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George Eliot's Literary Criticism - especially as seen in her Contributions to Periodicals.

A Thesis Submitted

by

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Abstract of a Thesis

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This is the first attempt at a complete survey of George Eliot's literary criticism, which is contained in all her writings: in letters and journals, novels and essays. The main concern of this thesis is George Eliot's literary reviews and review articles, which covered only a brief period of her life: from 1846 - 1865.

The Introduction describes this period and discusses her critical qualifications, her private reading and opinion of literary criticism and the literary references used in her novels.

Chapter I is a survey of her opinion of Fiction, of past and contemporary novelists, as seen in her letters, novels and essays. Her reviews of individual novels, major and minor, are studied in detail with some use of other contemporary periodical criticism as a means of comparison.

Chapter II similarly surveys her opinion of poetry and drama.

Chapter III is a more selective account of her reviews

of prose works other than fiction: literary criticism, translations and biography. Some of the many non-literary works reviewed by George Eliot are studied because, as they are mainly addressed to the general reader, they have bearing on George Eliot's methods and critical criteria. Her private reading of prose works is examined and her opinion of the special contribution of women to literature is considered.

The conclusion summarises her criteria of criticism.

A list of the essays and reviews contributed by George Eliot to periodicals is given in the Appendix.

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Notes

1. It has been found convenient not to include in the text dates of publication which were coincidental with George Eliot's review of the books concerned. A full list of publications and dates is given in the Appendix and Bibliography.

2 The text of all essays and review articles is that of the first publication. Any relevant difference between this text and that of those essays contained in the revised edition of *Essays* (1884) is mentioned in the footnotes.

Abbreviation used in the Footnotes

Haight	.....	*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 7 vols., London (1954-6).

INTRODUCTION:

George Eliot's literary criticism is to be found in all of her writings: in journals and letters and in her novels and essays. But the bulk of her criticism is contained within a relatively brief period of her life, in contributions to periodical literature most of which were written before the publication of her first novel.

George Eliot's career as a literary critic began soon after her friend Charles Bray bought the Coventry Herald and Observer in June 1846. As far as is known her first contribution was a single review, 30 October 1846, of three books translated by C.Cocks, Quinet and Michelet's The Jesuits, Michelet's Priests, Women, and Families, and Quinet's Christianity in its various aspects from the Birth of Christ to the French Revolution. A review of Gilbert a Becket's Comic History of England appeared 13 November 1846. A series of humorous essays was introduced, 4 November 1846, under the heading 