germany to remonstrate with every German writer who turns out elaborate works in this *unmapped* state which obliges you to plunge into them with as little idea where you shall find any particular thing, as if you were plunging into a virgin forest in America.[84]

Throughout the first issues of the new series, close attention is paid to the arrangement of the contents, the inclusion of headlines and the compilation of the index – to the mapping of the text for the reader. Though these features are occasionally under-whelming, not always displaying the cohesion and authority of the first issue, there is always the sense that the editor at her letterpress is keeping in mind through these extra-textual editorial practices that the periodical functions to both entertain and instruct. The layout or design format then operates as a hyper-text that helps us navigate individual articles and informs too of the periodical as a commercial and cultural concept.

After Evans left the *Review*, the index began to resemble that of the *Edinburgh Review*. Her association with the periodical, lasting officially until January, and unofficially until April, ended definitively when she traveled to Germany with Lewes in July 1854. Immediately following her departure, some of the creative aspects to the practice of indexing that flourished under Evans' time with the journal were lost. And the practice in the index of including two or even three entries for a single page of an article was replaced by the more perfunctory one entry for each pair of pages which was typical of most quarterlies of the time.[85] James Hannay's article on 'Beards' in the July 1854 issue of the *Westminster*, for example, reflects Evans' absence. It is a humourous piece in the style of the Shellfish article but neither the headlines nor the index reflect this tone. Both provide

[84] [Marian Evans], '*Belles Lettres*,' *Westminster Review* 64 (October 1855): 614. She goes on to praise a text by Panzer, 'Here we have a table of contents and an ample index of words; both very needful'.
[85] See for example *British Quarterly Review* 15 (1852).

a very dry token coverage of the article's contents.[86] By necessity, Chapman became more involved in the letterpress following Evans' departure, and his editorial hand makes its presence felt in more obtrusive and less helpful ways in this article. The difference in intervention serves as a blunt example of Evans' quiet attention to editorial detail and Chapman's brazen editorial self-assertion. Hannay claimed the editor added the last four paragraphs to this article and indeed the editor's presence is quite obvious.[87] Initially an historical account of the beard in England, there is a discernible and jarring shift in tone towards the end when the piece turns to a discussion of the beard as a natural respirator (Chapman was always interested in current, if untested, medical theories and later trained and practiced as a doctor).[88] The disadvantages for the fairer and weaker sex in not benefiting from beards in this regard are observed, while the writer makes clear he obviously prefers a clear chin on a lady – an unsurprising line of argument – but the tone throughout these last pages is everywhere marked by the pen of the incorrigible womaniser. A long-winded footnote on the superiority of women's beauty intrudes on the penultimate page and includes Chapman's name as the publisher of a book quoted in the note.

The fall off in attention to details is also reflected in the inconsistency in other aspects of the *Review*'s format that appeared after Evans left. The section on contemporary literature for example, which, developed under Evans and transformed the periodical into a lively dominant force in nineteenth-century criticism, became increasingly inconsistent and fragmented in format. Through the late 1850s and 60s the *belles lettres* article at times never even appeared. And the so-called Independent section, abandoned by Evans after two issues, returns in July 1854 and again sporadically and for no apparent reasons in the following years. The initial coherency, followed by a period of disruption, together suggest Evans' practical and influential role at the journal.

The development of the contemporary literature section of the *Review* was the most obviously original contribution made by the new editors to its layout and to its

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[86] James Hannay, 'Beards,' *Westminster Review* 62 (July 1854): 149-67

[87] Walter Houghton, ed., *Wellseley Index to Periodical Literature 1824-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 3: 621, n., 1397.

[88] He began his medical training in the mid-1850s and in 1858 was discovered to have drawn on *Review*

genuine claims to review status. It was a successful move in both business and ideological terms signaling the editors' awareness of the need to create distinctive selling points for the New Series and, for the editors themselves, to formulate an alternative dimension to the practice of reviewing in the mid-nineteenth century. The initial idea seems to have been Chapman's, but it was Evans' direct editorial hand that made the section such an effective drawing point. Until this time, the *Westminster* had no distinct review section except for chaotic brief 'Critical and Miscellaneous Notes' at the end of each issue or, from the 1846, in the Foreign Literature section mentioned already. These sections contained either short paragraphs or less of notes on recent publications in the style of the *Literary Gazette*; or, alternatively, they were made up of pages of quotations from the texts 'under review'. The *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* had no such end-of-issue round up. The latter was noted in particular for its almost complete disregard for contemporary fiction and poetry; the *British Quarterly* was limited to mere note-based coverage of contemporary publications. Seeing a gap in a market increasingly overwhelmed with new publications, the *Westminster* sought to establish itself as the forum for substantial critical debate of new texts.

This intention was announced in the Prospectus to the New Series. Conventional enough in its declared intention to cover politics, religion, and social philosophy more or less in the manner to which *Westminster* readers had become accustomed, in the matter of 'general literature,' the editors boldly asserted that the *Review*, 'will be animated by the desire to elevate the standard of public taste in relation to both artistic perfection and moral purity'.[89] In a dramatic turn away from Hickson's policy on literature, the editors emphasise the aesthetic quality of the work under review. 'Moral purity,' the vital rubric for all literary criticism at this time is of secondary significance under this new regime. In itself, 'moral purity' must be interpreted loosely given the *Review*'s expressly non-religious and patently skeptical philosophy. The term is understood in the context of the prospectus, 'without regard to the distinctions of party; the only standard of consistency to which the Editors will adhere being the real and not the accidental relations of measures

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money to pay for his studies. See Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot,' 219.

[89] Prospectus to the *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, *Westminster Review* 57 (January 1852): 4, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 3-7.

– their bearing not on a ministry or class, but on the public good.' The religious implications of the expression are translated in this way into a recognisable utilitarian notion of morality that is defined by what is desirable for the public good. The pairing then of 'artistic perfection' and 'moral purity' repeats in reverse the opening statement of the Prospectus which claims to 'confirm and extend' the *Review*'s influence. It will confirm the non-political, non-institutionally bound openness established under its predecessors and it will extend its influence, in substantial part, through the development of this extra critical dimension to the periodical thus offering continuity and change to its usual and to its potential readers.

In focusing on the aesthetic aspects of the general literature discussed, however, the new editors were in fact reawakening an idea of the *Review's* future first articulated by J. S. Mill two decades earlier. Writing to Bulwer Lytton in his first year as editor of the conjoined *London and Westminster*, Mill explains he aspires to 'soften the harder and sterner features of [the journal's] radicalism and utilitarianism both which in the form in which they originally appeared in the *Westminster* were part of the inheritance of the eighteenth century.'[90] Mill envisioned the reevaluation of poetry as an essential part of the transformation of the *Review*. It would contribute to the development of a comprehensive philosophy that did not narrowly focus on the rational side of man:

> The *Review* ought to represent not radicalism but neo-radicalism, a radicalism . . . which takes into account the whole of human nature not the ratiocinative faculty only . . . which holds Feeling at least as valuable as thought and Poetry not only on a par but the necessary condition of any true and comprehensive philosophy.[91]

True to his word, in the late eighteen-thirties, for the first time the *London and Westminster* incorporated more reader-friendly and popular articles on literature to its pages as an important regular dimension to the *Review*. His *London Review* (1835-36) had given over almost a quarter of each number to articles on poetry, drama or fiction.

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[90] John Stuart Mill to Edward Bulwer Lytton, 23 November 1836, *Earlier Letters of J. S. Mill*, 312.
[91] Ibid.

The trend continued through the remainder of the decade.[92] This new departure led to what Rosemary VanArsdel terms the beginning of the *Review*'s distinctive feature as a leading voice in nineteenth-century literary criticism.[93] It marked a significant change from the stale and repetitive formulaic accounts of history and politics, biography and travel literature that were served up by the same handful of writers, notably T. P. Thompson and Andrew Symonds in the early part of the decade. As Joanne Shattock has shown,

> the barometer for a quarterly's intellectual health was the space it devoted to articles on history and biography and reviews of geography and travel literature, its vitality being in inverse proportion to the size of these sections, the well-known 'fillers' used by editors.[94]

She goes on to note that in the 1850s, the *North British*, the *Prospective* and the *National* were well respected for the fact that unlike the waning *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh*, they gave over a quarter of their space to literary criticism. The *Westminster* of the late 1830s and again of the early 50s should be included here. The editors of the new series show by this focus on fiction, not just a commitment to the broader development of a 'true and comprehensive philosophy' – an ongoing debate in the later novelist's work – but good business sense as well.

The cultivation of literary criticism at the *Review* lay dormant, however, under the eleven-year editorship of William Hickson.[95] The *Review* reverted much more explicitly to the original Benthamite principles under which it was established. Bentham had advised the first editors of the *Review* to give space to what he tellingly termed 'literary insignificancies' to pull in some readers but not to distract from the periodical's purpose – to establish a forum for the promotion of his particular brand of 'politics and morals.'[96]

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[92] See for example, *London and Westminster Review* 3 and 25 (April and July 1836); the issues contain articles on the Romance, English literature of 1835, the Poets of the Age, French novels, Faust and French literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
[93] VanArsdel, 'The *Westminster Review*, 1824-57,' 33.
[94] Shattock, 'Spheres of Influence,' 104.
[95] Henry Slack took over as editor for Hickson in 1851 as he prepared to sell the journal to Chapman.
[96] *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowering (Edinburgh 1843), 10: 540, cited in VanArsdel, 'The *Westminster Review*, 1824-57,' 3.

Hickson, originally a disciple of Bentham's, took his politics and morals seriously. He was a social reformer with a particular interest in educational reform. As studies of fiction reviews under his stewardship have revealed, novels were examined at this time for their promotion of reforming doctrines – not for any aesthetic or other qualities. This 'pragmatic approach' is epitomized in the opinion of leading fiction critic William Ellis, of the ideal novelist as a 'social thinker and reformer.'[97] Hickson's understanding of the periodical's function is made clear in his editorial preface to the new *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* in 1846 where he suggests the amalgamation of both reviews will be a work of 'improved general interest (of which the reader will judge) and an enlarged sphere of utility,' which he goes on to explain: 'The *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly* will be sustained by the same motives which influenced the original founders of the *Westminster Review* in 1823.'[98] Contemporary publications from Germany and France predominately did feature in the *Foreign Quarterly* section of this revised *Review*, but the articles had none of the consistency or range that was later evident in the New Series under Evans and Chapman.

Following Mill's lead and the pressure of the market, then, the editors of the New Series moved away from sketchy summaries of contemporary publications presented in an irregular fashion at the tail-end of each volume. Instead, each issue of the New Series contained at least one article on a single writer or literary topic and, importantly, the last four articles of each number provided a substantial account of contemporary publications from America, England, France and Germany respectively. In all, the *Westminster* addressed over a hundred books per issue in these four articles. The new editors announced the reason for this revised format in the first issue of the New Series:

> Under the conviction that brief and incidental literary notices, such as have been hitherto appended to the more important part of the *Westminster Review* are of little value in a quarterly periodical, it has been decided to substitute for them a

[97] Odile Boucher-Rivalain, 'From 'Literary Insignificancies' to 'the Sacredness of the Writer's Art': Aspects of Fiction Criticism in the *Westminster Review* 1824-57,' *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* 44 (1996): 39.
[98] *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* 46 (1846): facing page 1.

> connected survey of the chief additions made to our literature during the preceding quarter . . . it is intended that the entire series shall give as complete a retrospect of the course of the literary production during the year as the prescribed space will allow.[99]

The decision to separate contemporary literature by country into distinct articles was a masterful exercise in many ways. By placing these often brief, often unconnected reviews under the banner of national literature, and by naming each section as a distinct 'article' in the table of contents (and not 'critical or miscellaneous notes' for example) they were given a sense of purposeful unity and structure. The idea of a 'connected survey' is interesting not least for the implications such a productively porous notion of disciplines in an age of increasing specialization has on the shaping of the writer 'George Eliot'. Some of the significance of her early years with the press emerges in the way in which the review section of this journal initially sought to counteract the rigid habit of separating science from fiction, fiction from philosophy, and so on. Marian Evans' self-education in Coventry across a range of subjects from German biblical historiography to mathematics and Greek, prepared the ground well for the interdisciplinary approach to 'literature' exemplified in the early numbers of the new series. George Eliot's fiction, of course, was from the beginning both informed by and criticized for its engagement with current debates in science, religion and philosophy.[100] Given this early free-range approach to learning both in her twenties in Coventry and in the material evidence of the *Westminster Review*, the layered intellectualism of her first fiction is hardly surprising.

The very notion of a national literature suggested by this alternative to a discipline-driven review section, tapped into current ideas of cultural nationalism that the *Review* itself promoted under its new editors and became a particularly notable selling point. The editors sought to promote European history, fiction, poetry and politics in every issue and the journal has been recognised for popularizing European figures such as Schopenhauer,

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[99] *Westminster Review* 57 (January 1852): 247.

[100] See her correspondence with John Blackwood about 'Amos Barton' for the first mention of this 'scientific' turn to her work, *GEL*, 2: 290-3; For criticism of this aspect of her writing, see Robert Buchanan, *A Look Round Literature* (London, 1887), 319-21; Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*, 245-6.

Heine and George Sand in its pages.[101] Throughout the decade, the periodical declared its interest in European republicanism, even as it defended British imperial authority farther afield. Evans and Chapman were sympathetic to the 'Friends of Italy' organization, attended meetings in support of European nationalist causes and knew exiled revolutionaries such as the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, the Hungarian, Lajos Kossuth, Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux. Evans notes in an 1852 letter that she was attempting to get Mazzini to write for the *Westminster*.[102]

Less idealistically and more practically, the revised layout partially disguised the amount of 'filler' biography, travel, geography and history material as these entries were dispersed in the individual 'national' articles. The article on contemporary American literature as a regular feature was an unusual departure for an English periodical – the *English Review* was an early leader in this field.[103] But again, it made good business sense since John Chapman was a major importer and distributor of American books at this time. Advertisements in weekly reviews throughout 1852 include in the same space, notices for new issues of the *Review* flagging its Contemporary Literature articles, alongside notices for new American imports from the publisher, John Chapman.[104] Evans first met Lewes on a business visit with Lewes to Jeff's bookshop in 1851, to arrange for the loan of new publications from the continent, imported by the bookseller.[105] As the publisher of translations of recent European work, the reviewing of 'national' European literature also suited Chapman's purpose.

The revised appearance of the *Review* was popular with the critics as well as with the public: subscriptions increased throughout 1852 and contemporary publications commented positively on the new energy reviving the long-standing quarterly. The editor

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[101] Haight, *George Eliot*, 193;

[102] To Sara Hennell, 21 January 1852, *GEL*, 2: 5. She succeeded: Mazzini's article 'Europe, its conditions and prospects' appeared in the second number of the New Series in April 1852, 442-67.

[103] See Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1930), 218.

[104] See for example, *Literary Gazette* No. 1835 (20 March 1852): 265; *Athenaeum* No. 1276 (10 April 1852): 413, where the Contemporary Literature section is singled out as a specific selling point of the *Review*, and No. 1279 (1 May 1852): 477, where the blurbs on previous numbers of the *Review* appear alongside Chapman's boast: 'Cheap Books and how to get them' including recent U.S. imports.

[105] This possibly explains Chapman's unusual advice to one of his reviewers in the mid-fifties, Mark Pattison, 'not even to cut the pages of the foreign books he was reviewing', Bod. MSS. Pattison, 51.f.44, cited in Rosenberg, 'John Chapman, George Eliot,' 207. It suggests something too of the fall off in reviewing standards after Evans' departure.

is credited for the distinctive the new look as well as the new content, named as John Chapman by Lewes in the review pages of the *Leader*, and in the blurbs from contemporary publications Chapman selected for advertisement.[106] More discreetly and tellingly, reviewers regularly commended the anonymous 'new management' or new 'editorial regime'. The *Examiner* was lavish in its praise and conscious of the effects of editorial changes on the buying public:

> The *Westminster Review* which has failed under so many managements, under its new management promises to be no failure at all. Good healthy blood stirs in it, and we have little doubt that it will not only win its way to as high a point in public circulation as it held in its best days but that more practical results will follow, and will be found to *sell*. With equal ability we observe a larger more catholic spirit. . . The notion of treating quarterly in four final articles the general contemporary literature of England, America, Germany and France is very good; the articles are well done and they place the Reader of the Review in possession of a kind of information he wants about the literature of the day.[107]

Evans was constantly monitoring the periodical's form and, in her reactions to the broader effect of the *Review* on the public, she shows a side rarely seen when she becomes 'George Eliot'. Notoriously scathing of contemporary reviews of her own fiction, pretending to mostly not care or not notice bad press, reputedly shielded by Lewes from the worst excesses of praise or blame, Evans is none the less always aware of her critical reputation in her later life as we will see in her last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. Though her secret role, of course, leaves her twice removed from public scrutiny since she is neither named editor, nor published public writer, that awareness is laid bare in letters to her friends about the *Westminster*. She worries incessantly about how each issue

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[106] *Leader* 3 (10 January 1852): 37-8. In the *Literary Gazette* in 1852, Chapman's advertisement includes a quote from the *Court Globe*, hardly a prime authority, but one that names the 'editor': 'we congratulate Mr. Chapman on the manifest high tone and spirit of superior enterprise.' No. 1834 (13 March 1852): 242.

[107] Quoted in the *Leader* 3 (4 September 1852): 860; See also *Athenaeum* No. 1263 (17 January 1852): 4 and No. 1279 (1 May 1852): 477. Throughout 1852, Lewes gave proportionally more space to praising the

will be received by its audience. Attention to her readers' needs repeatedly surfaces. 'I think the 3d [sic] number of the W.R. will be capital – thoroughly readable and yet not frothy', she tells Charles and Cara Bray. To Sara she implies it both entertains and provokes: 'I do think it a rich number – matter for a fortnight's reading and thought.'[108] Back in London after a summer in Broadstairs, she fretted over the October issue: 'I am a few degrees more wizened and muddle-headed, and the articles for the Review are on the whole unsatisfactory. I fear a discerning public will think this number a sad falling off.'[109] A strong issue, with solid contributions from an impressive list of writers, including Harriet and James Martineau, Lewes, Combe, Francis Newman, Greg and Froude, her anxieties were unfounded. She later revises her opinion as she immerses herself in preparing the copy for press and in the end, it was well received. Perhaps her initial anxiety was born from her nervousness about the decision to get rid of the Independent Section in this issue, which would seem to have been at her instigation.

The aspect of the *Westminster* noted most consistently in commentaries on the new production was its freedom from political and religious biases. Remarking on both the quality of contributors and editorial policy, the *Weekly News* notes that the revived review is 'distinguished by high literary ability and a tone of fearless and truthful discussion which is full of promise for the future'. The *Globe* praised the fact that it 'exhibits a very effective coalition of independent minds under one literary banner'.[110] Such remarks emphasising the conception of the *Review* as an organ of free thinking uninhibited by editorial strictures is one Evans recognised as a dominant selling point of the quarterly. As such, she sought to reverse what appeared to be the inclusion of a gimmicky 'Independent Contribution' section in each issue. The feature was initially trumpeted in the public prospectus:

> for the reception of articles ably setting forth opinions which, though not discrepant with the general spirit of the *Review* – may be at variance with the particular ideas

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Westminster in its own review pages than to combined reviews of all other periodicals.

[108] 21 June 1852 and to Sara Hennell, 16 July 1852, *GEL*, 2: 36, 43.

[109] 11 September 1852, ibid, 55.

[110] Cited in the *Literary Gazette* No. 1834 (13 March 1852): 242.

> or measures it will advocate . . . for men of high mental power . . . zealous friends of freedom and progress, yet differ widely on special points of great practical concern, both from the Editors and from each other. [111]

This section was an obvious attempt at an original selling point, following, perhaps, the 'Open Counsel' pages of Lewes and Thornton Hunt's *Leader*, but one Evans later regretted, and after only two issues it was abandoned. It is a revealing inclusion, however, in this new series of the *Westminster* – a half-hearted effort, by implication, to free the contributor from the in-house editorial policy or consensus on certain principles that established for reviews their niche or market. In 1877, the *Nineteenth Century* made such openness its trademark and did so successfully for a number of years because the journal, as a whole, was presented along the lines of the *Westminster*'s so-called 'Independent Contributions'. The problem for the *Westminster*, however, was one of perception or implication as Evans saw in hindsight. The formal distancing of the editors from the Independent section as set out in the Prospectus suggested cohesive, internal principles at work in all the other articles and in consequence, she observed, this made the 'editors responsible for everything outside that railing – Ah me! how wise we all are *après coup*,' she tells Chapman in a letter in July 1852.[112]

Following this letter, the Independent Contributions distinction disappeared for the remainder of Evans' time with the *Review*. No longer under Evans' eye then, in July 1854, the independent contributions returned, renamed 'Independent Section' with 'The fact and principle of Christianity'. In April 1855, F. W. Newman's 'Administrative example of the United States' was similarly packaged separately from the rest of the articles.[113] The decision to switch from 'Independent Contribution' to 'Independent *Section*' points to a conscious contravention of Evans' qualms expressed above: 'section' implies an even more significant editorial distinction. Consequently, it suggests a more unified ideological

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[111] *Westminster Review* 57 (January 1852): 5.
[112] To John Chapman, 24-25 July 1852, *GEL*, 2: 49.
[113] [Unsigned], 'The fact and principle of Christianity,' *Westminster Review* 62 (July 1854): 195-221; F. W. Newman, 'Administrative example of the United States,' ibid. 63 (April 1855): 492-516.

agreement between the remaining articles, all belonging, it is to be presumed, to the non-independent section, or the section that has secured the editor's approval.

Occasional articles are literally sectioned off by Chapman through the fifties and sixties in a similar fashion and always manage to draw more attention to the editor than to the independent contribution with readers being left to speculate why the editor decided to present a particular article cordoned off from the rest. As Shelia Rosenberg remarks, however, the logic behind the decision to declare articles suitable for the independent section only is never apparent. She asks, for example, why W. E. Forster's 'sympathetic but by no means uncritical' article on Quakerism was deemed to fall 'outside the editorial consensus' and placed in the Independent section while an article on the Latter Day Saints, 'History and Ideas of the Mormons,' appears in the main body of the *Review*.[114] Rosenberg's assessment of the reasoning behind the separation of 'The fact and principle of Christianity' article from the rest of the contributions is plausible. She concludes that the article's main message, which she reads as ' faith in the divine inspiration behind the supreme Christian message of self-sacrifice' was felt to be 'too enthusiastic and uncritical'.[115] However, there is also the fact that Chapman deliberately sought to revoke Evans' decisions and reassert his control over the periodical following her departure, which explains the type of forceful intrusion on articles like Hannay's in this issue noted already.

Tensions between Chapman and Evans had increased throughout 1853 as she asserted her independence from him and from 142 The Strand, and as she came to realize that she needed to earn a more substantial living to support herself and her recently widowed sister and family. She began to look for a more lucrative outlet for her skills and a less dependent livelihood. To the Brays in Coventry she explains in early 1853: ' I am out of spirits about the *WR*. The editorship is not satisfactory and I should be glad to run away from it altogether. But one thing is clear – that the *Review* would be a great deal worse if I were not here. This is the only thought that consoles me.'[116]

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[114] See *Westminster Review* 57 (April 1852): 593-624; ibid., 62 (July 1854): 196-230.
[115] Rosenberg, 'The "wicked *Westminster*",' 236.
[116] 19 February 1853, *GEL*, 2: 87.

Sharing this view, the hitherto supportive review pages of the *Leader* written by Lewes, who was in a relationship with Evans by this stage, reveal a turn against some editorial decisions through 1854. In July, for example he questions why the review of Milman's *History of Latin Christianity* is 'condemned to that fever-ward', the isolated independent section reintroduced by Chapman.[117] Lewes had already attacked the *Westminster* in January in response to T. H. Huxley's poor review of his work on Comte that questioned his credentials as a man of science while praising Harriet Martineau's abridged translation of Comte's *Positive Philosophy*. The review appeared in the 'Science' section of the new-look January edition of the *Westminster* which reversed the policy of grouping texts according to nationality and instead divided them by subject: 'Theology and Philosophy, 'Science,' 'History,' '*Belles Lettres*'.[118] Lewes' very lukewarm reception of this change in editorial policy and his more forceful critique of the specious reasoning behind the 'Independent Section,' suggest Evans' dissatisfaction with Chapman's new policies as much as Lewes' pique.[119] They recall too her complaint to the Brays that though the 'letter-press' was her domain, in 1853 she acknowledges 'even that is not always what I will'.[120] She announces the change in the layout of the review section in November 1853 in an ambiguous letter to Sara Hennell that carries Evans' own sense of disenchantment with the periodical:

> It must be tremendous conscientiousness of yours on the hunt for duties that makes you read through the Co[ntemporary] Lit[erature] of the WR. However it is to be worth the reading in the future – done on a new plan – the Foreign Lit blended with the Eng[lish]. J. Martineau is to do the Theology and Philosophy, Huxley the Science and Froude the History!! I am afraid, though, that this will not be a very tempting programme to you.[121]

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[117] *Leader* 5 (8 July 1854): 640.

[118] Thomas Henry Huxley, 'Science,' *Westminster Review* 61 (January 1854): 254-70.

[119] *Leader* 5 (14 January 1854): 40. He warns 'To make this scheme quite successful . . . we should suggest that more space be devoted to the important works, and only the titles of the others given.' Ibid.

[120] See note 62.

[121] 8 November 1853, *GEL*, 2: 124. Two weeks later she writes with irony to Hennell 'I told Mr. Chapman yesterday that I wished to give up any connection with the editorship of the Westminster. He wishes me to continue the present state of things until April, but admits that he is so straitened for money and for

Her own dissatisfaction with the change is coloured by her defence of Lewes' scholarship. She finds fault with Huxley's article in factual detail and in tone, in particular in the parts addressing Lewes' work, and tells Chapman it is likely to be a 'regular "mess"' advising him to 'leave it out altogether' and goading him with a telling insight into the *Westminster*'s broader editorial policy:

> Do you really think that if you had been the publisher of Mr. Lewes's book and Bohn the publisher of Miss Martineau's, Mr. Huxley would have written just so? 'Tell that to the Marines.'[122]

The issue rouses Evans to be more forceful than customarily. She is regretful and annoyed that her editing out of Huxley's 'ungentlemanly sneers' from the piece gave the final copy the appearance of objective and reasoned authority it did not deserve. She tells Chapman to 'expunge' the notice altogether and in a very unusual assertion of her own authority she writes: 'I think I ought to have a voice in the matter, in virtue of the share in the management of the WR [sic] which I have had hitherto, and which does not cease till this number is out.'[123] Revealed in one of six newly published letters by Evans, this exchange with Chapman is especially significant for the rare glimpse of Evans giving a straightforward articulation of her editorial authority. In this instance, as she prepared to depart from her editor's position, Chapman ignored her appeal and published the piece in full.

In her exasperation with the limitations of her role, Evans partakes in a long tradition of frustrated writer/editors. In the secrecy that surrounded her work, however, Evans is unlike her nearest contemporaries, such as Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens or M. E. Braddon, all of whom were established authors by the time they edited successful periodicals. Evans was an unknown both in the sense that her editorship was a secret, and

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assistance in the mechanical part of his business that he feels unable to afford an expense on the less tangible services which I render.' 25 November 1853, ibid, 127-8.

[122] To John Chapman, 17 December 1853, ibid., 132; 19 December ibid., 133.

[123] To John Chapman, December 1853 cited in Ashton, 'New Letters at the Huntington,' 119-20.

by the fact that she was newly arrived in London with few friends and no reputation save for the very small circle of admirers who knew of her translation of Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu, The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1846). In contrast, Dickens, Trollope, Braddon, and Thackeray at the *Cornhill*, all used their names as editors or were used *for* their names.[124] Dickens, for example, not only had his name emblazoned across the front page of *Household Words*; it appeared as a recto headline on *every* page in the magazine. Announcements for the *Cornhill* boasted loudly of Thackeray's editorship of the new monthly in every advertisement in the same way it proclaimed a new Thackeray story. Clearly, both the text and the name were independent marketable products. George Eliot's name was used in a similar way in 1862-63 when the *Cornhill* secured the serialisation of *Romola* for the journal. Though the story was unpopular with *Cornhill* readers, the editor persisted on leading each issue with Eliot's installment because it was written by 'George Eliot'.

As an editor, then, her work influenced her writing life in ways that are not relevant to the established authors-turned-editors. In this she is like Thackeray, whose first engagement with the literary world was as editor/proprietor of the *National Standard.* Richard Pearson's work on Thackeray and the magazines attempts to redress the neglect of the periodical press's influence on the writer's history, arguing that his years as a journalist were formative ones and determined the style and content of his more famous fictional works. [125] The writer's deconstruction of journalistic figures and the exertion and abuse of the powers of the press is everywhere apparent in his work. Thackeray, though, was a well-known journalist and he made use of his audience's familiarity with his journalistic figures such as Titmarsh and Yellowplush in his novelistic satire. Marian Evans was not known as a journalist and she did not engage directly with analyses of the world of journalism in the ways familiar to readers of Thackeray's work. In his account of the newspaper world in the nineteenth-century, Aled Jones addresses Evans'

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[124] Trollope edited *St Paul's Magazine*; Dickens, among others, edited his own *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, among others; Braddon, edited *Belgravia.*

[125] Though, 'his knowledge of the marketplace and the processes of literary production are usually overlooked,' Pearson observes, '[w]hat strikes me about Thackeray is his singular determination to understand his profession and to engage intellectually with the rituals of the new commercial marketplace.' Pearson, *W. M. Thackeray and the Mediated Text*, 1.

representation of the press with a brief analysis of Will Ladislaw as the writer/editor of Mr. Brookes' political newspaper in *Middlemarch*. It stands in marked contrast to longer discussions of both Thackeray's and Trollope's fiction.[126] The influence of journalism on Evans' later writing is not as pronounced as that of her other editors-turned-novelists, in part, because George Eliot's writings were never associated in the public mind with the work of the periodical editor and journalist. As the following chapters will argue, part of the deliberate separation of the artist from the trade has to do with Evans' careful cultivation of her new fictional identity. She never presented herself as a subject of the press as Thackeray, Braddon or Dickens did, and the subject of journalism never surfaces in any explicit way in her writings after 1857 until her final work, *Impressions*, in 1879.

The association between nineteenth-century periodicals and Evans' work is much less content based. In her editorial role at the *Review*, however, and in her own periodical journalism, she develops a pragmatic understanding of the profession that informs her fictional identity. Her early experience with the 'ways and . . . trammels' of the press underpins her writing life and determines aspects of her various narrative and publishing choices. Evans the editor understood the need to court a larger audience and went about the task with the tact and thoroughness that always escaped Chapman. It was Evans who ensured variety in the range of articles that made up each issue; contemporaneity in the topics under discussion; comprehensiveness in the literary reviews; consistency and coherence in the presentation of material, coupled with an attentive eye on the need to amuse and persuade through tone and style as much as content. The *Review* clearly blossomed under her stewardship and made its mark as a distinctive publication in a competitive market. In a response to her description of the need to maintain the periodical as a sort of 'Noah's Ark' George Combe gives a reasonable summary of Evans' success in making the *Westminster* a marketable yet impressive venture because of her understanding of the needs and limitations of its audience:

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[126] Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), 43.

> I am not disposed to join in your lament that the Review is like 'a Noah's Ark'. The English public mind is a perfect counterpart of that famed vessel and its contents, and my impression is that such a number as your last in which there is much advanced thinking, with a goodly assortment of error and nonsense, but throughout characterised by vigour and earnestness, is the best suited both to please and instruct.[127]

Evans' work at the *Westminster* demands our attention then not just to fill in a gap in her biographical record. This work demonstrates the practical ways she recognised the text as a commodity and provides an early indication of her attempts to redefine the possibilities for such texts as both instructive and entertaining media at mid-century. As the next two chapters will show, these crucial negotiations are a persistent feature of her own writings for periodicals.

[127] 28 July 1852, cited in Ashton, 'New George Eliot Letters at the Huntington,' 115.

Chapter Three:
'The healthy fact of working for one's bread':
Marian Evans the periodical journalist

What I have said refers to beauty in the wider sense of the word, in the sense which the word has in the literary tradition. In the marketplace it has another sense. When we speak of beauty in the second sense of the term our judgement is influenced in the first place by the art itself and the form of that art.

James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

'If literary criticism may be said to flourish among us at all, it certainly flourishes immensely, for it flows through the periodical press like a river that has burst its dikes [sic].'[1] This churlish opening to Henry James' 'The Science of Criticism' (1891) sets the negative tone of faint praise that characterizes his complaints about the saturated state of periodical writing at the close of the nineteenth century. It is market-driven, page-filling dross, for the most part, James argues, that demonstrates little concern for objective critical standards or sympathetic imaginative insight. Periodical literature is an inferior form that has debased literary criticism since the periodical trade has made criticism a product of the marketplace. His objections are not new ones. Thomas Carlyle, like James, both servant and critic of the periodical trade, conducted bitter attacks on the business earlier in the century: 'Reviewing spreads with strange vigour. . . at the last Leipzig fair there was advertised a Review of Reviews. By and by it will be found that all literature has become one boundless self-devouring Review. Thus does literature, . . . like a sick thing, superabundantly "listen to itself"'[2]

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[1] Henry James, 'The Science of Criticism,' *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 290.

[2] Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics' (1831), *A Carlyle Reader: Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 87. W. T. Stead's *Review of Reviews* appeared in England in January 1890 and ran monthly until 1936.

There is the danger, emphasised through the century by writers as diverse as Carlyle and Henry James, of taking too much notice of this 'sick thing' talking to itself. I do not want to make exaggerated claims here for the aesthetic value of mid-century periodical writing and in particular for the value of Marian Evans' periodical contributions which are the subject of this chapter. She was not a very prolific journalist throughout her life as Dickens and Thackeray were. Her acknowledged writings for the periodical press amount to fewer than eighty articles. Many of these are short notes on newly published books and most of her journalism, almost three-quarters of her total output, was written in the space of two years, 1855-56. Neither did she persistently cast herself in the role of critical commentator for her age as vocally as Carlyle, Mill, Ruskin or Arnold. Any study of periodical literature is clearly fraught with dangers of hyperbole. In his analysis of the *Edinburgh Review*, John Clive points up some of the temptations for what he calls the 'revivalist' of periodical writing:

> One tends to take the articles too seriously, forgetting that they were often dashed off in great haste by authors more interested in supplying a manuscript on time than in standing its test. Nothing is simpler than to construct consistent systems of thought and seemingly harmonious lines of development out of the mass of available material.[3]

Evans' non-fiction writings, when examined at all, have for the most part been subjected to such consensus-based readings.[4] In the only article to associate her non-fiction specifically with the essay tradition, G. Robert Stange inadvertently suggests one potential danger of this push for consensus that tends to read George Eliot's journalism as a commentary on her more famous work:

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[3] John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The* Edinburgh Review *1802-1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 11.
[4] See for example, [Unsigned], 'Review of George Eliot's Essays,' *Athenaeum*, no. 2939 (24 February 1884): 241-3; William Myers, 'George Eliot's Essays and Reviews, 1849-1857,' *Prose Studies 1800-1900* 1, no. 2 (February 1978): 5-20; Rosalind Wade, 'George Eliot: Journalist,' *Contemporary Review* 215 (1969): 88-92; James D. Rust, 'The Art of Fiction in George Eliot's Reviews,' *Review of English Studies* 7 (1956): 164-72; Stang, 'The Literary Criticism of George Eliot,' 952-61; Haight, 'George Eliot's Theory of Fiction,' 1-3; Mooney, 'George Eliot the Journalist,' 74-84; Richter, *Narrative/Theory*, 12.

> We read George Eliot's pieces because of the light they shed on the opinions and themes of a great novelist and because in some of the later articles one finds preliminary studies for the fiction. *From this point of view everything about the articles is interesting.*[5]

Another equally misleading extreme is to offer a content-based summary of what are deemed to be the most important essays written by the 'apprentice' journalist. Avoiding the tendency to over-generalise with the secure vision of hindsight, the position for the revivalist according to Clive, is 'to seek to surround the dry bones with the flesh and blood of personal context and contemporary setting.'[6]

The immediate issue raised by this point is central to this study: why 'revive', George Eliot's periodical writings? There are two related answers to that question that will form the basis of this chapter. First, this chapter will demonstrate how Marian Evans' journalism, when situated in the context in which it was produced, displays the internal textual debates that involve the twin contending aspects of her essayistic persona: the corporate writer and the individual artist. This figure informs the construction of both 'George Eliot' and the narrator of her later fiction and essays. Identification with the general spirit of the journal in which you are writing is a prerequisite of the form. This corporate voice, I will argue, has been either ignored or persistently misrecognised as 'George Eliot's' own voice. Acknowledgement of the influence of context on this constructed essayistic figure who adapts with ease to changing demands of rival publications, however, provides a much more contingent image of the fiction writer's various narrators and the journalist's 'spokesperson'.

Importantly too, the formal features of the essay as they emerge in mid-century periodicals – its ephemeral nature, its constant negotiation of content and style to suit various audiences, its refusal to stabilise long enough to be clearly categorised – are all precisely the features that, ideologically, make the periodical article central to Evans' writing history. Evans' work is preoccupied with the impossibility of stability in this mortal material world. Her suspicion of rigid theoretical positions of any kind is implied

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[5] Stange, 'The Voice of the Essayist,' 316. Emphasis added.
[6] Clive, *Scotch Reviewers*, 12.

in the refusal of calcified creeds; the trend marks both her non-fiction and fictional work. The transforming power of the individual imagination becomes the central impetus of her writing as many of her critics have pointed out. But as an elusive and perpetually shifting impulse, it is never formulated into a theory of fiction, neither is it articulated with the same optimism as the Wordsworthian Romantic or with the same clarity. Mid-Victorians had long abandoned such faith in the self and the self in nature and mid-Victorian criticism reflects this failure to reimagine the Romantic ideal in an increasingly mechanised, increasingly fragmentary existence. Victorian critics notably lack a clear manifesto or clearly defined school of thought. Evans' periodical writings are beset with the same absence of system or doctrine. But this lack, I argue, is the positive value that points not only to her awareness of the contingency of the medium within which she was working but also to the only constant in her body of work: the persistent experimenting with writing forms.

Her assertions in her periodical criticism on the importance of the imagination or on the natural organic laws that govern our universe are all part of a vaguely conceived literary critical vocabulary at mid-century that never materialises into a science or philosophy of criticism. Evans' employment of terms such as 'sympathy,' 'realism,' 'truth in art,' usually in the opening paragraphs of her articles, fall short of convincing party cries and, in context, strike us more as examples of the shorthand vocabulary of her critical climate. Repositioning these literary 'theories' then in the contentious and contingent environment of mid-century periodical culture rather than accepting them at face value as articulations of George Eliot's literary manifesto, it becomes necessary to reevaluate the critical ideologies of George Eliot's body of work.

The second purpose of this chapter, then, is to redress the bias towards the novelist, George Eliot, at the expense of the writer, Marian Evans. This novel-focussed approach has led to the representation of Evans' journalism as expedient scaffolding for Eliot's novels or repositories for early articulations of the novelist's theories on art and realism. Evans' work as professional journalist, however, like her work as full time editor, shapes her writing in more significant ways than hitherto offered by descriptive accounts of the content of her journalism. To revive the 'flesh and blood of personal context and contemporary setting' as Clive's historicist approach proposes, though, still

neglects the crucial dimensions of form and style that so concerned nineteenth-century commentators on periodical literature: the problem of packaging in a business-driven environment. In the marketplace, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus asserts simply, discussions of aesthetics must necessarily address the fact that our judgement is influenced by 'the art itself and the form of that art'.[7] The 'dramatic form' all representation takes when the artist presents his work to the public, as Stephen suggests, is the aspect of Evans' journalism that has been most often overlooked and it is the aspect, I argue, that most crucially demonstrates the significance of her non-fiction writings for her oeuvre.

This chapter will situate Evans' journalism in three interrelated contexts: since most of her journalism has its roots in the review tradition, it is necessary to examine how current theories on the function of art inflected the vocabulary of this particular critic. Secondly, her criticism takes the form of the periodical article which makes generic demands on the writer that have been persistently bypassed in commentaries on this phase of her career. In her analysis of George Eliot's account of realism in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, for example, Sally Shuttleworth turns to Evans' most cited essay, 'The Natural History of German Life.' Like most other critics, she uses the article as evidence of the writer's theories on art, asserting that in this piece, 'authorial statement is unqualified by the ambiguities of narratorial role.' The point both ignores the construction of an essayistic figure in any periodical article and the many 'ambiguities' related to subject, journal and intended audience, that preclude the possibility of making unmediated 'authorial' statements.[8] Following the description of the nineteenth-century periodical essay and its heritage as laid down in my first chapter, I will emphasise the aspects of Evans' journalism that demonstrate the influence of the formal features of the essay genre on her writing. These features have particular significance for the formation of a commentator's voice in her longer articles.

Finally, entertainment and instruction are general terms open to wide interpretation depending on your creed or philosophy. At the *Westminster*, Evans was conscious of the editor's role in drawing the lines of demarcation for her readership to

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[7] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; London: Penguin, 1996), 243.

[8] See Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 29. Josephine McDonagh similarly collapses the distinction between Marian Evans and her essayistic persona in her piece 'George Eliot' in

strike the particular mix of distraction and indoctrination demanded by dual responsibility to the market and to the reader most likely to pick up that particular quarterly. As a journalist, placing her work with a broad range of publications, Evans was adept at manipulating her material to suit the requirements of individual publications. Looking at her short articles on the same subject for a number of different periodicals, the shaping force of context asserts itself.

It becomes difficult to get the measure of Evans in this environment. She is exasperatingly elusive at times, disguised behind her attention to the formal restrictions and editorial demands on the journalist. She is no mere ventriloquist, however. And if we can never comfortably formulate a clearly packaged ideological programme from her non-fiction writings, something of her personal biases emerge as the individual writer does battle with the corporate voice.

The Dummy, the Knight, and the Consumer: the periodical machine and its critics at mid-century

In these years as a journalist Evans began what was to be her life-long experimentation with both writing forms and the manipulation of audience and market in a professional environment: all part of the 'antiseptic' practices that derive from the 'healthy fact of working for one's bread' as she explained in a long article for the *Westminster Review*.[9] Though hardly the most glowing of tributes to the business of writing for a living, Evans' observation here nonetheless suggests the professional journalist's indebtedness to mid-century periodical culture.

The fact that this debt has long gone unacknowledged stems from the perpetuation of a negative attitude towards periodical criticism, ironically, most often sounded by the critics themselves writing in periodicals. 'If we are looking for the opponents of print and the public sphere,' Christian Thorne has remarked of satirical attacks on eighteenth-century print culture, we will find them among the same writers

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Encyclopaedia of the Essay, ed. Tracy Chevalier (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 247. See also note 4.

[9] [Evans], 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' 461, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 162.

'who are in some sense most representative of that sphere'.[10] The Critic has long been at the forefront of debates about criticism. The nineteenth-century critic rehearses the bid for dominance over an increasingly saturated market driven by a public whose motivation and understanding he often questions, as his eighteenth-century predecessors had done. However, the mechanical aspect to mass-produced literature and the rise in power of the consumer become more and more pertinent in the nineteenth-century field of cultural production. As noted, Henry James' end-of-century article in the *New Review* embodies many of the problems vocalised earlier by his forerunners. Matthew Arnold, for example, was a long time advocate of the superiority of the selective French system over the unregulated open door policy of the English free press reviewing. The idea of an élite body of criticism focussing on what is adjudged to be the 'best that is thought and said' is typical of Arnold's notion of mid-century clerisy and is, in its élitism, antagonistic to the realities of free trade and freedom of expression. It is the conjunction of these last two points – free trade and free speech – that leads to the glut of mediocre and inferior reviewing of mediocre and inferior works, James implies in his depiction of periodical writing in terms of an undistinguished mass or bulk. Periodical literature is like a 'regular train,' he claims:

> which starts at an advertised hour, but which is free to start only if every seat be occupied. The seats are many, the train is ponderously long, and hence the manufacture of dummies for the seasons when there are not passengers enough. A stuffed mannikin is thrust into the empty seat, where it makes a creditable figure till the end of the journey.[11]

Much of Evans' literary criticism has been shelved for its 'stuffed mannikin' quality. Her so-called 'pot-boiling' reviews, especially her shorter pieces for the *Leader*, have been dismissed from her canon for taking up space but saying nothing.[12]

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[10] Christian Thorne, 'Thumbing our Nose at the Public Sphere: Satire, the Market and the Invention of Literature,' *PMLA* 116, no. 3 (2001): 533.
[11] James, 'Science of Criticism,' 290.
[12] Kerry McSweeney, *George Eliot: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 32. McSweeney ascribes the label to those reviews where Evans, he suggest, 'is content to be descriptive, topical and/or entertaining.' These features are, of course, typical of the essay tradition.

Many of these articles were no doubt rushed off, and very often little can be claimed for the importance of their articulations in the wider field of Eliot studies. However, the criteria for dismissing these pieces as dead dummies are suspect. Most often, they are ignored because they are short, written for money and serve to fill a space. Should we comb through the serial parts of Dickens' or Thackeray's stories for similar pot-boiling sections that can be defined as rhetorical space-fillers? The problem with such 'pot-boiling' pieces seems not to be the fact that they say little – but that, by the short few lines they occupy, the long quotations to which they resort, they so obviously say little. The question of interest then, I would suggest, it not what do these reviews mean but why do they exist at all and why in this particular form? This moves us away from evaluating content alone and poses questions that relate to not just the subject of the piece, but the form, publication outlet, audience, and culture that create the need for such pieces.

In contrast to the dummy on the train, James' critic is a more traditional, even aristocratic and (tellingly), an implausible figure out of place in this machine-driven age of dubious progress. The critic is

> the real helper of the artist, a torch-bearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother. . . . when one considers the noble figure completely equipped – armed *cap-à-pie* in curiosity and sympathy – one falls in love with the apparition. It certainly represents the knight who has knelt through his long vigil and who has the piety of his office.[13]

This figure epitomises the polar opposite of the mass of readers that emerges in an increasingly democratic society. The élite servant of the feudal lord, the knight's function to mediate and serve is premised on his faith in maintaining strict hierarchies. The most outspoken commentators of the time, Carlyle, Ruskin, Mill, Arnold, though differing in political ideologies and writing styles, all imagined this figure of the critic or interpreter in an idealised fashion that testifies to their anxieties about the future of high

[13] Henry James, 'Science of Criticism,' 293.

literature in a mass readership democracy. Arnold's articulation of his notion of the 'clerisy' is typical:

> the highly instructed few, and not the scantily instructed many, will ever be the organ to the human race of knowledge and truth. Knowledge and truth, in the full sense of the words, are not attainable by the great mass of the human race at all.[14]

Mill's depiction of the genius is premised along these same lines: 'The initiation of all wise or noble things comes and must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual. The honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open.'[15]

Much of the horrified questioning that undermines the value or function of the periodical press, typified by writers such as Carlyle and Ruskin, is charged with political and social distrust of a level cultural playing field. For Arnold and Mill, the realisation that electoral reform is necessary and the growth in political and economic power of the working and middle-classes therefore inevitable, sees them making their pitch for influence over emerging mass readership. Arnold, literally as a schools inspector, and ideologically as a critic in mainstream middle-class periodicals, becomes a self-appointed guardian of culture, or, as one commentator has put it, an 'intellectual civil servant'.[16]

Evans' view of her role in this field is not transparent. She shared none of Carlyle's neo-feudalist sympathies, nor is there any sense that she saw her role in the periodical press in James' terms of the pious knight. She did not programmatically advocate culture, as Arnold did through the 1860s, as the redeeming spiritual salve for

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[14] Matthew Arnold, 'The Bishop and the Philosopher' (1863), *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. H. Super with the Assistance of Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 43-4. Originally published in *Macmillan's Magazine* 7 (January 1863): 241-56.

[15] John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty (1859), *On Liberty with the Subjection of Women and Chapters on Socialism*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 66.

[16] Patrick Parrinder, *Authors and Authority: English and American Criticism 1750-1990* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 160.

an increasingly irreligious urbanised nation deprived of its traditional land-based class systems. Nor was she part of the mid-Victorian clerisy, university-men, including Arnold and Mill, that spear-headed what Christopher Kent has described as the leading, 'higher', journalism of the time. Following Coleridge's requirement that those at the intellectual vanguard should remain amateur journalists, men of the people, these educated men speaking to educated men were wary to avoid the so-called potential corruption of trade. Invoking Gramsci's more capacious conceptualisation of the intellectual, Ann Parry has offered a corrective to Kent's influential article. In her survey of contributors to *Macmillan's Magazine* (1859-68) she suggests over half of middle-class journalists of the time were a new breed: the 'tradition-breaking intellectual' or 'organic' intellectual who was not attached to particular institutions or class-based politics.[17]

Evans was one of this type – the professional intellectual – a type increasing in number since the growth in newspaper and periodical publication from the 1830s in particular had made it possible to make a living as a journalist. As her work as an editor shows, she was always conscious of the necessary conjunction of culture and commerce in the workings of the press. In her first long article for the *Westminster Review*, she asks Chapman bluntly: 'Tell me what space you want filled?' She was also one of the few journalists to ensure she controlled the copyright to her articles in the periodical – something learned no doubt from her own experience as editor of the same review.[18] As we will see, in her later existence as the novelist 'George Eliot', Evans separated herself from this life as a paid servant of the press. She presents herself in correspondence and in her literary salons as an artist most conscious of and concerned about the moral effect of her writing. In an early letter to her publisher, John Blackwood, she dismisses his suggested revisions for 'Janet's Repentance' with a now much repeated defence: 'The moral effect of the stories of course depends on my power of seeing truly and feeling justly; and as I am not conscious of looking at things through the medium of cynicism or

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[17] See Christopher Kent, 'Higher Journalism and the Mid-Victorian Clerisy,' *Victorian Studies* 12 (December 1969): 182-85; Ann Parry, 'The Intellectuals and the Middle-Class Periodical Press,' *Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 20, 25.

[18] 8 July 1854, *GEL*, 8: 125; Chapman wrote asking permission to republish five of her *Westminster* articles acknowledging that he had returned the copyright to her, 16 January 1860, ibid., 259. See Lewes' Journal, 18 January 1860, for their cool response to this request, ibid., n., 7.

irreverence, I can't help hoping that there is no tendency in what I write to produce those miserable mental states.'[19]

Her cynicism about the publishing market, however, is everywhere apparent in her minute attention to the sales and presentation of her work in dealings with publishers throughout her life. And it is most explicit in the coruscating critique of the corrupt and vainglorious press-trade in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. As my concluding chapter on this, her last work, will argue, Evans sought to cultivate the mystique of the ethical artist impelled by the promptings of the imagination alone to justify her work to herself and to her public. But she battled all the time with an open-eyed awareness of the compromises necessitated by the business of writing and the superficiality of public success. Such a blend of idealism and pessimism in its manifold forms brilliantly underpins her best fiction. It also makes it difficult for us to have faith in the assertion of educative literary manifestos as reconstructed from her periodical writings since she has no blind faith in them herself.

Evans was a liberal and a radical to the extent that she believed in educational, legislative and social reform as advocated by both the *Westminster* and *Leader*. Her writings display a clear illustration of class and gender biases in nineteenth-century England. She had the courage of her convictions to live in a highly unconventional relationship with a married man for nearly twenty-five years. But she also wrote for conservative journals antagonistic to reformist positions like the *Saturday Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, she refused to openly support campaigns for women's suffrage and she insisted that even her closest friends address by the very conventional title, 'Mrs. Lewes.' Like the best creative writers, there is no one key to explain her writing history, no simple creed formulated in her work.

Similarly, rather than providing us with an articulation of the transcending power of some universal culture, her periodical contributions more clearly display the contingency of context. In this light, the difficulty of determining Evans' critical position in these writings is not surprising given the indeterminate nature of Victorian literary criticism more generally. Fitzjames Steven denied the possibility of journalism ever gaining respect as a profession because it had too many levels – an unbridgeable

[19] 12 July 1857, *GEL*, 2: 362.

gap between the higher criticism and the gutter press.[20] The wide-range of essay forms and wide variety of Victorian periodicals and newspapers similarly compounds the problem of classification and analysis and it hampers too the emergence of a clearly defined Victorian school of criticism. Henry James employs the terms 'literary criticism' 'contemporary journalism' and 'periodical literature' as synonyms in his 'Science of Criticism.' And though he asserts that the 'art of criticism' has nothing at all in common with the current deluge of 'reviewing' – the distinctions between the differing genres are not at all clear. This blurring of boundaries, inevitable when a river bursts its dikes, is also a tale of mid-century critics struggling to contain the rapidly rising flood of publications on the market. James' deliberate failure to offer a 'science' of criticism here, mirrors the central dilemma of Victorian critical commentary: the attempt to produce a shared flexible theoretical frame of reference by which literature can be assessed and discussed while avoiding the unhelpful limitations implied in the formulation of a 'science of criticism.'[21]

Accounts of mid-nineteenth-century criticism generally begin with the acknowledgement that it is mostly amorphous and unsystematised. Sandwiched between the manifesto-driven Romantics and the co-existing outspoken aesthetes such as Wilde and Pater and linguistically-oriented scientists of the late-nineteenth century, Victorian criticism is seen to languish in a morass of moralistic terminology where key words have multiple levels of valency depending on the critic and the periodical. E. S. Dallas' *Poetics* (1852) put it succinctly: 'We have critical opinion in great abundance, and often of great value, but we have no critical system.'[22] The shared vocabulary of critics, prioritising character, moral feeling, sympathy, and truth, seems to be shared only in the sense that most critics used the same words.

Leonard Starzyk's familiar argument summarised in his study of post-romantic criticism is the most commonly articulated effort at formulating a nineteenth-century

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[20] [James Fitzjames Stephen], 'The Profession of Journalism,' *Saturday Review* 7 (1 January 1859): 9-10, also cited in Kent, 'Mid-Victorian Clerisy,' 187.

[21] James changed the title of 'The Science of Criticism' to 'Criticism' in his *Essays* (London 1893), noting perhaps, as the Gard implies, that the original title was ironic, see James, 'The Science of Criticism,' 290.

[22] E. S. Dallas, *Poetics* (London, 1852), 3. John Valdamir Price explains that Dallas' *Gay Science* was his attempt to address this lack and to raise literary criticism to the 'dignity' of a science, by offering itself as a 'science of pleasure.' See E. S. Dallas, *The English Language and Poetics: An Essay on Poetry*, introduction, John Vladimir Price (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995), viii-ix.

school of thought: in a world increasingly bereft of external authority, the writer becomes preacher and teacher. His study focuses on the way in which the poet became that figure of authority, because 'by virtue of the harmonious operation of the totality of his powers, [he] is capable of transforming his environment to predicate vision and unity – religion in the broadest sense – to his contemporaries who recognise in life only spiritual and psychological dissolution.' Such is the function of the poet: 'not composition, entertainment and instruction, but the projection of the integrated self in all its aspects' summed up in the apparent paradox, 'imaginative reason.'[23] Ben Knights has argued, in contrast, that 'enormous pedagogic confidence' characterises the *novelists* of the period. They presented their fictional worlds as the necessary 'model of intelligibility' required by this disintegrating century:

> The rational mind of the author and of the reader can organise the relevant data; the social world at large can provide subject matter. Truth is many-sided (the extension of sympathy was an imperative of the novel), and misunderstanding – whether arising from ignorance, from prejudice, or from social inexperience – can in principle be resolved . . . Belief in the possibility of comprehensive understanding . . . went along with a residual faith in consecutive prose and logical argument.[24]

The terms on which this literature, poetry or novel, are received and defined, however, stays in the hands of the critics, as Knights outlines, who from Carlyle to Arnold argue for the their own position as interpreters for the masses. Patrick Parrinder has pointed out that the original concepts 'author' and 'authority' share a common root in the Latin verb *augeo* where the creator *was* the authority. Through time, a split occurred and the 'native force of the maker or originator was brought up against the common standards of society.'[25] Parrinder does not debate that controversial phrase,

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[23] Leonard Starzyk, *The Imprisoned Splendor: A Study of Early Victorian Critical Theory* (London: Kennikat Press, 1977), x, 112.
[24] Ben Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 11-12.
[25] Parrinder, *Authors and Authority,* 1.

'the common standards of society' while of course its definition entirely represents the power of the critic.

In the mid-nineteenth century, in between two transforming reform acts, in a world made small by the expansion of trade and colonies and the development of steam travel, made large by the proliferation of organs of opinion, made old by the stretching of time beyond the biblical four millenia to paleontologist's millions of years, made more complex too by an increasingly industrial environment and a diminishing God and Church, the 'common standards of society' were up for debate as never before in the public presses. The fourth estate, through their influential role as interpreters of these changes, made literature answer to not just the dictates of the so-called common standards of society, variously defined, but responsible too for the constant redefinition of society. Such judicial and economic criteria, as Chris Baldick puts it, 'achieve particular prominence in criticism, when critics become advisers to a class of literary consumers anxious to know the worth of their purchases.' The effect upon the periodical writer, upon Marian Evans' journalism, is inevitable: 'the literary vocabulary of value is . . . not an arbitrary figure of speech but the mark upon criticism of considerations which no book reviewer can altogether ignore, absorbed into criticism "from outside".'[26]

From their inception, periodicals gain audiences, as chapter one has argued, because of their successful promotion of the value of symbolic capital. To participate in legitimate cultural criticism, the critic is obliged to learn the discourses of the day. Evans' generalisations on the functions of art throughout her journalism then, need to be contextualised. This is not to absolve Evans of responsibility for what is sometimes an overly complacent invoking of the confused philosophies that often dominated periodical writing practices of her time, but to question the repetition of these views as typically George Eliot's.[27] Above all, her periodical writing can never be simply

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[26] Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 7, 9.

[27] In his fine overview of her non-fiction writings, William Myers observes that the 'illogical procedures' of the 'Natural History of German life' article, for example, 'belong more to the age than to George Eliot personally, but that does not make them less damaging to the coherence and integrity of her writing about society. Particularly dangerous is the assumption that a general recognition of social determinism justifies a bland haziness about its detailed workings.' See Myers, 'George Eliot's Essays and Reviews, 1849-1857,' 12, 11.

repeated as a transparent articulation of her conception of fiction generally and of her themes in her own novels in particular.

It should be noted then that the complex struggle in George Eliot's novels between the various ideological tugs of individual and society, or as Terry Eagleton has suggested, between 'a progressively muted Romantic individualism, concerned with the untrammeled evolution of the "free spirit" and certain "higher" corporate ideological modes,'[28] is actually manifested much earlier in Evans' writing career. In fact, the corporate character of the literary field in which Evans was writing impinges most obviously on her writings for the periodical industry. Her periodical criticism internalises the tension between content and form, between individual expression and quite literal corporate expectations, and exposes what is in fact a false opposition of these terms. Bourdieu's explanation of the importance of the literary field in more general terms as noted in chapter one, therefore, is central to understanding how Evans' work must be read with attention to the charged context. As he argues, all literary works 'are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws'.[29]

Most critics writing in the mid-nineteenth century emphasised the social function of literature. That is not to say that literature became a soapbox for social theories, but that creative writing was judged as a social art with a responsibility to the society in which it was produced. Various terms have been used to characterise this post-romantic turn from the focus on aesthetics. Starzyk notes this essentially utilitarian aspect underlying all early Victorian literary criticism: 'the two most prominent functions assigned to criticism in the Victorian period . . .[are] moral elevation or regeneration and social meliorism'.[30] M. Abrams' useful phrase 'pragmatic' criticism, itself suggestive of literature's function outside of the text, is invoked by Isobel Armstrong among others to define what is more commonly known in a general sense as Victorian earnestness.

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[28] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976), 111.

[29] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 163.

[30] 'For the Victorian critic,' he argues, 'morality was generally eponymous with comprehensiveness of view: the ability to see the relative disposition of things from a distanced perspective and ultimately, the ability to communicate that vision effectively . . . Morality was thus opposed to any kind of bias – religious, political or intellectual.' The critic here I would suggest is cast in terms of the unorthodox essayist originating with Montaigne. Starzyk, *Imprisioned Splendour*, 7, 8.

Pragmatic theories of literature are grounded in the notion that all literature should both please and teach. The definition of what pleases and teaches (entertains and instructs) is located in the demands of the audience. As Abrams puts it, again in quite utilitarian fashion, this criticism is 'ordered towards the audience . . . since it looks at the work of art chiefly as a means to an end, an instrument for getting something done, and tends to judge its value according to its success in achieving that aim.' Using Philip Sidney's characterisation of poetry, Abrams notes the importance of classical theories of rhetoric in the formulation of the basic vocabulary for such pragmatic criticism since its aim was to persuade.[31]

Victorian criticism, in the wake of the Romantic repudiation of classical models, follows the turn inwards that locates meaning within the individual instead of in the external authority of rhetorical modes. But as with Romantic criticism, it retains the pragmatic impulse to persuade, calling on the very different type of rhetoric that is appropriate to its own cultural moment. The predominant difference then is in the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian consensus-driven earnestness impinged upon individualist romantic rebellion. Mid-Victorians are in this way more like their Enlightenment predecessors, seeking to relate individual experience and knowledge to broader social questions and sidelining questions of pure aesthetic interest that had captivated Coleridge, for example, and that became the focus for late nineteenth-century critics such as Wilde. In the face of social, religious, industrial and political upheaval, criticism strove to emphasise not rebellion but cohesion, sympathy, and common values. 'All the commonest evaluative words in criticism at this time carry a psychological, human/social or moral reference,' Armstrong explains in this regard.[32] And significantly, the form in which this criticism was disseminated, as periodical literature, is a crucial shaping influence on content and ideology.

Periodical criticism, by its very nature as news or journalism appearing in daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly instalments, carries with it the badge of its transitory, ephemeral origins. Armstrong implies the contingency of Victorian critical theory when she draws attention to its publication format and its form:

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[31] M. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, (Oxford: University Press, 1953), 14-21, 15.

[32] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry 1830-1870* (London: Athlone Press, 1972), 6.

> Periodical criticism is closer to cultural pressures than the abstract treatises and makes one powerfully aware of the literary situation in which it was written, aware of the anxieties, stresses and distresses from which Victorian criticism emerges.[33]

Its form as periodical criticism is integral to its existence as literary criticism. And the absence of definitive manifestos is unsurprising given the flexibility of its tenets which, in their loosely conceived articulations as social, moral, or psychological ideals must necessarily change as society and its individuals do. While the common vocabulary of the Victorian critics is premised on the universality of moral feeling, on the doctrine of sympathy, on apparently impervious truths like 'duty,' the refusal of a clearly formulated science of criticism, and the implicit relativism inherent in the definitions of truth that are based on individual incidents and interactions, makes Victorian criticism as flexible and multi-faceted as the periodical form in which it appeared.

This sense of transience or constant flux characterises much of the contemporary commentary on the periodical industry itself. Metaphorical coherency is maintained throughout James' 'Science of Criticism', for example, through images of excess and consumption combined with the idea of constant movement, irrespective of destination, epitomised by the rail. 'Periodical literature is a huge, open mouth which has to be fed – a vessel of immense capacity which has to be filled,' James argues. But consideration of how we 'fill' that gaping vessel no longer concerns producers or consumers: 'we blunder in and out of the affair as if it were a railway station – the easiest and most public of the arts.[34] Food and rail metaphors are obvious signifiers of consumption and flourishing industry's progress. But these images are emblematic too of the century's understanding of the literary form as a product of an increasingly industrial consumer-driven age where the literary text is defined by its ephemerality and perishability. The periodical, as a weekly, monthly or quarterly publication, rather like the newspaper, is most obviously and immediately implicated in the transitions and traditions of its

[33] Ibid., 3-4.
[34] James, 'The Science of Criticism,' 290, 293.

particular historical moment. Walter Bagehot's seminal mid-century piece on 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers' (1855), argued just this point when he analyses the form of contemporary periodical articles:

> In truth review-writing but exemplifies the casual character of modern literature. Everything about it is temporary and fragmentary. Look at a railway stall; you see books of every colour . . . but all small. People take their literature in morsels, as they take sandwiches on a journey.[35]

The periodical article mimics the literature it considers; literature is prepared, like a sandwich, to facilitate quick consumption. As the century progressed, shorter more punchy literary articles, epitomized by those in the *Athenaeum* or the *Saturday Review* began to gain in popularity over the longer quarterly articles.[36] Packaging became more integral to the process of writing and reading. As Bagehot notes: 'And the change in the appearance of books has been accompanied – has been caused – by a similar change in readers.' The clause is a telling one since it is impossible to separate the course of change into a clearly defined sequence of events. The writing of literature, the reviewing of literature, the reading of literature all cause and reflect the changed environment. All parties are participants and spectators in the cultural productions of the mid-nineteenth-century. Fitzjames Stephens' concern, in an article for the *Cornhill* in 1862, is focussed on the implications for this reader-driven, food-processing, industry on writing style: 'In our days, men live like bees in hives'; the preoccupied nature of their lives means, 'they are forced to live upon intellectual mincemeat. Their food must be chopped up small before they eat it; and it must be so prepared as at once to tempt the appetite and assist digestion.' To aid this process of consumption, he concludes, with cutting irony, 'leading articles have been brought to their present perfection in order to meet this want. This condition determines both their substance and form.'[37] The

[35] Walter Bagehot, 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers,' 310.
[36] See J. D. Jump, 'Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen-Fifties,' *Review of English Studies* 24, no. 93 (January 1948): 42-57.
[37] Fitzjames Stephens, 'Journalism,' 53-4.

argument anticipates T.S. Eliot's less acerbic suggestion that criticism from age to age will reflect the things that the age demands.[38]

Marian Evans' writings from her years as a professional journalist, in both their substance and form cannot be excised from their origins in this increasingly influential and burgeoning mid-century periodical marketplace. Armstong makes the point briefly when she notes the *Westminster* stamp on Evans' review of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'.[39] Both the volume and the ephemeral nature of periodical journalism, however, have resulted in the critical neglect of context. Though the natural and pervasive presence of periodical literature at this time is also implied through the recurring use of food metaphors – it exists to sustain and nourish the busy man's cultural and intellectual life – the form of that sustenance, as implied above is tainted with inescapably negative connotations. Evans herself emphasises these points in an almost apologetic opening to the 'History, Biography, and Travel' article in the *Westminster* in October 1856:

> This trade of reviewing of ours brings volumes before us, a hundred of which, if digested into one, might make a book which would survive to all time; yet they will die, all of them, and we cannot wish it otherwise. The truths that are in them are mainly but as crystals of salt, scattered up and down a mass of perishable substance to make it palatable for immediate consumption; and our business unfortunately, is not to indicate the appearance of new authoritative teachers, but to notice merely the flavours of this or that new dish which is to be purchased in today's book market, and which must give place tomorrow to a fresh condiment.[40]

Analogies that accentuate consumption and digestion point to the detritus that is the inevitable final stage in the metaphorical chain. Individual morsels, not just the books under review, but the articles that make up each journal are not made to be preserved but

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[38] T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), see for example, 21-22, 27.
[39] Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies*, 3.
[40] [Marian Evans], 'History, Biography, Travel,' *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856): 554.

to pass out of the system. And so they have. Literary scholarship has little time for the vast bulk of material produced in the nineteenth-century periodical press. Even editors of the press made cutting distinctions between the great writers and the mere 'bread scholars' who wrote the staples to fill out each issue. John Chapman for instance, vows to keep George Henry Lewes out of the *Westminster* since he considers the professional journalist, Lewes, a mere 'bread and butter scholar.'[41]

By transferring their articles into book-length collections of essays, many periodical writers attempted to secure longer life for their work. Sanitised within the bounds of hardback covers, freed from the 'sell-by-date stamped'[42] pages of the periodical and its advertisements with their taint of trade, this writing deliberately erases its origins as periodical literature. Matthew Arnold, Walter Bagehot, Henry James, like so many of their fellow journalists were complicit in this 'rescuing' of literature from the periodical. They all revised their journalism for republication in book form. Arnold's second edition of *Culture and Anarchy* (1875) for example removes many of the topical allusions that survived from its origins as a series of papers in the *Cornhill*.[43] Barbara Benedict's assessment of the cultural politics of eighteenth-century anthology making is appropriate too in this context where revised and bound volumes of essays replace the mixed anthology: 'Texts become dehistoricised, depoliticised, and hence "timeless," immortal, or in other words, eternally contemporary' she suggests, 'these texts appear as immaculate vessels of cultural value, not works in context or transtion.'[44]

Evans' periodical writing has been consistently represented along these lines, for the most part stripped of the crucial dimension of genre and of setting. She herself selected and revised what she deemed her most representative pieces, robbed of their original contexts for *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, published posthumously in 1884. Editors of her non-fiction writings have followed the nineteenth-century practice of suppressing the periodical in periodical literature. Of the three substantial collections of her non-fiction writings in the twentieth century, only one, Thomas Pinney's

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[41] Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman*, 44.
[42] The expression is Margaret Beetham's. See Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 8.
[43] See Matthew Arnold, *Selected Prose*, ed. and introduction, P. J. Keating (Penguin: London, 1987), 459.
[44] Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader*, 6, 7.

collection in 1963, focuses entirely on her periodical work.[45] Byatt and Warren's 1990 edition for Penguin and Rosemary Ashton's 1992 World's Classics edition both combine a selection of Evans' articles with other critical writings. The Penguin edition includes poems, letters and extracts from Evans' two translations. Ashton's broad definition of 'critical writings' stretches to include extracts from the serialized story 'Amos Barton' (1857) and from her first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859). Describing the continuity of concerns in her fiction work and her translations, Ashton notes that these connections are made 'allowing, of course, for the difference of medium.'[46] There is no such acknowledgement offered for differences in medium with regard to her periodical writing. Yet, all commentators on this genre insist on the influence of context – the significance of the reader, of timeliness, the fact of economic exchange – in shaping this writing. Evans' earliest known journalism provides telling evidence of this point.

Early Writings: The *Coventry Herald and Observer* 1846-1849

Marian Evans' first published prose comprised of six short pieces written between December 1846 and February 1847 for the literary section of her local newspaper, *The Coventry Herald and Observer.* They remain interesting for the early

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[45] See Pinney, *Essays*; Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*; Ashton, *Selected Critical Writings*. The other editions of her journalism are: *Early Essays by George Eliot*, privately printed and introduced by Major George Redway (Westminster Press, 1919); *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook.* Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1884; *Essays and Uncollected Papers*, vol. 22, *The Writings of George Eliot*, 25 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1908); Mrs. S. B. Herrick, ed., *Essays and Reviews of George Eliot, not Hitherto Reprinted, Together with and Introductory Essay on the Genius of George Eliot* (Boston: Aldine Book Publishing Co., 1887); Nathan Sheppard, ed., *The Essays of 'George Eliot' complete: Collected and Arranged with an Introduction on Her 'Analysis of Motives'* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883); Joseph Weisenfarth, ed., *George Eliot A Writer's Notebook 1849-67 and Uncollected Writings* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981).

[46] Ashton, *Selected Critical Writings*, xxxii. Both the Byatt and Warren and Ashton editions are openly indebted to Pinney's collection and to the novel-focussed attitude to Evans' critical writings set out in his introduction. Byatt's introduction offers a pointed account of the influence of religion and science in shaping Evans' critical outlook. Ashton's profound knowledge of German literature and culture inform her reading of Evans' German articles in new and revealing ways. However, Pinney's short and informative explanatory notes at the start of each 'essay' in his 1963 volume are simply repeated for the most part in the 1990 and 1992 collections. Of the other twentieth-century collections, Redway's and Weisenfarth's editions are not widely available. Redway's consists of the six short pieces from the *Coventry Herald and Observer.* Weisenfarth includes articles from the *Leader* and *Saturday Review* not published in Pinney's collection. The purpose of publishing the articles though, along with the Notebooks which form this volume, is entirely focussed on illuminating sources for the novels.

demonstration of techniques that characterise Evans' approach to writing throughout her career. So though the content and style of these pieces reveal little artistic merit or originality, they anticipate Evans' tendency to carve out ideological space for herself while fulfilling the obligations of space and form demanded by her publishing outlet. The split voices of the imaginative essayist and the newspaper journalist, further complicated in the first five of these pieces by the construction of a heavily ironical narrator, provide an early glimpse of the increasingly sophisticated strategies by which Evans negotiated the relationship with her audience and her editor and while, at the same time, attentive too to her personal voice.[47]

These early essays are most often grouped with Evans' final work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), mostly eliciting only cursory references scattered through biographies on George Eliot. They share essay format and a similar type of narrator – the educated gentleman bachelor figure. And significantly, they display a cavalier attitude which critics of *Theophrastus Such* claimed amounted to a complete disregard for their audience. By the time Evans wrote *Theophrastus Such* in the late 1870s, she was financially secure and her increased independence allowed her more complete freedom to interrogate the position and the responsibility of the author in the business of literature. In 1846, Evans experienced a similar sense of freedom or independence for very different reasons.

Evans' friend, Charles Bray, bought the radical *Coventry Herald and Observer* in the summer of 1846. The Brays are widely acknowledged for having provided the rebellious Evans with intellectual and social sanctuary before her move to London in 1850. In Bray's newspaper, Evans found a comfortable first entry into the world of publishing. These early pieces are in clear contrast to her more rigorous and more heavily stylised writings for London publications in the fifties. Much of both the independence and the slackness of her *Herald* writing are the result not simply of her inexperience – the source of publication is a crucial factor.

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[47] 'Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric – Introduction,' *Coventry Herald and Observer* (4 December 1846): 2b; 'How to Avoid Disappointment' (15 January 1847): 2b; 'The Wisdom of a Child' (5 February 1847): 2bc; 'A Little Fable with a Great Moral' (12 February 1847): 2ab; 'Hints on Snubbing' (19 February 1847): 2ab, reprinted in Pinney, *Essays*, 13-26.

Apart from its long-established radical anti-Tory stance, Bray's paper had little formal regularity. It was a four-page weekly broadsheet. Each page consisted of six columns of close type filled with advertisements, local news and a brief literary section in the first one or two columns of the second page. Though by 15 January 1847, the issue that included the second of Evans' 'Notebook' instalments, this section was organised into subsections, announced in boldface type – Poetry; Literature; Art and Science – it still maintained the sense of random or chaotic space filling. Generally, the poetry section consisted of sentimental verse or a light sarcastic poem reprinted from *Punch*. Literature could include anything from extracts from recent novels to brief summaries of periodical publications. Art and Science, for 15 January 1847 comprised a paragraph-long account on improvements in anaesthetic methods in surgical operations. In between this and a mildly ironical piece on commercial trade at Christmas was Evans' 'How to Avoid Disappointment.'

Clearly conceived on an open-ended basis which never reached its anticipated run, the series contained no poetry and appeared at irregular intervals over a three month period. The essays seemed to be dropped if the section included a serious prose piece as it did on the 5 February 1847: a supportive account of George Combe's pamphlet on the benefits of a national secular education dominated the literary columns. The lack of stable format or tone to the literature section challenged any sense of an established audience and consequently of audience expectation. This allowed the writers to be as whimsical or inconsistent in tone and content as they wished in Bray's hotch-potch press.

The only regular feature at this time was the summary of recent periodical publications. It is conceivable that Evans wrote some of these quick sketches with Bray and possibly his wife, Cara. Their correspondence reveals them all to be avid readers and critics of the periodical press. Whether or not she is actually responsible for any of the short reviews, it is worth noting the ways in which these reviews, read if not written by Evans, persistently indicate the importance of clearly targeting an audience in a saturated national market. [48] Each abstract characteristically emphasises the usefulness

[48] There is no official record of Evans' work from this time, her journal for these years is missing, and most of the literary entries are too short to provide conclusive evidence of her hand.

of the individual publication, its price, the variety of articles and its entertainment value. This summary of *The Critic* for 12 February 1847 is typical and shares column space with Evans' 'The Wisdom of the Child':

> The price of this periodical has been reduced to 2d, a weekly number with a view of trying whether the public 'will supply the circulation necessary to the support of a cheap literary journal.' Its reviews of books are above the average market and its general literary information tolerably full, but certainly not equal to some of the rather higher-priced and longer-established journals.[49]

Such straightforward market-driven assessments were the first types of journalistic reviewing to which Evans was exposed. Evans' editorial correspondence from her years at the *Westminster Review* is not far removed from this type of evaluative criticism.

In the same column, an account of the latest issue of *The Man in the Moon* explains it is a 'racy little periodical full of fun and sparkle, though not quite so political and sensible in purpose as our old friend *Punch* who nearly always contrives to immolate an abuse or teach us a moral while making us laugh.' Evans' prose for the paper seems to operate along these very lines, immolating abuses, teaching morals while (attempting) to make us laugh. Like the *Man in the Moon*, her work is never as sharp and as politically acute as *Punch*'s, the short essays also betraying the irregular and uneven tone that characterises the *Herald*'s literary section.

'Poetry and Prose' begins with an introductory essay in which Evans establishes a narrative frame. Adopting the voice of an admirer and friend of the 'Eccentric' Macarthy, this heavily ironical section sets the tone through which we are expected to read subsequent 'Notes.' The fissure created by the frame of irony typically represents the journalistic technique that allows the writer to convey controversial ideas without necessarily alienating her audience. Thus through the 'innocent' voice of first the 'framing' narrator and then through the misguided and pompous voice of Macarthy, Evans takes shots at the unquestioning disciples of Romanticism, at the Neo-Platonists, and ecclesiastical hypocrisy among other things. 'How to Avoid Disappointment' and

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[49] *Coventry Herald and Observer* (12 February 1847): 2ab.

'The Wisdom of the Child' most obviously display the doubled voice. The overwrought romantic sensibility of Macarthy undercuts the seriousness of his notes. By 'A Little Fable,' however, the inconsistency in Evans' model emerges. Macarthy disappears with his eccentric views and opaque reasoning and in his place we get a plainly told moral tale for children warning of the dangers of vanity. This is followed on 19 February by the most openly critical and most humourous of the pieces – the short essay on snubbing. Evans is bolder and more fiery here than in her later writings – though she does lack the subtlety that makes the irony of her longer articles so effective. Without the illusion of Macarthy or his friend the irony, though, is less constrained and more pointed and immediate. Evans' narrator accumulates varying degrees of snubbing sins ranging from societal vanity and journalistic opportunism to religious bigotry and domestic abuse. In attacking what she presents as the façades of social, religious and domestic structures, the youthful Evans is not only playing the tune the unorthodox Bray appreciates, but she is clearing the ground for her own controversial career.

Implicit in this piece in particular is the journalist's awareness of how fickle and often destructive the press can be because of the authority lent to it by its public:

> Editors of country newspapers, who feel themselves and their cause in a precarious condition . . . may find a forlorn hope in snubbing. Let them choose for a victim any individual who presumes to avow an opinion in opposition to their own – and, what is more, to act upon it. We assure the dullest poor fellow of an editor, that he may put down such an upstart, and utterly ruin him in the esteem of the majority, by keeping a stock of epithets like so many missiles, to be hurled at him on every favourable occasion. . . . No matter how stale the epithets may be: paucity of invention is no disadvantage here. . . . Do we not know that two-thirds of mankind are influenced, not by facts or principles but by associations about as appropriate as the connection between a bright summer's day and roast pig, in the mind of the ingenious Mrs. Nickleby?[50]

[50] Ibid, 19 February 1847, 2ab.

The reference to Dickens's recently published novel is typical of the periodical article always aware of the need for topicality: references to 'news' subjects – mesmerism, electricity, current popular fiction writers – are frequent in these short pieces.

Her only other acknowledged fictional piece in the *Herald* appears on the back page of the issue on 26 February 1847.[51] 'Vice and Sausages' is a punning satirical comic interlude based on a factual police story reported in the previous week's columns that warned the public about the dangers of purchasing unwholesome meat products. The anxiety followed the discovery that carcasses of 'unknown' origin were being delivered to the local meat processing plant. Evans turns this serious parochial news item into a comic farce inspired, it seems, by the original headline 'Caution to Sausage Eaters' and by the name of the investigating officer, Inspector Vice. The article is interesting for the elision between journalism, or news reporting, and non-fiction essay writing that marks much of Evans' periodical work. Generic boundaries do not inhibit the writer in the choice of materials. The 'factual' tone that suggests an accurate retelling of actual events in both this piece and in the Macarthy testimony points to the deliberate interweaving of fact and fiction that destabilises both categories and points to the creative dimension to any piece of writing. In this particular context, we begin to suspect the validity of the initial police report and can never be entirely sure that it is not a hoax. Evidently, the hyperbolic seriousness of tone in Evans' account points up the fictional aspect of her piece, which with Swiftian echo asks us to hope that Inspector Vice will let us know when 'cats is in' since,

> there may be those among the lovers of this savoury meat who may not consider that the virtue lies all in the seasoning and that the meat is nothing and that whether the animal died in the natural way by being killed, or from neglect of sanitary regulations is equally of no importance . . . every kind of animals, mice, rats, kittens, puppy dogs, up to a dead beast or a body, may all be made, by judicious seasonings to taste like pork sausages.'[52]

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[51] [Marian Evans], 'Vice and Sausages,' *Coventry Herald and Observer* (26 February 1847): 4b.
[52] Ibid.

But this irony is only effective if it plays close to the truth or to the facts so that the audience can recognise the split between text and tone. And part of the bite in this display of irony comes from the fact that Evans' piece follows a report on the need for improved sanitation in the town published in the column just above it. This non-accidental proximity broadens Evans' article beyond the closed in-joke and puns and the piece becomes effective in articulating a more general concern with hygiene and the need for accountability in public service. It takes on a satirical edge, more commonly associated with Dickens' journalism, when read in the context of the paper's history, in relation to local political debates, and in the light of that particular type of social satire with which English readers were familiar since the eighteenth century. Prematurely dismissed as an irrelevancy of Evans' early journalism, and never regarded in the terms of its historical and material environment, Evans' journalism, though often gauche in humour and derivative in method informs us of Evans' early understanding of the intertextual and interdisciplinary aspects of periodical writing culture.

Evans' three articles reviewing recent publications for the literary section of the *Herald* are very different from the style of her fictional essays. Light-hearted irony or pointed satire do not feature and a more straightforwardly factual writing style emerges instead. While suggestive of the differences that mark the essay from the review, the shift in style is more purposefully highlighted in terms of Lukács' defining questions: 'what is its intended form of expression and what are the ways and means whereby this expression is accomplished.'[53] Here, it is intended that the articles inform the public of what is deemed the cultural significance of the texts noted. Evans does so in a direct way in these pieces and in essayistic fashion she introduces broader topics of more general interest to more fully contextualise the books under review. The Quinet and Michelet review, for example, begins with a consideration of the value of translated material.[54] Evans' appreciation of the books is even-handed, though, as would be expected, from a personal and public point of view, the reviewer makes her distance

[53] See chapter one, note 34.

[54] [Marian Evans], Review of Edgar Quinet *Christianity in its various Aspects*; Jules Michelet and Quinet, *The Jesuits*; Michelet *Priests, Women and Families*, trans. by C. Cocks, *Coventry Herald and Observer* (30 October 1846): 2a, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 261-4.

from the teachings of Jesuits quite clear.[55] Typical review features include the standard caveat preceding any long page-filling quotation. 'We have not space for many quotations but we give the following . . .'. As Walter Bagehot notes elsewhere, this 'apology' is a well-practiced review technique:

> As a young gentleman, at the India House examination, wrote 'Time up' on nine unfinished papers in succession, so you may occasionally read a whole *Review*, in every article of which the principal difficulty of each successive question is about to be reached at the conclusion. Nor can any one deny that this is the suitable skill, the judicious custom, of the craft.'[56]

Throughout, Evans displays her consciousness of her medium, and this awareness was to remain a consistent feature of her writing. Such cognizance on her part of the importance of genre and audience points up the irony that sees her non-novel work either ignored or robbed of its context. Both this review and the more thorough review of J. A. Froude's *Nemesis* in 1849 begin and end with references to the press.[57] The 1846 piece opens with praise for the facilities that produce a 'rapidly increasing stock of cheap literature' and she closes the review in much the same tone: 'Too much credit cannot be given to Messrs. Longmans & Co., for the style in which these publications are got up . . . we trust that the spirited publishers will follow up their praiseworthy commencement in this department of the public service.'[58] By 1849, the writer about to embark on a literary career in London is more cynical about the 'increasing stock of cheap literature' and is more hostile to the burgeoning publishing industry that produces only few gems from the '*spawn* of the press'.[59]

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[55] 'M. Quinet shows that the system of Loyola runs counter to the grand law which God has impressed on all nature, - the production and development of life; that wherever it presides there must be moral, social and intellectual death; its first aim being to annihilate in its agents, and consequently in those on whom they act, all spontaneity, all will,' Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 262.
[56] Ibid, 263; Bagehot, 'First Edinburgh Reviewers,' 312.
[57] [Marian Evans] Review of J.A. Froude *Nemesis of Faith*, *Coventry Herald and Tribune* (16 March 1849): 2a, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 265-7.
[58] Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 264.
[59] Ibid., 265.

The review closes with a quote from Froude's book which is even more damning of the press (and of religion) than her introduction. Here, Evans uses a technique that is to becomes a staple of her writing; it allows her to protect her position as objective critic from accusations of bias while at the same time conveying her own often radical personal views. She quotes Froude's words without providing any commentary to guide the readers' response to the passage or indicate the reviewer's position on the writer's ideas:

> The men that write books, Carlyle says, are now the world's priests, the spiritual directors of mankind. . . . God abolished texts for all purposes, except of mischief and vexation, when he gave mankind the printing-press. What is the result of sustaining them, but that we are all at the mercy now of some clever self-assumer? . . . the minds of all of us, from highest Lords to enlightened operatives, are formed in reading-rooms, in lecture-rooms, at the bar of public-houses, by all the shrewdest, and often the most worthless, novel writers or paper editors. Yet even this is better than nothing, better than that people should be left to their pulpit teachers, such as they are.[60]

While unsurprisingly scathing of contemporary religious institutions, the passage also illustrates Froude's very telling skepticism about the claims the press makes to act as an instructive medium. In refusing to signal either approval or disapproval of Froude's line, Evans side-steps reader criticism and editorial reprimand. The words are Froude's and the lead-in is exculpatorily ambiguous: 'the following passage is at least as forcible.' It is left to the reader to judge Evans' attitude. Because her letters suggest that Evans was in broad agreement with Froude's views, it becomes clear that this method of selective, pointed quotation ambiguously presented allows Evans to give voice to unorthodox views that radically undermine traditional faiths. And with irony, it allows both writers to signal their desire for independence from the press-pulpit that finds listeners for such views, while using that very pulpit to make their views heard. In this way the journalist provides a covert articulation of the embattled space she occupies

[60] Ibid., 267.

between her responsibility to her own personal beliefs and to the demands of the corporate medium through which such thoughts are given expression.

In the Quinet and Michelet review, the questioning of black and white reasoning is made clear in the condemnatory tone that points to a fault in both texts: 'they have the fault, perhaps inevitable to the works of an antagonistic character, of putting statements too broadly, and painting facts in too strong lights and shadows.'[61] Very often, attempts to theorise Evans' writing philosophies from her non-fiction prose works tend towards broad brush strokes that neglect to acknowledge the prescriptive trammels of the press that impose a particular rhetorical vocabulary on the writer. Closer examination of Evans' journalism as journalism allows us to investigate the tensions that surface from her earliest prose pieces to her final essays as the demands of the author, the corporate narrator, the press and the public converge in the written text.

The 'antiseptic practice' of working for one's bread: the journalist at mid-century

Leslie Stephen has described the contending encounter between the individual writer and the corporate voice of the magazine in terms of a struggle that inevitably influences the style and content of the contributor's articles:

> The inexperienced person is inclined to explain it [the 'we' effect] as a mere grammatical phrase which covers in turn a whole series of contributors. But any writer in a paper, however free a course may be conceded to him, finds as a fact that the 'we' means something very real and potent. As soon as he puts on the mantle, he finds that an indefinable change has come over his whole method of thinking and expressing himself. He is no longer an individual but the mouthpiece of an oracle. He catches some inflection of style, and feels that

[61] Ibid., 261.

> although he may believe what he says, it is not the independent outcome of his own private idiosyncrasy.[62]

The subject of Stephen's account here, his journalist brother, Fitzjames Stephen, has explained the issue more bluntly: 'Whatever may be the tone and bearing of journalists, they are in reality, the servants of the public, and the course which they take is, and always will be, ultimately determined by the public.'[63] A comparison of articles written by Evans on the same material but for different publications provides us with a practical demonstration of these general observations.

Living off an inadequate legacy from her father of about ninety pounds a year, Evans supplemented her income by working as a professional journalist from 1854 to 1857. In 1855 and 1856, her critical writings were published predominantly in the *Westminster Review* and the weekly newspaper founded by Thornton Hunt and George Henry Lewes, The *Leader*. As was common practice among journalists at the time, Evans often produced short articles on the same material for each publication. The anonymity of contributors made the repetition of material easier but the very differing demands of the editorial lines in each of these publications meant that Evans' articles were shaped in particular ways to suit the horizon of expectations of both editors and audience. The *Westminster Review* was a middle-class liberal intellectual quarterly of long-standing reputation; The *Leader*, a relatively recent addition to the burgeoning number of weekly journals, sought to present a politically and culturally radical and initially socialist agenda to reach a broader range of middle-classes than the traditional quarterly audience. Evans' reviews of Thomas Keightley's *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton* (1855) which appeared in both The *Leader* and *Westminster Review* display how the author registered their differing target audiences and editorial lines.[64]

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[62] Stephen, *Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* (London, 1895), 216, also cited in Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 87.

[63] [Fitzjames Stephen], 'Journalism,'53.

[64] The *Leader* review appeared first, see [Marian Evans], review of Thomans Keightley, *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton: with an Introduction to Paradise Lost* (1855), *Leader* 6 (August 1855): 750. The *Westminster* review was part of the *Belles Lettres* section in October 1855. See [Marian Evans], 'Belles Lettres,' *Westminster Review* 64 (October 1855): 596-615.

Though they shared a liberal readership, readers clearly would have had different expectations of both publications and Evans was obviously aware of these differences. Her *Leader* review is conversational. It offers a generalised overview of the text, acknowledging the typical shorter review trend: 'in these days, when the chief place of study is the railway carriage, the majority of readers will be satisfied with [a] rapid *coup d'oeil*.'[65] This shaping of form to suit audience is especially pertinent when the text is appearing not in the more substantial format of a quarterly but rather in a 24-page weekly paper. Both articles open with short statements of appreciation, on the value of the text for its biographical details but there the similarities end. The *Leader* piece maintains a general, lively tone and includes a potted history of Milton's life. In line with the distinctive character of *Leader* criticism, Evans' short article is also controversial in its angle of approach. Apart from some brief preliminary remarks which comment favourably on Keightley's efforts, Evans addresses the subject of Milton's religious opinions and specifically his Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. She defends Milton's personal investment in supporting the cause of divorce against the 'Presbyterian vituperation' of his contemporaries, and makes explicit reference to the Caroline Norton case to emphasise the newsworthy nature of this volume.

The longer *Westminster* article does not mention the topic of divorce, though the quarterly became one of the more outspoken supporters of the need for reform of the divorce laws. Rather, in line with the *Review*'s heritage as an organ of enlightenment, interested in the practical use of knowledge and in educational reform, Evans deals with Milton's theories on education and she turns a critical, pedantic eye on Keightley's scholarly methods and his interpretations of Milton's life and work.[66] 'He is rather an exact and diligent than fascinating critic,' Evans claims of Keightley, 'and is less apt at bringing into relief the beauties of diction and sentiment than at setting the student right on a point of etymology or prosody.' Such specifics do not surface in the less academic, snappier criticism of the *Leader*. Evans continues with a telling insight to her own writing practices: 'but this also is a good service and is one least often rendered in these

[65] Ibid, 750.

[66] Thomas Pinney has noted this difference in emphasis, and Evans' personal investment in the issue of divorce, but he does not address the broader significance of this journal-specific writing in any detail. See Pinney, *Essays*, 154.

days when writers are more given to be eloquent on their personal impressions than to aid us in seeing outward fact.'[67] The *Westminster* piece attempts just that: to aid us in seeing facts of Keightley's scholarship and Milton's influence. In its typically expert *Westminster* voice, it betrays little of the personal tone of the *Leader* review.

In both accounts, however, something of the 'reviewer's personal impressions' also emerges though they are disguised in the objective rendering of 'outward fact.' When the articles are examined in its contemporary setting, the 'flesh and blood' writer begins to take shape. We see how the reviewer incorporates a more individualised voice into her periodical work that penetrates the powerfully interdependent trinity of genre-market-audience. Evans follows the remarks noted above with a conclusion expressing the wish that Keightley had been more forthcoming on the 'degree to which the story of the Fall, both of the angels and of Man was created by Milton.' The agnostic humanist carefully obscures her grammar by employing the third person objective pronoun, 'It,' in the next sentence to imply that the confusion between poetry and supernatural religion is widespread and natural and that her statement offers a diagnosis, not an opinion:

> It helps us to understand how the poets of primitive ages gave fixity to national religions, when we find that in quite modern times, an Epic gets itself accepted as a sort of gloss on the scriptures, and that perhaps to the majority of English minds at this moment it would be difficult to say how much of their belief about Satan, about the temptation of our 'first parents' and the consequences of the Fall, is gathered from the Bible and how much from 'Paradise Lost.'[68]

Similarly, the *Leader* article's defense of divorce is undeniably coloured by the fact that by 1855 relations between Evans' partner, George Henry Lewes, and Thornton Hunt, the father of four children by Lewes's wife, Agnes, had soured significantly. Much of the radical edge that characterised the *Leader*'s political and literary pages had been considerably softened by the departure of both Hunt and Lewes in the early eighteen-fifties. In their absence, the more conservative Edward Smyth Piggot turned

[67] [Evans], 'Belles Lettres,' *Westminster Review* 64, 604.
[68] Ibid.

the paper away from its socialist agenda and made it a more tepid and conventional publication. Reports from workers' meetings in the industrial towns and cities were gradually replaced by accounts of the colonial war efforts and navy movements. In a letter to the *Leader* in 1852, Hunt signalled his dissatisfaction with the commercially-driven changes imposed by Piggot: 'I believe your more moderate utterance is calculated to win the concurrence of larger numbers among those who support weekly newspapers of the class to which you belong than the unqualified utterance to which I adhere when I am personally accountable.'[69]

Evans' contributions to this paper, however, carefully negotiate this conservative and commercial censorship and reveal instead the influence of Lewes's pointed and intimate style of criticism. Her facility in adopting the voice of the weekly review emerged first in the Spring of 1854 when she filled in for Lewes when he was too ill to work. Unlike the more covert articulation of personal impressions in the *Westminster*, the *Leader* review with characteristic openness defends Milton's right to advocate changes in the divorce laws, even as his own personal circumstances meant his position was not a disinterested one:

> personal interest may lead to exaggeration, and may be unwisely thrust into prominence, but *in* itself it is assuredly not a ground for silence but for speech, until we have reached that stage in which the work of this world will be all done vicariously, everybody acting for some one else and nobody for himself.[70]

The doubled nature of these words is obvious: they represent at once the always personalised voice of the *Leader's* literary critic and that of the liberal defender of divorce living a relationship made unconventional by intransigent social and legal positions on marriage. The longest extract from Milton's writing quoted in this review, for instance, is a plea for sympathy for the husband in a failed marriage. Adding force to the public support for the Norton case, Evans concludes, again, not in disinterested fashion: 'For want of a more modern pendant to Mrs. Norton's plea, it is worth while to

[69] *Leader* 3 (25 September 1852): 917-18.
[70] [Evans], 'Review of Thomas Keightley,' 750.

take up Milton's and consider what such a mind as his had to urge on the husband's side of this painful subject.'[71] While much of the rest of the paper moved to middle-road politics, the literary section maintained its distinctive pungent style of reviewing even as the paper lost its consistency and form.

The contradiction that emerges here too between the *Westminster*'s prizing of objective accounts over 'personal impressions' and the *Leader*'s defence of personal prejudice as the springboard to action, underlines the differing agendas of the quarterly and the weekly. The former was founded to provide a forum for such independent analysis of philosophical and social issues, the latter, to encourage individuals to actively participate in social and industrial reform. In this age of 'pragmatic criticism', Evans is conscious of these histories and the influence of reader and editorial expectations dominate the tone and content of both reviews.

This awareness reveals itself too in her *Saturday Review* pieces. As befits a new brisk weekly paper, they are much more light-hearted, livelier and full of peppery anecdotes in contrast to the careful unfolding of learning that characterises many of the *Westminster* articles. She is careful too to respect the fact that the weekly was a much more conservative publication than the *Leader*. Her review of Stahr's *Torso*, for both weeklies again demonstrates how different angles of approach to the same material produce contradictory reading experiences. Stahr's work was an historical and philosophical study of the artists in ancient Greece, in two volumes. The *Saturday Review* piece addressed both volumes as one, the earlier *Leader* piece, the first volume only. The later review repeats much of the detail of the first one though as Weisenfarth notes, 'her use of humourous anecdotes . . . adds a touch of freshness' to the *Review* essay. [72] There is an even more notable difference, however, that emerges in the discussion of Greek sculptors' attitudes to the body, and in particular the Œginetan sculptures, 'last seen at Crystal Palace', she notes helpfully for *Leader* readers. There is a significant reversal of emphasis in each review that indicates something of the readership. In the first, for the more unconventional *Leader*, she reports:

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[71] Ibid.

[72] [Marian Evans], 'The Art and Artists of Greece,' *Saturday Review* 2 (31 May 1856): 109-10 and 'The Art of the Ancients,' *Leader* 6 (17 March 1855): 257-8; both are reprinted in Weisenfarth, *George Eliot*, 280-83 and 244-48; Weisenfarth, ibid., 280.

> The early Italian masters were animated by the spiritualistic idea that the body was but an unworthy swelling for the immortal soul, and hence they threw all their power into the face, where the soul might be said to look out from its tabernacle; whereas in the conception of the Greeks, a fine body was the primary condition of a fine mind. First the body and then the soul by and through the body, was the order of their ideas.[73]

Though professedly neutral on religious controversies, the *Review* was a much more conservative publication. As a result, throughout her second version of this article Evans is more cautions, and less openly enthusiastic about pagan Greek culture: 'Critics of more negative disposition and possibly of greater technical acquirement than Professor Stahr, will assail him for his too admiring attitude towards ancient art', she writes. But the 'general reader', she cautiously observes, 'by whom we imagine is usually meant a reader of no particular information – is likely to find *Torso* an acceptable book.' The 'difference in the order of artistic progress' noted above in the *Leader*, is presented in the *Review* as one of the 'fundamental differences between Greek and Christian conceptions', with emphasis falling away from rather than on the Greeks:

> To the Greek, a fine body was the primary condition of a fine mind; but to the spiritualism of the fourteenth century the body was but the transient and unworthy dwelling of the immortal soul, which flourished in proportion as the body was emaciated. Its canon of art was –
>
> Give us no more of body than shows soul.[74]

Pinney and Weisenfarth have both noted some differences in her articles on the same material for competing publications but the shifts in tone and interpretation from publication to publication has not been applied to readings of these non-fiction writings. Pinney, however, implies something of the corporate restrictions that prevented Evans

[73] Ibid, 246.
[74] Ibid, 280, 281.

from being a more outspoken and perhaps more influential essayist in his note on her *Leader* review on recent German translations. He suggests the piece gives an indication of 'the articulate theory she might have presented had she conceived her role of reviewer differently and had the conditions of her writing for the *Leader* allowed.'[75]

Considering the 'conditions of her writing', then, Evans' most well-known and longer essays for the *Westminster*, so often used to summarise the novelist's artistic ambitions, need to be examined with reference to the established policies of the periodical. As histories of the literary aspect of the *Westminster Review* show, from its early days through J. S. Mill's editorship to socialist reformer William Hickson's years as editor and owner, in keeping both with the temper of the times and the purpose of this particular publication, literature was predominantly addressed in terms of its social or moral function. The pervasiveness of the critical vocabulary emphasising 'sympathy' and 'common humanity' is obvious from even the most cursory look at any issue of the *Westminster*. In his review of 'Oeuvres de Alfred de Vigny' in 1838, for example, John S. Mill approvingly observes that de Vigny sees his work as an artist: 'to probe the wounds of society and humanity is part of his business, and he will neither shrink from exhibiting what is in nature because it is morally culpable not because it is physically revolting.'[76] The defense of realism in art implicit in this review provides an early articulation of the association made between social responsibility and accuracy of representation. This perspective resulted in a predominant emphasis on 'truth' or realism in art as bywords for socially responsible artistic presentations. In what he diagnoses as a disturbing abuse of 'the suffering community,' W. R. Greg, for example, in his article on Disraeli's *Sibyl* in 1845, accuses the author of sensationalising his representation of the working class for the sake of his story, adding:

> There is a weighty and serious, though little recognised responsibility laid upon all who, whether as writers or speakers, have obtained possession of the public ear, to beware, lest, carelessly or from unworthy motive, they employ the enormous power which this position lends them to give currency to error . . .

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[75] Pinney, *Essays*, 207. See [Marian Evans], 'Translations and Translators,' *Leader* 6 (27 October 1855): 1014-15.

[76] John S. Mill, 'Oeuvres de Alfred de Vigny,' *London and Westminster Review* 7 and 29 (April 1838): 5.

> especially too when the matter at hand is one bearing strongly and directly upon welfare. . . . few sins, we really believe, are so great, because few are so extensively mischievous, as habitual neglect of this duty, and yet few sins are so common, or are regarded as so venial.[77]

The assumed moral responsibility of the middle-class author towards the working classes is the characteristic concern of *Westminster Review* criticism. The importance of what is deemed a socially responsible representation of these troubled classes, therefore, persistently agitates the pragmatic reviewer. And over ten years later, in the new series of the *Westminster*, Marian Evans' article on German social history maintains this critical stance in her condemnation of over-idealised portraits of peasants and country life:

> Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life. It is not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions – about the manners and conversations of beaux and duchesses; but it is serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-men should be perverted, and turned towards a false object instead of the true one.[78]

These generalised commonplace comments from Evans' introduction to this article on German sociologist Wilhelm H. Von Riehl's *Die burgerliche Geselschaft* (1851) and *Land und Leute* (1853), are most often cited to demonstrate George Eliot's theories on fiction. Always conscious of the editorial line operating in the *Westminster Review*, Evans' response to the formal and public pressures of genre and forum are evident in the

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[77] [W. R. Greg], '*Sybil – A Novel* by Benjamin D'Isreli,' *Westminster Review* 44 (September 1845): 142.
[78] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life,' 54.

structure and the rhetorical strategies she employed in her account of Riehl's works. The result is an oblique piece of writing that is anything but a transparent representation of George Eliot's views on fiction. So though this article is perhaps the most often cited of Evans' critical work – Gordon Haight set the tone which has not yet been seriously questioned, when he straightforwardly asserted, 'Anyone who wishes to understand the origin of George Eliot's novels should read the essay on Riehl'[79] – the regularly quoted sections from this piece, on the so-called 'doctrine of sympathy' and on realism in art, to which Haight makes reference, are, in fact, among the more conventional generalisations of Victorian criticism employed regularly in the mid-century quarterlies of Evans' time, and in the *Westminster* in particular. The perceived centrality to George Eliot studies of the opening section of this piece is almost universal, but typically, arguments for its relevance are limited to very selective illustrations from the text based only on three or four paragraphs from a 29-page article. Little effort is made to contextualise these paragraphs. If anything, however, their relevance to Evans' later writing derives from the crucial importance of the periodical context.

Deborah H. Roazen's more discursive examination of the differences between Evans' and Wordsworth's understanding of such terms as 'realism' and 'society' is indicative of a much needed and welcome move beyond the merely descriptive account of Evans' periodical writings. Keeping pace with revisionist interpretations of Evans' life and her novels from psychoanalytical, feminist, Marxist or historicist perspectives over the last twenty years, attention to Evans' non-fiction by Gillian Beer, Jenny Uglow, Kerry McSweeny and Carol Martin, for example, has offered a more critical approach to this phase of her work. These accounts, however, are rare, and apart from brief references to the journals for which she wrote or writing traditions to which she might belong, they persist in neglecting to properly contextualise her work.[80] Laurel Brake, Dallas Liddle, and in particular Alexis Easley have more recently addressed the

[79] Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, 202.

[80] Deborah Roazen, 'George Eliot and Wordsworth: 'The Natural History of German Life' and Peasant Psychology,' *Research Studies* 41 (1973): 166-78. See also Beer, *George Eliot*, 30-51; Uglow, *George Eliot*, 65-81; McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 22-54; Carol A Martin, 'George Eliot: Feminist Critic,' *Victorian Newsletter* (Spring 1984): 22-5.

relationship between format, content and in much greater detail.[81] However, they do not address in any detail the piece on Riehl, which has become canonised as Evans' pivotal non-fiction article.[82]

It has rarely been acknowledged that the much cited remarks on art in this piece consist of under one page of material in a long article or that the article is concerned, not so much with fiction or art as such but with the value of social history. It is rarely mentioned that these generalised comments are a typical feature of Evans' introductory paragraphs used here in an attempt to win over an English audience often hostile to relatively unknown German writers. Suzanne Graver is almost alone in acknowledging both the very selective nature of the account and the use of stylised rhetorical devices in the opening sections.[83] Generally overlooked too, but highly significant, is the fact that in the course of this article Evans introduces a split perspective on the value of Riehl's work which is suggestive of Evans' own unresolved and ambiguous attitude to any type of theory in practice.

It is worth noting at this point that her journal entries for April 1856 suggest Evans did not choose to write on Riehl, something overlooked persistently in critical considerations of this piece of work. It would seem that Chapman imposed the topic on her at short notice. Chapman had asked Evans to write an article on missions and missionaries for the April 1856 issue; Eliot promised it for the July issue instead but in the end 'resigned the subject' to Harriet Martineau. Martineau's 52-page article opened the July issue and was followed by Evans'. Her journal entries for April indicate that the Riehl material came her way unsolicited:

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[81] Laurel Brake, 'Writing, Cultural Production, and the Periodical Press,' in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J. B. Bullen (London: Longman, 1997), 54-55; Liddle, 'Mentor and Sibyl,' 5-39; Easley, 'Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,' 145-60; Easley, 'Victorian Women Writers.'

[82] See for example all the articles listed in note 4 and Dentith, *George Eliot*, 30; McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 38, 50; Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 24; Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 482; Ashton, *Selected Critical Writings*, xxvii; Levine, 'Introduction,' to *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, 2.

[83] Graver, *George Eliot and Community*, 28-39. Graver reads Evans' interpretation of Riehl as the embodiment, 'in embryonic form' of a 'set of premises as important to her as they were to the social theorists she addresses in her argument.' However, she acknowledges the contradictions that beset attempts to ascribe theoretical positions to Evans in this piece since the article also shows that there is 'if not hostility to theory, certainly a decided uneasiness with it.' Graver sidesteps the contradiction by suggesting that the hostility is 'less a denigration of theory than a criticism of its misuse,' ibid., 35. I would argue that Evans' discomfort with theoretical certainties is made evident throughout the second part of this article.

April 5: Mr. Chapman has accepted my proposition to write an article on Young.

April 22: Began article on Young.

April 26: Article on Margaret Fuller's letters.

April 29: 'Began to read Riehl, *on which I am to write an article* for the *Westminster*.'[84]

Her discussion of Riehl's two-volume sociological study was half-hearted at the very least. She was finishing a number of short pieces for the *Leader* when reading his work; she had started writing her article on Edward Young (a subject she, rather than Chapman selected) and she was also writing up a twenty-one page '*Belles Lettres*' section for the July issue of the *Westminster*. In her 'Ilfracombe Journal' she complains of working on the Riehl article 'considerably *à contre-coeur*'[85]

Riehl's method of social history had been reviewed two years earlier by James Martineau in the 'Theology, Philosophy and Politics' article in the July 1854 issue of the *Westminster*. Categorising his works in the section devoted to politics, Martineau approvingly notes that Riehl is 'pre-eminently an artist in his modes of feeling and judgment; and by allowing the free dominance to this faculty creates a theory of society, certainly one-sided and extravagant in parts, but genial and natural even in its most startling estimates.' The positive praise is motivated by Riehl's genuine intentions, having 'lived for a while in direct personal contact and sympathy with the people of different districts and occupations to gain a distinct conception of the moral factors of German life.' The vocabulary is typically vague in its assessment here, typically Victorian. In the short space allotted to each text in this 'Politics' section, Martineau is not required to expand upon such generalizations. He keeps his quotations, his praise and his criticism brief and, significantly, notes that it is a work 'which ought to have an ampler notice than we can give it.' Martineau unsurprisingly singles out for approval Riehl's support for decentralized government: the *Westminster* was a longtime agitator for localized and municipal government. And importantly for the context in which we

[84] *Journals*, 59. Emphasis added.
[85] Ibid., 266.

judge Evans' attitude to the German sociologist, Martineau explains Riehl's antipathy to burgeoning urbanization – the '"hydrocephalous" developments of modern civilization' – particularly for the ways in which such cities harbour the dangerous group, the 'Fourth Estate'. Attached to neither of the stable classes rooted in the land, the aristocracy or the peasantry, these intellectuals, 'whose class is to be no class' threaten the stability and authority of the 'natural classes.'[86] To align Evans' views with Riehl's theories is to ignore the very contentious and dubious conclusions Riehl reaches in his conservative sociology that is so deeply suspicious of the developing middle classes. To associate Evans with Riehl's conservatism based on selective quotations from her review is to ignore the fact that she embodied in practical ways the 'fourth estate' Riehl condemns, and the fact that Evans takes pains to distance herself from the orthodox defense of 'natural' class hierarchies promoted by Riehl. Avoiding all the potentially subversive subjects that would disrupt the *Westminster*'s and Chapman's general endorsement of Riehl's work, Evans shows herself here to be a typically evasive reviewer. She provides no supporting approval for his conclusions and instead obfuscates: 'We must not follow him in his criticism, however; nor can we afford to do more than mention hastily his interesting sketch of the mediaeval aristocracy.' She tellingly equivocates on a discussion of the 'Fourth Estate' and avoids altogether Riehl's anti-Semitic attitudes which were antithetical to her own views.[87] She seems in this way a rather uncontroversial, unoriginal, and somewhat spineless critic. All the more peculiar, then, that Riehl's natural history and this article have been made so central to George Eliot's theories. I would suggest that Evans' display of typical periodical features and her quietly subversive distancing from Riehl's views are where the real interest in this piece lies. Together they implicitly demand we reconsider the ways in which the essayist's remarks have been made the founding stone of the artist's manifesto.

[86] [James Martineau], 'Theology, Philosophy and Politics,' *Westminster Review* 62 (July 1854): 236-7.
[87] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life', 76, 77.

'The Natural History of German Life' and the Limitations of Theory: Texts in Context

Evans begins this consideration of Riehl's social history by priming her readership to acknowledge the need for this new discipline and to accept the relevance of a study of German peasant life as a *model* for similar study of English society. She adopts her usual technique in long articles by invoking a series of allusions to broader topics to hook her reader's interest. The technique is a familiar one, identified by Charles Knight in his analysis of the formal construction of essays in the *Spectator*:

> The author of an essay makes an initial assumption about the nature of the primary topic and the knowledge of the reader and these assumptions dictate the location of that topic upon the ladder of generality.[88]

The more unusual or foreign the material, then, the more accessible and commonplace are the opening pages. Here, Evans constructs an opposition between the general bluffer and the specialist on the topic of railways – a familiar, yet still relatively controversial subject, and as we have seen, a commonly invoked metaphor in periodical criticism:

> Now it is possible for the first mentioned personage to entertain very expanded views as to the multiplication of railways in the abstract, and their ultimate function in civilisation. He may talk of a vast network of railways stretching over the globe, of future 'lines' in Madagascar, and elegant refreshment-rooms in the Sandwich Islands, with none the less glibness because his distinct conceptions on the subject do not extend beyond his one station and his indefinite length of tram-road. But it is evident that if we want a railway to be

[88] Charles A. Knight, 'The *Spectator*'s Generalising Discourse,' in *Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth-Century Periodicals from the* Review *to the* Rambler, eds. J. A. Downie and Thomas N. Corn. (London: Frank Cass, 1993): 45.

made, or its affairs to be managed, this man of wide views and narrow observations will not serve our purpose.[89]

We would look instead for the man who had experience with railways, who, she asserts, on hearing the word 'railways' 'would include all the essential facts in the existence and relations of the thing.' Such unexamined generalisations make up the nature of these introductions: allusions are accumulated, not developed, and their function is to serve the broader purpose of the article. A predictable parallel is drawn between the man of 'wide views and narrow observations' and the 'many who theorise with eloquence' on the terms '"the people", "the masses", "the proletariat", "the peasantry" . . . or who legislate for them without eloquence.' The sly jibe at politicians' inadequacies and ignorance is a crowd-pleasing tactic aimed at her middle-class liberal intellectual audience.

Another feature of this technique is her use of robust rhetoric: she condemns a recent painting of a rural scene 'where we have a peasant girl who looks as if she knew L. E. L.'s poems by heart, and English rustics, whose costume seems to indicate that they are meant for ploughmen, with exotic features that remind us of a handsome primo tenore.'[90] Macaulay, a much practised writer for periodicals himself characterises a crucial aspect of any review-writing claiming that success is dependent on 'a bold dashing scene-painting manner.'[91] John Woolford has argued that this showy style, so typical of the early nineteenth-century reviewers, never entirely disappears through the century: Victorian earnestness is always mixed with the need to entertain. Woolford designates this style as 'adjectival criticism' where 'performance has usurped the place of principle.'[92] In his examples, the criticism is directed at specific poets, while in this essay, Evans speaks more generally.

Her introductory section here strikes for such 'scene-painting' to the extent that it becomes both style and substance of her text: She continues, 'Rather than such cockney

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[89] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life,' 52.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Cited in Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers*, 106.
[92] John Woolford, 'Periodicals and the Practice of Literary Criticism, 1855-1864,' in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 110-12.

sentimentality as this, as an education for the tastes and sympathies, we prefer the most crapulous group of boors that Teniers ever painted.'[93] Evans' repeated insistence on the dull, ordinary, dishonest, ignorant, cheating nature of the peasant in this article is an exaggerated opposition to the pervasiveness of idealised versions of rural life presented in art and literature. The emphasis on *artistic* representation is central here. The rhetorical nature of her language is obvious in the mocking assertion:

> The selfish instincts are not subdued by the sight of buttercups, nor is integrity in the least established by that classic rural occupation, sheep-washing. To make men moral, something more is requisite than to turn them out to grass.[94]

In a clever, self-reflexive follow-on to this stylised passage, the writer explains,

> Opera peasants, whose unreality excites Mr. Ruskin's indignation, are surely too frank an idealization to be misleading; and since popular chorus is one of the most effective elements of the opera, we can hardly object to lyric rustics in elegant laced bodices and picturesque motley.

Hyperbole is a stylistic feature of particular art forms. And Evans' rhetoric in this introduction is typical of a particular periodical writing style of the time, one that Macaulay in an animated phrase calls 'viciously florid.' Such linguistic excess, he explains, with emphasis once again on food metaphors, was a requirement of the genre in which his writing was published:

> Periodical works like ours, which unless they strike at the first reading are not likely to strike at all, – whose whole life is a month or two – may, I think, be

[93] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life,' 51, 52.
[94] Ibid, 53-4.

> allowed to be sometimes even viciously florid. . . . it is not by his own taste, but by the taste of the fish, that the angler is determined in his choice of bait.[95]

To maintain the interest of her audience, then, she manipulates language in striking poses and resorts to claims for realism and truthfulness in art that would be familiar to readers of the *Westminster Review*. She directs her readers towards the view that since 'art is the nearest thing to life,' and since 'falsification' of the life of the less fortunate is an especially pernicious fault of both much contemporary art and contemporary commentary, a detailed social history of those less fortunate is necessary to expose the crime of dishonest or poorly conceived representations.

In the interests of developing sociological models by which the English can better understand English society, Riehl's theories are presented as the embodiment of 'what we are desiring for ourselves,' but only 'in some degree'; the warning is significant. Now deliberately self-conscious about Riehl's foreignness to her readership, she proceeds to give 'a rapid sketch from his picture of the German peasantry' before her analysis of the 'general purpose and contents of his work'. These are the first of the distancing devices that Evans invokes in this article indicating an uneasiness with both the high rhetoric of her opening paragraphs and the potential usefulness of Riehl's accounts. Both the opening tone and the content of this article are made suitable *Westminster* material but it seems they are not directly representative of the writer's views. In a highly unusual intervention into her own text while outlining Riehl's 'socio-political conservatism,' Evans uses a footnote to explain: 'Throughout this article, in our statement of Riehl's opinions, we must be understood not as quoting Riehl, but as interpreting and illustrating him.'[96] The footnote is followed in the main text by another often-cited paragraph from this work:

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[95] Letter to Macvey Napier, 25 January 1830 in which Macaulay expressed his annoyance at what he deemed to be the harsh editing of his article on 'Utilitarian Theory of Government' published in October 1829 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*. See *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1: 261, also cited in Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers*, 105.

[96] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life,' 56, 57, 69.

> What has grown up historically can only die out historically, by the gradual operation of necessary laws. The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium, and development can take place only by the gradual consentaneous development of both.

To use the sentiments of this paragraph as illustrative of Evans' conception of organic history, then, directly contravenes the context of these words, even if Evans' work elsewhere can be seen to support the essentially conservative idea of slowly evolving change. Evans' footnote is phrased to read as a cautionary note to ensure that the author under review is not represented in his own words and, as such, is curiously out of place in an article in a journal by an experienced professional writer who made her living 'interpreting and illustrating' texts for an audience who presumably bought the *Westminster* for this distilled account of substantial and new works. Both writer and reader were well acquainted with the different practices of interpreting, illustrating and quoting from texts. Furthermore, quotations from the original work were always clearly distinguished from the contributor's commentary by quotation marks or smaller type set off from the main body of the article's text. Riehl's own words and a quotation from Ruskin are presented in this distinctive way in the course of this piece. Nowhere else in her critical writing did Evans so deliberately intrude upon her own text: it is clearly a significant intrusion. Its purpose seems to be not to point to the obvious but to indicate her own distance from the theories under discussion and her disquietude in the face of Riehl's approach. Evans' practical experience working in the periodical press provides her with the knowledge to manipulate standard essay features to subversively question Riehl's conclusions while not disrupting her view of her function to objectively convey the facts that should be the staple of any review and in this way, 'confers on this knowledge a genuine constitutive power' as Bourdieu has suggested in more general terms.[97]

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[97] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 467.

As the article progresses, Evans becomes more clearly critical in her analysis of Riehl's opinions and conclusions. Qualifications are more frequent, ('it is admitted'; 'it is alleged'), and the more controversial biases that surface in Riehl's study, in relation to class, for example, are presented in Riehl's own words.[98] The contradictions that beset the particularities of Riehl's natural history of German life are collectively, though subtly, condemned. Despite his insistence on a careful analysis of the particular circumstances, traditions and customs of German peasant life, the article demonstrates, importantly in Riehl's own words that,

> the generic character of the German peasant is everywhere the same: in the clean mountain hamlet and in the dirty fishing village on the coast; in the plains of North German and in the backwoods of America. 'Everywhere he has the same historical character – everywhere custom is his supreme law. Where religion and patriotism are still a naïve instinct – are still a sacred *custom*, there begins the class of the German Peasantry.'[99]

The distancing footnote is in the next paragraph and in the remaining third of the article, the critic takes over from the ventriloquist and Evans' attitude to the value and use of Riehl's theories emerges. Riehl deserves an audience, Evans insists, because of the methodology of his argument which presents an approach to study hitherto 'not sufficiently insisted on': that 'in the various branches of Social Science there is an advance from the general to the special, from the simple to the complex, analogous with that which is founded in the series of the sciences from Mathematics to Biology.'[100] In his study of the German peasantry Evans gives credit to Riehl for his efforts to produce a more rigorously specialised approach.

Persisting in her uneasy breach with the writing she 'interprets', she insists on including what seems like a disclaimer of the assertions that emerge in her illustration of Riehl's texts such as the idea of the 'generic character of the German peasant'. In her elaboration on arguments for the value of specialisation for example, she adds: 'no

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[98] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life,' 74-5; 76-7.
[99] Ibid., 68.
[100] Ibid., 71.

biological generalisation will enable us to predict the infinite specialities produced by the complexity of vital conditions.' While noting the value of the basic observations that only Natural History can produce, she challenges the limits of any type of generalised commentary.

In this very suspicion of biological generalisations, Evans' article stands in marked contrast to the more formally predictable and ultimately conventional article by George Henry Lewes in the same issue of the *Westminster*. The comparison serves to highlight not only the textual fractures within Evans' piece in her use of standard periodical features while maintaining a dissenting critical voice, but points too to the internal debates between individual articles presented in the one corporate voice. Lewes' piece typifies the regular and jingoistic national and middle-class biases that often characterised periodical writing aimed at a particular market. 'Hereditary Influence, Animal and Human,' in this way, is very different from Evans' more carefully constructed, multi-layered and subversive contribution.[101] Like Evans, Lewes begins his article by questioning the value of generalisations, specifically with reference to questions of hereditary transmission, both physical and moral. Claiming the status of an objective review that shuns the fancifulness of metaphorical illustrations, he provides us with factual examples of problems that derive from generalisations and does not follow Evans' course of accumulated analogies. He is equally programmatic about the function of his essay:

> We shall endeavour to disengage (the question) from all technical difficulties so as to present it in a form intelligible to the general reader, and to clear up any misconceptions, popular and scientific, which at present obstruct the question.[102]

Lewes takes on the role of the ideal reviewer then, to clarify and instruct. The constructed role, however, is his greatest piece of fiction in this article for there is little objectivity in his account. Instead, Lewes follows a particular topical line on both science and nationalism repeating dogmatic positions that echo those of the sociologist,

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[101] [George Henry Lewes], 'Hereditary Influence, Animal and Human,' *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 135-62.
[102] Ibid., 135, 136.

Herbert Spencer, whom he quotes at length, and which conflate social, psychological, theological and biological issues. The article, in this way, sounds the exact opposite note to Evans' cautious warning of the need to attend to the infinite exceptions that confound the claims of all social and scientific disciplines.

The three texts purportedly reviewed by Lewes receive only a brief paragraph assessment. For the rest of the piece, Lewes bombards his readers with details. Rather than clarifying the question of whether the transmission of genes in animals and humans involves the inheritance of moral as well as physical traits, Lewes fudges the entire issue by presenting sensationalised examples and unsupported hypotheses from these examples. And though the earlier part of the article warns of the dangers of 'generalising from a few facts, however striking, in questions so complex as all biological questions are,' his own statements are bold but unexamined. 'The truth is this,' he claims at one stage, 'Constancy in the transmission of structure and character from parent to offspring is a law of nature.'[103] The equation here between physical and moral transmission is indisputable in his view and is repeated throughout the article. It is also the most suspect and troublesome of Lewes' generalisations. It allows him to conclude that we are 'born with moral sense' and in similar tones to Riehl, he claims the moral character or 'native tendencies' of differing races is everywhere the same. Generalisations from unsubstantiated examples become more frequent as the article progresses. Just as 'a puppy pointer has inherited an aptitude to 'point' – which if it do not spontaneously manifest itself in 'pointing' renders him incomparably more apt at learning it than any other dog, – so also has the European boy inherited an aptitude for a certain moral life, which to the Papuan would be impossible,' Lewes concludes. No factual support is given to support these statements, rather, anxious to assert this organic theory of natural laws, Lewes quotes Herbert Spencer's speculative principles of psychology as if they were given truths. Taking Spencer as the mouthpiece of progressive evolution, he explains:

> Hereditary transmission, displayed alike in all the plants we cultivate, in all the animals we breed, and in the human race, applies not only to physical but to

[103] Ibid., 147, 136.

> psychical peculiarities. It is not simply a modified form of constitution produced by new habits of life is bequeathed to future generations; but it is that the modified nervous tendencies produced by such new tendencies of life become permanent, the tendencies become permanent...

Hence, Lewes reasons, we have the emergence of 'national character.' These essentially Lamarckian theories were later discredited. [104] Here, they help Lewes to justify his jingoistic panegyric to the English national character that concludes the article. Without the inevitability or permanence of national types, 'how could Englishmen manifest their sturdy political independence, their ineradicable love of liberty so strikingly contrasted with that want of feeling in other nations?' The specifics of environment have little bearing on such certainties, according to this theory: 'The Scotchman "caught young" as Jonson wittily said will lose some of the superficial characteristics, but will retain all the national peculiarities of his race; and so will the Irishman.' The savage native Australian has no words for 'justice.'[105] This type of logic is endemic to Victorian criticism, making Evans' suspicion of generalizations here all the more controversial and all the more cautious. Such logic offers the typical rhetoric needed to justify colonisation for example, to claim for the Englishman, because of his more advanced psychological (read moral) state, the right to 'instruct' a rebellious or savage India or Ireland.[106] Lewes was an educated, liberal, pro-European, often radical and eclectic scholar. Whether or not he personally supported the views propounded here is not really the issue I want to address. Rather it is the fact that he voiced these commonplace and conventional generalisations so willingly and without question, to what was on the whole an already convinced audience. He played the part of the institutional voice to perfection, in contrast to his partner, Evans, whose very undermining of the definitive

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[104] Rosemary Ashton, 'Introduction,' to *Versatile Victorian: Selected Critical Writings of George Henry Lewes*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), 23.
[105] [Lewes], 'Hereditary Influence,' 162, 163.
[106] Matthew Arnold's famous 1853 preface to his *Poems*, for example, outlined his desire for poetry that was 'particular, precise and firm' which would 'most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race and which are independent of time.' See Matthew Arnold, 'Preface to First Edition of Poems' (1853), *On the Classical Tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 2, 4. Such logic provides the foundation for the national stereotypes of his later *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1867).

dogmas that mark Riehl's text, by implication challenges the comfortable rhetoric of Lewes' argument.

Herbert Spencer figures as a useful example here to illustrate the utter divergence in views held by Lewes and Evans towards the value of theory that informs their work in such different ways. Spencer was notoriously driven by theoretical speculation. As T. H. Huxley once quipped: 'Spencer's idea of tragedy is a deduction killed by a fact.'[107] This kind of unquestioning faith in one's own notions is precisely the point that inspires Lewes, as is obvious in his extensive unchallenged repetition of Spencer's views in 'Hereditary Transmission.' Three years after these articles were written, Lewes acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Spencer on matters 'personal and philosophical' claiming that he met Spencer at a time when he had given up, but the 'stimulus of [Spencer's] intellect, especially during our long walks roused my energy once more and revived my dormant love of science. His intense theorising tendency was contagious, and it was only the stimulus of a *theory* which could then have induced me to work.'[108] Evans was the opposite. Already rejected by him as a prospective wife because she did not fit his ideal notions of beauty, Evans' distance from Spencer's constant principle-driven approach to the world persists in her disagreement with his ideas on women for example.[109] A letter written to Sara Hennell provides a more personal insight: 'I went to Kew yesterday on a scientific expedition with Herbert Spencer, who has all sorts of theories about plants – I should have said a *proof*-hunting expedition. Of course if the flowers didn't correspond to the theories we said '*tant pis pour les fleurs.*'[110]

Attempts to derive any generalised theories from Evans' writings, and especially from her own very general introductions to her articles are anticipated in her insistence on the 'infinite specialities produced by the complexity of vital conditions.' Her emphasis on this point recalls the less theoretical popular illustration of this view in the opening paragraphs of the article on Riehl promoting the need for an expert not a train bluffer, and for contextual examination to counteract the 'splendid conquests of modern

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[107] Reported by Herbert Spencer, *Autobiography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904): 1: 403.
[108] GHL Journal, 28 January 1859. M.S. Yale, cited in Rosemary Ashton, *G. H. Lewes: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 120. Emphasis is Lewes'.
[109] For the fullest treatment of these differences, see Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer.*
[110] 29 June 1852, *GEL*, 2: 40. Emphasis is Evans'.

generalisation.'[111] Care too needs to be taken with the narrow limitations of so-called experts. We are warned of the need to examine Evans' own writing with an eye on the circumstances and conditions of their publication as well as to the particular individualised articulation that is expressed in each piece of written work.

Evans' periodical writing career, then, is characterised most particularly by her refusal to give precedent to any systematised theories on literature. As one pioneering critic of Evans' non-fiction has put it in a useful phrase, she does not have a 'theology of aesthetics'.[112] A skeptic of religious dogma from her early twenties, Evans' insistence that institutional religion be subjected to historical rather than purely theological analysis was undoubtedly influenced by both nineteenth-century German biblical scholarship and the progressivism of Auguste Comte that informed her early intellectual development. And her literary criticism reflects her radical turn from conventional Christianity. The critic who slates the popular preacher Cummings for his orthodox sensationalist rhetoric, and the religious poet Young for his insincere manipulative pieties; who is uncompromising on the failure of literature that presents itself as a moral parable, is indeed a consistent presence in her *Belles Lettres* and longer articles.[113] But Evans is not the disciple of Feuerbach, Strauss or Comte. Her 'slashing essays'[114] on Cummings and Young or on silly novels by lady novelists, are not just driven by her antagonism to specific types of religion or specific trends in literature. The articles are periodical essays and by their nature invoke generic features that require the writer to entertain as well as to offer instructive opinion.

In the *London and Westminster Review* in 1838, a jaundiced critic noted that in our increasingly market-driven age the notion of the reviewer as disinterested instructor was questionable to say the least. Most reviews, as a result, are increasingly motivated

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[111] [Evans], 'Natural History of German Life,' 55.

[112] Michael Wolff, 'Marian Evans to George Eliot: The Intellectual Foundations of Her Career' (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1958). Facsimile reproduction of microfilm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 151. See also, 115, 157, 318.

[113] See for example, [Evans], Review of J.A. Froude, 2a; review of R. W. Mackay *The Progress of the Intellect*, *Westminster Review* 54 (January 1851): 353-368; 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming,' *Westminster Review* 64 (October 1855): 436-62; 'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young,' *Westminster Review* 67 (January 1857): 1-42. 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' ibid., 66, 442-61; 'Belles Lettres,' ibid., 566-82.

[114] Pinney, reads these 'slashing essays' as 'occasions to deliver something she herself particularly wants to say,' Pinney, *Essays*, 2.

by the need to entertain: 'slashing articles,' he claims, 'have become more valuable to reviews. They are really very stirring reading: even when stupidly done they are not dull.'[115] Evans' 'slashing articles' are replete with examples of rhetorical extravagances. One 'silly novelist' for example, is accused keeping 'a sort of mental pocket-mirror, and is continually looking in it at her own "'intellectuality"':

> she spoils the taste of one's muffin by questions of metaphysics . . . she mistakes vagueness for depth, bombast for eloquence, and affectation for originality; she struts on one page, rolls her eyes on another, grimaces in a third and is hysterical in a fourth . . . rhodomontade is the native accent of her intellect.[116]

Acknowledgement of the need for 'rhetorical oversimplifications'[117] in any periodical article is a recognition of both the article's origins in the essay form and its final destination in the marketplace. Such recognition provides an important counter force to the tendency in studies of nineteenth-century journalism generally, and in criticisms of Evans' writing in particular, to take such bold statements at face value as articulations of a writer's creed.

The radical stance against conventional religion is a feature of Evans' articles along with the concomitant elevation of a so-called religion of humanity, of the primacy of feelings and emotions rather than reason alone, and the importance of social sympathy over individual ego. But these general outlines offer little by way of an original artistic manifesto. There seems little point in formulating one from snatches of commentary on various art forms. Like so many of her contemporary commentators, Evans does not explain, for example, what she means by regularly invoked words such as 'sympathy' or 'truth.'[118] For this reason, this chapter does not offer a detailed descriptive account of the content of her non-fiction articles. The most comprehensive

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[115] John Robertson, 'Criticism on Women,' *London and Westminster Review* 32 (October 1838-January 1839): 457.
[116] [Evans], 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' in Byatt and Warren, *Selected Essays*, 155.
[117] McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 51.
[118] See Wolff, *Marian Evans to George Eliot*, 223.

and informed accounts of Evans' journalism[119] note that the writer returns with most frequency to issues such as moral purpose of literature, the so-called 'doctrine of sympathy,' humanist and progressivist notions of the individual, and history and the organic nature of society; standard features of any mid-century criticism. Details to support the prevalence of such issues in her work are found in her letters and in her journalism. The function of such a content-based approach, as McSweeney explains in his review of her comments on the novelists she read in the forties and fifties, is that it provides insight into the 'comparative standards' she employs in what he calls her 'practical criticism' and forms the 'long background of her own creative practices.'[120] The danger of such an approach, as noted in the beginning of this chapter, is that everything becomes relevant and connections between the non-fiction, the fiction and the life ramify beyond any useful synthesis. Her critical pieces on fiction, poetry or general literature do not have a clearly defined and programmatic ideology. As in religion, she questioned the feasibility of all such theories in a world marked by constant change and flux. Neither is it useful then to comb through her various articles for sound bites on realism or art or religion since these were precisely the techniques employed by the journalist, as today, to hook an audience, not to formulate a faith.

[119] See Pinney, *Essays*; Myers, 'George Eliot's Essays and Reviews, 1849-1857'; McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 22-54.
[120] McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 43.

Chapter Four

Staging Scenes: Marian Evans and 'George Eliot' in *Blackwood's Magazine*

It is a commonplace that words, writings, measures, and performances in general, have qualities assigned them not by a direct judgement on the performances themselves, but by a presumption of what they are likely to be, considering who is the performer.

George Eliot, 'The Wasp Credited with the Honey'
Impressions of Theophrastus Such

The importance of the periodical context to George Eliot's writings – almost entirely neglected by her current critics – was recalled by one of her contemporaries in an 1863 review of her fiction:

> George Eliot did not burst upon us like a flood, but trickled into fame through the channel of a monthly magazine. Readers who in 1858 took up the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine*, with the languid inexpectancy with which the first writings of new novelists are received, were astonished that, instead of an author, they had found a man, – and a man uniting the characteristics of Montesquieu's two classes, those who think for us, and those who amuse us.[1]

Written in an age dominated by periodical culture, Simpson's review hints at the writer's indebtedness to the format that allows for narrator and narrative to be reshaped from instalment to instalment as the work 'trickled' into existence. The accomplished piece that surprised readers taking up her work for the first time suggested that this new fiction writer was not new to writing. Evans was a professional journalist for almost a decade before she wrote the first of the stories in *Scenes* and the practised periodical writer clearly shows her hand in her fictional

[1] [Richard Simpson], 'George Eliot's Novels,' *Home and Foreign Quarterly Review* 3 (October 1863): 522, reprinted in Stuart Hutchinson, ed., *George Eliot: Critical Assessments* (Sussex: Helm

debut. Tellingly, in the invocation of Montesquieu's two classes, Simpson's remarks recall the central dictum of popular periodicals from the eighteenth century onwards, the obligation to entertain and to instruct, which Marian Evans the editor and the journalist upheld in her work throughout the 1850s. As I will demonstrate, the principles of periodical publication continued to influence her writing as they had done throughout her professional career to this point and continued to govern the ways in which Evans presented her work to her reading public.

This chapter will consider the significance of these stories as periodical literature. Since the *place* of 'performance,' to extend Theophrastus' opening epigraph, has a profound shaping effect on the work produced, my focus on the periodical context of Evans' first fiction means the discussion will be more about the staging of these scenes of clerical life than offering individual readings of each story. I will argue that the place of performance in *Blackwood's Magazine* significantly determines Evans' narrative persona and the blend of realism and melodrama, the conventional and the sensational that feature in the three serial stories. As we have seen, Evans was experienced in commissioning and editing material for publication, and in adapting her work as a journalist for different periodicals by the time she began writing fiction. 'George Eliot,' a middle-class gentleman with scientific and clerical leanings, is offered here as the author of a series of sketches to John Blackwood in another demonstration of the facility with which Marian Evans could adopt appropriate narrative voices for particular audiences. Still in disguise, the character of Editress turned objective authoritative journalist becomes a man, and as Simpson observes, a convincing well-rounded storyteller. Though often interpreted as a definitive turn away from functional journalism to creative writing, I will show how this new disguise was both part of a planned professional strategy to protect Evans' career in the periodical press and a canny appropriation of a typical *Blackwood's* voice.

'I am open to conviction on all points except dinner and debts. I hold that one should be eaten and the other paid. These are my only prejudices,' Marian Evans once joked in a letter to her friend, Sara Hennell.[2] However flippant the remark, the biases of consumption and circulation that define the fluctuating periodical industry, maintain a hold over the work of Marian Evans in ways not matched by clearly

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Information, 1996), 1: 576-600, henceforth, *Critical Assessments*.
[2] 20 October 1857, *GEL*, 2: 388.

articulated philosophical convictions or other writing agenda. This chapter suggests that these stories need to be returned to the complicated cultural, aesthetic and economic environment in which they were produced as a corrective to the type of criticism that passes over their original context and reduces this first fiction to a simplified articulation of her realist aesthetic.

Published in *Blackwood's Magazine* as an open-ended series from January to November 1857, the narrator and characters in the three stories that make up *Scenes*, everywhere display the dangers of overarching ideology and of reductive categorisation to point up a moral and instructive purpose.[3] We are repeatedly called on as readers not to judge the stupid Amos Barton, the temperamental Tina, the alcoholic Janet Dempster, the old, flawed, and not very spiritual Mr. Gilfil. To see their stories played out will help us see past the limits of superficial judgement. This is familiar territory capturing the romantic humanism and realism seen to typify George Eliot's work.[4] But the mode of presentation takes us beyond these much-repeated parameters to suggest that the stories will not just teach us how to think. Crucially, these stories will also entertain. The pleasure of Mr. Gilfil's story is likened to that gained from a 'passage from a favourite book or the scenes of a familiar play.' The narrator of 'Janet's Repentance' warns of the story's deceptively ordinary setting, that 'to a superficial glance, Milby was nothing but dreary prose'.[5] Our understanding of the place and its people will move beyond the superficial but not just through the so-called 'raw-bone realism'[6] of George Eliot's work as so often argued. The narrator suggests that a closer look at Milby allows us to see the small acts of neighbourly kindness that colour the 'dismal mixture of griping worldliness, vanity, ostrich feathers, and fumes of brandy'.[7] The author, almost in opposition, however, goes on to demonstrate that the fullest picture is in that very animated play between the ideal and the ordinary. And we are moved beyond the thud of 'dreary prose' by her focus

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[3] 'The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton' was serialised in two parts in the January and February numbers of *Blackwood's* in 1857. 'Mr. Gilfil's Love story' appeared in four parts from March to June and 'Janet's Repentance' in five parts in the succeeding months. The series concluded in November 1857. The three stories were published by Blackwood in two volumes in 1858. References to the stories are from George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Glasgow: Collins, n.d.).

[4] See for example the Feuerbachian interpretation in Derek and Sybil Oldfield, '*Scenes of Clerical Life*: the Diagram and the Picture,' in *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, ed. Barbara Hardy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 1-18.

[5] 'Mr. Gilfil,' 112; 'Janet's Repentence,' 270.

[6] The phrase is Kathleen McCormack's, 'George Eliot's First Fiction: Targeting *Blackwood's*,' *The Bibliotheck* 21 (1996): 75.

[7] 'Janet's Repentance,' 270.

on the romance, the pathos, and the drama with ostrich feather and brandy fumes that constitute these ordinary provincial lives. In 'Mr. Gilfil,' the narrator warns us not to judge the eponymous old man by his appearance:

> I, at least, hardly ever look at the bent old man, or a wizened old woman, but I see also, with my mind's eye, that Past of which they are the shrunken remnant, and the unfinished romance of rosy cheeks and bright eyes seems sometimes of feeble interest and significance, compared with that drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its catastrophe, and left the poor soul, like a dim and dusty stage, with all its sweet garden scenes and fair perspectives overturned and thrust out of sight.[8]

An imaginative engagement with the potential for drama in the ordinary is presented here in almost moral terms. The narrator echoes Dickens' 'preliminary word' to his readers in the first number of his mid-century preserve of entertaining and popular serial fiction, *Household Words* in 1850: 'In all familiar things there is Romance enough, if we will find it out.'[9] The narrator's task in *Scenes*, as we will see, is to 'find out' this romance because it is this heightened emotive state, not mundane routine, that shapes both understanding and actions: ours, as readers, the characters, as players in these scenes.

Most often, however, these early stories are judged predominantly for their demonstration of the practising writer's faith in realism: the careful observation of environment, the particularisation of character in the 'stomach and pocket'[10] plainness of his existence. Chapter five of 'Amos Barton' is quoted at length to support this view. 'Depend upon it' we would 'gain unspeakably' if we valued the drama in the ordinary is the often repeated shorthand summary in critical studies of Eliot's theoretical stance.[11] Taking the narrator as a ventriloquist for George Eliot's view on fiction, the emphasis in such criticism is always on the *ordinary*.[12] When *Scenes* is returned to its original environment as a *Blackwood's* series, however, the *drama* of

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[8] 'Mr. Gilfil,' 108-9.
[9] Cited in Paul Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 192.
[10] 'Janet's Repentance,' 325.
[11] 'Amos Barton,' 53-4.
[12] See for example, Thomas Noble, *George Eliot's Scenes of Clerical Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), the only fully length study of this work; David Lodge; 'Introduction,' *Scenes of Clerical Life* (London: Penguin, 1973), 7-32; Graham Handley, 'Introduction,' *Scenes of Clerical*

the text surfaces – that which evokes emotion, distracts both character and reader, and which entertains. The celebrated Eliot narrative voice is shown to be indebted to the typical *Blackwood's* voice in the creation of a dramatic platform for the staging of these clerical scenes. And we will see too, however, that the serial writer negotiates an independent space for her authorial persona through her manipulation of drama and pathos, the standard features of the *Blackwood*'s tale. Through her imaginative encounter with the demands of the periodical voice and the generic aspects of the periodical serial story, Evans extends the boundaries of both. The flexibility of the periodical magazine, its mixed heritage that demands it must amuse as well as instruct becomes a central impetus for the author's creative potential.

The importance of maintaining a balance between the functional and the aesthetic, between practical actualities and imaginative creations, is recalled by the narrator of 'Janet's Repentance' when he remembers the garden of a neighbour:

> The garden was one of those old-fashioned paradises which hardly exist any longer except as memories of our childhood: no finical separation between flower and kitchen-garden there; no monotony of enjoyment for one sense to the exclusion of another; but a charming paradisiacal mingling of all that was pleasant to the eyes and good for food.[13]

Despite the nostalgia that implies such gardens no longer exist, the picture provided finds its mid-nineteenth-century expression in the periodical miscellany like the *Blackwood's magazine* in which these stories appeared. Periodical culture itself embodies an approach to literary culture that resists the limits of categorisation, as we will see. Like the garden, it claimed its reader's attention in the crossing of generic boundaries and its inherently dialogic form. The specific literary culture in which Evans was writing goes some way to suggest the reasons for the productively mixed tones, the entertainment and instruction, the often haphazard combination of flowers and kitchen garden, that make her work continually challenging. Consideration of this periodical environment undercuts any centripetal conclusions about her writing while offering a context in which to contain her 'component parts'.[14] Driven by the twin

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Life (London: Dent, 1994), xxi-xxxii.

[13] 'Janet's Repentance,' 319-20.

[14] Auerbach, 'The Waning of George Eliot,' 353.

engines of consumption and circulation, like meals and money, the periodical industry's speculative role in reflecting and forming public taste and public reading habits is one that is continually being defined and never reaches definition. It is, to use Jauss' phrase, a 'process-like genre,'[15] like the open-ended mode of composition that defines the serial story itself.

The serial story, in particular when publication begins before the full text is finished, as in the case of *Scenes*, also bears the shape of the magazine in which it appears in both content and form. Robert Patten usefully outlines four aspects to fiction usually read as books that are 'significantly altered' by serialisation in a magazine which, therefore, inform any consideration of periodical fiction: 'the convention of single authorship; the genre of fiction itself; the apparent "self-containedness" of the material whole; and the timing and effect of the story's reception.'[16] Carol Martin's *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (1994) has addressed some of these features in the only book-length study to date on the serial aspect of Evans' work. In a chapter on *Scenes*, she focuses in particular on the timing and reception of Evans' first fiction. Her work gives an important account of how Evans adapted individual instalments of the stories to maximise their effect on her audience. She also demonstrates how some other serial fiction that appeared alongside the clerical scenes in *Blackwood's* – Margaret Oliphant's *The Athelings* and Louisa Fraser's 'Hester Benfield' – reinforced some of the themes in Evans' stories.[17] Little attention, however, is given to either the particular influences of the periodical form in general or to the *Blackwood's* model.

Evans' three stories use the personality-oriented tone of *Blackwood* journalism to help develop the very particularised though nameless narrator of *Scenes*. Similarly, the need to incorporate a particular type of pathos into her fictional text is identified early by both Evans and Lewes as a key feature of the typically popular *Blackwood's* story and therefore as a needed component of her own fiction.[18] This is a type of domestic melodrama that appeals to a mainstream middle-class audience because of its carefully balanced formula that suggests the sensational but only actually provides emotionally charged climaxes. This 'contained' melodrama anticipates but does not

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[15] Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, 94.
[16] Patten, 'Dickens as Serial Author,' 140.
[17] Carol Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, see in particular, chapter 2, 'Striking Situations and Serial Endings: Eliot's Apprenticeship in *Scenes*,' 32-92.
[18] George Eliot, 'How I came to Write Fiction,' in *Journals*, 289-90.

deliver the more shocking exploits of 1860s sensation fiction. It trades off melodrama's potential for sensation though, setting up the reader in the case of these clerical tales, for dramatic scenes with heinous villains and possible murder, suicide, adultery and incest and then defuses them with narrative moralising and the reassertion of the ordinary. It makes for very self-conscious storytelling.[19]

Rather than providing us with transparent 'moralising fables'[20] or conventional wisdoms, however, Evans denies her audience the clear resolutions expected of the moral tale. She uses the melodramatic to hint at the significance of emotional excess but does not fully articulate or contain its meaning and so emphasises her suspicion of both the irresponsibly sensational and the over-determinedly rational. Evans' sense of the incessant but unavoidable pull between the demands of the corporate body in its many forms and her own artistic independence surfaces in her attempts to redefine the legibility of these dramatic scenes. But as we will see, in her efforts to 'rescue' the melodramatic from the overtly sensational, while refusing outright to simply saddle the mode with a reductive moral message, Evans ultimately produces a doubled narrative that is internally divisive. As they appear in the pages of the magazine, the stories speak at once to her audience's expectations in her use of familiar modes and signal a certain dissatisfaction with the restricted readings of these modes – namely verisimilitude, melodrama, and the *Blackwood's* voice. In this way, most obviously as I will suggest in her particular relationship with the melodramatic mode, *Scenes* anticipates the complexity usually only credited to Evans' later writings such as *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.[21] The double-consciousness of her more well-known serialised novels of the 1870s is displayed in fact in the writer's first fiction as she negotiates the periodical serial form.

In acknowledging the way in which the magazine writer fulfils the demands of

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[19] David Carroll's '"Janet's Repentance" and the Myth of the Organic,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (1980): 331-48, suggested a revision of standard critical approaches to the idea of organic unity in George Eliot's work. He argues 'Janet's Repentance' undermines claims for such unity but does not refer to the original context of the work in *Blackwood's*, which I suggest is a central feature of the need for such revision.

[20] The phrase is used to designate Evans' work by Henry James. See Henry James, review of John Cross's *George Eliot's Life*, reprinted in *Critical Assessments*, 1: 527.

[21] See for example, D. A. Miller's assessment of *Middlemarch*, where he argues the novel 'oscillates in a curious exemplary way: between a confident reenactment of traditional form . . . and an uneasy subversion of its habitually assumed validity . . . *Middlemarch* seems to be traditional and to be beyond its limits, to subvert and to reaffirm the value of its traditional status,' Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents*, 107, 108.

genre and publication format from instalment to instalment, there is the danger of reducing writing to a mere 'bag of cheap tricks'[22] from which the periodical writer produces the appropriate voice for the relevant format. Thomas Carlyle thought as much in the early part of the century claiming that books were now not only printed, 'but in a great measure, written and sold, by machinery' – yet another negative sign of the times. He pre-empts to some degree the twentieth-century Marxist and materialist figuring of the fiction writer's encounter with the periodical press as 'hand-loom weavers' entering a factory.[23] The crucial difference of course is the individual impetus implied in the '*skilful* filling of pre-defined genres, each of which stands for certain definition of the audience's needs', as Macmillan explains of late-nineteenth-century journalism.[24] If sufficiently skilful, the 'certain definition' of readers' needs can also be troubled, extended, subverted, challenged.

In his 1838 parody of the typical Blackwood's article, Edgar Allan Poe has his fictional editor, Mr. Blackwood give advice to the aspiring writer: 'Hint everything – assert nothing.'[25] The aspiring fiction writer but practised periodical hand, Marian Evans is more assertive and revealing than this mocking 'whatever you say, say nothing' apothegm. Nonetheless, her informed negotiation of the demands of audience, editor and genre recall a more direct if sarcastic statement of Poe's in his 'Magazine Writing – Peter Snook': 'There is no greater mistake than the supposition that a true originality is a mere matter of impulse or inspiration. To originate is

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[22] Archibald C. Coolidge Jnr., *Charles Dickens as Serial Novelist* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 6. His study of arguably the most well-known serial novelist acknowledges the synthetic vision of the artist while noting the systematic materiality in the ways in which Dickens went about fulfilling the demands of serialisation for periodicals. For other studies that examine this balancing of aesthetics and commerce, see Butt and Tillotson, *Dickens at Work;* Sutherland, *Thackeray at Work* (London: Athlone Press, 1974), *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* and *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*; Mary Hamer, *Writing by Numbers: Trollope's Serial Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Peter Shillingsburg, *Pegasus in Harness: Victorian Publishing and W. M. Thackeray* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Edgar F. Harden, *The Emergence of Thackeray's Serial Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979); Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Bonnie Gerard, '*Far from the Madding Crowd* and the Cultural Politics of Serialisation,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 331-49. Linda Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); Tromp, Gilbert and Haynie, eds., *Beyond Sensation.*

[23] Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' (1829), *A Carlyle Reader: Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 36. N. N. Feltes, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 64.

[24] Frederick Macmillan, *The Net Book Agreement 1899 and the Book War of 1906-1908* (Glasgow: Robert Maclehose, 1924), 14, cited in Feltes, *Modes of Production*, 67.

[25] Edgar Allan Poe, 'How to write a Blackwood's Article,' *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott with the assistance of Eleanor D. Kewer and Maureen C. Mabbott, (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1978), 2: 342.

carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine.'[26] The careful crafting of Evans' first fiction, the fulfilling of expectations and the attempt to extend them, can only be revealed by returning to the original scene of these stories in *Blackwood's Magazine*. In this context our idea of the author is complicated beyond the overly reverent romantic ideal of the independent genius transcending her cultural and economic environment. As we will now see, however, neither is the writer reduced to a hand in a factory line or made almost invisible and redundant in Roland Barthes' notion, for instance, of the powerless figure inscribed in the text.

From critic to artist: the making of 'George Eliot'

Until recently, the dominant approaches to Evans' first fiction have rarely addressed the pre-volume existence of *Scenes*. This bias has been challenged by the work of Carol Martin, as already noted, and in studies by critics more concerned with the connections between the forms and content of Evans' work. Kathleen McCormack's 'George Eliot's First Fiction: Targeting *Blackwood's*,' for instance, as the title suggests, reads the stories specifically in the context of the Edinburgh journal and provides some illuminating examples of the ways in which Evans incorporated typical middle-class magazine subjects into her early fiction. However, the arguments are weakened by the fact that the subjects addressed – intoxication, women's legal rights and women's duties – are typical of most middle-class family-oriented periodicals of this time and not particular in any way to *Blackwood's*. The article is entirely content-focussed giving little sense of the style or genre of these first fictions. Though as McCormack points out, in her first fiction, we see less of the 'Victorian sibyl' George Eliot became in retrospect and more of the 'Victorian hack' she was at the time of writing.[27]

Dallas Liddle and Marie Alexis Easley have pointed up more sharply the continuities between Evans' journalism and her first fiction by moving beyond content-based comparisons.[28] Liddle proposes that through the stories of *Scenes*, the

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[26] Edgar Allan Poe, 'Magazine Writing: Peter Snook' (1845), *Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (New York Crowell, 1902), 4: 737.
[27]. See McCormack 'George Eliot's first fiction,' 70-1.
[28] Liddle, 'Mentor and Sibyl,' 5-39; Easley, 'Victorian Women Writers and the periodical press,' 155-77; Easley, 'Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,' 145-60.

narrator explicitly invokes and then rejects the 'reviewing' voice that typified quarterly journalism. Having found the so-called authority of journalistic discourses fundamentally flawed, he argues that Evans attempted to assert through her fictional narrator in *Scenes*, an alternative and superior morally assertive, less shrill and more instructive voice. In contrast, Easley suggests that Evans claims the authority to address social issues in her fiction by employing those very narrative strategies associated with periodical journalism which Easley shows crossed boundaries of gender, identity and media. Her dissertation focuses on gender identity in the press and the social problem context of *Felix Holt* (1866) in particular. Nonetheless, my work shares with Easley's an emphasis on the interdependence of periodical and novelistic narrative strategies and on the importance of this connection in the formation of Victorian authors in the mid-nineteenth century. Easley's general points on authorship as 'narrative performance' have a particular significance in what I see as Evans' deliberate staging of scenes in her first periodical fiction.[29] Liddle's arguments, however, are less convincing, I would suggest, because of his insistence on claiming for Evans' first fictional steps a deliberate and programmatic separation from her periodical roots which I will demonstrate, given Evans' dependence on the *Blackwood*'s voice, neither text nor context fully support.

These recent studies signal a long overdue shift in Eliot criticism that has overwhelmingly suppressed significance of the periodical context for Evans' first fiction. The persistent neglect of her early writing history seems to follow the path laid down by 'George Eliot' herself since she was initially the main force behind the erasure of Marian Evans the periodical writer. In her later life, as it emerges in her correspondence and in reported conversation with acquaintances, she is harsh and unforgiving of the periodical press. Emily Davis reports in an 1869 letter, '[Mrs. Lewes] thinks people who write regularly for the Press are almost sure to be spoiled by it. There is so much dishonesty, people's work being praised because they belong to the confederacy.'[30] As she attempted to control responses to her fiction and her reputation following the publication of *Adam Bede* (1859), 'George Eliot' insisted on the difference between her work and that of 'lesser' popular novelists. She responds in

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[29] See Easley, 'Victorian Women Writers and the periodical press,' 12, 183-213. In her 'Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,' Easley suggests as part of this 'narrative performance,' that Eliot destabilises notions of masculine or feminine authorship through the complexly gendered narrative voice of anonymous journalism, a voice that persists in 'Amos Barton.'

[30] 2 August 1869, *GEL*, 8: 466.

a defensive and arch tone to her old friend Francois D'Albert-Durade's report that a French journalist had compared her work to Dinah Mulock's.

> Journalistic criticism does good to no author; it is written by incompetent men who are not even doing their best, and it is utterly indecisive as to the ultimate rank of any book . . . the most ignorant journalist in England would hardly think of calling me a rival of Miss Mulock – a writer who is read only by novel readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture. A very excellent woman she is, I believe – but we belong to an entirely different order of writers.[31]

Her rejection of her own journalistic and reviewing background is typical of the novelist's attempts from the 1860s onwards to whitewash her connections with the poor trade of criticism and her own part in the 'confederacy'. The whitewash has been successful by all accounts: as previous chapters have argued, Evans the journalist serves the novelist's theories but her journalism is never given an independent existence. Crucially for this chapter, the 'high culture' claimed here for her fiction has led many to ignore the appeal to 'novel readers, pure and simple' that was an especially telling feature of her first stories. Fitzjames Stephen noted the point succinctly in 1855: 'The majority of those who read for amusement, read novels.'[32] Schooled as she was under the journalistic rubric which demands the writer amuse as well as instruct, Evans ensured that her *Blackwood's* stories would entertain such 'novel readers'.[33]

Chronology too has been important in this cleavage between the artist and the servant of the press. Marian Evans' writing history provides an apparently neat break between her journalistic and fictional writing careers. She published only a handful of journalistic pieces after January 1857 and these appeared in the late 1860s when six of her eight fictional works were already published and popular and by which time she had made 'George Eliot' an established name. Two of those pieces were written

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[31] 7 July 1860, *GEL*, 3: 300-2.

[32] James Fitzjames Stephen, 'The Relation of Novels to Life,' *Cambridge Essays, contributed by members of the University* (1855), 161, reprinted *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, eds. Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 94.

[33] See John Crombie Brown, *The Ethics of George Eliot's Work* (Edinburgh, 1881); Hamer, *Writing by Numbers*, 26; Henry Alley, *The Quest for Anonymity: The Novels of George Eliot* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997) which discount the popular or purely entertaining aspect to Evans' work.

under the name 'George Eliot' in the *Fortnightly Review*; *Blackwood's* published an 'Address' by 'Felix Holt' and the other four were by 'Saccharissa' in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.[34] With the name change, this apparent substitution of fiction for journalism adds to the completeness of transition from the anonymous Marian Evans to the public, though disguised, George Eliot. But the finality of the split has been constructed retrospectively, to the detriment of her periodical work, and has the lie of autobiography about it as Evans' Theophrastus Such put it elsewhere: 'In all autobiography there is, nay ought to be, an incompleteness which may have the effect of falsity.'[35]

Theophrastus makes the deception of representation in fiction and non-fiction, in public and in private, the subject of his corrosive analysis of the world of authorship. In this last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, that provides a revealing look backwards at the mid-nineteenth-century publishing industry, Evans makes clear her own awareness of the tricks and truths of the trade. A central theme in this collection of apparently independent essays, published first in book form, is the problem of original authorship in a corporate market, a subject that is especially pertinent to the jobbing journalist, as we have seen, and relevant too to the writer of serials for magazines. Having begun her writing life as an amateur contributor to her local newspaper, she ends that career with a dissection of the writing industry that foregrounds public views as expressed in the periodical press. The writer's acute awareness of the vagaries of public opinion, having made her living in the public press since the early 1850s, suggests the adoption of the pseudonym had more to do with the tentative nature of her fictional enterprise than any dramatic turn from critic to artist.

Conscious of the need to construct a marketable public image, very much aware, as Theophrastus Such explains in the epigraph to this chapter, that the performance is often judged according to the performer, Evans invented a male

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[34] 'A Word for the Germans,' *Pall Mall Gazette* 1 (7 March 1865): 201; 'Servant's Logic,' ibid. (17 March 1865): 310-1; 'Futile Falsehoods,' ibid. (3 April 1865): 470-1; 'Modern Housekeeping,' ibid. (13 May 1865): 880; 'The Influence of Rationalism,' *Fortnightly Review* 1 (15 May 1865): 43-55; 'The Grammar of Ornament,' ibid. (15 May 1865): 124-5; 'Address to Working Men by Felix Holt,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 103 (January 1868) 1-11. On her *Pall Mall* pieces, see Kathleen McCormack, 'The Saccharissa Essays: George Eliot's Only Woman Persona,' *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 4 (1990): 41-59; Hilda Hollis, 'The Nibbling Mouse: Eliot's Saccharissa Letters in the Context of Bodichon's Call for Political Engagement,' *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 27, no. 1 (2000): 49-59.

[35] George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, ed. Nancy Henry (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 5.

persona for her first show as a fiction writer. Alexander Welsh, among others, relates this move very specifically to Evans' playing of the cultural field with a clear sense of the historical, political and cultural significance of her market: 'For George Eliot and her contemporaries the end of patronage meant the beginning of dependence on the market, and for intellectuals who were not employed in any other sector of the economy, a dependence on publishing.' Since most of the profit for such professional writers came from popular fiction, the experiment in *Blackwood*'s was an obvious one. And the use of a pseudonym, guaranteed to fuel publicity, Welsh points out, was not simply a 'defensive maneuver.'[36]

Lewes presented this new author in explicitly male terms in correspondence with John Blackwood during the initial negotiations for her first story:

> This is what I am commissioned to say to you about the proposed series. It will consist of tales and sketches illustrative of the actual life of our country clergy about a quarter of a century ago; but solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect . . . He begged me in particular to add that – as the specimen sent will sufficiently prove – the tone throughout will be sympathetic and not at all antagonistic.

In this opening gambit, Lewes and Evans set out the genre markers, along with the gender marker, that they hoped would add weight to the effort. Lewes invokes both Goldsmith and Austen as predecessors and claims, 'such humour, pathos, vivid presentation and nice observation, have not been exhibited (in this style) since the "Vicar of Wakefield".' Emphasis is placed on the requisite and therefore safe aspects of conventional fiction – sympathy, drama, humour, accuracy.

In subsequent letters, Lewes maintains and enhances the illusion, dropping expressions such as 'my clerical friend' into correspondence and never correcting Blackwood's use of 'he,' 'his' and so on, in these exchanges. In January 1857, Blackwood begins his dealings with his new author with the opening address: 'My dear Amos.'[37] A month later, Evans offers Blackwood the pseudonym 'George Eliot' as a distraction for the periodical audience, always eager to consume new material, to

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[36] Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 23.

[37] 6 November 1856, *GEL*, 2: 269; 12 November 1856, ibid., 272; 30 January 1857, ibid., 290.

feed the cult of publicity, or as she puts it in a suggestive metaphor, as a 'tub to throw to the whales'.[38] Blackwood later admitted in an interview with the *New York World*, that when he found out the gender of his author he was somewhat embarrassed that the tone and content of his early letters might not have been appropriate: 'I addressed her as 'dear George' and used some easy expressions, such as a man only uses to a man. After I knew her, I was a little anxious to remember all that I might have said.'[39] The revelation gives some indication of the potential prejudice a woman writer would face from this patriarchal publishing firm.

The name was invented in February 1857 but did not become public knowledge until June 1859, almost six months after the publication of *Adam Bede* and over two and a half years after she first began writing fiction. The secret came out only when Evans was forced to reclaim her fictional work from a delusional pretender, Joseph Liggins. Having convinced a local minister that Blackwood was withholding payment for 'his' work, Liggins mounted a public campaign to expose the Edinburgh publisher that only finally ended when Evans revealed her identity.[40]

Initially then, 'George Eliot' was the shield behind which Evans the professional journalist protected her reputation in the publishing industry. In defending the reason for such subterfuge to her editor, Evans indicates that this first attempt at publishing fiction was not viewed by the author herself as a decisive break in her writing life but rather as another experiment with writing forms:

> Whatever may be the success of my stories, I shall be resolute in preserving my incognito, having observed that a *nom de plume* secures all the advantages, without the disagreeables of reputation.[41]

Failure as a storyteller would not taint the journalist and translator experienced in evaluating the cost of fame, 'having observed' the demands and expectations of a writing life at close quarters for almost a decade. In a typically light-hearted though nonetheless telling letter to her friend, Charles Bray, written in January 1857 as the

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[38] 4 February 1857, ibid., 292.
[39] Cited in F. D. Tredrey, *The House of Blackwood 1804-1954: The History of a Publishing Firm* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Son, 1954), 116.
[40] See Haight, *George Eliot*, 244-5, 280-91. For the most informed accounts of the significance of these duplicitous performances by Evans, Lewes and Liggins, see Bodenheimer, 'The Outing of George Eliot,' *The Real Life of Marian Evans*, 119-60; Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*, 113-31.
[41] 4 February 1857, *GEL*, 2: 292.

first part of 'Amos' appeared, Evans writes:

> You needn't observe any secrecy about *articles* of mine. It is an advantage (pecuniarily) to me that I should be known as the writer of the articles in the Westminster. And I am a very calculating person now – valuing approbation as representing guineas.[42]

Infamously ostracised by her family and by London society for her relationship with Lewes, Evans also knew only too well, the damage done at a personal level by 'disagreeables of reputation'. As a result, more general public disapproval and the consequent threat to popular literary success was almost certain for a number of reasons: because of her unconventional relationship, her challenging translations, her association with the radical sceptical *Westminster*, and because she was a woman. Richard Simpson noted as much in 1863 in a straightforward assessment of the practical need for a pseudonym. He argued that it would have been 'difficult to gain the ear of an audience as a professedly religious and even clerical author, if the same name had been signed to the *Clerical Scenes* in 1858 and to *Adam Bede* in 1859, as had been signed to the translation of Strauss's *Life* in 1846.'[43] Evans was particularly defensive on these points when the pseudonym was eventually exposed – despite courting controversy and gossips with the mystery of 'secret authorship.' In a contradictory postscript to a letter Evans wrote to Barbara Bodichon, Lewes added:

> It makes me angry to think that people should say that the secret has been kept because there was any *fear* of the effect of the author's name. You may tell it openly to all who care to hear that the object of anonymity was to get the book judged on its own merits, and not prejudged as the work of a woman, or of a particular woman.[44]

Though the first sentence contradicts the second, the fear expressed cannot be dismissed as paranoia. Tuchmann and Fortin, for example, have demonstrated the change in tone and vocabulary in reviews of fiction once the gender of the author is

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[42] January 1857, ibid, 287. Her emphasis.
[43] Simpson, 'George Eliot's Novels,' 523.
[44] 30 June 1859, *GEL*, 3: 106.

revealed.[45] Her own pointed attack on the danger of gender-based criticism as culpable in the continued production of inferior writing by women was published in the *Westminster* shortly before she began to write 'Amos.' Because written by women, she argues silly novels by silly novelists are never taken seriously enough to receive the criticism needed to stem the frothy tide. Original fiction by women writers on the other hand, the polemical journalist claims, is never reviewed in an even-handed manner:

> By a peculiar thermometric adjustment, when a woman's talent is at zero, journalistic approbation is at the boiling pitch; when she attains mediocrity, it is already at no more than summer heat; and if ever she reaches excellence, critical enthusiasm drops to freezing point.[46]

Given this hostile environment, it is unsurprising that the careful construction of a public authorial self emerges in Evans' private journals. Harris and Johnston have noted that the journal for December 1857-61 is split in two parts. A 'Recollections' section at the end of this journal records material about her 'public persona', suggesting that 'this section of the diary keeps separate from the person whose doings are jotted in the diary, the writing identity known already to Blackwood at the end of 1857 as "George Eliot"'.[47] For almost a year and a half the two texts run concurrently until May 1859. The following month Evans reluctantly reveals her identity and, as Harris and Johnston explain, the journal 'becomes again the journal of Marian Lewes – not as it has been so far, George Eliot's journal'.[48] It is clear therefore that 'George Eliot' is a persona not a novelist. Marian Evans was testing a new type of writing when she constructed this persona but not straying far from the territory she knew as a professional periodical writer. Evans' mastery of the mostly masculine *Blackwood's* voice guaranteed the initial success of this new identity, as is evident in the speculations of contemporary critics about the author of *Scenes*. It was confidently asserted in the *Saturday Review* that the writer was 'some studious clergyman, a Cantab, who is the father of family, of high church tendencies and

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[45] Gaye Tuchmann with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1989), 184-7. See also, Easley, 'Authorship Gender and Identity,' 154.
[46] [Evans], 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' 161.
[47] *Journals*, 286,
[48] Ibid., 287.

exceedingly fond of children, Greek dramatists and dogs. Thus much the internal evidence suggests.' The *Daily News* pitched in: 'Mr Eliot writes like a man who has dined at country clerical clubs and taken tea and talked scandal with farmers' wives, and men mixed up in the tragic strifes and momentous squabbles of country towns.'[49]

Evans' turn to fiction at a time when she and Lewes were under considerable financial pressure from his growing family and from her increasingly dependent one was no doubt motivated in part by the hope that she would begin to reach that growing readership always outside the considerably more limited intellectual circles of the *Westminster Review* and the *Leader*. The family-oriented and popular *Blackwood's Magazine* offered an ideal opportunity in this regard with its wide distribution rate, the potential for post-serial publication in volume form, and John Blackwood's connections with the circulating library market dominated by Mudie's. *Blackwood's* was the best known of the mid-century middle-class miscellaneous magazines that published non-fiction, poems, and fictional serials. The name change, the later whitewash of her part in the 'confederacy', the incorporation of a suitable '*Blackwood's*' narrative voice and, as we will see, her use of dramatic material, were all part of her 'professional tactics'. Donald Gray has used the phrase to assert her invention of a pseudonym was not 'feminine withdrawal' but the negotiation of potentially profitable cultural space that was both 'careful and canny'.[50] It is clear too though, that her calculating professionalism emerges in the formal aspects of her work in the context of the periodical magazine. This crucial aspect to her work has been repeatedly underplayed by the critics who have otherwise brilliantly championed George Eliot's inventive writing experiments. U. C. Knoepflmacher, Barbara Hardy, David Carroll and Rosemarie Bodenheimer, for example, explain the writer's continual formal innovations in philosophical and biographical terms for the most part.[51] They too however, overlook the shaping power of the periodical context on this periodical fiction.

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[49] [Unsigned], review of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Saturday Review* 29 (May 1858): 566, reprinted in *Critical Assessments*, 65; [Unsigned], review of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Daily News*, 5 February 1858, 2, cited in Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, 35.

[50] Donald Gray, 'George Eliot and Her Publishers,' in *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, Levine, ed., 185. The immediate success of this professional move is evident in increase in Evans' income from 119 pounds, 8 shillings in 1855 to 443 pounds in 1857. See *Journals* 58, 72.

[51] U. C. Knoepflmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London: Athlone Press, 1963); Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*; Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Marian Evans*.

Narrative scenes: a *Blackwood*'s voice

Scenes of Clerical Life is not a novel. The work was initially envisioned as a series of sketches which suggests Evans' need to stay within the periodical format for this fictional experiment. Lewes actually used the term 'sketches' to describe the project in his first correspondence with Blackwood.[52] Dickens' *Boz* sketches were a notable precedent in terms of the shared title if not the actual content that followed. 'Sketches' indicates the speculative nature of the stories that is so suited to the periodical form because the project is open-ended and as such it can be stopped after any 'sketch' without damaging public faith or public support. This was the case with *Scenes*. Evans had first planned *Adam Bede* as the fourth scene of clerical life but a dispute with Blackwood over the suitability of 'Janet's Repentance' as *Blackwood*'s material in June had led her to suggest the third story be published separately and influenced her eventual decision to close off the series.[53] The relatively unfixed nature of a non-novel series also gave Blackwood the reassurance that he could halt publication of the clerical scenes if he thought it necessary without disappointing readers or breaking contracts. In this way, he could avoid the disruption Dickens faced in *All The Year Round* in the Autumn of 1860, for example, when the serialisation of Charles Lever's *A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance* had to be cut off because it was losing the magazine money. The 'story' was unfinished, faith was broken with his audience, the editor's judgement tainted in the public eye, and a new slot had to be filled in haste.[54]

Despite a number of misunderstandings between the writer and editor, events did not reach such a dramatic conclusion with the serialisation of *Scenes*. Evans' purpose in suggesting these sketches to the magazine editor was not entirely to get her work judged on its own merits but, extra-textually, to get it accepted as a particular

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[52] 6 November 1856, *GEL*, 2: 269; the series was not named 'Scenes' until Lewes' letter on 22 November 1856, – Evans' thirty-seventh birthday, ibid, 276.

[53] See Evans' letter to Blackwood, 11 June 1857, *GEL*, 2: 347-8. She started writing the first part of *Adam Bede* in late October or November 1857, closed off *Scenes* in November and was preparing to publish her new work as a serial in *Blackwood's*, but changed her mind months later in March 1858. See Haight, *George Eliot*, 252-4; Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, 94-106; Carol Martin, 'Two Unpublished Letters from John Blackwood on the Serialization of *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*,' *Publishing History* 37 (1995): 51-9.

[54] The editor filled the space with his own *Great Expectations*.

type of fiction in a particularised reading environment. Like any experienced journalist she had done her research on her target market. It is clear that Evans' narrator employs many of the same rhetorical devices as the essayistic personae of the non-fiction articles that appear alongside her stories in *Blackwood's*. There was an in-house tendency, for example, to directly pre-empt the audience's reaction to material in the magazine in both fiction and non-fiction articles. So often mistaken as the prescriptive moral voice of George Eliot sounding out her theories on fiction, this narrative persona is more accurately understood as part of Marian Evans' adopted magazine voice. The man who presents himself in the opening story of *Scenes* is a *Blackwood's* man: a conservative gentleman with Tory leanings, rural roots, and a certain nostalgia for the past and for tradition.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this narrative style is the frequent address to the reader through the three stories. Garrett Stewart has usefully diagnosed the technique generally as the 'relentless micromanagement of reaction in nineteenth-century narrative,'[55] and it is typical of *Blackwood's* interventionist style. 'The most intimate of magazines,'[56] *Blackwood's* was established in 1817 as a specifically Tory alternative to Constable's Whig *Edinburgh Review*, and as recent scholarship suggests, as a rival to the more reader-friendly *Scots Magazine*, also published by Constable.[57] It sought to associate itself with the élitist tradition of highbrow Quarterlies while aiming to reach a wider audience. Like the more rigorously intellectual triumvirate of *Quarterly*, *Edinburgh* and *Westminster*, *Blackwood's* included serious political and historical articles. Unlike them though, from the outset it set about cornering a popular readership by including lighter sketches, memoirs and sensational accounts (fictional and non-fictional), by appearing monthly rather than quarterly, and by adopting the more reader-friendly 'magazine' in the title. The commercial roots of this word, meaning storehouse for goods for sale, are suggestive of the more overt market-driven impetus to the monthly periodical. The eclectic nature of that storehouse further incorporates the mixed-bag character of a journal

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[55] Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in 19th-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 21. A detailed theorisation of the conscription of readers into narrative, Stewart virtually ignores the role of the periodical in shaping both audience and narratives through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Corporate productions, periodicals find their market through the macro management of reaction that necessarily influences individual novelist's imitation of the process on a more localised level.

[56] A. L. Strout, 'Concerning "Noctes Ambrosianae",' *Modern Language Notes* 51 (1936): 497.

[57] David Finkelstein, *The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 8.

such as *Blackwood's*. As competition for fiction-reading middle-class audiences increased from the 1830s onwards, *Blackwood's* made poetry and fiction a regular and substantial part of each issue. The intention seemed to be to make *Blackwood's* the family magazine: the more diverse content would attract those serious about reading but not necessarily desiring just serious reading material.

The intimacy and the élitism of the tone it paradoxically achieved is due in no small measure to the familiar conversational style of many of its contributors who incorporate a very masculine direct address to the reader in a way that underlines the sense of a collusive coterie. At the same time, the author wields knowledge – insider knowledge, intuitive knowledge – as power to be desired by the many. The famous 'Noctes Ambrosianae' section in the early years is the clearest articulation of this style with its clubby camaraderie and gossipy in-jokes. When Evans was writing for the magazine under John Blackwood (the fourth), fiction had become a much more established part of the magazine's profile. The literary sections occupied a substantial proportion of its contents and the political sections, dominant in the early years, were less prominent. 'For all its affected élitism', Michael Allen has observed, 'the magazine was careful to maintain its relationship with the popular audience' which included frequent dedications to its readers and regular trumpeting of circulation figures.[58]

By the time John Blackwood became editor in 1848, the 'slashing' essays that marked its early controversial reputation had toned down and 'Noctes Ambrosianae' had been wound up. But it still retained much of its early character. Though battered by the passing of Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill, to which it was vehemently opposed, it maintained a determinedly conservative position. A family-oriented magazine, John Blackwood impressed his consciousness of his audiences' needs on Evans from the beginning of their association, making clear too the ways he played on those needs. He explains to his new writer that he will open the January 1857 issue of the magazine with 'Amos':

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[58] Michael Allen, *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 22. Peaking in the early 1830s with sales figures reaching 8000, by the 1850s, *Blackwood's* sold between 6000-8000 each month. These figures of course only suggest the extent of the magazine's readership since each sale represents a number of readers which can never be fully determined. See Alvar Ellegård, 'The Readership of the Victorian Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain,' *Victorian Periodical Newsletter* 13 (September 1971): 3-22 and Morris Milne, 'The Management of a Nineteenth-century Magazine: William Blackwood and Sons 1827-47,' *Journal of Newspaper and*

> I put him in that position because his merits will entitle him to it – also because it is a vital point to attract public attention to the first part of a Series to which end being the first article of the first number of the year may contribute.[59]

That public reaction informs the way the editor, and by extension the writer, think about the production and placing of serial parts is reinforced throughout Blackwood's correspondence with Evans. In February he is anxious about the continuation of the clerical scenes:

> It would be a monstrous pity not to come on time with No. 2 of the series and I hope the M.S. is either on the way or will be dispatched in response to this. Do not of course hurry yourself to the detriment of the story; the perfecting of that must always be the first consideration, but it would be a serious disadvantage to baulk the public expectation now fairly raised.[60]

Consideration of 'public expectation' is crucial to the business of writing and this awareness is a characteristic feature of the *Magazine*. It cultivates familiarity with its audience across all types of writing that make up an individual volume. Informed by post-structuralist and cultural materialist arguments, nineteenth-century scholarship of the novel has recently begun to focus on the intertexual relationship between the fiction and non-fiction articles in periodicals. Such readings suggest the interdependence of what were hitherto read as distinct and independent genres; they illuminate the ways in which fiction writers attempted to overcome editorial strictures or demonstrate the effectiveness of editorial control directed towards the 'engineering of consent.'[61]

Charles Dickens provides us with telling nineteenth-century evidence of the

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Publishing History 1, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 24-33.

[59] 29 December 1856, *GEL*, 2: 283.

[60] 10 February 1857, ibid, 293.

[61] The phrase is Oscar Mauer's, ' "My Squeamish Public: Some Problems of Victorian Magazine Publishers and Editors,' *SB* 12 (1959): 24. For recent scholarship on the influence of the magazine context for our reading of Victorian fiction, see for example, Andrew Blake, *Reading Victorian Fiction: The Cultural Context and Ideological Context of the Nineteenth Century Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*; Wynne *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*; Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell's Work* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Pearson, *W. M. Thackeray and the Mediated Text*; Turner, *Trollope and the Magazines*; Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press'; Jordan and Patten, eds., *Literature in the Marketplace*; Patten, 'Dickens as Serial Author.'

ways in which the author envisaged his writing as contributing to a collective periodical culture that refuses to separate the writer from the context of his work. In an interesting elision in his preface to the last instalment of *Nicholas Nickleby* (which actually appeared in part publication, not as a magazine serial), Dickens names himself 'the periodical essayist, the Author of these pages.' Implying few qualms about generic distinction, he presents himself, quoting Mackenzie, as 'the author of a periodical performance'.[62] In revising our idea of authorial identity, the individuality of texts, and the economics of literary form, it is clearly important to keep in mind the persisting differences between the writing and reading of non-fiction and fiction that derive from the specific demands of modes, and the unfashionable, but nonetheless undeniable point of view of the individual writer and reader at any given historical moment. These positions, however, are notoriously hard to reconstitute for reasons suggested, for example, by post-structuralism's denial of the independent subject, late Marxist notions of interpellation, and the plain lack of historical detail on nineteenth-century reading experiences.

With these caveats in mind, contemporary textual evidence does imply the ways in which the nineteenth-century writer and reader of periodical literature understood and expected cross-genre consistency in individual publications. The *Blackwood*'s in which Evans' writing first appeared is indicative of such understanding and clearly informs the tone and rhetorical aspect of her first fiction. In the first issue of 1857, the efforts of each article writer (including Evans) to display a companionable self, for example, is everywhere evident. E. B. Hamley's piece on 'John de Castro' establishes its easy tone in two ways: the writer first casts himself as one of the crowd while at the same time declaring his credentials as a writer. A reluctant reader himself, he is also a corporate voice initially somewhat comic in his awkwardness, perhaps to win over his audience to his ordinariness: 'Nobody whose acquaintance with us is not (unfortunately for them) of considerable standing would suspect that we had ever been a great reader. A more illiterate person than we have been for several years past does not exist.'[63] Appearing as this article does on the pages of *Blackwood's* of course belies these claims and sets up the typical *Blackwood's* paradox of text and commentator belonging to the reader and informing the reader at once. The address to the audience towards the end of the article is direct:

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[62] Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London, 1839), ix-x.
[63] E. B Hamley, 'John Decastro,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 81 (January 1857): 99.

> Reader, did you never in the circle of your acquaintance know or hear of a man of original talent and excellent heart, whose good qualities were rendered nugatory by some ill habit – tippling, bad language or some such evil propensity, and who, after being pitied through life by his friends as 'nobody's enemy but his own' finally hides in an obscure grave, talents which might have made the fortune of half his generation?[64]

The 'sagacious reader' will no doubt see beyond the surface faults of this talented but flawed commentator, or see himself counted as one of the unwise. Evans' narrator takes a similar line of approach justifying her drawing attention to the old, ordinary gin-drinking Mr. Gilfil in the same journal two instalments later in March 1857:

> Here I am aware that I have run the risk of alienating all my refined lady-readers, and utterly annihilating any curiosity they may have felt to know the details of Mr. Gilfil's love-story. . . .
> But in the first place, dear ladies, allow me to plead that gin-and-water, like obesity, or baldness, or the gout, does not exclude a vast amount of antecedent romance.[65]

Both writers create the ideal conditions for the reception of their writing by appealing in part to the vanity of their audience. Anticipating rejection or criticism, they head off objections by manipulating the reading context so that refusal to engage with the material presented is a refusal to understand, to sympathise, to see and feel deeply. The rhetorical and defensive attack is a constant feature of periodical journalism born out of a knowingness that reader approbation is sign for the reader that he or she belongs, as argued in chapter one. There is also the clear implication that mystery lies beneath the surface of the most ordinary or commonplace surfaces, a feature more typical of *Blackwood*'s collusive approach and less frequent in quarterly publications. The 'antecedent romance' is precisely the drama Evans invokes to move us beyond the surface of 'dreary prose' that fails to sell periodicals.

One of George Henry Lewes' strongest features as a journalist was his ability to

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[64] Ibid., 121.
[65] 'Mr Gilfil,' 108.

write reader-friendly accounts on scientific or philosophical subjects that might otherwise be limited to specialist audiences.[66] In his article on sea anemones in the January issue of *Blackwood's*, he uses the same type of playful engagement with the reader which his audience expected and which made him a regular contributor to the Edinburgh journal. The article opens with a personalised and flattering tone with the critic as companion emphasising the amateur aspect to the practice of science that ensures knowledge is not beyond the reach of the many:

> as many of Maga's loving readers are possessors of vivaria, actual or potential, and will certainly not content themselves with blank wonderment but will do their utmost to rightly understand the anemones, even if they make no wider incursions on the domains of the zoologists, I may hope they will be interested if I group together the results of investigations . . . In the present state of knowledge, the independence of observations of who has any experience cannot be but welcome.[67]

But Lewes is aware his function is not just to flatter and to be of interest, he must also instruct, and to this end he engages in conversation with his (imagined) audience much as Evans does in the extract quoted above: 'the plant, you say, is nourished by the earth and air, the animal depends on what it can secure. I must contradict you; Indeed I must, although with the profoundest respect.'[68]

The tone of the *Magazine* is very much determined by this unfussy approachability that sets out to collude with readers and at times cunningly gain their agreement and approbation in reader traps. Evans' narrator, most noticeably in the first two stories of *Scenes* makes similar gestures to audience in this periodical conversational style. The debt to the eighteenth-century narrative voice is of course obvious. But as Kathleen Tillotson and John Butt have pointed out in their study of Dickens' serial fiction, the most influential model for both the eighteenth-century novelists and their nineteenth-century counterparts is the periodical press. They

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[66] This aspect to Lewes's work more unfortunately earned him the reputation of being a light-weight intellectual captured in Carlyle's assessment of Lewes as 'an airy loose-tongued, merry-hearted being with more sail than ballast'. Thomas Carlyle, to his sister Mrs. Aitken, 25 April 1850, cited in Rosemary Ashton, *George Henry Lewes: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 96.

[67] George Henry Lewes, 'New Facts and Old Fancies About Sea Anemones,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 81 (January 1857): 58-9.

[68] Ibid., 60.

suggest the De Coverley papers are 'on the whole – the nearest precedent offered by the eighteenth century for the serial novel'. David Carroll's definition of Evans' fictional narrator more generally as both casuist and companion, though he does not address the issue, similarly indicates the writer's indebtedness to the periodical's conversational and instructive essay style.[69]

The typicality of this 'casuist-companion' writing can be seen in the series of letter-articles that appear in the *Blackwood's* in the 1850s, some of which coincide with the clerical scenes. In the February 1857 instalment, for example, there are two such articles: G. C. Swayne's 'Ticket-of-leave: a Letter to Irenaeus' and the first of W. E. Aytoun's 'Letters from a Lighthouse' series.[70] Both pieces, in different ways, attack the ticket-of-leave system of criminal justice and in opposition to liberal government, express conservative attitudes towards the operation of law. Both, too, are typical of the personality-focussed journalism characteristic of the magazine that is in marked contrast to quarterly writings. 'Phosphorous' writes from his Pictarnie lighthouse of the glut of material that makes up contemporary periodical literature in a humorous and sly attack on the po-faced quarterlies that were *Blackwood's* rivals for prestige:

> I have read, sir, very nearly through the whole periodical literature of Great Britain published during the last eight years; and I have arrived at the deliberate conclusion that the said floating literature has been gradually becoming water-logged, and is in great danger of disappearing like the mysterious islet of Lochlomond.

There is a pointed criticism of the style of the intellectual quarterlies, of journals like the *Westminster* and their journalists like Marian Evans. The writer goes on to characterise the *Blackwood's* reader as the ideal reader in his intelligence but ordinariness, in his desire to be entertained which the writer, as Evans had learned, should never forget:

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[69] Butt and Tillotson, *Dickens at Work*, 72; Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, 5-6. For Dickens' indebtedness to the eighteenth-century periodical tradition, in particular to the *Spectator* and to Goldsmith's *Bee*, see also Grahame Smith, *Charles Dickens: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 60-85.

[70] G. C. Swayne, 'Ticket-of-leave: a letter to Iranaeus,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 81 (February 1857):

> Time was when the Quarterlies supplied a stock of reading which if not very pungent, was at least easy of digestion, suited to the comprehension of the numerous class of consumers who do not affect unusual profundity and occasionally relieved by a touch of something which it was possible to mistake for humour. But all this has disappeared. The new brood of contributors are much too learned for their audience, and you might as well look for liveliness at an undertaker's wedding, as within the pages of a Quarterly review.[71]

Reading one number gave this reader a 'fit of colic' as 'six or eight fellows, each more heavy-sterned than the other, trudged by in succession bearing burdens of bosh upon their shoulders'.[72] This self-promoting piece defends the more lightweight *Magazine* to make its accessibility and familiarity of style – epitomised by its cosy nickname, *Maga* – a moral requisite almost of published pieces.

In a gibing set-piece against the antiquarian who inhabits the pages of quarterlies, a 'learned' article in a recent publication is seen to derive its authority from our writer's self-confessed drunken ramblings in an Egyptian Bar.[73] In this way, the article also suggests that a blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction is typical of the periodical press. The authoritative voice of so-called objective, learned pieces is undercut by this clearly flawed essayistic figure. Such blurring further promotes the ethos of the miscellaneous magazine where the brief to instruct is always underscored with greater attention to the need to entertain. In this environment, Evans' personality-driven narrator in *Scenes* is entirely at home, alternately intrusive, heckling, condoning, populist, learned, and foolish. His many, often eccentric, aspects reflect the dual focus of the *Magazine*.

In 'How to write a Blackwood's Article,' Edgar Allan Poe offers a programmatic parody of the in-house tone of the famous British magazine in a first person account of an instructive meeting with John Blackwood (the third) where the blustering editor gives away his in-house secrets. Poe's fanciful narrator, Signora Psyche Zenobia, urged on by an expert in magazine writing, the none too subtly named 'Dr. Moneypenny,' approaches the famous Scottish editor for advice on how

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178-88; W. E. Aytoun, 'Letters from a lighthouse,' ibid, 227-42.
[71] Aytoun, 'Letters from a lighthouse,' 228.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 229.

to write a *Blackwood's* article. Though repetitious and overt rather than cutting in much of its parody, the piece, like all caricature, nonetheless touches on some revealing generalisations about the well-established magazine that characteristically boasted of its unchanged traditional ethos through the decades. Like Dickens, Poe's Blackwood and Zenobia do not distinguish between fictional and miscellaneous pieces. The only distinction suggested is made between political and non-political articles. 'Tone' is an in-house quality that all writers adopt. The types of 'tone' accumulated in Poe's parody move from the sensation article to the broader caricature of the essayistic or fictional persona of all *Blackwood's* non-political articles. We can see that Evans' narrator takes his shape from the models suggested here. These offer tone didactic, enthusiastic, natural, laconic, tone 'elevated, diffuse, interjectional'; 'Blackwood' points out, 'some of our best novelists patronise this tone'. The most flexible tone, though, is 'tone heterogeneous': 'It is merely a judicious mixture in equal proportions of all the other tones in the world and is consequently made up of everything deep, great, odd, piquant, pertinent and pretty.'[74] This mixed tone helps to characterise the conflicting and often confusing registers of Evans' narrator in *Scenes*. He is, for instance, quite unlike Mrs. Oliphant's guide in the less successful *The Athelings*, which was serialised alongside Evans' stories. Her narrator is a mild, didactic omniscient type, and her readers were not amused. It is 'in construction and execution altogether feminine,' George Meredith complained in the *Westminster* following republication of the serial in volume format. His point of attack is precisely the formulaic aspect to the middle-class magazine serial :

> We have to look through her three volumes again and again to discover how it is she can possibly have contrived to spin out dreary conversation to such an extent as to fill them, and preserve a vestige of interest. The secret is that the novel is addressed to the British Home, and it seems that we may prose everlastingly to the republic of the fireside.[75]

Evans' narrator, in contrast, is much less easy to categorise: part character, part omniscient figure, part male, part female, given to objective description, subjective intervention, pompous indignation and compassionate generosity of spirit. He is

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[74] Poe, 'How to write a *Blackwood*'s article,' 342-3
[75] [George Meredith], 'Belles Lettres,' *Westminster Review* 67 (October 1857), 596.

enough of a Tory and a gentleman to satisfy the 'republic of the fireside' but is idiosyncratic enough to be of interest to those (like Meredith) wishing to extend the boundaries of audience expectation beyond the British Home. His professed maleness is important in this regard because it makes him a more readily respected guide and protects him from dismissive judgements of being 'altogether feminine'.

At times, though, the narrator's mirroring of the typical *Blackwood's* voice seems almost parodic. The fictional *Blackwood's* most important piece of advice to Psyche Zenobia is made clear in Poe's tale: 'The most important portion – in fact, the soul of the whole business ... is the *filling up* – the impression on your readers of your erudition and wide-range of reading – however false the impression' and he concludes, 'In a Blackwood article nothing makes so fine a show as your Greek. The very letters have an air of profundity about them.'[76] Evans' narrator does not disappoint in this regard. He proclaims his own ignorance and limitations on the one hand while immediately following up these claims with untranslated quotations in Greek.[77] Such erratic behaviour has led to complaints by critics of a failure in consistency by the 'apprentice' writer. Thomas Noble, for example, draws attention to the 'laboured facetiousness in diction and phraseology which runs through the narrator's comments in contrast to the perfectly realistic speech of the characters' and claims that this unevenness 'strikes most modern readers' as a 'defect in style' though it was 'undoubtedly considered humorous by the first readers.'[78] This is precisely the point, though Noble does not address it: these features of narrative commentary are typically included to amuse because the first readers of the story were magazine readers. When models for this type of pattern are seen, even in parody, such instability emerges as a constant feature of magazine material and typical of the varied and contradictory character of the (male) casuist and companion of *Blackwood's* pages.[79] Elizabeth Ermath has argued that to avoid ascribing misleading views or theories on fiction or philosophy to Marian Evans we must be careful not to take the narrator's statements as an 'unconscious result of a psychological leak on the author's part'. The observation is an important one, but it must be noted too, as

[76] Poe, 'How to write a *Blackwood*'s article,' 346.
[77] 'Amos Barton,' 52.
[78] Noble, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 102.
[79] Ermath's assessment of the narrative voice as 'conspicuously inclusive and resistant to judgmental distinctions' which 'typically presents itself in dialogue: not as one voice with a single correct view, but as several voices with competing views, and including even some irony at the expense of the reader,' touches on the specific features of the essayist's mediating role typified by Montaigne as

Scenes demonstrates, neither is he an entirely 'individual agent' as she puts it, since there is clearly a corporate aspect to the narrative figure that owes much to the *Blackwood's* man.[80]

In his negotiations with the still faceless author of these *Scenes*, John Blackwood was cautious of premature commitment to the series. He explained his circumspection to the go-between, George Henry Lewes in November 1856:

> Although not much given to hesitate about anything, I always think twice before I put the decisive mark 'in type for the Magazine' on any MS from a stranger.
>
> Fancy the intense annoyance (to say nothing of more serious considerations) of publishing month after month a series about which the conviction gradually forces itself on you that you have made a total blunder. [81]

It is telling that Blackwood went against his natural prudence about such matters by taking on Evans' series based on the first two parts alone. He had a 'high opinion of this first tale' with its 'great freshness of style' but a significant contributing factor must have been the fact that 'Amos' was so obviously of a type for the *Magazine*.

In the same issue as Phosphorus' letter, Evans opens the second part of 'Amos' with what is possibly the most famous extract from *Scenes*. When looked at in the context of the magazine, however, the so-called philosophy of fiction propounded by 'George Eliot' is not so original or strident nor should it be sequestered from the pages of the magazine as the author's clear manifesto. It is worth quoting at length to demonstrate its shared heritage with its surrounding material:

> The Rev. Amos Barton, whose sad fortunes I have undertaken to relate, was, you perceive, in no respect an ideal or exceptional character; and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable – a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast . . . 'An utterly uninteresting character!' I

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outlined in my first chapter. See Ermath, *George Eliot*, 59.

[80] Ibid., 139.

[81] 18 November 1856, *GEL*, 2: 275.

> think I hear a lady reader exclaim – Mrs. Farthingale, for example, who prefers the ideal in fiction; to whom tragedy means ermine tippets, adultery, and murder; and comedy, the adventures of some personage who is quite a 'character.'
>
> But, my dear madam, it is so very large a majority of your fellow-countrymen that are of this insignificant stamp. At least eighty out of a hundred of your adult male fellow-Britons returned in the last census are neither extraordinarily silly, nor extraordinarily wicked, nor extraordinarily wise; their eyes are neither deep and liquid with sentiment nor sparkling with suppressed witticisms; they have probably had no hairbreadth escapes or adventures; their brains are certainly not pregnant with genius, and their passions have not manifested themselves at all after the fashion of a volcano. They are simply men of complexions more or less muddy, whose conversation is more or less bald and disjointed.[82]

The stand against sensationalist fiction is obvious but Evans is not claiming anything new here. As many commentators have pointed out, Bronte, Thackeray, Oliphant, and Gaskell, among others, had all been writing novels with ordinary, flawed characters well before Evans. In her preface to *The Professor*, first sent for publication in 1847 and eventually published after her death in 1857, Charlotte Bronte announces her motivation:

> I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs – that he should never get a shilling he had not earned – that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment of wealth . . . that he should not marry a beautiful nor a rich wife, nor a lady of rank – As Adam's son he should share Adam's doom – Labour throughout life and a mixed and moderate enjoyment.

In this age of periodical entertainment, such a story, however, does not succeed, as she goes on to explain:

> I found that Publishers in general – scarcely approved of this system, but

[82] 'Amos Barton,' 53-4.

> would have liked something more imaginative and poetical – something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, *with a native taste for pathos* . . . Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real – on trial this idea will be often found fallacious: a passionate preference for the wild, wonderful and thrilling – the strange, startling and harrowing agitates diverse souls that shew a calm and sober surface.[83]

The balance between asserting the claims for ordinariness of protagonists, which was becoming increasingly necessary in a market driven by the middle-classes, and the demand for entertainment beyond the ordinariness of dull prose, was the formula desired by editors and fulfilled by writers. The challenge was to blend the drama with the ordinary and Evans does exactly this in her highly rhetorical opening to the second instalment of 'Amos' cited above. In his story, like those of Tina, Gilfil, Tryan, and Janet Dempster, action proceeds through the narrator's focus on the drama behind the apparent 'calm and sober surface' of their lives.

The soapbox quality of her opening chapter of 'Amos' is also understandable in the work of a writer new to fiction defensively justifying the choice of subject and validity of the tale. In his examination of the relationship between Wordsworth and the Victorians, Stephen Gill has pointed to the way in which both Evans and Wordsworth 'announce the beginning of their careers as imaginative artists with imperious manifestos'. 'Wordsworth', he argues, 'was always a programmatic writer, not, that is, one who worked to a programme, but one who was always ready to conceptualise his aims and justify his achievements with reference to a plan. So was George Eliot. Each writer makes declarations about truth and falsehood in art as if writing *ab initio*, as if previous debates had not existed.'[84] Gill focuses on chapter seventeen of *Adam Bede* to support his thesis. *Scenes* is bypassed, though it was her

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[83] Charlotte Bronte, *The Professor*, eds. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten, with an introduction by Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1, 2. In her introduction, Smith cites Francis Trollope's narrator in *One Fault* making claims for the ordinariness of her protagonists which Smith notes was a commonplace ploy in fiction of the 1840s: 'The persons of the story I am about tell were neither of high rank nor of distinguished fashion' and worse still. The narrative cannot by possibility be forced to become one of romantic interest. Ordinary everyday human beings, and ordinary everyday events are my theme,' cited in Smith, 'Introduction,' *The Professor*, xi.

[84] Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 151, 153. Janice Carlisle makes a similar argument comparing Bronte's preface to *Shirley* with chapter five of 'Amos' but Carlisle implies Evans was not aware of the fact that her claims for her fiction were not unique. She expresses surprise at the writer's 'willingness to use narrative techniques that had become by 1856 conventions of a well-established and distinct tradition.' Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience*, 169.

first outing as an 'imaginative artist.' These stories with their 'imperious' claims, perhaps bespeak too obviously their roots in a periodical tradition, especially in their setting forth of framework by which the reader is to interpret the story. The romantic conception of the independent artist is threatened by such an obviously produced social text as Jerome McGann has so ably argued elsewhere.[85]

Swayne's letter from Tlepolemus to Iraneus in the February 1857 issue of *Blackwood*'s foregrounds this social aspect to the *Blackwood's* article. The article takes a much more convivial tone than that offered by the sometimes irate Phosphorus in his Lighthouse. He explains the need for magnanimity and charm in his opening paragraphs: 'There is a grave old lady called Maga looking over my shoulder while I write, and I am obliged to be circumspect in consequence.'[86] This extent of such self-censorship is impossible to recover or to quantify. Anthony Trollope, for instance, both a journalist and writer of serial fiction, claimed such self-censorship was pervasive in all that he wrote.[87] There is also a type of censorship that can announce itself more insistently to the serial storywriter in the course of her writing. Unlike Trollope who generally finished a work before sending it for publication in parts, Evans, like Dickens and Thackeray, wrote from instalment to instalment. As a result, as Carol Martin has shown of *Romola*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*, adjustments to plot, character and narrative shape are made in response to editorial, critical and readers' demands.[88]

Other restrictions suggest themselves in the course of writing and changes are made accordingly. *Maga*'s innate conservatism, for example, was well known to Evans. The most often reported example of the editor's sensitivity to controversy emerged while she was writing 'Janet's Repentance.' Lewes sent off an article on his sea-side studies to Blackwood and the editor sent it back for revisions requesting that he should be more circumspect in the section dealing with the excretory and reproductive systems of sea anemones since particularised detail offered a potential source of offence. Lewes's reply is one Evans never so openly dared to send to her editor, though the worldly Lewes tellingly does as his editor requests:

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[85]See McGann, *Towards Literature of Knowledge*. See also Smith, *Charles Dickens*, 1-20 where he demonstrates how Dickens' success can be linked to the way in which he embraced the material reality of the socially produced text.

[86] Swayne, 'Ticket-of-leave: a Letter to Iranaeus,' 173.

[87] Trollope, *Autobiography*, 143.

[88] See Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*.

> I shall cut the objectionable faeces altogether. But you must confess it is an awful wet blanket on a writer's shoulders, that terror of lady readers and what they will exclaim against. I am tempted to exclaim with Charles Lamb 'Hang up the ladies! I will write for antiquity!' The passage you objected to about desires was playful but I perceive it may be misinterpreted and shall change it altogether.[89]

Such prudish sensitivity to 'lady readers' stemmed from a very restricted and limited conception of women in the mid-century that was not confined to the pages of *Maga*.[90] These prejudices, however, affected not only the writers of non-fiction work in this conservative publication. They were obvious too in the reviews of work by women and in the depiction of women in fictional work included in the magazine. A woman in an unorthodox relationship, even with the safety net of her pseudonym, Evans was certainly conscious of the conservative beliefs of her editor, readers and fellow writers.

Described by one critic as 'consistently prejudiced against women writers'[91] from its earliest years, its deep-rooted biases were clearly demonstrated for Evans' *Blackwood's* audience in W. E. Aytoun's review of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* which followed the first instalment of 'Amos Barton' in the January 1857 issue.[92] Aytoun was one of the most regular reviewers for the magazine. His claims to be a representative voice of the *Maga* are not lightly made and his admission that his views are 'more chivalric than commonly promulgated', read less as a qualification of his judgement and more as a transparent acknowledgement of the magazine's bias towards his type of criticism.[93] The review is revealing for a number of reasons. It articulates a dominant tone of *Blackwood's* attitude to poetry, prose, and women writers. And in doing so, signals for writers new to this magazine such as Evans, who was always attentive to the differing demands of different publications, the gender and generic expectations of both the audience and fellow *Blackwood's*

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[89] 3 May 1857, *GEL*, 2: 325.
[90] See Kate Flint's overview, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[91] Michael Mundy, 'Jane Austen, Women Writers and *Blackwood's Magazine*,' *Notes and Queries* 20 (1973): 290.
[92] W. E. Aytoun, 'Aurora Leigh,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 81 (January 1857): 23-41.
[93] Ibid., 33.

contributors. The portrayal of Milly Barton, written before Evans would have seen this review is tailored to the *Blackwood's* style. She is feminine, devoted, self-sacrificing and never questions her dominant husband's flawed judgement and actions. Even the villain of the story, the Countess Czerlaski bows out when the impropriety of her position and the strain she is placing on the married woman are pointed out.

Female characters like these no doubt met with the approval of Blackwood, and of Aytoun who lambastes Barrett Browning for her unattractive characterisation of Romney, the hero, as a 'milksop' and the heroine Aurora as thoroughly 'unfeminine'. The *Blackwood's* reader and writer cannot countenance such subversion:

> we must maintain that woman was created to be dependent on the man and not in the primary sense his lady and his mistress. The extreme independence of Aurora detracts from her feminine charm and mars the interest we might have otherwise felt in so intellectual a heroine.

The lists of complaints against Elizabeth Barrett Browning begin with a condemnation of the narrow-minded egoism of magazine critics in general. Aytoun explains he is not the type of hot-headed critic who takes on writers for the sake of controversy, and who, in particular, gripes against women writers. This preface establishes the writer of this review as a reasonable man and representative voice of *Blackwood's*. He asserts that the *Maga* is always a 'repository of fair criticism'. It is not perfect, but since so much criticism is subjective – how could it be? Nonetheless, he maintains an authoritative objective tone in his approach to Barrett Browning's work. He attacks the poem for its 'fanciful, exaggerated and therefore grotesque picture of life' accusing the poet of 'perpetuating, in essentials, an extravaganza or caricature instead of giving the public a real life picture'. These clearly expressed expectations from the 'fair' pen of the *Maga* go on to set out the principles of art in an even more prescriptive and pointed manner. Genius is not sufficient, Aytoun argues: 'Artists, like architects must work by role – not slavishly indeed, but ever keeping in mind that there are certain principles which experience has tested and approved and that to deviate from them is literally to court defeat.'[94] Anxious to succeed in the first

[94] Aytoun, '*Aurora Leigh*,' 33, 34, 32.

part of her new experiment, Evans was not likely to go into battle courting defeat. To stave it off in 'Amos', she chose what appeared to be an entirely conventional heroine, and a typically '*Maga*' narrator who repeatedly proclaimed the authenticity of his account.

In a pointed dismissal of Browning's work, Aytoun derides the writer for being 'too like George Sand',[95] an unintentional irony that the as yet unnamed 'George Eliot' no doubt noted. Evans was an admirer of both the radical French writer and Barrett Browning's poem, and she too was soon made very aware of the patriarchal tone of *Blackwood's* pages.[96] She encountered it personally in Blackwood's response to her depiction of both Tina and Janet in the second and third stories of *Scenes*, written after she would have read this review. Both heroines at once incorporate and challenge the *Blackwood's* pointers for characterisation outlined by Aytoun here in what can be read as an intriguing intertextual and extra-textual debate.

Janet Dempster's story certainly fulfils the demand for a realistic and unexaggerated picture of life. She is a subservient, long-suffering woman, loyal to her husband and kind to children and the elderly, and extremely devout. But she is also an alcoholic and she changes religious camps to become a devotee of the extremist Evangelical, Rev. Tryan. She is thrown out of her house by her husband on a stormy night for her rebellion against his behaviour and is left to wander the streets of Milby in confusion in her nightdress. She finds refuge with a neighbour, finds strength in Tryan's message of redemption through suffering, but much of the last part of the narrative is spent detailing her very unheroic struggle with alcohol withdrawal.[97] The controversial characterisation in this story, the grim realism of its setting, the potentially subversive criticism of the established church, and Janet's unfeminine flaws all worried Blackwood from the outset. 'Surely the colours are too harsh for a

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[95] Ibid., 33.

[96] Evans was reading *Aurora Leigh* for the second time while writing *Scenes* and had reviewed it in *Westminster* also in January 1857. Though she was critical of points of dialogue in the text, and of the 'lavish mutilation of hero's bodies,' the usual fodder for novelists, she suggests, she praises the 'deep sensibility' that controls the material. In an intriguing demonstration of the duplicity in her journalistic persona, she singles out the influence of her gender: 'It is difficult to point to a woman of genius who is not either too little feminine or too exclusively so. But in this, her longest and greatest poem, Mrs Browning has shown herself all the greater poet because she is intensely a poetess.' [Evans], 'Belles Lettres,' *Westminster Review* 66 (January 1857), 306-8. Evans read *Blackwood's* regularly and would have seen Aytoun's review in the January 1857 issue Blackwood sent to her in December 1856, well before her completion of the second two parts of the series.

[97] 'Janet's Repentance,' chapter xvi, chapter xxiv.

sketch of English country town life only twenty-five years ago,' he writes to Evans. And though he acknowledges the unfortunate authenticity of Janet's domestic situation, he makes his concerns for his readers known: 'Dempster is rather too barefaced a brute and I am sorry that the poor wife's suffering should have driven her to so *unsentimental* a resource as beer.' He had similar concerns about Tina's intention to kill the man who spurned her in 'Mr. Gilfil.'[98]

The unsentimentality of characterisation in 'Janet's Repentance' is all the more conspicuous for its stark contrast to the heightened pathos of the portrait of Milly Barton. The uncomplaining, model wife and mother epitomises the stereotype of ideal womanhood, described in almost breathless fashion by the narrator in adjectival overdrive early in the first part of this first story:

> She was a lovely woman – Mrs. Amos Barton; a large, fair, gentle Madonna, with thick close, chestnut curls beside her well-rounded cheeks, and with large, tender, short-sighted eyes. The flowing lines of her tall figure made the limpest dress look graceful, and her old frayed black silk seemed to repose on her bust and limbs with a placid elegance . . .
>
> Soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions, all accomplishments.[99]

Cautiously imitating the conventional platitudes of gender stereotype, Milly remains the ideal woman; her goodness eventually transforming the hearts of her selfish husband and bitter neighbours. Thus far, 'Amos' is a fairly typical sentimental tale. The transition from 'Angel of the House' Milly to Alcoholic Janet could be seen as one indication of the way in which Evans took on the limitations of Aytoun's line on acceptable depictions of womanhood. There is also the fact that Evans grew in confidence with her bolder painting of potentially disruptive images of women as her position with Blackwood became more established. But as Nancy Cervetti has pointed out, the self-sacrificing Milly as suffering Madonna is also a potentially negative role model. Arguing that Evans' agnosticism should lead us to see that the 'spiritual' reading of the story of idealised woman is only true if Evans believed and she did not, Cervetti claims, 'the role of the good female Christian subject is a lethal one' in this

[98] 8 June 1857, *GEL*, 2: 344, emphasis added; 11 March 1857, ibid., 308.
[99] 'Amos Barton,' 21. See also, ibid., 77.

story. In context, it is possible to see how Evans is at once playing the appropriate gender game and subverting it. Cervetti cites the example of the personalised narrator, chatting with his audience, revealing his biases as well as his omniscience as a clear indication that, contrary to conventional criticism, these stories are 'anything but "immanent" and "natural", and his word on Milly, by implication, open to questioning.[100]

The double-reading of Milly's character can not only be inferred from Evans' own beliefs, or lack of belief, however. The village chorus narrating the various instances of Amos' neglect of his wife and his wife's own unquestioning submission to the will of this weak man provide an undermining counter commentary to the narrator's.[101] And their criticism of Milly as an over-timorous and weak woman is clearly justified since her refusal to act against her husband's foolishness precipitates her death, leaving her children without a mother. The gossip surrounding the countess, it is made clear, could have been easily resolved with decisive action from the woman of the house since a bitter eye-opening word from Nanny, the 'maid-of-all-work,' sees Czerlaski demonstrate a change of heart, realise the difficulty she has been causing and leave.[102]

The split narrative, though, is often explained away as part of the moral of the tale. If we listen to the village gossip and judge as gossips do, we are culpable too in Milly's death. And like them we are exposed and shamed by the revelation of facts: there was no adultery between Amos and the 'Countess,' there is no sensational mystery to Czerlaski's past. To pay heed to innuendo is to prize the salacious over the factual:

> Nice distinctions are troublesome. It is so much easier to say that a thing is black, than to discriminate the particular shade of brown, blue, or green, to which it really belongs. It is so much easier to make up your mind that your neighbour is good for nothing than to enter into all the circumstances that would oblige you to modify that opinion.[103]

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[100] Nancy Cervetti, 'The Resurrection of Milly Barton: At the Nexus of Production, Text and Reproduction,' *Women's Studies* 21, no. 3 (1992): 351, 350, 354-5. In particular, Cervetti takes on what she presents as the 'phallic criticism' of F.R. Leavis, Bernard Paris, and more recently, Stephen Marcus and Daniel Cottom that over-simplifies Eliot's work.
[101] 'Amos Barton,' 65, 71.
[102] Ibid., 80-1.
[103] Ibid., 48.

This call on the reader to be more discriminating, to avoid the ease of reductive judgement is presented by the narrator, and accepted by many of Evans' critics, as a call to be wary of the simplifications of the extreme view, the melodramatic.[104] But it could serve too as a criticism of Milly's unbending idea of the role of a good Christian wife who thinks too well of her neighbour and her husband to everyone's detriment.

Contradictions persist in the narrative, opening the possibility for a double-reading of all characters that forces us to appreciate the difficulty of 'nice distinctions' so often demanded by the broad-stroke of magazine writing. Throughout this first story, for example, we are confronted with strategically placed rhetorical apostrophes to readers advising them to look elsewhere if they want sensational or thrilling tales. At the beginning of the first chapter of the second instalment, a crucial place to recapture your audience, we are told in a direct address, if we find Amos' tale too 'homely' or 'beneath . . . attention,'

> you can if you please decline to pursue my story further; and you will easily find reading more to your taste, since I learn from the newspapers that many remarkable novels, full of striking situations, thrilling incidents, and eloquent writing, have appeared only within the last season.

But this appeal, and the mocking 'apology' in chapter seven from the narrator, that without 'fertile imagination' he is unable to 'invent thrilling incidents for your amusement,'[105] are both followed by scenes of heightened pathos and sensational incidents. In chapter five we are given a heart-tugging description of Milly's decline and the staging of what the narrator terms a 'little scene,' between the self-sacrificing wife and her loving son, which brings tears to the 'unsentimental eyes' of Mrs. Hackit. This is almost immediately proceeded by an account of Czerlaski's brother, the wealthy, middle-class, stolid Bridman, who was found kissing the maid in the

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[104] Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London: Athlone Press, 1963), 28; Janice Carlisle likewise suggests, 'Gossip . . . is authoritatively dismissed by the narrator's revelation of the simple truth.' I would argue, however, that the narrator persistently complicates the possibility of 'simple truths' and, ironically, in her use of the melodramatic, Evans reinforces the difficulty of simple judgement. See Carlisle, *Sense of an Audience*, 181.

[105] 'Amos Barton,' 54. See also, ibid., 74.

dining room by his sister and is now 'bent on marrying her.' The outraged countess moves in with the Bartons, understandably fuelling gossip about her intentions.[106] A deliberately pathetic and highly stylised account of Milly's decline and death follows the protestations of the narrator's incapacity to spin a good yarn in chapter seven. Similarly, in 'Mr. Gilfil,' Tina's commitment in the clarifying morning light to restrain her dramatic outbursts at the beginning of chapter six is sabotaged by the author's decision to charge up the emotional engine of the story once again by shortening the chapter to a mere few paragraphs, feeling the need, it seems, like Caterina, of 'rapid movement' to create a 'scene.' The overwrought heroine is taunted by Wybrow, the object of her desires, and is driven from his presence in tears. The predictable Gilfil, epitomised by his calm pastimes of fishing and carpentry is transformed into an over-reacting irrational lover who comes to the most melodramatic conclusions about Tina's disappearance following Wybrow's death. He first thinks she has killed him, then gone mad and killed herself.[107] The narrator reassures us of the rational and planned nature of Tina's departure, listing the items taken with her such as her saved shillings, all of which belied the possibility of suicide. This is followed by the image of Gilfil 'turning up the heaps of dead leaves, as if it were possible her dear body could be hidden there'. Evans even gives us the formulaic picture of the house-bound but hidden madwoman, here behind the cabinet rather than in the attic:

> Then another horrible thought recurred, and before each night came he had been again through all the uninhabited rooms of the house to satisfy himself once more that she was not hidden behind some cabinet, or door, or curtain – that he should not find her there with madness in her eyes, looking and looking, and yet not seeing him.[108]

The melodramatic scenes of pathos and excess that drive the plots of all three stories have ties with both the eighteenth-century literature of sentiment and the post-enlightenment privileging of feeling that characterised writing of the Romantic Movement. George Eliot's credentials as a romantic humanist have been well

[106] Ibid., 56, 56-7, 60-62.
[107] 'Mr Gilfil,' 213, 222-224, 228.
[108] Ibid., 228.

documented.[109] Critics from Knoepflmacher to McSweeney have remarked on the vacillation in *Scenes* from protestations of ordinary truth-telling to actual scenes of tragic loss, hinted adultery and incest, failed romance, threatened suicide, and murder; from realised scenes of domestic physical abuse to highly stylised pathos.[110] This aspect of her writing though, has never been linked to the periodical tradition from which it derives. Though Evans avoids, for the most part, the 'cliff-hanger' conclusions that typified obvious serial fiction fare, as Carol Martin has observed, and as epitomised by Oliphant's *The Athelings*, *Scenes* nonetheless is structured around the play between realistic detail and emotive or sensationalised scenes.[111] The final section of 'Janet's Repentance,' for instance, invokes the increasingly popular swift juxtaposition of scenes cross-cutting from the image of Dempster's body ('No one knows whether he is alive or dead') to a calm Tryan in his study contemplating his mission to convert Janet, back to a report of Dempster's accident.[112]

As a journalist and serial writer, Evans was embedded in a periodical culture where claims on the reader's attention were so often pitched at an emotional as well as a rational level, much like advertising or cinema today, in a highly competitive market. It was a literary culture that did not divorce the realistic from the melodramatic.[113] Despite her deep reservations about Evans' use of melodrama, Barbara Hardy acknowledges as much in her assessment of these swings from realism to high drama:

> The ordinariness is there in the understated events and characters. But it is a lively image of ordinariness, not a flatly realistic presentation. It is enlivened by anti-climax and irony, by isolated melodrama and by the changing formal contrast between groups and voices.[114]

The animation of the sensational is needed to enliven the mundane. This diagnosis has

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[109] See for instance, Newton, *George Eliot Romantic Humanist;* Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians.*
[110] Knoepflmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, 5, 58, 64, 67; McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 56.
[111] Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, 51.
[112] 'Janet's Repentance,' 407-9. On this technique, see Judith L. Fisher, 'The "Sensational Scene" in Charles Dickens and Dion Boucicault,' *Dramatic Dickens*, ed. Carol Hanbery Mackay (London: Macmillan, 1989), 153.
[113] The 'ubiquity of the realistic mode in urban melodrama' of the working classes is noted in particular by Michael R. Booth, 'Melodrama and the Working Class,' *Dramatic Dickens*, ed. Carold Hanbery Mackay (London: Macmillan, 1989), 104.
[114] Hardy, *Novels of George Eliot*, 30.

implications not only for sale of magazines. A finely discriminated balancing of the need to fulfil reader expectations for entertainment while assuring her middle-class audiences of the inherent value in the reading process was a considerable demand on the periodical writer. Dickens was aware of the demand in all he wrote according to Paul Schlicke: 'In his fiction and his journalism Dickens never abandoned his intention of providing entertainment. However sophisticated the achievement of his artistry was to become, and however polemical the purpose of his journalism, he always considered both activities suitable outlets for his profession as an entertainer.'[115] So did Evans, and to achieve this balance in her first fiction she turned to the melodramatic.

Periodical melodrama, which incorporated both the sensational and the domestic by the late 1850s, was a recurrent feature of *Blackwood's* articles. Evans recognised its appropriateness for a *Blackwood's* story and profited from the use of the melodramatic mode economically, culturally and aesthetically. She uses its tactics to enliven her tale for her serial readers; taps into the mid-Victorian taste for pathos and drama to produce an acceptable *Blackwood's* tale; and finally she attempts to formulate a narrative aesthetic around the melodramatic that moves it beyond the merely commercial and familiar to suggest the ambivalence and impenetrability of melodrama's 'mute text'.[116] There are inevitable difficulties to this project that sees the writer trying to satisfy too many parties at once. Evans' uneasiness with the simplicities of melodrama's stark polarisation of characters, for instance, and her complication of the moral message that always sees virtue justified if not always rewarded, constantly shadow the surface straightforwardness of these stories. At the same time, she persistently plays up the emotive and the pathetic in her narrative in a deliberate and unapologetic way. But she recognised too that the inevitable emphasis on the melodramatic, on the 'surface' of the text, could allow her to escape to some extent the prescriptions of formula magazine writing that demanded clear messages and legible scenes. These contradictions are grounded in the magazine's heritage as a forum for both instruction and entertainment. And as the next section will demonstrate, they help to shape the much-celebrated layered complexities of George

[115] Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, 228-9.

[116] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Hale University Press, 1976), 56. The term refers to the way in which the melodramatic is formulated, not through language but 'through the register of the sign' used as metaphor to signify the 'second drama', 'hidden behind the written drama', ibid., 75.

Eliot's writings, though the periodical context of her first fiction is rarely credited with such a fundamental shaping role.

Real Drama: *Scenes*' Generic Play

The nearly paradigmatic presence of melodrama's defining features throughout nineteenth-century English literary culture, as Elaine Hadley notes, has been increasingly acknowledged by Victorian critics.[117] Its features are characteristic of the serial fiction that is the staple of that other pervasive presence in the nineteenth-century cultural scene, the periodical. Peter Brooks has pointed out that the novel in the nineteenth century 'maintained an unembarrassed relationship to popular entertainment';[118] the mixed bag format of the periodical has no small part to play in this bridging of cultures.

The role of the periodical in making melodrama acceptable for a middle-class audience has rarely been fully acknowledged. Deborah Wynne has recently credited magazine editors' ability to combine the 'respectable' and the 'scandalous' in her discussion of the controversy surrounding the emergence of sensation fiction, which by its nature invokes the melodramatic mode, in the 1860s. 'The popular mix of sensational fiction and non-fiction writings [in periodicals] established literary sensationalism as the dominant discourse' of the time, she argues.[119] The co-existence of fact-based articles and sensational stories in magazines is just one example of the cultivation of mainstream nineteenth-century readers for melodramatic material, and it long precedes the 1860s. The generic crossover that actually blends the realistic and melodramatic within individual articles, has its roots in the eighteenth century and in the personal essays of Addison, Steele and Johnson. The omnipresence of such generic blurring was exemplified, for example, in Defoe's highly popular

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[117] Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 3. See also, Wylie Sypher, 'Aesthetic of Revolution: the Marxist Melodrama,' *Kenyon Review* 10 (1948): 431-44; Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23; Booth, 'Melodrama and the Working Class,' 97.

[118] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, x.

[119] Wynne, *The Sensational Novel*, 1, 2. In this regard, she echoes Henry Mansel's 1862 account of the sensation phenomena which he claimed had three principal causes: periodicals, circulating libraries and railway bookstalls, [Henry Longueville Mansel], 'Sensation Novels,' *Quarterly Review* 113 (April 1862): 481-9, reprinted in *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel*, ed. David Skilton (London: Routledge, 1993), 74-8.

'biographical' accounts of Alexander Selkirk and Moll Flanders. It was also increasingly conventional in the countless 'conversion' stories that made up much of the content of religious periodicals. A nineteenth-century aesthetic history, Christine Gledhill points out, 'suggests the interdependent development of melodrama and realism'.[120] Melodramatic tactics are of course, particularly suited to the serial format and the sensational story with their demands for a continuous series of climactic moments to ensure the reader's return for subsequent instalments.

Its pervasiveness across the sub-genres that make up periodical literature is everywhere apparent. A typical issue of *Blackwood's* in 1845, for example, contains a highly sensationalised review of a book on mesmerism that includes a first hand account of a session as 'fact' alongside a sentimental melodramatic reversal-of-fortune tale and a translation of a German-American romance, praised in a preface for its 'deep knowledge of human nature, a vivid power of description and a command of dialogue, not only spirited and natural but often rising with the occasion into dramatic point and brilliancy.'[121]

The preoccupations of melodrama on stage varied throughout the nineteenth century as Alan Fishlen has recently summarised: 'the prevailing fashion was first Gothic, then nautical, and finally domestic.'[122] The turn towards the domestic on stage has been related to a number of interdependent social, cultural and economic causes. These include the introduction of suburban railways that allowed the middle-classes safe and easy access to central London theatres at night time, increased wealth and leisure time across classes, and the development of 'gentlemanly' melodrama by Dion Boucicault among others which, as Fishlen notes, did not make virtue class specific, the working man the only possible hero, or the law the enemy of the people.[123] These shifts are also registered in the use of the melodramatic in periodicals such as *Blackwood's* through the forties and fifties indicating that periodical and stage dramas continuously influenced each other.[124]

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[120] Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation,' *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1987), 31.

[121] William Grove, 'Mesmerism,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 57 (February 1845): 219-41; 'The Superfluities of Life,' trans. William Henry Smith, ibid., 194-203; Frederick Hardman, 'The Viceroy and the Aristocracy or Mexico in 1812,' ibid., 251.

[122] Alan Fischlen, 'Drama,' *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 345. See also, Booth, 'Melodrama and the Working Class,' 101.

[123] See Michael Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14; Fischlen, 'Drama,' 346.

[124] See Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 64, where he suggests, for instance that 'the

Poe's parody 'How to write a Blackwood's article' has the third John Blackwood conclude his advice to his prospective writer, Signora Psyche Zenobia:

> 'Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations – they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet. If you wish to write forcibly, Miss Zenobia, pay minute attention to the sensations.'[125]

Such purely sensational writing had, however waned by the time Evans produced her first story. Even by 1850, a title such as 'The Green Hand' in the January issue, did not provoke terror of the unnatural and sensational. An account of the adventures of a naïve shipman, the story was part of the general shift towards military and nautical dramatic adventures on stage and in periodical literature.[126] The type of melodrama that characteristically features in *Blackwood's* by 1857 combined features of both the sensation tale popularised in the magazine's pages in the 1830s, later reinvigorated in the 1860s,[127] and the domestic pathos that came to dominate *Blackwood*'s fiction through the late forties and fifties.

'A Christmas Tale,' written by a regular of the *Blackwood's* stable, Mrs. Oliphant, initially typifies the 'sensation paper' that found its model in the Poe tale. Published in the same issue as the second part of *Scenes*, it is a conventional horror story with the threat of ghosts, murder, suicide and an unresolved mystery. All terror and mystery are eventually defused, however, with the lazy and comfortable denouement that sees the story end with the gentleman narrator waking up by his fireside realising it was all a dream. The conclusion provides a neat illustration of how the potentially disruptive and terrifying sensational aspects were contained in the restyled family magazine of the late 1850s. This turn to the domestic sphere, away from the exotic European locations of the Gothic or from the high seas, is obviously

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nineteenth century revealed a powerful bent in whole classes of fiction to assimilate themselves with drama, while drama itself was under a compulsion to make itself over as a picture.' See especially, 'Telling Scenes,' 52-68.

[125] Poe, 'How to write a *Blackwood's* article,' 340.

[126] [George Cupples], 'The Green Hand – a 'short' yarn,' *Blackwood's Magazine* 67 (January 1850): 76-93. The Story ran sporadically from December 1848 to October 1850. In the same volume see the military tale by [Thomas Boys], 'My Peninsular Medal,' ibid, (November 1849-July 1850) and Samuel Ferguson, 'The Siege of Dunbey; or the Stratagems of War,' ibid, (February 1850): 153-74.

[127] For a cultural and historical critique that ties the emergence of sensation fiction in the 1860s to nascent modernity, see Nicholas Daly, 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses,' *ELH* 66 (1999): 461-87 and Daly, 'Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity,' *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 1 (Autumn 1998/1999): 47-76.

linked to an expanding, stable English middle-class that, for instance, owned more private property than before, had a higher level of education than previously, and participated more fully in the development of an individualist capitalist market economy. The magazine, as noted in my first chapter, was increasingly marketed as the 'family' magazine and, as Meredith observed, aimed at the 'republic of the fireside'. But as Oliphant's tale implies, the private family fireside was still invaded by dark incomprehensible anxieties, figured here in a sensationalised dream that mirrors the fractured and complex nature of the middle-classes.[128]

The recurring taste for the melodramatic in theatre, fiction and periodical literature signals, arguably, two broad needs: one overtly psychological, one social, both representing dominant theories on the mode. The melodramatic, in a shared tradition with the Gothic, facilitates the articulation of repressed anxieties in an increasingly pressurised, atomised society, while paradoxically, its strict polarisation of vice and virtue provides reassuring coherence in a more secularised, specialised world (which the Gothic does not always allow). Alternatively, the mode provides for a counter balance to the post-Enlightenment privileging of the mind over emotions, which had resulted in an insular social and cultural élitism that was ultimately alienating. By bringing to the surface inner emotions, and by its emphasis on the gestural, the outwardly theatrical, and the determinedly anti-intellectual, melodrama, in contrast, reaffirmed cultural and social inclusivity.[129] Aspects of both influences recur in middle-class periodical literature. As argued in previous chapters, the periodical saw itself on the one hand as a forum for the promotion of political, cultural and intellectual specialisation in response to a growing and increasingly differentiated reading public. In its aim to reach as wide an audience as possible, though, middle-class family magazines in particular promoted social responsibility and social cohesion.

The fact that the melodramatic mode pervaded the pages of *Blackwood's* was early identified by Evans and Lewes and recognised as a needed component of her own fiction. In a retrospective piece in her journal, 'How I came to Write Fiction,'

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[128] The complexities of the Victorian middle-classes are recorded in numerous studies of the nineteenth century. See for example Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments*; Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Flint, *Victorians and the Visual Imagination*.

[129] See Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination* for the most influential theorisation of the psychological roots of the mode and John, *Dickens's Villains*, for an original and complex analysis of how the melodramatic aesthetic is used to affirm social cohesion with specific reference, as the title suggests, to

Evans recalls that her decision to write her first story was made with a view towards a specific audience: 'We determined that if my story turned out good enough, we would send it to Blackwood.'[130] Lewes, Evans explains, was unsure she was capable of writing fiction. Her essay on Cummings, he recalled, convinced him of her ability as a writer of distinction, she had 'wit, description and philosophy'.[131] These traits of the essayist are fundamental to the narrator of Evans' early fiction. With some alteration for the wider, less scholarly audience, the essayistic persona of the *Westminster* and *Leader* articles crosses over to *Blackwood's* and maintains the essayist's sometimes enlightening, sometimes prescriptive overtones. Furthermore, the typical *Blackwood's* voice already outlined, with its appeal for us to observe the drama beyond the surface, in fact embodies what Peter Brooks has described more generally as the essentially melodramatic nature of narrative in terms that make him sound like the narrator of 'Amos' and 'Mr. Gilfil,' in particular, in its claim for the antecedent romance behind the real:

> The narrative voice, with its grandiose questions and hypotheses, leads us in a movement through and beyond the surface of things to what lies behind, to the spiritual reality which is the true scene of the highly coloured drama to be played out in the novel.[132]

Lewes was more doubtful, Evans explains, of her ability to write dialogue – a skill not tested in essay writing – and of the dramatic quality of her writing, 'he distrusted – indeed disbelieved in, my possession of any dramatic power'. The possession of such 'dramatic power,' both Evans and Lewes imply is crucial to the success of any magazine story. Evans is quite straightforward in her account of the very deliberate method by which she sought to incorporate these stylistic requirements into her own work and it is worth quoting at length:

> I mentioned to G. that I had thought of the plan of writing a series of stories containing sketches drawn from my own observation of the Clergy, and

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Dickens' work.
[130] *Journals*, 289-90.
[131] Ibid., 289.
[132] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 2.

> calling them 'Scenes from Clerical Life' opening with 'Amos Barton'. He at once accepted the notion as a good one – fresh and striking; and about a week afterwards when I read him the early part of 'Amos', he had no longer any doubts about my ability to carry out the plan. The scene at Cross Farm, he said, satisfied him that I had the very element he had been doubtful about – it was clear I could write good dialogue. There still remained the question whether I could command any pathos, and that was to be decided by the mode in which I treated Milly's death. One night, G. went to town on purpose to leave me a quiet evening for writing it. I wrote the chapter from the news brought by the shepherd to Mrs. Hackit, to the moment when Amos is dragged from the bedside and I read it to G. when he came home. We both cried over it, and then he came up to me and kissed me, saying 'I think your pathos is better than your fun'. So when the story was finished G. sent it to Blackwood...[133]

The tears of pathos never blind the business eye and with the story 'working,' the prospect of publication in *Blackwood's* becomes a reality. The success of this death scene was immediate. Blackwood himself, with no small delight, replayed the effect of Milly's death on a friend, Albert Smith in a letter to his new, still unnamed, author:

> [Smith] describes himself as having been more moved than he thought possible, and from his account the luminaries of the Garrick generally seem to have mingled their tears with their tumblers over the death bed of Milly.[134]

The Smith letter is even more expressive on this point:

> Nothing had delighted me so much for a long time as that story of 'Amos Barton' in the Magazine. The death of that sweet Milly made me blubber like a boy. I did not think, at forty, I had so many tears left in me; and was really glad to find, after somewhat worn-out London life, I could still be so moved. You will be pleased to hear there is but one opinion about its excellence.

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[133] *Journals*, 289, 290.
[134] 10 February 1857, *GEL*, 2: 293.

Thack's eyes sparkled through his spectacles as he spoke of it yesterday.[135]

This mini-drama staged around her unveiling of her own dramatic power in fact encapsulates what Evans does throughout *Scenes*. Each 'pathetic' moment is very overtly staged in a way that functions to evoke an emotional response, to gain sympathy, to create drama. Milly's death-bed scene; Tina's futile murderous rage against Wybrow; the community's panic that she has attempted suicide and her subsequent dramatic return to consciousness; the beating of Janet Dempster and her expulsion from her home on a stormy night by her alcoholic husband; his delirium and death are the exemplary incidents in the three stories.

Juliet John has correctly observed 'it is virtually impossible to know with any certainty how nineteenth-century theatre audiences processed emotional "excess",'[136] though the responses just recorded give some indication of the rejuvenating and cathartic function of pathos. The attitudes of twentieth-century critics, however, are well documented and markedly different from Lewes', Thackeray's and Smith's. The melodramatic tactics inherent in the self-consciously staged incidents of *Scenes*, in general, provoke embarrassment: they are either cynically dismissed or they are redeemed by being incorporated into a pre-programmed theory of fictional realism or translated away into something more acceptable as a feature of Evans' 'doctrine of sympathy.'

For the most part, George Eliot's critics apologise for such melodramatic 'incidents' as evidence of the new writer's nervous and awkward adoption of formulaic literary conventions. The ways in which she uses these conventions and the reasons behind their use are on the whole, unexamined. Knoepflmacher condemns the 'unnecessary pathos interjected as Dempster beats his wife [which] smacks of the cheap melodrama of the Victorian stage'. Derek and Sybil Oldfield dismiss 'Mr. Gilfil' as a little more than an over-written sentimental melodrama.[137] In the early sixties, Joan Bennett singled out the scene of Milly's death in 'Amos' for scathing criticism that typifies the rejection of Victorian melodrama and embarrassment by emotional excess that for so long has left this crucial aspect to Victorian culture under-theorised:

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[135] Ibid., n., 9.
[136] John, *Dickens's Villains*, 30.
[137] Knoepflmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, 83; Oldfield and Oldfield '*Scenes of Clerical Life*: the

> The scene can still draw tears, as can many of Dickens's pathetic death-bed scenes, or indeed many screen plays of yet inferior quality. It is all too easy to draw tears by describing the death of a devoted mother who summons her children one by one to her bedside and harrows their feelings with her 'selfless' dying words. But such scenes are often, on reflection, unconvincing and few modern readers will be able to accept Milly's death-bed.

Bennett provides a long extract from the scene and concludes:

> There is something radically wrong with this . . . If Victorian mothers really staged such theatrical death-bed scenes their notion of the seemly has dated. But one suspects that the scene is literary rather than naturalistic.' [138]

The 'literary' has negative connotations in this context in its opposition to the naturalistic. It speaks of the type of overt, and in the case of Milly's death-bed scene, exaggerated, stylisation that sits uneasily with the 'stomach and pocket' plainness of Evans' work, her celebrated realist project.[139] The realism of these stories in particular finds unequivocal support from the fact that the 'characters' depicted – Amos, Gilfil, Tina, Janet, Robert Dempster – were modelled on actual people who had lived in and around Evans' childhood home. Some were so realistically drawn they were recognised by their relatives and claimed as the 'originals' for these literary figures. 'Gilfil,' for instance, was identified as Revd Bernard Gilpin Ebdell who had actually baptized Mary Ann Evans in 1819.[140] Evans defends her use of actual facts in her correspondence with Blackwood, claiming of the Tryan story for example,

> I only know the *outline* of the real persecution. The details have been filled in from my imagination. I should consider it a fault which would cause me

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Diagram and the Picture,' 6.

[138] Joan Bennett, *George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art* (1948; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 92, 93.

[139] Miriam Bailin has attempted to rescue such 'death-bed scenes,' reinterpreting Milly's death, for example, as representing the 'romance of her realism, the ideal towards which the social ethos of her realist project aspires,' Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 110.

[140] See Haight, *George Eliot*, 220; Ashton, *George Eliot*, 174-9.

> lasting regret if I had used reality in any other than a legitimate way common to all artists who draw their material from their observations and experience.[141]

Much attention has been given to explicating George Eliot's versions of realism. However, the ways in which the writer manipulates the real for dramatic effect, her transformation of observed and experienced life into sometimes very sentimental fictions, into constructed, emotive stories is addressed less frequently and with more caution.

One of George Eliot's most influential early advocates, Barbara Hardy, struggles with precisely this tension between the realistic and the 'artificial' in her work. Hardy argues that George Eliot abhorred sentimentalism and melodrama.[142] Instead, she suggests, Eliot skilfully addressed the tragic human condition in her novels in deliberate, understated ways to avoid excess. But Hardy acknowledges, 'it would be inaccurate to suggest that in these ways George Eliot avoids melodrama'. Listing central scenes from George Eliot's fiction, she suggests, that what she terms the 'peripheral melodrama,' so much a part of the plots of her novels, 'may be a kind of indirect compensation – probably not a deliberate one – for the flats which make the norm of action and conduct'.[143] The assessment touches on one of the central aspects of Evans' use of melodrama in this piece: the very straightforward but necessary impulse to vary style to entertain and maintain her periodical serial readers. It is this obvious conjunction of commerce with craft that perhaps has seen this mode condemned for its exploitative effect and expunged from Evans' writing as 'probably not . . . deliberate'.

Eliot criticism tends to repeat Hardy's line of thought for the most part and when addressed at all, melodrama is seen as secondary or incidental to George Eliot's work. Janice Carlisle points out that George Eliot employs melodramatic tactics in *Scenes* but does not relate the use of the mode to the form of publication, for example,

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[141] 18 August 1857, *GEL*, 2: 376. The letter is written in response to a letter Blackwood received from William Pitman Jones on the 12 August wondering if there were to be any more stories in the magazine about his brother John.

[142] Evans' 'Silly Novels by Silly Novelists,' Hardy notes, stridently opposes such cheap formula fiction. See Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot*, 28.

[143] Ibid., 28-9. Echoing Bennett, she writes: 'Where the violence or excitement strike us as melodramatic or inflated it is not only because we are repelled by the external and sensational action. It is also because of the existence elsewhere of the decorous and sensitive treatment of the commonplace mind and the commonplace event', ibid., 28.

or in any sustained way to Evans' fictional enterprise. Carlisle suggests, moreover, that Evans used sensational tactics such as the highly rhetorical address to the reader merely to trap her audience: 'as long as it served her purpose and satisfied her desire to engage her reader's interest in the story; as soon as she had achieved this aim . . . she had created the confidence she needed to reject the convention'.[144] The proposition dismisses the use of such rhetorical techniques much too easily. Noting that 'literature does not simply reflect the social constructions of its period but numbers itself among them,' Garrett Stewart has concluded elsewhere that 'it is not the mimetic mode . . . which best grasps the relation between a text and its time but rather the rhetorical one.'[145] It is in these very rhetorical aspects of Evans' style that we can begin to comprehend how an author constructs an audience, figuring the reader in the text through apostrophe, humour, and emotional appeals. All three features demand reader responses or engagement not expected in closed or contained inscriptions of naturalism or pictorial realism. It is in this deliberate transcendence of the limitations of literal realism that melodramatic tactics become central to these scenes.

Recent criticism has paid more attention to the purposeful use of the melodramatic in Evans' work. David Carroll asserts it is a key feature, not just an appetiser, and has suggested that Evans leans on melodrama especially in 'Mr. Gilfil' to articulate a broad interpretative method by which we grasp the inexpressible, linking the story in this way to Hardy's assessment of the Proustian aspect to Victorian fiction. Through the 'topos of inexpressibility,' she argues, Victorian novelists attempted 'to discover the shape of that which we have felt'. Carroll argues of 'Mr Gilfil,' however, that this story's melodramatic simplifications eventually lead her to reject the possibility of such a project.[146] *The Oxford Reader's Companion*, like Carroll's work, informed by recent critical efforts to theorise the melodramatic mode, acknowledges that 'melodrama persists throughout [Evans'] work' and that it can be seen to 'reveal a dark underside of Gothic romance that troubles and complicates a predominantly realistic representation of life'. The emphasis remains, however, on its peripheral status, on the 'moments of melodrama'.[147] Nonetheless, this recognition of

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[144] See Carlisle, *Sense of an Audience*, 184.
[145] Stewart, *Dear Reader*, 6.
[146] Carroll, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 54-61: Barbara Hardy, *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (London: Peter Owen, 1985), 12.
[147] The section concludes with the suggestion that since the most melodramatic story in *Middlemarch*,

the ways in which the melodramatic challenges the straightforwardness of realism goes some way to acknowledging the 'literary duplicity' that pervades *Scenes*.[148]

Evans certainly avoids the stark polarisation of good and evil that are a feature of melodrama. The three stories are repeatedly slowed down by the narrator with the careful elaboration of setting countering the usual 'breathtaking peripety'[149] of the mode. Her narrator repeatedly mocks the excesses of popular thrillers and the superficiality of sensation fiction. At the same time, though, the writer persists in invoking melodramatic traits and melodramatic scenes that are made central to the plots of the three stories. These contradictions provide for less than straightforward readings of these scenes. It should be noted, of course, that such inconsistencies are not unique to Evans' use of melodrama. The duplicitous relationship with the mode can be explained in part as a consequence of the cultural climate that demands the embarrassed and put-upon paid author of the press include such obvious ploys in his fictional plots. The narrator of Edward Bulwer Lytton's 'What Will He do With it' by Pisistratus Caxton provides an example of this internally divided reaction to the mode in the opening pages of the story that appeared alongside the second part of 'Mr. Gilfil'. The narrator finds himself and a friend, 'two spectators' amidst a crowd in a rural town, attending the 'Grand Melo-dramatic Performance of The Remorseless Baron and the Bandit's Child':

> We grant that it was horrible rubbish regarded in the aesthetic point of view but it was mightily affective in the theatrical. Nobody yawned, you did not hear even a cough, nor the cry of that omnipresent baby . . . Here the story rushed on *per fas aut nefas* and the audience went with it. *Certes*, some man who understood the stage must have put the incidents together, and then left it to each illiterate histrio to find the words – words, my dear *confrères*, signify so little in an acting play. The movement is the thing. Grand secret! Analyse,

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Lydgate's disastrous affair with a French actress, takes place abroad there is the clear implication that Evans viewed melodrama as 'foreign to the English provinces,' John Rignall, *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. John Rignall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 255.

[148] The phrase is Jenny Uglow's, see Uglow, *George Eliot*, 85.

[149] Peter Brooks usefully outlines the connotations of the word 'melodrama' that include 'the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expressions; dark plotings, suspense, breathtaking peripety'. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 11-12.

practise it![150]

The most overtly staged scene of Evans' three stories, the promotion of a crude pantomime marshaled by Dempster against Tryan in chapter nine of 'Janet's Repentance,' makes explicit the negative possibilities of such 'entertainment.' Listing the playbill in full, concluding with the 'Screaming Farce' the 'Pulpit Snatcher,' emphasis throughout the chapter is not on clearly articulated words: Tryan is tormented not just by Dempster's 'sarcasms' which were 'visible on the walls',

> they were reflected in the derisive glances, and audible in the jeering voices of the crowd. Through this pelting shower of nicknames and bad puns, with an *ad libitum* accompaniment of groans, howls, hisses, and hee-haws . . . Mr. Tryan walked pale and composed.[151]

This type of cheap 'drama' is immediately distinguished from the dominant mode of pathos in *Scenes* as Evans' narrator suggests. He draws a sharp contrast between this closing tableau of Tryan walking through the jeering crowd, 'pale and composed,' almost Christ-like, and Tryan's final scene:

> Once more only did the Evangelical curate pass up Orchard Street followed by a train of friends; once more only was there a crowd assembled to witness his entrance through the church gates. But that second time no voice was heard above a whisper. . . . That second time, Janet Dempster was not looking on in scorn and merriment; her eyes were worn with grief and watching, and she was following her beloved friend and pastor to the grave.[152]

The emphasis remains as before, not on words, but on the tableau. However, by invoking the pathetic scene, ironically achieved through the dependence on the highly rhetorical repetitions ('once more only', 'that second time'), there is the implication that the same players, and the same stage can produce either 'scorn and merriment' or

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[150] [Edward Bulwer Lytton], 'What Will He Do With It?' by Pisistratus Caxton, *Blackwood's Magazine* 81 (June 1857), 653.
[151] 'Janet's Repentance,' 334-6.
[152] Ibid., 336.

'grief and watching' depending on the sympathy of the spectator/reader.

The tragic circumstances facing characters such as Amos, Tina, Gilfil, Tryan and Janet are typically judged as purposeful for the way in which they elicit emotional responses from their local community that turn from 'scorn and merriment' to sympathy. Critics generally see this feature of communal experience as the engine of *Scenes* whether suspicious or otherwise of Evans' politics. As David Lodge puts it, the 'doctrine of sympathy' is 'vital to an understanding' of this work.[153] The valorisation of community over individual needs is presented as the heart of her writing. And we learn from the way her characters eventually come to recognise the need to transcend their individual egos through traumatic encounter and heightened emotions.

Throughout *Scenes*, the melodramatic moments dismissed as mere *moments* in Evans' work are in this way made central not just to the pace of the plot but to the morality of message. This rescuing of melodrama from mere effect has been theorised by Peter Brooks, for example, who suggests that the 'melodramatic moment of astonishment is a moment of ethical evidence and recognition.'[154] Janet, Tina, and Amos are all shown to be shocked into insights about themselves that lead to transformation in their lives. Janet recognises her dependence on her husband and on alcohol is an abdication of responsibility for her own actions; Tina realises the violence and self-destructive nature of her passions; Amos is awakened out of his gross self-absorption and acknowledges the selflessness of his wife. The 'primary purpose' of melodrama, Brooks claims, 'is the recognition of virtue – the reward of virtue is secondary'.[155] In successfully revealing the virtue of Milly, Gilfil, Tryan and Janet, and the communities of Milby and Shepperton, in adverse circumstances, *Scenes* seems to accommodate a standard articulation of melodrama's conserving function: to posit the possibility for humane justice in acknowledgement of the good. In this way, Evans' work participates in what has been described more generally as

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[153] Lodge, 'Introduction,' *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 14.

[154] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 26. The 'clash of virtue and villainy' central to melodrama, Brooks explains, it is the 'active force and motor of plot', ibid., 34. The villains of the three scenes, Czerlaski, Wybrow, Dempster, though not clashing with entirely 'virtuous' opposites, are nonetheless employed in schematic ways to tempt or provoke the ordinary weak central characters for dramatic purposes. Elizabeth Ermath recognises these defining moments but entirely downplays the obvious melodrama central to them claiming Evans' technique here is to 'use a trauma of confidence to suggest an awakening, and an attending of recognition that is powerful without being melodramatic', Ermath, *George Eliot*, 59.

[155] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 27.

the 'strategies of social melodrama' motivated by the concept of sympathetic identification.[156] Amos is eventually reconciled to the people of his parish as they support him in his hour of need at Milly's death and after. Janet finds reason to go on living by working for others less fortunate and by accepting the love and support of her neighbours:

> The good will of her neighbours, the sympathy of her friends who shared her religious feelings, the occupations suggested to her by Mr. Tryan, concurred, with her strong spontaneous impulses towards works of love and mercy, to fill up her days with quiet social intercourse and charitable exertion.[157]

This life of sacrifice, where duty to others precedes all personal desire, links all three stories and in Janet especially provides for instructive sermonising from Tryan and the narrator.

In this way, it can be suggested, Evans attempts to justify the emotive type of writing demanded of the periodical writer as something other than a commercial trick. The dependence on 'grief and watching,' aesthetically and morally, is promoted as a means of resisting the disruptive potential reactions founded on emotions only that can persistently evade personal, and by implication, authorial control. In its 'surfacing' of emotions then, in the legibility of actions, Evans' melodramatic aesthetic approaches Dickens', as theorised recently by Juliet John. In its opposition to the egoistic interiority of High Romanticism, emblematised in part by Dickens' cerebral villains, John suggests that melodrama offers an alternative mode that in its 'passionate ostension or transparency is crucial to the survival of community'.[158]

The *threat* of the melodramatic in Evans' work, however, the fear of visible emotion unharnessed from communal control, was early recognised in the measured tones of Samuel Lucas's review of the two-volume edition in the *Times*. The review

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[156] Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth, 'Introduction,' *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, eds. Eigner and Worth, 14.

[157] 'Janet's Repentance,' 441.

[158] John, *Dickens's Villains*. 8-9. In this regard, John criticises Evans' infamous condemnation of Dickens' work for its failure to provide psychological depth to his characters in her article 'The Natural History of German Life' which mistakenly equates emotion with interiority. The theatrical deals with 'surface' not 'superficial,' she argues. See John, ibid, 15. [Evans] 'Natural History of German Life,' 55, reprinted in Byatt and Warren, eds., *Selected Essays*, 111. In contrast to the truism that Evans revolutionised narrative by 'putting all the action inside', I would suggest that *Scenes* demonstrates that in her use of the melodramatic mode she shows how the narrator attempts to bring all the action outside through his 'reading' of these publicly staged dramatic scenes.

seems to accept as essential the melodramatic excesses of the stories but at the same time attempts more overtly to control the drama by praising the writer's strategies of containment. The book, he notes is 'a careful study of familiar types, and an absence of exaggeration in their treatment'. He suggests that the 'artificial elements in the story' (the result of 'exaggerated treatment'?) are 'kept within bounds [since] the tendency to sacrifice to their exigencies is compensated by a reference to the actual results of experience and a closer resemblance than usual is thus established between the conceptions of fiction and the realities of the world.'[159] The emphasis is on the writer's efforts at restraint; the fateful draw of the melodramatic is diluted by the appeal to the real.

The review recalls in some ways John Blackwood's worried response to the dramatic plot twist in 'Mr. Gilfil' when Tina, in a jealous rage, takes a dagger from Cheveral Manor and rushes out to kill the man who has spurned her, Wybrow:

> I have grave doubts about the dagger, beautifully as the impossibility of her using it is indicated. I daresay GE will kick furiously at the base idea of altering a syllable at this point, but I am pretty sure that his dear little heroine would be more sure of universal sympathy if she only dreamed or felt as if she could stab to the heart and think it would be more consistent with her character than the active step of getting hold of the weapon.[160]

In an effort to dilute the provocative emotive aspects to stories such as *Scenes*, the pathos or sensationalism of the fiction is called up in that catch-all term 'sympathy'. Blackwood's editorial anxiety is understandable. As Brooks suggests, the 'critical resistance and embarrassment' that melodrama has elicited could 'derive from its refusal of censorship and repression'. In addition, the challenge offered by melodrama, as Elaine Hadley notes with specific reference to nineteenth-century literary culture, with its 'techniques of display and performance . . . undercut domesticity and its bourgeois virtues of modesty and prudence,' since it is all about 'visibility and excess'.[161] With an appeal to the 'truth of feeling'[162] though, as Evans

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[159] [Samuel Lucas], review of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *The Times*, January 1858, 9, reprinted in *Critical Assessments*, 63-4.
[160] 11 March 1857, *GEL*, 2: 308.
[161] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 41; Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics*, 169
[162] Evans to Sara Hennell, 9 October 1843, *GEL*, 1: 162.

put it elsewhere, the writer creates a space where the melodramatic mode can be invoked at once for instructive and entertainment purposes. So in fact its play on sensations, not rational sense, is precisely the aspect of the mode she harnesses into a conventional morality. Her personal narrative, 'How I came to Write Fiction', in obvious, self-referential ways exemplifies melodrama's role in sweetening human contact through extremes of emotion, just as Smith's and Thackeray's tears are presented as a positive demonstration of their openness and lack of cynicism.

But there is much in these three stories that escapes containment. The evocation of pathos – as opposed to the cooler 'sympathy' – calls up both physical and cognitive responses, in character and reader, in its appeal to both emotion and physical reaction.[163] The safe 'realism' that Blackwood hoped would win sympathy for Tina, for example, is abandoned by Evans in 'Mr Gilfil' for a highly stylised emotive display of uncontrollable emotion that leans for effect on the use of the present tense:

> See how she rushes noiselessly, like a pale meteor along the passages and up the gallery stairs! Those gleaming eyes, those bloodless lips, that swift, silent tread, make her look like the incarnation of a fierce purpose, rather than a woman ... Yes, there are sharp weapons in the gallery. There is a dagger in that cabinet; she knows it well. And as a dragon-fly wheels in its flight to alight for an instance on a leaf, she darts to the cabinet, takes out the dagger, and thrusts it into her pocket. In three minutes more she is out, in hat and cloak, on the gravel-walk ... Her hand is in her pocket, clenching the handle of the dagger, which she holds half out of its sheath.[164]

In response, Blackwood signalled his anxiety that Evans would alienate her heroine from her readers if she made her contemplate murder: 'I may be wrong, however and I daresay many will prefer the *dadger* [sic].' This anxiety may be an acknowledgement by a conservative patriarch that he could not possibly dictate the responses of an emergent mass readership, though he suspected the worst and was intimidated by it. There is no attempt to explain why his audience might have such a

[163] Gledhill notes these physical and cognitive responses as central to melodrama's function in her overview on the mode. See Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field,' 30.
[164] 'Mr. Gilfil', 211.

preference for the violent, the senseless. The drama that results from such irrational action, as the stories of Tina, Gilfil, Dempster, and Tryan demonstrate threatens characters and readers alike, driven as it is by extreme behaviour. Such behaviour exemplifies melodrama's radical disruptive potential. Such drama, clearly, is more troublesome, affecting and disturbing than the more neatly calibrated 'scenes of sympathy.'

Audrey Jaffe has argued for the centrality of 'scenes of sympathy' in middle-class Victorian fiction more generally, suggesting that the safe role of sympathising spectator allowed the concerned middle-classes to acknowledge their universal humanity by feeling deeply. This articulation of a broader base of shared understanding operated to reassure the middle classes of their power to read and therefore contain the expanding, no longer invisible, working classes. 'Sympathy in Victorian fiction,' she maintains, 'is inseparable from issues of visuality and representation because it is inextricable from the middle-class subject's status as spectator and from the social figures to whose visual presence the Victorian middle-classes felt it necessary to formulate a response.'[165] The sympathetic relationship is maintained, paradoxically, through a refusal to acknowledge the separateness of the suffering being in an imagined co-opting of their suffering. It is a conserving, self-protecting strategy long associated with George Eliot's early fiction.[166] But as Kate Flint has recently demonstrated, the 'presumed drive' among the Victorians, 'towards exposure, towards bringing things to the surface, towards making things available to the eye and hence ready for interpretation' is much more problematic and self-questioning than hitherto acknowledged.[167]

Throughout these stories, in opposition to the presentation of legible scenes, the author deliberately fails to 'formulate a response' that accounts for the tragic action of the various plots. Conversely, through the figure of an inconsistent and subjective sermonising narrator, Evans ironically exposes the limitations of our attempts to explicate life's mysteries. The three stories complicate the straightforwardness of any neat 'doctrine of sympathy' in a number of ways that leave us with little clear sense of an author-driven agenda. In fact, agendas, based on theory,

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[165] Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 8.
[166] Her Marxist critics in particular rail against the perceived dominance of this feature of her work. See Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*; Cottom, *Social Figures.*
[167] Flint, *Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, 7, 24-5.

formulated in language, are the very thing undercut by the stories. The persistent undermining of categorisation of any kind occurs throughout *Scenes* but most especially in 'Gilfil' and 'Janet's Repentance.' The very particularised personalisation of the narrator and subsequent erosion of his objective status are central to this process. When the narrator adopts the tone of omniscient observer generalising from particular examples presented by Gilfil, Tina, Janet, Tryan or Amos, his opinions are shadowed by his previously displayed prejudices and full audience approbation of his view is forestalled as noted earlier.

Even more controversially, attacking the platitudes of Victorian pathos, *Scenes* seems to suggest that if sympathy is all that is given, it is entirely insufficient. Jaffe suggests that sympathy as a cultural narrative, 'makes fictions do away with bodies'.[168] The fixed relationship between object and spectator implied in the term, however, fails to account for the uncontrollable emotive physical reaction to the melodramatic events of these stories, and there are bodies everywhere. Milly's end is anticipated throughout 'Amos' by means of constant reference to her prolonged physical decline. Tina's passion and her sorrow fatally damage her physical and mental health and cause her early death. She marries Gilfil, and he is happy to marry her, when she is in the depths of despair that leaves her physically incapacitated. Gilfil's distress at Tina's disappearance is so extreme he hallucinates Tina's drowned corpse, a floating Ophelia. Janet is subjected to protracted physical torment by Dempster and drink. The insistence on the irrevocable and physical nature of their suffering gives it a material reality that artificiality of language cannot contain or explain.

Blackwood's suggestion that Tina should only dream about taking the dagger reveals his own awareness of the transgressive potential of denying our ability to control the real, the material, in language. He is fearful about depicting such action 'in reality'. The businessman in him wanted the drama but not the responsibility for it. Evans couches her dramatisation of the 'real *scene*' in the language of containment to assuage her publisher's concerns while still not tempering the highly charged effect:

> it would be the death of my story to substitute a dream for the real scene . . . so many of us have reason to know that criminal impulses may be felt by a nature

[168] Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy*, 13.

> which is nevertheless guarded by its entire constitution from the commission of crime that I can't help hoping my Caterina will not forfeit the sympathy of all my readers.[169]

The failure of our 'entire constitution' to check such impulses, however, is left open to possibility by the fact that Wybrow was already dead by the time Tina reaches him, dagger in hand, so we can never be sure if her rational self would have curbed her criminal impulse. And this doubt is reinforced by Gilfil's momentary but nonetheless disturbing suspicion that she had in fact killed him:

> Mr. Gilfil was bending to raise Caterina in his arms. As he lifted her from the ground he felt something hard and heavy in her pocket. What could it be . . . He carried her to the sofa, put his hand in her pocket, and drew forth the dagger.
>
> Maynard shuddered. Did she mean to kill herself, then, or . . .or . . . a horrible suspicion forced itself upon him. 'Dead – in the rookery.' He hated himself for the thought that prompted him to draw the dagger from its sheath. No! there was no trace of blood, and he was ready to kiss the good steel for its innocence.

It is the 'good steel' that is innocent, not Tina, who, lying on the couch could have been kissed as easily as the dagger. The potentially disturbing and anomalous aspect to her behaviour is reinforced for us by Gilfil's next set of questions: 'Yet why had Caterina taken this dagger? What was it that had happened in the rookery? Was it only a delirious vision of hers?'[170] This last question, echoing Blackwood's plea for it all to be a dream, with the other never-answered questions, together directly contravene Evans' false assurance to her editor that such behaviour is contained by law and explicable by language.

The permanent opacity of Tina's character is captured in the first image we have of her: her closed up room in Gilfil's house, left untouched for nearly forty years. Unlocked once a quarter for dusting, the narrator enumerates the emblems, jewellery, water-colours of Naples, miniatures in oval frames, to suggest the written

[169] 14 March 1857, *GEL*, 2: 309.
[170] 'Mr. Gilfil,' 213.

text's power to preserve. But to preserve what exactly – Tina's life or her death? Gilfil's persisting grief or his ability to lock away the past and move on? The room is presented to us through the narrator's pathos-laden description ('an unfinished baby cap, yellow with age', 'a pair of tiny red slippers') and is either replete with meaning or a dusty vacuum. The narrator confidently names it a 'visible symbol of the secret chamber in his heart'[171] but in the story that follows, the mysteries of that chamber, like Tina herself, leave more questions than answers.

The three stories are full of such amplified scenes that just as readily point only to empty promises of revelation. Coming too late to relieve Milly of her burdens and perhaps save her life, for instance, the delayed support offered to the Barton family in time of crisis stands in brutal counterpoint to the charged cross-currents of attentive gossip that dominated accounts of the Bartons up to Milly's final illness and death. Though momentarily consoling and though Barton's family is eventually taken into the hearts of the people who are moved by his plight, Evans deliberately refuses the once selfish, now transformed souls the happy ending allowed to the Vicar of Wakefield and his family for instance. The refusal amounts to a denial of the cosy consolation of pathos and of the legibility of melodrama's morals. Barton must again uproot his young children, move them away to the city, where they become strangers to their former life. The ending is not a simple nostalgic articulation of how the homely rural past is transplanted by an alienating new urban reality: the bitter divisiveness of the rural community has been demonstrated throughout the story. Rather, by removing Barton and his family from the scene, we are robbed of a satisfying dénouement. The closing tableau of Patty and Barton at Milly's grave years after her death, presents an insufficient frame to the emotional charge of the story: the dead mother's grave, the lonely ageing father, the daughter's lined face emblematic of a life sacrificed, like her mother's, for Amos. The neat parallels jar against the bitterness and misjudgements and belatedness of responsive action throughout the story. Endings usually tie things up and Blackwood persistently pointed out to Evans her weakness in concluding a story.[172] The 'weakness' derived from the author's refusal to come to conclusions. In response to Blackwood's criticism Evans wrote: 'Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some fault lies in the very nature

[171] Ibid., 110-11.
[172] Blackwood to Lewes, 30 April 1857, *GEL*, 2: 322.

of a conclusion, which is at best a negation.'[173]

The melodramatic scene, sensationalist or pathetic, is substituted for narrative explanation in a way that suggests this negation. It could be argued that this refusal to articulate meaning indicates that Evans' work reinforces the inherently ethical nature of the mode, its 'mute text,' full of significance that cannot be spoken. Such a conclusion would imply that all readers share the same understanding of that meaning, that there is a trans-historical moral system. In this world robbed of its Gods and their sacred framework, truths persist though they cannot be formulated into neat phrases. This understanding of the melodramatic gives it a depth that is appealing but may belie its inherently 'surface' or performative aspect, its emphasis on impotent gesture and not on meaningful words. After Milly's funeral, for example, we witness Amos sobbing at his wife's grave, 'clasping it with his arms, kissing the cold turf'. His words of sorrow are an entirely inadequate rendering of his grief. There is no transparent vocabulary to express or represent the actuality of her loss and the stylised speech – 'Milly, Milly dost thou hear me' – runs against the uncontrolled and manic physical effort to get close to her body through the grave. In the end, 'the sobs came and choked his utterance'.[174] There is no way to write loss, to understand death, so the narrator simply leaves the scene and moves to the 'Conclusion.' In this too swift and snug ending Evans seems to suggest, as Juliet John puts it elsewhere, 'the reality of innerness and depths is ultimately never empirically knowable; the belief in "antecedent causes" must ultimately be emotional rather than knowable.'[175] Through her conventional narrator, Evans offers social sympathy or the 'strategies of social melodrama' as a consoling interpretative framework. But the alternative realisation pushes through in the most melodramatic moments of the text: as Brooks admits generally of melodrama's 'truths,' this is the recognition of the 'provisionality of its created centres, the constant threat that its plenitude may be a void'.[176]

These subversive aspects to Evans' use of melodrama complicate the argument that in its emphasis on social feeling rather than social action, it is essentially nostalgic, and politically impotent because it is a politically disengaged mode. Elaine Hadley, for example, contends that melodrama emerges in the early

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[173] 1 May 1857, ibid., 324. D. A. Miller discusses this aspect of Evans' work with reference to her later fiction. See Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents*, 107-92.
[174] 'Amos Barton,' 95.
[175] John, *Dickens' Villains*, 121.
[176] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 200.

nineteenth century as a 'polemical response to the social, economic and epistemological changes that characterised the consolidation of market society in the nineteenth century, especially in the varied effects of the classificatory procedures instituted by English bureaucracies'. She argues that it was an 'essentially conserving' reaction that was not targeted at party politics and operated to 'promote a nostalgic view of society' in opposition to the increasingly market-driven, capitalist, category-ridden emergent culture.[177] Evans' deeply ironic depiction of rural communities in *Scenes* resists the varnish of nostalgia although the stories do open with the narrator indulging in idle and easy reminiscences familiar to periodical readers. In 'Amos,' the narrator in typical *Blackwood's* mode, points up his failings to win over his readers:

> Mine, I fear, is not a well-regulated mind: it has an occasional tenderness for old abuses; it lingers with a certain fondness over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons, and has a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors.

The singing in the old choir stall, he continues, 'was no mechanical affair of official routine; it had a drama'.[178] The drama of the past, its untidy imperfections, like those of the old Shepperton church before refurbishment and modernisation, are played out here against the more organised, reforming tendencies of progressive capitalism. Drama itself, the narrator implies, with its suggestions of mystery, with the defiance of reason or expectation inherent to it, is beyond the scope of the modern categorising age. But the picture of this rural community from the early part of the century is anything but straightforwardly nostalgic. Its people are partisan, gossiping, judgmental and occasionally supportive, loyal and virtuous. And melodrama, too, participates fully in the emergent culture it apparently rails against, implicated as the mode is in commercial enterprises. It is perhaps this recognition of the commercial imperatives of the melodramatic that provokes this dual response to the mode as evidenced throughout *Scenes*, what Garret Stewart has termed in another context, the 'coalition of suspended disbelief and cued self-consciousness'.[179]

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[177] She notes as examples of this increased bureaucratisation, the New Poor Laws of 1834 and the contagion of diseases acts. Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics*, 3-4, 30.

[178] 'Amos Barton,' 6, 7.

[179] Stewart, *Dear Reader*, 5. Benjamin Fisher describes a similar split in Poe's serial fiction as a 'simultaneous winking at aware readers and hoodwinking of the lumpish mass'. Benjamin Fisher,

Evans both installs and withdraws melodrama's function as an interpretative mode. The duplicity of this method shares the sceptical erosion of narrative authority so prominent in the competing story-tellers populating Thackeray's fiction for example. Thackeray's response to 'the ability of omniscient narration to manipulate or control readers,' as Judith Fisher has argued, 'was to develop his skill at parody into an inconsistent multi-voiced narration that inhibits and undermines any consistent reader-identification'.[180] Hyper-conscious of the 'perilious trade of authorship' that demanded from the writer a specific narrative voice and a heart-rending tale, Evans' use of the melodramatic mode incorporates a destructive scepticism that erodes the authority of both prescriptions. In this way, as Pierre Macherey, for instance, has suggested elsewhere, the fictional text interrogates itself and lays bare the processes of its own inventions. By implication, the reader is similarly compelled to participate in this interrogation, thus making all readers critics, reading against the grain.[181]

The summer before she began writing her first stories, Marian Evans spent some time with Lewes in Wales where they read, wrote articles, and, as amateur marine biologists and geologists, explored the sea shore. Evans' 'Recollections of Ilfracombe' recounts these pursuits, and towards the end, she notes:

> I have never before longed so much to know the names of things as during this visit to Ilfracombe. The desire is part of the tendency that is now constantly growing in me to escape from all vagueness and inaccuracy into the daylight of distinct, vivid ideas. The mere fact of naming an object tends to give definiteness to our conception of it – we have then a sign which at once calls up in our minds the distinctive qualities which mark out for us that particular object from all others.[182]

She continues the next paragraph in travel journal mode with details from their last few days, concluding with a minute description of two Cockle women in Swansea. The passage has been preserved as an early articulation of the representative realism

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'Blackwood Articles à la Poe: How to Make a False Start Pay,' *Revue Des Langues Vivantes* 39 (1973): 419.

[180] Fisher, *Thackeray's Skeptical Narrative*, 3.

[181] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). See for example, 198-99.

[182] 'Recollections of Ilfracombe' (1856), *Journals*, 272.

of George Eliot's work.[183] It stands in marked contrast, though, in many ways to Marian Evans' use of the melodramatic mode throughout these stories and to the stand taken by her narrator in his turn from the limitations of naming and numbering. The desire to know the names of things and to articulate difference is belied by the 'mute text' of melodrama, mute not in Brooks' sense of the meaningful subtext, but in the sense of impenetrable. Robert Dempster's dying convulsions boldly contradict the desire of the journal writing Evans. His *delirium tremens* causes ravings that defy comprehension. His death provides no solace for himself nor clarity for his wife:

> He kept his eyes fixed on her, and there was a faintly perceptible motion of the lips as if he wanted to speak.
>
> But the moment of speech was for ever gone – the moment of asking pardon of her, if he wanted to ask for it. Could he read the full forgiveness that was written in her eyes? She never knew.[184]

The final scene is not legible to either husband or wife, and neither is it clear to the reader.

The deliberate impenetrability of this scene reminds us of the only other story that Evans published in *Blackwood*'s, her curious and neglected piece, 'The Lifted Veil' (1859). Described as a 'dismal story of clairvoyance, attempted murder, and ghoulish, quasi-scientific resurrection from the dead,'[185] Blackwood was very reluctant to publish the piece and refused to publicise it as the work of the recently identified author of the hugely successful *Adam Bede*, anxious not to 'fritter away the prestige' now attached to the name.[186] As with the melodramatic *Scenes*, various efforts have been made to 'rescue' a moral from the tale but little attempt has been made to relate it to its context. Kate Flint's recent reading of the story, as a 'deliberate questioning of the desirability of specularity,'[187] however, goes some way to returning it to its shared heritage with Evans' other *Blackwood*'s tales. Flint argues that the story suggests the limits of clear-sight since omniscience leaves the

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[183] See Byatt, 'Introduction,' *Selected Essays*, eds. Byatt and Warren, xvii.
[184] 'Janet's Repentance,' 426.
[185] Beryl Gray, 'Afterword,' *The Lifted Veil* (London: Penguin, 1985), 6.
[186] John Blackwood to William Blackwood, 15 June 1859, cited in Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, 304.
[187] Flint, *Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, 112.

mysteriously clairvoyant narrator of the story alienated, cynical and restless. Furthermore, the blood transfusion experiment in the final scene, though realistic and probable in terms of nineteenth-century medical research, is equally 'unhampered by the laws of corporeal possibility'. It is at once tied to contemporary medical science and 'the most ghoulish and incredible of all the scenes in the story.'[188] It is suggestive of the duplicity of Evans' work that figured in her first fiction for the magazine, and tellingly, it is in its most sensational aspects that this duplicity emerges.

Challenging the panoptic vision of the sea-scientist, the clear-eyed critic, or the omniscient author, the narrator of the final story in *Scenes* defends the flawed Mr. Tryan, Dempster's counterpart. Having shown up the man for his tendency to provoke hero-worship amongst his female followers and his own leanings towards religious martyrdom, the narrator proclaims:

> Any one looking at him with the bird's eye glance of a critic might perhaps say that he made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system ... that his intellectual culture was too limited – and so on; making Mr. Tryan the text for wise discourse on the characteristics of the Evangelical school in its day . . . But I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road, through the crowd of unloving fellow men. [189]

An appeal for charity from a concerned humanist; a covert side-stepping of the uncomfortable reality of class and religious difference through the promotion of a vague doctrine of sympathy; an illustration of the ordinariness of character and narrator typical of the informal *Blackwood* mode; or a denial of the calculated drive towards exposure, this passage demonstrates the often indeterminate, multiple and self-reflexive readings entangled in the narrative voice of Evans' serial fiction. As a serial in the periodical press, however, we are alerted to another crucial interpretative framework for these stories. The narrator is literally *in the press* with his character,

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[188] Ibid., 96, 97. Flint reads the story as an intervention to contemporary debates about the separation of the mind from the body and argues that the ghoulishness of the final scene 'rather than being sensationalist and improbable,' is directly linked to nineteenth-century physiological experiments and therefore suggestive of the 'potential horrors of our investigative tendencies,' ibid., 102. See also, Kate Flint, 'Blood, Bodies and "The Lifted Veil",' *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51, no. 4 (March 1997): 455-73.

[189] 'Janet's Repentance,' 344.

self-reflexively attempting to parry the potential condemnation of the critical reader and emphasising the shaping context in which we find both himself and Tryan, along with George Eliot and Marian Evans.

Conclusion

Last Impressions: Marian Evans takes on her audience

The oracles have always had the wisdom to hide their secrets in the obscurity of many meanings, or of what has seemed meaningless; and might it not, after all, be the finest epitaph for a self-respecting man of letters to be able to say, even after the writing of many books: I have kept my secret, I have not betrayed myself to the multitude.

Arthur Symons, 'Stéphane Mallarmé'

Marian Evans' last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, published in 1879, the year before she died, has not survived well in George Eliot studies. Summarising critical approaches to the text in the recent *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, Nancy Henry states the case plainly: 'There is no tradition of critical debate about *Impressions*, merely an occasionally articulated consensus that there is not much to say about it.'[1] That there was ever anything to say about it seems entirely due to the fact that this somewhat obscure and testy series of essays was written by the renowned novelist George Eliot. It was reviewed widely in the months following its publication, but that 'snorting Behemoth the British Public'[2] was not pleased with this latest offering from one of its greatest writers. Though praised for the characteristic George Eliot words to the wise scattered throughout the essays, and the occasionally fine epigrammatic phrase, there was a general sense of dismay at the fact that the book was not a novel. The great author had wasted her energy and imagination it was argued, on such a poorly realised character as the middle-aged failed writer and city bachelor, Theophrastus. The fact that the book was more analytical than descriptive was an unwelcome feature and its unusual form caused confusion. It had no clear plot, which made it difficult to talk about the work as a whole. Similarly, the numerous and obscure references to contemporary science and to characters from classical literature

[1] Nancy Henry, 'Impressions of Theophrastus Such,' in *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. John Rignall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 175.
[2] Lord Lytton to Evans, 22 February 1880, *GEL*, 9: 296.

alienated readers, as did the in-joke pen portraits of unidentified public figures and writers. The irony is laboured in places, the wit turgid. The simplicity and directness that mark the tradition of Character writing with which the book aligns itself through the eponymous first-person narrator are strikingly absent.

'I can hardly believe anybody can now read it except from a sense of duty' Leslie Stephen concluded in 1902 in his biography of the writer.[3] Few have felt that duty. The text is generally overlooked in critical studies of Evans' work. The *Critical Assessment* series, which aims to provide comprehensive coverage of all aspects of George Eliot's writing, carries three heavily edited nineteenth-century reviews for this last work, commanding barely ten pages of material over the course of its four volumes. David Carroll's *Critical Heritage* goes so far as republishing extracts from W. H. Mallock's review of *Impressions* in the *Edinburgh Review* in October 1879, but includes only the first half of the article where Mallock discusses George Eliot's works in general. The substantial second half of the piece, which specifically addresses her new book, is omitted.[4] Graham Handley's guide to the maze of critical approaches to Evans' writings, *State of the Art: George Eliot* (1990), contains three passing references to the text but notes no significant commentary on its form, content or place in Marian Evans' oeuvre. Neither of the collections of essays marking the centenary of Evans' death makes reference to this, her last publication.[5] *Impressions* was out of print until Nancy Henry's edition from Iowa State University Press and the Pickering Women's Classics series appeared in 1994; D. J. Enright's Everyman edition followed in 1995 though, as has become something of a trend, the title was inaccurate: *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such.*[6]

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[3] Leslie Stephen, *George Eliot* (1902; London: Macmillan, 1909), 195.

[4] See [W. H. Mallock], '*Impressions of Theophrastus Such* by George Eliot,' *Edinburgh Review* 308 (October 1879): 557-86. Mallock discusses *Impressions* from 569-86. For the extract from this review see David Carroll, ed., *George Eliot: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 448-60; Hutchinson, ed., *George Eliot Critical Assessments*, 429-40.

[5] Graham Handley, *State of the Art: George Eliot. A guide through the critical maze* (Bristol: The Bristol Press, 1990), 27, 28, 54. Individual essays on Riehl, Cumming, Silly Novels, Heine and Young get more attention. For centenary collections, see Anne Smith, ed., *George Eliot Centenary Essays and an Unpublished Fragment* (London: Vision Press, 1980); Gordon S. Haight and Rosemary VanArsdel, eds., *George Eliot: A Centenary Tribute* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

[6] *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, ed. Nancy Henry (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1994). All further references will be to this edition of the text; *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, ed. D. J. Enright (London: Everyman Dent, 1995). See also Nancy Henry, 'Introduction,' *Impressions*, xv, for an enumeration of misrepresentations of the title and the absence of the text from bibliographic studies of George Eliot. From the earliest to her most contemporary critics, references to *Impressions* continually produce the most basic errors or oversights suggesting that the book is hardly looked at at all. Mallock in the *Edinburgh Review* mistakenly counts 16 for 18 essays in the volume, Mallock, '*Impressions*,' 572; the same error is repeated more recently in Hughes, *George Eliot*, 467.

When it is addressed at all in accounts of the novelist's work, two dominant approaches to the text emerge. The first, echoed in the earliest criticism, and anticipated by Evans, Lewes and Blackwood in the pre-publication publicity, was to consider the essays as a failed novel and misguided application of the novelist's skills. The second approach reads the book only for what it can tell us about George Eliot. Reading Theophrastus as a transparent representation of George Eliot's voice, the text has unfortunately contributed to the afterlife of the writer as a ponderous moralistic figure. Both approaches neglect the form, content and context of the work as a discrete text and, as this thesis has argued of Evans' early work, these oversights underplay the complexity of her non-novel writings. Just as her own dismissal of her journalistic years has seen the early phase of her life ignored in accounts of the writer's work, Evans' own ambivalence towards this peculiar last work suggests some of the reasons for its neglect.

Little is known of the composition of *Impressions*. It was written in 1878 when Evans and Lewes moved out of London to Whitley, the year Lewes was dying. Evans' journal for this year is missing and Lewes' contains only the briefest of references to *Impressions* in an entry for April 1878. In the midst of a list of names attending a music party and of books he was reading he notes: 'Polly read her M.S.'[7] The publisher, John Blackwood registers its arrival on his desk with surprise: 'From the way she spoke I knew she was not idle but the M.S. came without beat of drum and you may guess my pleasure and surprise.'[8] Just over a week before he died, Lewes had announced the delivery of Evans' new manuscript with a warning about its form that is alert to future problems that marked its critical and popular reception: 'Of the parcel itself I say nothing except that it is the work of the last few months and is *not* a story. Your impression on reading it will therefore have no bias.'[9] Evans takes over the correspondence following Lewes' increasingly rapid decline. Despite her considerable anxiety about the state of Lewes' health, she writes clearly and definitely about the marketing of *Impressions*, determined to make it obvious to her audience that this book is not typical of the novelist George Eliot:

I have thought that a good form of advertisement to save people from

[7] George Henry Lewes, *Journal*, 16 April 1878, reprinted in *GEL*, 7: 21.
[8] John Blackwood to Joseph Munt Langford, 24 November 1878, ibid., 82.
[9] To John Blackwood, 21 November 1878, ibid., 78. His emphasis.

> disappointment in a book of mine not being a story, would be to print the list of Contents which, with the title, would give all but the very stupid a notice to what form of writing the work belongs.[10]

Blackwood agrees, and throughout his correspondence with advertisers and the American and European publishers, he emphasises the form of this new work.[11] Following Lewes' death on 30 November 1878, Evans isolated herself in her home; she refused visitors and her letters became more sporadic. As a result, there is very little information about any revisions she made to the text. Blackwood was sensitive as ever to his writer's needs, and publication of *Impressions* was held up until May 1879. The book was almost not published. Evans expressed indifference towards the entire project in January 1879, and in March, she claimed she wanted to 'suppress it in its original form and regenerate it whenever – if ever – I recover the power to do so'.[12] She finally agreed to publication only on condition that Blackwood made clear that the work was written before Lewes' death. The publisher's note duly appeared in the first edition:

> The Manuscript of this work was put into our hands towards the close of last year, but the publication has been delayed owing to the domestic affliction of the Author.[13]

Evans seemed to dread audience disapproval, fearful that she might be seen to have been working through her mourning – doing a disservice to herself and to Lewes' memory. Just prior to publication, she wrote to her publisher in a typical plea for reassurance: 'If you had at all suspected that the book would injure my influence you would not have wished me to give it forth in its present form.'[14] It is no coincidence that *Impressions* debates precisely the various aspects of the relationship between writer, reader and public opinion in much bolder and pointed fashion than suggested by this hesitancy. Her reluctance here can be seen to stem precisely from her awareness of the excoriating criticism of public and press in the book.

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[10] To John Blackwood, 23 November 1878, ibid., 81.
[11] 24 November 1878 and 24 March 1879, ibid., 82, 120.
[12] To John Blackwood, 13 January 1879, ibid., 93; 25 March 1879, ibid., 122.
[13] Ibid., 136, n., 9.
[14] 5 March 1879, ibid., 111; 5 April 1879, ibid., 126.

Evans was also initially clearly anxious to distance 'George Eliot' from the words of her first-person narrator suggesting as an original title 'Characters and Characteristics or Impressions of Theophrastus Such' to be 'edited by George Eliot'. She finally decided on *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, for clarity, she implies, and because there were already too many publications with 'Characters' in the title.[15] The change is an important one for other reasons. It points towards a calculated uncertainty in the first-person narrator's pen portraits that is uncharacteristic of the form as practised by the original Theophrastus and his European champion, La Bruyère.[16] 'Character' from the Greek *Χαράσσειν* means 'to engrave or make a deep impression'.[17] Evans plays off her knowledge of this translation that firmly places her text in the tradition of Character writing, against the hesitant somewhat embittered narrator who provides a more contemporary nuance on the word. The changed title is the first indication of the instability of this form in its late nineteenth-century expression, something that is deliberately highlighted by Evans.

No clear reason is given for removing the extra mediating layer suggested by the naming of George Eliot as editor apart from Evans' remark to Blackwood that she wished to simplify the title's appearance.[18] It might have been a mistake. The too-ready identification of the first-person narrative voice of the essays with George Eliot's which has persisted from the earliest accounts of this work to this day could have been forestalled to some degree.[19] As this thesis has argued, the elision of narrative persona and author has bedevilled readings of Evans' journalism, and it is no coincidence then, and rather more of a pattern, that this tendency penetrates so much of the criticism on her final series of essays. As with readings of her journalism, the practice comes from both the reduction of the writer Marian Evans to the novelistic persona, George Eliot, and the reluctance to accept the artistry of less

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[15] To John Blackwood, 5 March 1879, ibid., 111; 22 March 1879, ibid., 119.

[16] Her correspondence from January 1878 suggests that Evans was reading La Bruyère's *Les Caractères de Theophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce Siècle*. Her letter to John Blackwood on 26 January notes that she was also reading the new edition of Pascal's *Pensées* to whom La Bruyère was indebted. See *GEL*, 7: 11.

[17] Edward Chauncey Baldwin, 'The Relation of the Seventeenth-Century Character to the Periodical Essay,' *PMLA* 19 (1904): 75-6.

[18] 'I am not quite clear whether it will be better to say simply "by George Eliot" or "Edited by George Eliot",' 22 March 1879, *GEL*, 7: 119.

[19] See, for example, Mathilde Blind, *George Eliot* (London, 1884), 213-4; Oscar Browning, *Life of George Eliot* (1890; New York: Kennikat Press, 1972), 133; Redinger, *George Eliot*, 11, 91, 152, 372; Dorothea Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines* (London: Routledge, 1991), 54, 142; Ashton, *George Eliot,* 13, 360; Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'The Jew' in English Literature and Society: Radical Representations 1875-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), passim.

familiar forms, in this case, the essay and the Character.

Arguing for the significance of the generic and cultural contexts that inform *Impressions*, this closing chapter on Marian Evans' final published work recapitulates my central thesis. The discussion will lead back to the beginnings of this study to the important role of the periodical press in the marketing of literary culture as entertainment and as moral necessity in the nineteenth century. It demonstrates the shaping role of mid-nineteenth-century periodical culture on the writing of arguably the century's most influential writer. The late nineteenth-century version of Character writing exemplified by *Impressions* results in the merging of the objective authoritative review with the subjective idiosyncratic essay; both traditions display debts to the Character form. It is a peculiar and contradictory marriage of genres, which ultimately functions to question and dissect ideas of authority, originality, and morality in nineteenth-century literary culture as the author turns against the industry and the audience that made her a successful professional writer.

The deconstructive nature of this project has led more recent critics to consider Evans' last work a 'dazzling calling card for Modernism,'[20] giving the sense of an indulgent acknowledgement of this 'anomalous' text. Its internally discursive nature is seen to somehow deny its roots in what is presumed to be a monolithic Victorianism. As we have seen in previous chapters, however, the sceptical hermeneutic of Evans' work is evident from her early journalism and her first fiction. The reassuring realism and moralism of *Scenes of Clerical Life* is shadowed by the possible meaninglessness of the characters' actions and lives, and of authorship itself subsumed as it is under a corporate body in periodical culture. Moreover, the self-reflexivity, evasiveness and obscurity of her final work participates in what has been identified as a general shift in literary representation in the 1870s and 1880s, 'when certain deep, discursive regularities (clarity, coherence, sincerity, objective representation) began to crack and slide.'[21] The growth in psychology as a discipline and escalating attention to the subconscious, along with the expansion of media publicity more generally, are related by Allon White to the tendency amongst readers to read 'symptomatically'. The text was increasingly viewed as a transparent window to the writer's personal biases and anxieties. Writers resisted such potential exposure

[20] Hughes, *George Eliot*, 486.
[21] Allon White, *The Uses of Obscurity: the Fiction of Early Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1981), 1-2.

by withdrawing from the public, literally, in the case of Hardy, Meredith and Conrad, the subjects of White's analysis, in the obfuscation of their past. Formally, their work, is seen to present 'occluded or mixed fictions, in which a traditional respect for truth, sincerity and mimetic accuracy, vies with deep uncertainty and difficulty.'[22] When the narrative persona of Evans' last text is related to the periodical and Character writing traditions from which it emerges and to the traditions being formed which it reflected and to which it contributed, we can better understand the originality of the work, rather than its exceptionality and so-called proto-modernism. With *Impressions*, through the mediating presence of Theophrastus, Marian Evans looks backwards and forwards at once, formally, thematically and personally. She returns to the first-person narrative and to the essay format of her earliest published pieces in the *Coventry Herald and Tribune* and to the ancient tradition of Character writing. But she finds a new expression for this first-person narrative and for the original Greek format in her contemporary situation in the 'shadows of the coming race'.[23] *Impressions* sees the writer revisiting her career in the periodical press and in the public eye as she interrogates literary culture and the cult of authorship. And though she was not to know this work would be her last, it is a fitting epitaph in this regard.

Impressions of George Eliot: the obscure author and the mystified readers

Following the publication of *Impressions*, there was disappointment, despite the warnings set out by Evans and Blackwood, that this novelist failed to deliver what her audience most wanted: a novel set in the midlands, another *Adam Bede*. Making reference to one of Evans' most chatty and humorous characters from this first novel, Leslie Stephens demands plaintively: 'What, one asks, has become of Mrs. Poyser?'[24] Most contemporary criticism saw the increasingly abstract nature of Evans' productions, finally exaggerated to unacceptable extremes in this fractured last work, as a source of the novelist's failure to do what she did best: provide realistic,

[22] Ibid., 43, 5, 30-54, 20. White shares with Hughes a tendency to over-simplify the narrative complexities of the Victorian period in his argument for early modernist signals in the work of Hardy et.al., ibid., 40, 55-9.
[23] *Impressions*, 137, the title of Chapter 17, which was originally the final chapter of the book.
[24] Leslie Stephens, *George Eliot*, 194.

domestic, sentimental, plot-driven, dialogue-rich dramas of ordinary middle England. Viewing Theophrastus and George Eliot as one, J. H. B. Browne complained:

> His earlier career was marked by artistic production of incomparable merit, redolent with an ability, a genius that was beyond all learning. His later life has been marked by works of a curious second-hand erudition in science and philosophy, and the pride of this paltry knowledge and these small attainments keep him from becoming again the scholar of his younger self, and imitating the great works of his freshness and youth.

Punning on the chapter title of one of the essays from *Impressions*, Browne continues with sarcasm: 'Is there not vanity, no disease of great authorship in continuing in this course in defiance of public opinion?'[25] Such defiance will lead to failure, the *Athenaeum* warned: 'it must be remembered that in really great works of art the decision rests with the "ordinary reader"; success is here the real test of merit.'[26] Public opinion, it seemed, as indicated by Browne, demanded repetition and copy, the circulation of familiar content and form. From the time of her greatest success with *Adam Bede* in 1859, Evans' work demonstrated an increasing resistance to restrictions imposed by the public and publishers while striving to give both groups enough of what they wanted. But by the 1870s the situation had changed and *Impressions*, it seems, was taken to be the culmination of Evans' growing distance from her middle-class middlebrow audience. The *Fortnightly Review* warned that readers who did not notice the 'vast intellectual gulf' between George Eliot and other 'superficial novelists' in their reading of *Romola* and *Silas Marner* would be 'bewildered and annoyed by the fine subtlety of her typical dissections in the new volume.'[27] Dividing George Eliot's career into two phases, with *Romola* as the 'exception' in its own 'sphere,' the *Athenaeum*, bemoaned the lack of 'direct rapport with her audience' that afflicted *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. This rapport is the key element to the success of the first phase of her career from *Scenes* to *Felix Holt*, and it is the

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[25] [J. H. B. Browne], 'Theophrastus Such,' *Westminster Review* 57 N.S. (July 1879): 192.
[26] [Unsigned], 'Impressions of Theophrastus Such,' *Athenaeum* No. 2692 (7 June 1879): 719.
[27] He goes on: 'they will consider themselves aggrieved to find that *Theophrastus Such* is not a story; and will regard the change of treatment as a breach of contract with the public,' Grant Allen, 'Some New Books,' *Fortnightly Review* No. 150 (July 1879): 149.

'prerequisite of great literary art'.[28]

Criticism of Evans' later work as registered here, focused on the novelist's tendency to be increasingly analytical in her writing. *Impressions* alienates its readers, it was argued, with its forensic exposure of human failings and human vanity. Positioning himself on the side of reader against writer, a typical drawing of battle lines in most contemporary reviews of *Impressions*, the *Athenaeum*'s critic notes this decline in George Eliot's currency:

> In [*Impressions*] are all the characteristics of her later 'manner' which critics have had to deprecate. The scientific interest and tone of her second period culminate in these studies of mental pathology. The consummate literary artist has degenerated into the student of social psychology . . . admirable dissections, no doubt, but life has fled under the scalpel.

There was widespread criticism too for the way in which Evans used her authorial position to propagate her theoretical biases, often mistakenly aligned with the Positivist movement, through these 'dissections'. Such concerns were antithetical to the work of the creative and imaginative artist: the 'eternal truths of art' were being subordinated to 'what may be the temporary opinions of science'.[29] Likening the book to Evans' poem 'Breakfast Party', the *British Quarterly* critic complained, 'it reveals a tendency which has even its pathological aspect. The scientific bias has compelled her to set up consciously a circle of mere lay figures, and that process cannot co-exist with the highest creative impulses, and if persevered in, must finally destroy it.'[30] In pointing to the chasm between authorial intention and readers' expectations that became apparent with the publication of *Impressions*, Browne, Allen and others hint too at Evans' contradictory attitude to her public that emerges quite explicitly in her correspondence around this time. In a letter to Mrs. Peter Taylor, she notes, with a rather bitter humour, Theophrastus has 'most unexpectedly won great favour with the public whom he certainly does not flatter, and they have been magnanimous enough to buy 6000 of his "Impressions"'.[31] In its scathing rejection of her analytical voice in

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[28] 'Impressions,' *Athenaeum*, 719.
[29] Ibid.
[30] [Unsigned], review of *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* by George Eliot, *British Quarterly Review* 89 (July 1879): 241, 240-2.
[31] 11 September 1879, *GEL*, 7: 200. See also ibid., 13, 46; ibid., 9: 225, 227.

this work, contemporary criticism further suggested the mutual exclusivity of critic and artist in the public mind and so produced the sectarian attitude that maintains the separation of George Eliot from the field of cultural production in which Marian Evans worked.

Allen's reluctance to categorise *Impressions* ('the new volume') indicates also the difficulty faced by critics in accounting for this unusual series of essays. And the problem of classification, essential to the critic, crucial to the marketing of books, caused growing concern for her readers and reviewers. From the writing of *Romola*, her novel based on the political and religious history of fifteenth-century Florence, which appeared entirely misplaced in the middlebrow domestically-oriented *Cornhill* in 1862-3, Evans experimented with various genres and modes of publication. *Silas Marner*, a middle-England fable written during the composition of *Romola*, appeared in one-volume format, not typical for the time, in 1861. Her unpopular serial was followed by a standard three-volume novel, *Felix Holt*, in 1866 but during the winter of 1864 she began writing an epic narrative drama in blank verse, *The Spanish Gypsy* (later revised and published in 1868). *Middlemarch* appeared in the highly unusual serial format of six bi-monthly parts with the final two parts published at monthly intervals (1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* was serialised in monthly parts only in 1876. As she became increasingly independent of the market and her public, she continually tested the boundaries of restrictive publishing practices.[32] *Impressions* is undoubtedly her most trying test.

The troubling aspects of a writer's relationship with an audience underscores the entire text and provides a crucial continuity in the theme of the work as a whole – a fact noted by most of her contemporary critics but curiously absent in most current accounts of the work.[33] *Impressions* offers an explicit analysis of the limitations of publishing practices through the genre and particular persona of Theophrastus. Here the audience is courted and despised, humoured and ridiculed by Theophrastus. This affront to both readership and the professions of writing and publishing raised the ire of her critics. They naturally bristled when faced with a series of essays that sought to expose the decimated state of nineteenth-century literary culture, the very culture that

[32] See Gray, 'George Eliot and her Publishers'; John Sutherland, 'Lytton, John Blackwood and the Serialisation of *Middlemarch*,' 98-104; Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*.

[33] Exceptions in this regard are Richard D. Madden, 'George Eliot and the Precious Mettle of Trust,' *Victorian Studies* 44, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 41-75; Stange, 'The Voices of the Essayist,' 312-30; Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, passim; Nancy Henry, 'Impressions of Theophrastus

fed the reviewers who read and commented on her work. The first fifteen essays address various types of vanities or failings centred on the business of literature; all eighteen consider the power of the press and role of readers in establishing ideas of what constitutes valid moral culture. The essays are critical, and overwhelmingly negative or bitter. Most of the targets, such as Vorticella, the 'wife of an important townsman' suffering from an overestimation of the effect of her single publication on the world, are easy ones. Browne at the *Westminster Review* could barely contain his anger at what he viewed as George Eliot's self-indulgent tirade against these minor literary failings hardly worthy of our notice: 'Was it worth Such's while to accumulate these instances of defects, and make this book a sort of Greenwich hospital for lameness of the literary sort?'[34] *Fraser's Magazine* proclaimed it 'unworthy of George Eliot to put her large sword through such a little body' as Vorticella's. To deride those so inferior to her in the moral fable format so tried and tested in storybook form seems wasteful: 'such transparent evils, such commonplace sinners, want but little pointing out'.[35]

The role of the periodical press in promoting Vorticella's sense of self-importance however, is the real target of criticism in this essay, as it is in the sketch of the tragic Merman in 'How we Encourage Research', in 'A Man surprised at his Originality', the 'Watch-Dog of Knowledge', and the 'Too Ready Writer'. Vorticella's 'chronic ailments' that come of 'small authorship' are induced by the attentions of the provincial press in her local town 'with the usual divisions of political partisanship and the usual varieties of literary criticism – the florid and allusive, the *staccato* and peremptory, the clairvoyant and prophetic, the safe and pattern-phrased, or what one might call "the many-a-long-day style".'[36] Theophrastus directs the satire at the writing practitioners; Evans, behind these 'puppets' has the press and that dangerous machine, public opinion, as her objects of ridicule. Perhaps part of the reluctance to address this work's focus on the dubious value of criticism, the compromised state of literary reviewing and publishing, the vanities and terrors of authorship may have to do with the fact that for anyone engaged in studying the text, however loaded the satire, these issues run close to home.

Such,' 171-75.

[34] Browne, 'Theophrastus Such,' 190.

[35] [Anon], 'Three small books by Great writers,' *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* No. 115 N.S. (July 1879): 107.

[36] 'Diseases of Small Authorship,' 121.

It is of course ironic too that this writer made her way into the mid-century literary world through her own editing and reviewing, shaping and manipulating material to suit the context and form of the publication outlet – though this point is not addressed by her critics. Evans and Lewes, however, had been some of the characters mocked by Theophrastus in these essays. Their early writing years were driven by an economic necessity that understood the need to produce what sells. The 'Too-Ready Writer', Pepin, ready to take on any subject, for any publication outlet 'obliged to use his first impressions as if they were deliberate opinions,' a 'general writer' who fulfils the demands of the 'general reader' exemplifies the early Lewes in particular.[37] Prolific and eclectic, Lewes was self-educated in an incredibly wide field of literature, languages, philosophy and science. His determination to publish in all of these areas led many of his more specialised contemporaries to question his expertise in any one area. Evans herself tagged him a writer in the mould of Pepin in a letter to Chapman in 1852.[38]

These impressions, then, with their 'corrosive quality of some acrid chemical substance'[39] suggest the painful burning off of her past for the purpose of longer preservation in the mind of her public of a very particular type of writer. As Lewes was dying, Evans desired an immortality for them both that would survive the ephemeral press or provide a more reassuring sense of permanence than the fleeting and always unreliable favour of public opinion.[40] In *Impressions*, 'George Eliot's fearful desire to be seen and discussed by her audience,' Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests, 'was turned into a confessional comedy and rehearsal for their benefit.'[41] The interaction between context and form noted here is crucial to understanding the significance of Evans' last work. It points the way to the beginnings of a critical debate not just about *Impressions*, however, but about the ways in which Marian

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[37] 'The Too Ready Writer,' ibid., 113.

[38] See Huxley, 'Science,' *Westminster Review* 61 (January 1854): 254-70. Evans also remarked she found his criticism in the *Leader* 'very poor and undiscriminating,' 24-25 July 1852, *GEL*, 2: 49, 50. Discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, this letter reveals Evans' scathing insights to the foibles of periodical publications anticipating this final work to a surprising degree.

[39] Blind, *George Eliot*, 213.

[40] In her autobiography, Edith Simcox recounts Evans' response to a valentine letter the devoted Simcox sent to her idol on 16 January 1876: 'She said it was a pity my letter could not be kept some five centuries to show a more sober posterity what hyperbolae had once been possible.' Cited in *GEL*, 9: 213.

[41] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 158. For more recent work on *Impressions* that, like Bodenheimer's examines the cultural and material contexts informing Evans' last publication, see Madden, 'George Eliot and The Precious Mettle of Trust'; Henry, *George Eliot and the British Empire*; Alison Cable, 'The Emperor's New Clothes: Reading the Real in George Eliot's Life and Fiction,'

Evans' writings more generally are informed by the publishing context in which they were produced and the public context in which they were consumed.

Lord Lytton, a close friend of Lewes and no stranger to public disapproval himself, makes an important early defence of the writer's right to experiment and change mask in defiance of public opinion. His support of the artist in the face of unimaginative critical consensus anticipates some concerns central to the critical reception of *Impressions* and to George Eliot's afterlife. 'The British Public,' he explains, 'as represented by the critical press,'

> is always burying alive in their own reputations its greatest literary benefactors, by walling them round forever with materials taken from their own books. The development of every original genius is ever . . . impeded and obstructed by the Public's hasty classification of it, for the public, having an uncomfortable consciousness that such classifications are premature and imperfect, is always disinclined to acknowledge the necessity of abandoning them. Tennyson has been stunted and atrophied like a Chinese Oak by the fear of ever outgrowing the small flower pot of an established success. I hope that the author of Jubal and The Spanish Gypsy will not listen, and that you will not allow her to listen to those oafs who exhort her not to write Poetry because she can write such great prose.[42]

It is precisely because she was so successful with her early prose fiction that Evans' later work and all her non-fiction writing is viewed through the 'premature and imperfect' classifications of both the 'great' author and her 'great' works. Extremely selective accounts of the essays are scanned for references to concerns previously articulated in George Eliot's novels. The final chapter, 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!', is most typically read as George Eliot's appendix to *Daniel Deronda* with its defence of Jewish nationalism and outrage at the short-sightedness of English persecution of a people who share such similar history and concerns. It is the chapter that has received the most attention, extracted, translated and circulated widely almost immediately after publication by Emil Lehmann.[43] Its popularity at the end of the

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(Ph.D. diss., University of East Anglia, 1998).

[42] Lord Lytton to George Henry Lewes, 8 June 1874, *GEL*, 9: 127.

[43] Haight, *George Eliot*, 523.

nineteenth century coincides with the rise of Zionism and British interest in the settlement of Palestine. The late twentieth-century focus on this chapter emerges too from our own particular attention to oppressed cultures and races, particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust and, academically, in the context of the growth in post-colonial studies. The fact that the essay is the most often reproduced with little reference to its original context, has encouraged the reading of 'The Modern Hep!' as an unmediated transparent account of George Eliot's beliefs regarding nationalism and culture. Chapter two, 'Looking Backward' consists of Theophrastus' account of his midlands childhood with particular emphasis on a pen-portrait of his conservative, Tory-voting father. It is given prominence in almost all critical and biographical accounts of George Eliot as a thinly-veiled, semi-autobiographical portrait with little consideration given to the essay's place in the book as a whole or to the ironic tone of the narrative persona in this 'nostalgic' reverie. In the recent *George Eliot: Family History*, Kathryn Hughes goes so far as to include the chapter in a collection of 'historical documents' that include extracts from a 'Memorandum Book of Occurrences at Nuneaton', Evans' birthplace, and correspondence between her father, her brother and their employer, Francis Newdigate. Vehemently opposed to stark categorisations, Evans might appreciate this blend of 'fact' and 'fiction' that goes unremarked in Hughes' editorial notes.[44]

Chapter ten, of *Impressions*, 'Debasing the Moral Currency' is highlighted for its very mid-Victorian moralistic tone. The narrator regrets the disintegration of serious literary culture and the elevation of the cheap laughs of popular burlesque at the expense of genuine appreciation. The 'reckless search after fodder for degraded appetites' will stultify English national culture, it is argued, and the debasement of national culture will lead to moral decline, all for the sake of the 'moral imbecility of an inward giggle'. The result is catastrophic:

> This is the impoverishment that threatens our posterity: – a new Famine, a meagre fiend with lewd grin and clumsy hoof, is breathing a moral mildew over the harvest of our human sentiments. These are the most delicate

[44] Kathryn Hughes, ed., *Place*, vol. 1, *George Eliot: Family History* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 2000), 27-52. See also Blind, *George Eliot*, 214; Bullet, *George Eliot*, 18; McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 143; Ashton, *George Eliot*, 360-1.

elements of our too easily perishable civilisation.[45]

This moral outrage is aligned with George Eliot's notion of the writer as teacher, of novel-writing as a vocation with attendant responsibilities and obligations. Evans' proclamations on the moral responsibilities on art and artists appeared with increasing frequency in her later years. These views fed the image of the over-ponderous and somewhat pretentious defensive middle-class matron so disparaged in the turn against George Eliot and eminent Victorians in the decades following her death. The Sybil of Cheyne Row popularised in contemporary accounts of her household is figured most explicitly in the Sunday afternoon 'salon' over which she presided. George Eliot held court to invited admirers of her intellectual coterie with Lewes as pleasant attentive courtier marshalling the guests attending his 'Madonna'. Fredric Harrison gives a not unbiased eye-witness account in his *Memoirs*:

> The gatherings at the Priory were a true 'salon' in the French sense of the word, except that there was no pretence of 'esprit,' and their vogue was maintained by the social many-sidedness of George Henry Lewes and by George Eliot's own sincerity and devotion to the best in thought and in art.[46]

The image and environment are carefully constructed however, as recent criticism by Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests and as contemporary remarks from fellow authors indicated. Eliza Lynn Linton, who like Evans arrived from the midlands to London to make her way in the world as a writer, faced the same discrimination as Evans in the mostly male-dominated publishing world. She is acerbic in her criticism of the far-more successful Evans. Part of the success, she implies has to do with the way Marian Evans created George Eliot to advance a sellable and acceptable image to her public, and perhaps to herself:

> She was so-consciously 'George Eliot' – so interpenetrated head and heel, inside and out, with the sense of her importance as the great novelist and profound thinker of her generation, as to make her society a little

[45] 'Debasing Moral Currency,' 83, 84, 85.
[46] Fredric Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1911), 2: 110.

overwhelming, leaving us baser creatures the impression of having been rolled very flat indeed.[47]

Evans' efforts to control and promote a very specific idea of herself as author, has been phenomenally successful. The almost exclusive attention to these three chapters of the eighteen in the book above all else points up the ways in which this Victorian novelist 'George Eliot' dominates the reading of so much of her work to the extent that in the case of *Impressions*, the text itself is barely examined at all. The focus on the artist figure as novelist-teacher does not fully account for the complexity of the work. The fact that it deliberately sets itself up as part of a tradition of Character writing has been noted but its significance not debated. This nineteenth-century version of Character writing displays its indebtedness to the essay genre as it developed through the periodical press in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its heritage is essential to understanding the competing, contradictory tones of these pieces – their distinct morally instructive voice and their idiosyncratic personal commentary. To ascribe this tone to George Eliot the teacher without consideration of the generic context and narrative persona adopted in these essays is to fundamentally misrepresent the ironical nature of much of this work. The 'Character' tradition and Evans' very particular nineteenth-century version of the Theophrastan figure are central to the work's satire.

The Character Theophrastus

Marian Evans placed her first-person narrator in an explicit and known tradition by naming him Theophrastus. The original Theophrastus (c. 370-288 BC), a native of Lesbos was a student of Aristotle and succeeded him as head of the Peripatetic school. His *Characters* consists of thirty sketches of types observed amongst the citizens of Athens and the work popularised a new genre of writing. The Character influenced the new comedy of Menander – with which Marian Evans was

[47] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Marian Evans*; Eliza Lynn Linton, *My Literary Life* (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1899), 86-7. For a more general account of this marketing of particularised versions of the woman writer through literary biographies in the nineteenth century, see Joanne Shattock, 'The Construction of the Woman Writer,' *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8-34.

familiar. *Characters* was translated into Latin by Isaac Casaubon in 1592 and R. C. Jebb, an acquaintance of the Lewes' produced an English version in 1870.[48] Evans' Casaubon in *Middlemarch*, the powerfully drawn exemplar of the scholar who in seeking to find the origin of all mythologies, the key to all literary questions, narrows his life to unbearable extremes is one of the more obvious intertextual figures in *Impressions*. The independent genius claiming the originality of his work and the scholar who withers away his life seeking to disprove notions of originality are both the focus of Theophrastus Such's irony.[49] But the connections to the Character are more than incidental. In his study of the Character's literary history, J. W. Smeed points out that the evolution of the genre through various cultures through the centuries provides a clear indication of changing social attitudes.[50] By maintaining certain features of the original form, and by displaying the traces of that form's evolution – from La Bruyère's popular French version and the seventeenth-century English tradition to the age of the periodical essay in the eighteenth century – Evans' late nineteenth-century contribution to the genre tells us more about the changing attitudes to literary culture and her response to those changes than about social types.

Continuity with the original form is maintained by the fact that Evans' Theophrastus, like his predecessor, focuses on a limited social type. Here, middle-class English men and women involved to greater and lesser degrees with the world of publishing and literary culture replace the citizens of Athens. Like the original model too, these impressions are entirely negative – addressing debased, corrupt or foolish people. The litany of the literary lame then (to paraphrase Browne in the *Westminster*) has a pointed precedent. La Bruyère is an important influence here too: his 'Des Ouvrages de L'esprit' dealt for the most part with literary types, again, with an overwhelmingly negative tone.[51] La Bruyère is explicitly invoked in the tenth essay, 'Debasing the Moral Currency', in a tongue in cheek appeal to the power of tradition, particularly foreign tradition:

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[48] Marian Evans reviewed Guillaume Guizot's new study of Menander's comedies in the *Leader* in 1855. See [Marian Evans], 'Meander and the Greek Comedy,' *Leader* 6 (16 June 1855): 578-9. R. C. Jebb, *The Characters of Theophrastus* (London: Cambridge and Macmillan, 1870).

[49] See 'How we Encourage Research,' 28-40; 'A Man Surprised at his Originality,' 41-8; and 'The Wasp Credited with the Honey,' 88-98.

[50] J. W. Smeed, *The Theophrastan 'Character': A History of a Literary Genre* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), v.

[51] See La Bruyère, *Les Caractères de Theophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce Siècle*, ed. Robert Garapon (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), 67-95.

> I am fond of quoting this passage from La Bruyère, because the subject is one where I like to show a Frenchman on my side, to save my sentiments from being set down to my peculiar dullness and deficient sense of the ludicrous, and also that they may profit by that enhancement of ideas when presented in a foreign tongue, that glamour of unfamiliarity conferring a dignity on the foreign names of very common things.[52]

The double-edged irony here that at once appeals to and erodes the authority of tradition, is typical of the text and it ultimately functions to expose the deceit of creativity. It also suggests why Evans chose the form she did for this final work.

Protesting, as one of her critics does, that 'literary life imaginatively conceived is just as susceptible of creative treatment as clerical life' is to neglect the point of the precedents and the ironic interrogation of these precedents.[53] Evans is not interested in a complex depiction of the foibles and feats of a definable scion of middle-class life for as Smeed explains generally, characters 'are not concerned with complex many-sided personalities: they are always selective and exaggerated to a greater or lesser degree.'[54] Similarly, to point out the restricted focus on *middle-class* types, is to ignore the tradition that from Theophrastus to La Bruyère maintains its definition as Character writing by concentrating on selective groups. This, of course, does not necessarily make for as interesting reading as the story of a well-developed character in a clearly established and detailed setting. Some of Evans' critics have noted that to criticise *Impressions* for its one-dimensional character, its lack of plot or minimal dialogue, is to criticise it for being something it never sets out to be. Though the *Athenaeum* is only half-heartedly apologetic in this regard: 'It may . . . appear unfair to upbraid the book for failing to be what it does not profess to be. But a great artist owes duties to the world as much as it deserves gratitude from it.'[55]

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[52] 'Debasing the Moral Currency,' 81. The quote from La Bruyère is a telling one for the emphasis on entertainment and instruction, the dual aims of any periodical essay: 'Il ne faut pas mettre un ridicule où il n'y en a point: c'est se gâter le goût, c'est corrompre son jugement et celui des autres. Mais le ridicule qui est quelque part, il faut l'y voir, l'en tirer avec grâce et d'une manière qui plaise et qui instruise,' ibid.

[53] Unsigned review, *British Quarterly Review*, 241.

[54] Smeed, *The Theophrastan 'Character'*, 2.

[55] See 'Impressions,' *Athenaeum*, 720. See also Ashton, *George Eliot*, 360: 'It is in the nature of the minor genre to which *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* belongs to lack plot, development, drama, light and shade, movement and feeling. What George Eliot elects to do here she does well, but none of her readers, from Blackwood on, could rejoice that she had chosen to do this rather than give them another novel.'

Why did Evans not choose to fictionalise her critique of literary life as Thackeray and Trollope had done for example, when the novel as a popular, pervasive form was in the ascendant? It is a question that is implicit in criticism of this last work but never debated. The great artist, George Eliot was celebrated above all else as a novelist. And the decline in status of the Character tradition, and more generally, the fall off of attention to the instructive and artistic purpose of periodical articles are concurrent with the rise in the status of the novel through the nineteenth century. The more expansive form suited the privileging of the individual in economic and class terms – as has been argued since Ian Watt's seminal study, *The Rise of the Novel* – and the increasingly complex nature of nineteenth-century society. The Character, in contrast, sacrificed the individual to the type, and contextual background for brevity.

Furthermore, the professionalisation of authorship through changes in copyright law from the late eighteenth-century onwards ensured that an artist's material was clearly determined as a commodity that could be owned.[56] Though seemingly antithetical to the idea of the genius-artist in its expression in the world of business, the fact that an author could claim substantial payment for the reproduction of his work, which he now controlled, reinforced the individualised connection between artist and his writing celebrated in other terms by the Romantics. Increased financial reward, and increased opportunities for publication and distribution no doubt contributed to the cult of the author. The periodical press, as a corporate production, where the name of the writer of individual articles or stories was often suppressed, ran counter to the growing needs of public and publishers alike to buy and sell on the popularity of personality. Such worship came at a price that critics presented as the author's obligation to his readership, one that was presented, as noted by the *Athenaeum* critic above, in the market terms of a fair exchange. George Eliot's persistent breaking of this contract from *Romola* on was finally not acceptable. A review in *Fraser's Magazine* outlined the increasing sense of abandonment:

> [George Eliot] has indeed strained the subservience of the public to a point which is almost ludicrous. The mass of ordinary readers have found George Eliot's later works altogether above their comprehension...Their countenances

[56] On the emergence of authorship as profession see Victor Bonham-Carter, *Authors by Profession* (London: Society of Auhors at the Spottiswoode Ballantyne Press, 1978); on copyright history see Lyman R. Patterson, *Copyright in Historical Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press,

have grown blank and rueful, their interest has flagged: but never their loyal faith in their instructress.[57]

Never, that is, until now. Because instruction came in the form of the novel, or less frequently, the poem, the public, if not the critic, persisted in its loyalty and Evans' book sales continued to increase until well after her death. This book of essays, however, not only betrayed its audience, it undercut the moral and instructive authority of the written word, of the periodical press, the objectivity of the Theophrastan character, and, of George Eliot.

Marian Evans did not write a novel describing scenes from literary life because one purpose of this last text of hers seems to be the rejection of precisely the kind of writing that lay behind the composition of *Scenes of Clerical Life*: the purposefully directed standard magazine-voice combination of instruction with melodrama's pathos and sensationalism. Under attack too is the idea of omniscient narration so often associated with her fiction. While her later novels in part-publication in particular present much more complex interrogations of the author function,[58] Evans took on the most authoritative yet non-narrative based of genres to articulate her questioning of narrative authority. Though all other significant examples of nineteenth-century versions of Character writing first reached the public through the periodical press – Dickens' *Sketches by Boz* (1839), Thackeray's *Book of Snobs* (1840), Trollope's *Hunting Sketches* (1865), *Travelling Sketches* (1866) and *Clergymen of the Church of England* (1866) – Evans published hers exclusively in book form. Since the periodical press is derided throughout the collection, this, too, is hardly surprising. The content of the book provides reasons for the form. Through the similarities and differences from the original genre that emerge in Evans' version, the form helps to convey the point of the contents.

The most obvious way in which *Impressions* sets out to deconstruct the idea of the author-authority is in the characterisation of Theophrastus. His name, meaning 'God-given speech' or 'spoken by God', presents the first obvious irony. The opinions of Theophrastus Such, as presented here, deliberately lack any of the divine

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1968). On the text as commodity, see Feltes, *Modes of Production*; Miller, *Novels Behind Glass*.

[57] [Anon.],'Three small books,' 103.

[58] See for example Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, Carroll, *George Eliot The Conflict of Interpretations*; Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*; Beer, *Darwin's Plots* and post-structuralist readings such as Hillis Miller 'Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*,' 125-43; Chase, 'The

authority, or the cool constructed detachment and consistency of the original Theophrastus.[59] His Greek predecessor did not enter the frame of the Character as a narrative persona so the sense of objectivity and omniscience is paramount. *Impressions* is informed by the development of a more personal essay tradition indebted to the Character form that was popularised in journalism by Addison and Steele in the eighteenth century and remained popular throughout the nineteenth century.[60] Her narrator emerges as a character himself in an intentional merging of the subjective *Spectator's* or *Tatler's* opinions with the Character's always unspoken claims for authority. In this way Theophrastus participates in both the instructive and entertainment aspects of the eighteenth-century periodical tradition that featured in the all-pervasive periodical press the following century. The tradition claims part of its moral authority from the Character while at the same time the didactic purpose or more general 'point' of individual pieces are lightened by the particularisation of the sketch. The Character, as Smeed explains of some of Johnson's essays, 'is the relish in the sandwich, the entertainment between two slices of instruction'.[61] The doubling purpose of the Character then, as entertainment and instruction signals its integral role in the essay and review traditions outlined in my first chapter. *Impressions* displays and interrogates these genres through its perpetually shifting narrative voice that at once claims and disavows authorship and authority, condemns and flaunts the erosion of tradition.

In the original Character tradition, for instance, there existed no contradiction or congruency between individual 'Characters'. In Evans' version, however, Such's condemnation of Touchwood's temper is followed by his apology for Mordax's irritability; uneven judgements mark many of Such's pieces.[62] The original Theophrastus did not explicitly pass judgement or moralise, the purpose of the Character in his hands is not didactic: 'he is a reporter, a deadpan observer of human affairs.'[63] There is uniformity of tone, content, style and length of each piece in

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Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*,' 215-27.

[59] See *The Characters of Theophrastus*, ed. and trans. J. M. Edmonds (London: Heinemann, 1929).

[60] Fitzjames Stephen gives some indication of the popularity of Addison's work (and the fluidity of genre at mid-century) when he nominates the *Spectator* as 'one of the best novels in the language,' see Fitzjames Stephen, 'The Relation of Novels to Life,' 161. Numerous selected editions of the paper were printed throughout the century.

[61] Smeed, *The Theophrastan Character*, 66.

[62] See 'Only Temper' and 'The Watchdog of Knowledge,' 56-62, 67-73.

[63] Smeed, *The Theophrastan Character*, 5.

Characters while *Impressions* consists of a series of pieces of various lengths, some playful, some sombre in tone. Some are focused entirely on the first-person narrator while he barely features in others. Borrowing from Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, who were read by Evans, La Bruyère incorporated anecdote, epigraph, and portrait in his *Caractères*. He remoulded the uniform length of the Character to encompass a wider variety of styles and Evans follows his lead in this regard adding, some would argue, the short story to the mix.[64] But though Smeed suggests such tampering with the boundaries of the form extend it beyond original model to turn it into something else, the continuities with the Greek form are deliberately resurfaced in a doubled-edged way throughout the text to suggest the reality of literary evolution: that historical context can fully determine our notions of cultural authority and scholarship and such a realisation denies the possibility of absolute truths and objective claims for the value of art and tradition.

Whether composed for after-dinner entertainment or as exercises in rhetoric, *Characters*, demonstrates Theophrastus' status as 'the great classifier,' practising on the citizens of Athens for humorous effect his methods as a botanist.[65] Theophrastus Such displays classificatory tendencies throughout *Impressions* reminding us of his predecessor in his particular engagement with scientific classification, of sea mammals, for example in 'How we Encourage Research.' Theophrastus reminds us in this way, among others of Evans' old friend, the great classifier himself, Herbert Spencer. The original Theophrastus never individualised his Characters with names. Evans, in contrast has her Theophrastus clearly identify and nominate his types using two distinct naming systems. The first uses the vocabulary of science noted above, the second invokes references from classical literature, Greek and Roman, in the style initiated by La Bruyère. Both naming systems tell something of Evans' purpose. The unfortunate scholar Merman in 'How we Encourage Research' had a group of Cetaceans as his intellectual opponents: Grampus (Greenland Whale), Narwhal (corpse whale or sea unicorn), Butzkopf (German for Grampus), Dugong (sea cow), Cachalot (sperm whale), and Ziphius (bottle-nosed dolphin).[66] Merman's failure to get his scholarship recognised by his peers, it is implied, is not unrelated to the fact that he does not belong to the 'group' classified cetacean. Such a political and

[64] Ibid., 121.
[65] J. M. Edmounds, 'Introduction,' *The Characters of Theophrastus*, 5.
[66] Henry, *Impressions*, 173, n., 6.

somewhat personal point is not brought to the foreground in Theophrastus' first-person account. He pities Merman's obsessive passion to 'correct' previous scholarship led by Grampus, feels particularly sorry for his long-suffering wife, despises his selfish intellectual pride in reducing her circumstances, and mocks the conservative backlash against the pretender in the periodical press by Grampus' followers (all in the club, all with access to publication outlets, all cetaceans). But the 'we' of the title signals an awareness of the corporate nature of the judgement of what constitutes worthy scholarship.

The limitations of classification, surfacing in Evans' muted admiration for the sociologist Von Riehl in her 'Natural History' essay in 1856, and again in *Scenes*, are lambasted in often heavy-handed fashion throughout this essay. The denaturalising effect produced by efforts to break into the artificial category constructed through the pages of periodicals is exposed in the depiction of Merman's demise; so too is the parasitic nature of 'scholarly' articles and reviews that repeat well-worn ideas rather than take on new theories on old subjects. The 'scandal' of Merman's challenge to Grampus' learning becomes the subject of popular press gossip so Merman, 'though not extensively read, was extensively read about' and even the possibility that his information was accurate is not relevant. The question of truth is irrelevant: 'Sound learning would not have been amusing; and, as it was, Merman was made to furnish those readers with amusement at no expense of trouble on their part.' The important thing was to know to laugh the 'laugh of the initiated'.[67] The multiple meanings of circulation that emerge – of publications, of scholarship, of gossip and public reputation – depict a vicious closed circle.

The didactic message that points up various types of betrayal, sins of pride and cowardice, selfishness and vanity, intellectual dishonesty and irresponsibility, however, is not entirely straightforward. Merman is as culpable as Grampus of these failings. The responses of the easily-led public are determined by Grampus' easily-led supporters. If 'spoken by God,' this Theophrastus has a forked tongue. The origin of blame is not determinable. As a result, the piece contributes to undermining the authority of the Character. The confusion has led commentators to view this essay not as a Character at all but as moral fable or short story; with no clear indication of the moral, it can hardly be seen to function as a fable; if a short story, why does it appear

[67] 'How we Encourage Research,' 34, 37, 33.

in a collection of essays presented as nineteenth-century versions of the Character?[68]

As with so many of the pieces in this collection, more questions are raised about it than can be answered – which makes it a puzzle as to why the book has generated so little critical debate. The point of blame lies with Evans, it is implied, who provides an unreconstructed rattle-bag in this last work that does not deserve close attention – 'all the scraps of a waste paper basket stuck between two boards', 'chips from the workshop which might well have been left on the ground'.[69] Consideration of the Theophrastan persona, however, offers other possibilities; his 'cryptic performance'[70] is central to the often bitterly ironic nature of the text.

The deliberate confusion of judgement in 'How we Encourage Research' suggests the compromised nature of Such's authority that is typical of this figure. He is almost universally condemned in critical considerations of the book as pretentious and shallow or as an unrealised individual who can never win the sympathy of his audience. He is 'a nobody, a pale and dubious ghost, utterly unlike life'.[71] More forcefully, comparing the work to Evans' other most unread longer work, Kerry McSweeney suggests, 'Half an hour of the post-prandial loquacity, periphrastic self-consciousness and genteel wisdom of this narrator is enough to send one back to *The Spanish Gypsy* with a sense of relief.'[72] He is both 'pale' and pompous, but he is meant to be. Part of the irony of his attack on those who join in on the 'laugh of the initiated' and its destructive implications for personal integrity and public scholarship is that Such is himself presented as a member of such an inner club.[73] In his intercourse with the 'political molecule' Spike, with philanthropists such as Mixtus, with journalists and writers, and in his comfortable clubbish conversations with Acer and Trost, he shows himself to be part of a city network of intelligentsia that is male, educated, all-knowing. Such's easy mocking of Vorticella and Hinze suggests the typically bourgeois élitism that assures him of the inherent rightness of his own judgement. His criticism of Scintilla, for whom, 'the majority of persons were ridiculous and deplorably wanting in that keen perception of what was good taste,

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[68] Smeed suggests that *Impressions* demonstrates what happens to the Character in the hands of a novelist, Smeed, *The Theophrastan Character*, 121.
[69] 'Three Small Books,' 110; 'Impressions,' *Athenaeum*, 720.
[70] Nancy Henry, 'Introduction,' *Impressions*, xiv.
[71] 'Three Small Books,' 106.
[72] McSweeney, *George Eliot*, 143.
[73] The pun is unavoidable; Nancy Henry suggests the *Such* 'surname' deliberately invokes the Character formula 'Such a type who...' to point up his own Character status. See Henry, 'Introduction,' xviii.

with which she herself was blest by nature and education,' might well be applied to himself in many of these sketches.[74]

Such irony has been noted by critics but for the most part, it is considered a contributing factor in the failure of Theophrastus as a character not part of Evans' purpose. The unevenness in the presentation of this figure, however, cannot be put down to carelessness on the part of this extremely self-aware and intricately constructed piece. As Nancy Henry makes clear in her introduction to the text and in her detailed editorial notes, 'verbal tricks characterise *Impressions* – contorted sentences, ambiguous quotations, incessant puns – destabilise the identification of sources, the fixed meanings of words and the reader's expectations.[75] The *Saturday Review* critic for example complained in particular about Evans' over-dependence on metaphors and allusions to new scientific advances. He notes with disdain these allusions too often involve the names of animals not from the familiar Aesop's *Fables* but from the Zoological Gardens such as 'walrus', 'skunk', 'hoope', 'shrike', wishing 'such hideous name and form' would 'keep their distance'.[76] The pervasive use of classical names is the other obvious example of the deliberate and intricate scholarliness of the text. A complex web of intertextual references to Greek and Latin literature stretches the knowledge of the most erudite of readers and in reality obscures full understanding of the text. Evans knew it would and she is only half-jokingly apologetic about her epigraph to the text from Phaedrus: 'Certainly everybody who does not read Latin will be offended by its claiming notice, and will consider that only the deepest dyed pedantry could have found the motive for it. But I will not leave it out altogether.' There are untranslated names, phrases or quotations in Latin, Greek, German and French throughout the text.[77]

The epigraph, from the Phaedrus' prologue to Book Three, sets the pattern for the contradictions between subjective opinion making and objective appeal to traditional authority that marks the opening 'autobiographical' essays 'Looking Inward' and 'Looking Backward':

If someone will let his suspicions wander,

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[74] 'A Half-Breed,' *Impressions*, 77.
[75] Henry, 'Introduction,' xiii.
[76] [Unsigned], review of *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* by George Eliot, *Saturday Review* (28 June 1879): 805.
[77] To John Blackwood, 9 April 1879, *GEL*, 7: 130.

> Snatching as his own what applies to all,
> He will foolishly expose his guilty conscience.
> I should like to be excused no less than he,
> For I have no mind to brand any individual person,
> But rather truly to show life itself and the habits of men.[78]

Theophrastus opens his claims for our attention with the apologetic explanation that we can never truly fully represent others nor can we ever fully represent ourselves. The authority of the claims for his critique of his fellow men is dependent on his own awareness of his failings. 'Dear blunderers,' he explains, 'I am one of you,'

> if the human race has a bad reputation, I perceive that I cannot escape being compromised. And thus while I carry in myself the key to other men's experience, it is only by observing others that I can so far correct my self-ignorance.[79]

The 'apology' is not reassuring. It merely suggests the limitations of the narrator's concerns and gives some insight into his personal bias. We are alerted to this narrative instability from the very beginning, implied as it is in the fluctuating meaning of the word 'impressions' in the title of the book. Evans' insistence that the definite article was not to be included in that title is another indication of her intentions to both invoke and disrupt tradition and authority.[80] The overt display of omniscience that is implicit in Such's ponderous judgements, then, seems to explicitly call attention the subjective voice submerged beneath the objective authority of her predecessors – Theophrastus, La Bruyère – and in this way, to undercut it. That the real Theophrastus appears in this text in fictional form is of course, the most obvious way of undercutting the status and objectivity of the father of the form.

Written by a woman using a male pseudonym, with a male first-person narrator describing a mostly male-dominated world, it is inevitable that one aspect of the text's irony is directed at the segregated business world of literature and literary criticism that cast Evans, and to a certain degree, Lewes, as 'half-breeds' or Mermen.

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[78] Translated by Henry, *Impressions*, 170, n., 1.
[79] 'Looking Inwards,' 4-5.
[80] In a letter to William Blackwood she points out the misprint in the advertisements: 'The title is

Though she achieved literary acclaim and substantial wealth from her work, she remained a social outcast to the majority of the upright bourgeoisie for most of her life because of her 'left-handed marriage';[81] Lewes was never fully accepted by many as a serious intellectual and philosopher. Unlike her fellow journalists editors essayists and novelists such as Thackeray, Dickens and Trollope, she existed in a much narrower social world. It was George Eliot only who had a public persona, Marian Evans remained behind the scenes. Her refusal to allow her photograph to be taken, to sign autographs, to give interviews or to authorise biographies can all be seen to be part of this separation of Marian Evans Lewes from George Eliot.[82] As Rosemarie Bodenheimer has suggested, even in her letters, as in all letters, the self that emerges to her private correspondent is a fictionalised or constructed self and argues that George Eliot 'elaborated in fictional form both the probing self-analyses and the transcending self-idealizations that she tended to repress, or compress, in her correspondence'.[83]

In this careful withdrawal from any kind of public recognition, Evans is of course more like Meredith and the later Victorians; her tactics are strikingly different from the approach of her contemporary, Dickens, who died in 1870. His editorial name appeared on every second page of his journals; his photograph was the frontispiece to the first edition of *Nicholas Nickleby*. His fame was 'so peculiarly a personal popularity,' his acquaintance Charles Kent explained, and it reached its apotheosis in his celebrated public readings, the 'greatest one-man show of the nineteenth century'.[84] The terms in which Dickens explained the reason for the performances – which generally involved reading heavily edited sections of the most crowd-pleasing parts of his stories – signal the very different nature of his response to a changing Victorian society:

> I have long held the opinion, and have long acted on the opinion, that in these times, whatever brings a public man and his public face to face, on terms of

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printed "*The* Impressions of etc" instead of simply "Impressions of etc.",' *GEL*, 7: 144.

[81] Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, 1: 204.

[82] There are only two photos of Evans and she categorically denied these existed. See Hughes, *George Eliot*, illustration 20 and the cover photo to Henry's edition of *Impressions*.

[83] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, xvi.

[84] Charles Kent, *Dickens as Reader* (London, 1872), 37; Raymund Fitzsimons, *The Charles Dickens Show: An Account of his Public Readings 1858-70* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1970), 15.

> mutual confidence and respect, is a good thing.[85]

The public 'man' George Eliot could hardly face her audience in confidence and though most knew the reality behind the pseudonym, the 'name' sold. Part of Evans' refusal to give up 'George Eliot' is related to her awareness of the productive reward of this cultivated discrepancy between her public and private selves. John Forster famously opposed the readings, giving some indication, it could be argued, of the reasons behind Evans' calculated privacy, but he sounds more like the stuffy Theophrastus than the canny Evans always conscious her own public performance as George Eliot:

> It [the public reading] was a substitution of lower for higher aims; a change to commonplace from more elevated pursuits; and it had so much of the character of a public exhibition for money as to raise, in the question of respect for his calling as a writer, a question also of respect for himself as a gentleman.[86]

Impressions, much more overtly than Evans' letters, brings to the surface the creative, deceptive, illusion-making impulse presented as public life. The hollowness of public acclaim is emphasised throughout this text. Hinze, the 'too deferential man' whose name translates from the German as 'everyman', is an obvious figuration of obsequious, and therefore, irrelevant public opinion.[87] Hinze is overwhelmed by each of Felicia's utterances though her observations, Theophrastus explains are as commonplace as those 'of an ordinarily refined and well-educated woman on standard subjects, and might have been printed in a manual of polite topics and creditable opinions'. Her conversation consists of the fodder of a middle-class magazine, it is implied; topics that are the new fads, as defined by the media, functioning like salutations, 'such as pipes, chocolate or masticating chewing'. To be conversant with these topics Theophrastus explains is vital to easy social intercourse. The media in this way serve a purpose and his irony is not primarily directed at the random nature

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[85] Charles Dickens, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens: A Complete Edition*, ed. K. J. Fielding (Brighton: Harvester, 1988), 264.
[86] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Dent, 1966), 3: Bk., 8, 200.
[87] 'The Too-Deferential Man,' 49-55.

of these acceptable openings for conversation. Instead, he seems to invoke them to justify the mediocrity of his own conversation: 'it is right and meet that there should be an abundant utterance of good sound commonplaces. Part of the agreeable talker's charm is that he lets them fall continually with no more than their due emphasis.'[88]

Everyman is the focus of Theophrastus' satire, the 'complimentary ape', who turns his meeting with Felicia as 'an opportunity comparable to an audience of a Delphic Sibyl' and her by the way remarks, 'part of the preliminary media of understanding' as if the infallible wisdom of an oracle. Theophrastus moves from particular example to general commentary to drive home his point:

> His nature is not tuned to the pitch of a genuine direct admiration, only to an attitudinising deference which does not fatigue itself with the formation of real judgement. All human achievement must be wrought down to this spoon-meat – this mixture of other persons' washy opinions and his own flux of reverence for what is third-hand, before Hinze can find a relish for it.[89]

The pun on the 'preliminary media of understanding' is pointed and the sharpness of the satire emerges as the piece progresses. Hinze, like Vorticella, is a soft surface target. The Media, 'spoon-meat' opinion makers, are the real objects of scorn here. They create a world divided into Sibyls and complimentary apes and suppress through their shorthand vocabulary typified by the sound-bite opinions of Felicia,[90] what Marian Evans and Theophrastus both craved, the illusive ideal reader who appreciates with 'genuine direct admiration'.

Theophrastus' lack of faith in the possibility of reaching the audience that will understand him given the current state of literary criticism, audience ability and the generally debased state of English culture as he presents it, has lead him to forswear publication of any other material until after his death. His only publication to date, he reports with wry irony has been appreciated only in translation by the Cherokee tribe. He is not 'willing to go through the pleasing punishment of publication' – that false notion of self-sacrifice for art he knows to be a lie. His ideal readers, he

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[88] Ibid., 50-1

[89] Ibid., 50-51, 55.

[90] In response to Hinze's question about the state of Art in England she replies, 'with a light deprecatory laugh: "Oh . . . I think it suffers from two diseases – bad taste in the patrons and want of inspiration in the artists",' 51.

acknowledges, consist of a fictional public: 'My illusion is of a more liberal kind, and I imagine a far-off hazy multitudinous assemblage, as in a picture of Paradise, making an approving chorus to the sentences and paragraphs of which I myself particularly enjoy writing.'[91] It is an ironic self-reflexive self-portrait, and presented in what White has described as the age of the 'symptomatic reader' seems to recognise the plight yet ridicule the pretension of the writer alienated from a sympathetic reader. He is in this way too, reminiscent of Marian Evans' first writer figure, Macarthy, whose 'Notebook of an Eccentric' appeared posthumously.[92] His self-important preservation from potential criticism is mocked by the author through the too deferential figure of the first-person narrator, the friend selected to edit Macarthy's papers. Through the limited perspective of her narrator, the early Evans reinforces the crucial public aspect of writing buried in that word *public*ation. Publication, she intimates, is what keeps writers honest and responsible. Macarthy's self-delusions are allowed to persist because he never goes public. He is even described by his 'editor' as existing in an other-worldly state: 'His sympathy with mankind was that of a being of an analogous, rather than of identical race.'[93] Theophrastus has the same fear of that 'too corporeal auditor'. Alison Cable has suggested that Theophrastus, in this way is the real figure of fun in *Impressions*. He 'incurs George Eliot's contempt', she argues, for his failure to live up to the responsibility of being a writer, for being a Macarthy rather than a George Eliot.[94]

Marian Evans obviously behaves quite differently from Theophrastus in this regard. From 1850 she spent her life in the publishing trade, the greater part of that time as the writer 'George Eliot'. Despite the erosion of authority that I have argued is everywhere displayed in this text, there is the sense also of an implicit belief in the power of writing to teach, to present the possibility for change or to imagine a better future than that laid out in the shadows of the coming race. Evans explains in a letter to Blackwood:

> There are some things in it [*Impressions*] which I want to get said, and if the book turned out to be effective in proportion to my other things, the form

[91] 'Looking Inward,' 12.
[92] See [Evans], 'Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric', reprinted in Pinney, *Essays*, 14-26.
[93] Ibid., 16.
[94] Cable, 'The Emperor's New Clothes,' 234.

> would lend itself to a 'Second Series' supposing I lived and kept my faculties.[95]

'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!,' the final essay of the book and one least mediated by the character of Theophrastus, offers for many the most immediate access to the opinions of George Eliot. Evans responded warmly to letters from Jews in Britain, the US and Europe thanking her for her anti-anti-Semitism in her depiction of the Jewish race in *Daniel Deronda*.[96] The acceptance of such thanks implies a certain degree of sympathy between the author and the aspirations of her main character. The perceived continuity of concerns between the novel's depiction of Deronda and his mentor Mordecai, and Theophrastus' plea for tolerance, further strengthens the view that the voice in this last essay is more George Eliot than Theophrastus, as many critics have claimed from its first publication to this day. Evans' letters to David Kaufmann, a champion of the Jewish cause in London who wrote favourably of her last novel, further suggests the abandonment of the Theophrastan persona in this final essay. She writes to him of *Impressions*:

> The book (not a story and not bulky) is to appear near the end of May and as it contains some words I wanted to say about the Jews, I will order a copy to be sent to you.[97]

There is no denying that Evans was clearly engaged by the unity and strength of Jewish culture and Jewish history. The Jewish race exemplified the persistence of a definable community in an international context, a balance Evans desired for her own alternatively too inward looking or aggressively imperialist and intolerant English nation. Nancy Henry's recent criticism of *Impressions* sees it in this determinedly post-colonial context. She argues that the text 'self-consciously reconciles the fragmentary intrusions of colonial knowledge and the need to consolidate Englishness'.[98] In this declaration by a Greek of the need to be more like the Jews, however, the satire of the text is more complex. It suggests an ironic reversal of

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[95] 5 April 1879, *GEL*, 7: 126.
[96] *Journals*, 1 December 1876, 146; See also Lewes to Elma Stuart, 23 December 1876, *GEL*, 6: 322.
[97] George Eliot to David Kaufmann, 17 April 1879, ibid., 7: 138.
[98] Henry, *George Eliot and the British Empire*, 6. See also Nancy Henry, 'George Eliot and Politics' *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, 138-58.

Matthew Arnold's assertion of the Hellenic ('to see things as they really are') over the Hebraic ('conduct and obedience') as the necessary remedy for his deprived, rigid and plodding nation.[99] Theophrastus, despite his best intentions, however, is far more prosaic than clear-thinking, spiritual and spontaneous through most of these essays, and though he shares with Arnold a deep pessimism about the increasingly mechanical and material nature of the future, his opposition to the machine in the fearfully entitled 'Shadows of the Coming Race,' is presented with irony as shrill and panic-driven.[100]

More broadly *Impressions* can be read as a purely pessimistic critique of a culture that, lacking a sense of its own heritage is doomed to annihilation. In this way, 'The Modern Hep!' is a fitting conclusion to the work: it is the only essay that offers the possibility of change, that moves beyond diagnosis to remedy. The inclusion of this essay with the seventeen others in *Impressions* as it stands was perhaps a mistake, however, from another point of view, since it seems to make redundant the mediating persona of Theophrastus and encouraged the type of criticism that sees him as redundant throughout the book. Cable, for instance suggests that Theophrastus' voice is 'incrementally displaced' in the course of the book. This type of reading is supported by an over-emphasis on the tenth essay, 'Debasing the Moral Currency' as exemplifying in particular George Eliot's views. The splitting of the text using this essay as a dividing mark into more Eliot-driven imperatives ignores the fact, for example, that the second last essay, 'Shadows of the Coming Race' exists as a dialogue between Theophrastus and his friend. The hysterical tone of the piece is entirely consistent with Theophrastus' paranoia and he is never more 'present' as a narrator than in this essay.[101]

Nonetheless, Evans' own attempts in this last essay to maintain his presence produce passages that are peculiarly complicated and uneven in tone such as the

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[99] Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism,' *Culture and Anarchy with Friendship's Garland and Some Literary Essays*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 165.

[100] 'Shadows of the Coming Race,' 137-42. Arnold and Evans met at dinner at Cross's home in 1876 and Lewes reported, unsurprisingly, Evans' concurrence with many of his views on religion in a letter to Elma Stuart, see *GEL*, 6: 78; ibid., 9: 184, n., 2. Joseph Carroll has pointed out that Arnold's Hellenic/Hebraic division derives from Heinrich Heine, the exiled German-Jewish poet; this suggests another connection since Evans was the other well-known champion of the poet in the English press. She wrote four articles on him: one in the *Westminster* (January 1856), two in the *Leader* (1 September 1855 and 23 August 1856) and one in the *Saturday Review* (26 April 1856). See also Joseph Carroll, *The Cultural Theory of Matthew Arnold* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982), 241.

[101] See Cable, 'The Emperor's New Clothes,' 228.

borderline racism of the first-person rant against foreigners marring the English language with their mangling of consonants and vowels.[102] Such passages are reminiscent of the middle-class fussy bachelor holding forth to his fellow club members but they have none of the pointed polemic that marks the most of this biting anti-imperialist paper. This last essay was originally the second last in the manuscript. For reasons that have never been explained, order was reversed for publication. The very token-like appearances of the narrator who unifies the other seventeen essays perhaps explains the reversal.

Arguing for the alignment between George Eliot's and Theophrastus' views, a more obvious source than *Daniel Deronda* for the type of critique that emerges in *Impressions* is her 'Leaves from a Notebook' published posthumously by her step-son Charles Lee Lewes, along with some of her essays.[103] These short pieces are too brief for the most part to be called essays, too general to be Characters or Sketches. There is little irony, no lightness, ('we have silliness enough' she remarks in 'On Authorship'),[104] and no particularised illustrations. The pieces most notably resemble Pascal's Pensées or some of La Bruyère's commentaries on writers and writing from 'Des Ouvrages'. These influences suggest Evans' purpose: to consider the moral responsibility of authorship and publication. She balances her thoughts about this responsibility with an acknowledgement of the limitations imposed on the writer by the public and by genre. These notes clearly indicate that issues at the core of *Impressions* as articulated by Theophrastus preoccupied Marian Evans long before she produced this first-person narrative persona. Authorship is here likened to public office or a vocation; the Author is a teacher and influences the public mind. Journalism is made distinct from creative writing and as such has different responsibilities. It functions as a public service in its 'judicious careful compilation' of material and, she claims, in 'that continuous production which in other kinds of writing is precisely the evil to be fought against'. 'Bad' literature is an 'amusing spiritual gin' and the reading public is likened to a dependent alcoholic who does not want to be saved: 'the dear public would do well to reflect that they are often bored from the want of flexibility in their own minds. They are like the topers of "one liquor".' The need for authors to find new material, to find new forms, to challenge

[102] 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!,' 158-9.
[103] Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook.*
[104] Ibid., 290.

what we understand to be good is emphasised. The writer must be freed, she argues, from 'the vulgar coercion of conventional plot'.[105]

Evans, then, is not a proto-postmodernist. She makes claims for the validity of literature as an instructive medium and the author as instructor throughout her letters. As Nancy Henry warns of *Impressions*:

> to insist that by questioning the value of cultural origins and authorial origination, George Eliot abandons the idea of authorship – that she kills and buries the author – would make her unaccountably postmodern and would risk the suppression of just those ethical concerns she consistently argues are central to the process of writing.[106]

But as indicated in her ambition to move beyond the certainties of well-rehearsed literary forms, that 'ethical concern' can be made manifest in the ironic dismantling of what she viewed as the rigid and ultimately detrimental expectations of the public and of publishers. The profound differences between her haphazard notebook jottings and the layered ironies of *Impressions* must be kept in mind in any comparison of the two works. The decision to create a first-person narrative persona in her last work is crucial in this regard, introducing as it does a performative aspect to the narrative that sets out deliberately to draw attention to and to undermine the power of authority and tradition. And it is not just Theophrastus', and his fellow writers who are the focus of out attention here; rather we question the authority of any constructed author figure and this implicitly includes 'George Eliot'.

Conclusion

That George Eliot is party to the cultural paralysis outlined in *Impressions* is not generally accepted as part of the irony of the text. Instead, as Dorothea Barrett argues, the calculated use of the Greek tradition is seen as an unfortunate contributing factor to the over-serious, self-important 'sibylline image' partially constructed by Evans, and which negatively afflicted George Eliot's afterlife:

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[105] Ibid., 291ff, 189, 291; 301, 297, 301.
[106] Henry, 'Introduction,' xxviii.

> the Theophrastan form was an unfortunate choice. Any non-fictional form would have facilitated the domination of . . . the conscious conservative in George Eliot, but the Theophrastan is particularly conducive to, and has a long heritage of, wisdom handed down from on high.[107]

'She takes herself . . . as seriously as her reading public invites her to,' Cable suggests, with Evans claiming 'for her text all the classical and intellectual authority associated with the Theophrastan tradition whilst at the same time undermining the status of the Theophrastan speaker himself'.[108] The fussy pedantic first-person narrator is himself the product of and participant in the literary culture she condemns, and George Eliot places herself in a position of ultimate authority above the literary environment that flatters, deceives, miscalculates, compromises, and that is heading to disintegration.

The ways in which Evans plays with George Eliot's elevated status with her audience in this decimated literary environment, then, contribute to the multiple ironies of the text. As criticism of *Impressions* has shown, that status rested almost entirely on the back of her early works. The George Eliot celebrated in 1879 is the George Eliot who was writing in 1859. Preserved as a particular type of novelist by the critical press, venerated as the creator of Amos and Milly Barton, of Adam Bede and Mrs Poyser. Evans, with deliberately extreme analogy and heavy irony, presents 'George Eliot' as Ganymede, the Greek ideal of male beauty, cup-bearer to Zeus. Only this Ganymede is forever condemned, it seems, to serve the same drink to his public, 'topers of one liquor' as they are. The idealised and deluded figure of Ganymede appears in *Impressions* as the man who refuses to grow old, celebrated in the critical press for his early precociousness, the first public view of him becomes the only view, in public and in private:

> Ganymede had been first introduced into the writing world as remarkably young, and it was not exceptional consequence that the first deposit of information about him held its ground against facts which, however open to observation, were not necessarily thought of. It is not so easy, with our rates

[107] Barrett, *Vocation and Desire*, 6.
[108] Cable, 'The Emperor's New Clothes,' 219, 247.

> and taxes and need for economy in all directions to go in expensive search after more genuine substitutes.[109]

As I have argued in this thesis, economic pressures have a determining role over the content and form of the periodical magazine in particular. In its dual role as purveyor of entertainment and pulpit of instruction, the periodical in many ways, made the nineteenth-century reading audience Marian Evans courted and sought to remake. An awareness of the parameters of the field of cultural production implicitly censors the writer and complicates issues of intellectual property, authorial originality, and control over the creation of public name to match the published work. All impinge upon the evolution of Marian Evans' work and on the emergence of George Eliot, as Evans was well aware. 'The Wasp Credited With Honey' addresses these very issues. The essay ends with a group of animals and birds all claiming inside knowledge of the creator of the treasured honeycomb and is generally read as a thinly disguised fable on the Liggins affair. The essay begins however, with a lengthy preamble on the 'vulgar frauds' of obvious plagiarism motivated by the 'immediate market value' of an invention or idea. It spares its condemnation in particular for the 'quiet appropriation of other people's philosophic or scientific ideas', especially when the thieves are well-established figures so their crime is always unsuspected. The defence of the underrated Lewes against his more 'accomplished' contemporaries is implicit in Theophrastus' condemnation of Euphorion, for example,

> the accomplished theorist [who] has an audience who expect much of him, and take it as the most natural thing in the world that every unusual view which he presents anonymously should be due solely to his ingenuity. His borrowings are no incongruous feathers awkwardly stuck on; they have an appropriateness which makes them seem an answer to anticipation, like the return phrases of a melody.[110]

However, in the unquestioned acceptance of the originality of Euphorion's genius, in the faith in the organic wholeness of his work that sees in diverse and often contradictory material the push towards one melody, there is a telling illustration also

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[109] 'So Young!,' 103.
[110] 'The Wasp Credited With Honey,' 89-90.

of the limitations placed on Marian Evans' legacy. The domination of George Eliot in considerations of the writer's work has lead to the extraction of her early writings in particular from the contexts that shaped them and often determined their form to a degree that is rarely credited. This thesis has sought to bring that early and most often unacknowledged debt to the surface, to take into account Marian Evans' negotiation of the material realities of publication that influenced her creative output in her early years.

Following her phenomenal success with *Adam Bede*, Evans began the process of disowning her past. The later works, *Romola*, *The Spanish Gypsy*, *Jubal*, *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda* and *Impressions*, which apparently alienated her audience, show the increasingly financially independent writer extend the parameters of her cultural environment. However she was unable to completely deny her own participation in the market economy that demanded she write following specific models to ensure publication and financial reward, initially as a journalist, later as a serial novelist. In this last work, Marian Evans revisits the past to take sarcastic swipes at the cultural field that produces and promotes blinkered versions of a Ganymede or George Eliot. Evans turns her back on this early George Eliot and disowns her early career as a periodical writer through figures such as Ganymede, Hinze, Vorticella, Pepin, and Lentulus, the self-proclaimed critical genius. They are compromised creatures, their legacy – bound up in the ephemeral press and the always fleeting attention of the public – is perishable. Evans was determined to secure a more permanent future. Little wonder her roots in the periodical press have been ignored. And little wonder too that this last work is so understudied since its turn against her earlier incarnation brings that very early self so much to the forefront.

As the title, 'The Wasp Credited with Honey,' suggests, to the surprise of all creatures gathered, the wasp is eventually recognized as the maker of honey. This fable ending however does not present the revelation of the 'real' creator, the 'real' George Eliot, as a triumph. There is no reassertion of the authority of author in this resolution. 'A complimentary deputation to the Wasp was resolved on, and there was a confident hope that this diplomatic measure would tell on the production of honey.'[111] The public demands only that George Eliot go on producing her liquid gold – the same sweet product – for easy consumption. George Eliot's account is

[111] Ibid., 98.

credited, her audience get their fill of 'sweetness and light'.[112] It is the most 'natural' thing in the world for her to do, her critics of *Impressions* argued then, and now. Anticipating this type of deputation, she instead takes the wasp's form of attack and defence in this last work. Her unrelenting stinging offensive against the publishing industry that the public feeds, and feeds from, is Evans' last effort to salvage a more complex, a more enduring and ultimately a more modern writer from the paid queen of the pastoral her public idolised.

In general, twentieth-century critical studies of Evans' work have dutifully fulfilled the writer's wishes for a more perfect immortality by unfolding the intricate and layered creations of her masterful novels while continually overlooking Marian Evans' roots in the periodical press. The reversal in emphasis that sees the more complex Dorothea Brooke or Daniel Deronda favoured over Mrs. Poyser or Amos Barton, however, has resulted in the over-simplification or outright neglect of Evans' writings before George Eliot. Consequently, the ways in which George Eliot's omniscient narrative voices are deeply embedded in mid-century periodical culture have been almost totally disregarded, and the persistent use in all of her literary creations of popular modes such as melodrama have been wholly obscured. In the push to demonstrate either the great teacher or the compromised moralist, the entertainer in George Eliot has been made to disappear. This study, then, has sought to offer a corrective to the misrepresentations of the first decade of Marian Evans' working life that have so influenced the writer's legacy. In resurrecting the editor and journalist, it suggests that it is time too, perhaps, to revive the poet and translator. It has argued for the need to recognise the novelist's indebtedness to the periodical press at mid-century and insists that by acknowledging the shaping force of that contingent commercial environment, we are obliged to reconsider our idea of the artist, as Theophastus does in this last work. And following Marian Evans' lead in this text, we are asked to revisit our conception of the novelist, George Eliot.

For Theophrastus, *Impressions* is a fearful cry, a last ditch effort to set the record straight, to claim a better future for English culture than the dystopia predicted in 'Shadows of the Coming Race'. The Arnoldian fear of modernism's dehumanisation of mankind is not surprising coming from this conservative middle-

[112] Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy,' 90-114; Evans once described a country house she lived in as being full of 'sweetness and light' but had 'not enough of more prosaic desirabilities' so she was going to give it up. To Mark Pattison, 17 November 1873, *GEL*, 5: 460.

class man. The clinical utilitarian efficiency of new technologies championed by Theophrastus' interlocutor and friend, Trost, provoke terror in Theophrastus who foresees the complete desensitisation of humanity and the ultimate elevation to rule of those 'inorganic combinations,'

> which will carry on the most elaborate processes as mutely and painlessly as we are now told that the minerals are metamorphosing themselves continually in the laboratory of the earth's crust? Thus this planet may be filled with beings who will be blind and deaf as the inmost rock, yet will execute changes as delicate and complicated as those of human language.[113]

Language, literary culture, the best that is thought and said, is reduced here to 'a consciousness screeching irrelevantly, like a fowl tied head downmost to the saddle of swift horseman'.[114]

The mock-serious apocalyptic tone of this piece suggests that Theophrastus' vision is not Evans' own. To ascribe his fear of the modern to Marian Evans is to do precisely what she sought to resist throughout this last work: the easy categorisation of the author, ascribing to her one politics, one vision, one way of writing, one way of reading. Writing this last work as Lewes was dying, Evans imagined her own end: the death of the author envisioned in this text is not simply an ideological proposition, it is a literal reality. It is unsurprising then that she is more concerned than usual with her legacy, with last impressions and lasting impressions.

[113] 'Shadows of the Coming Race,' 141-2.
[114] Ibid., 141.

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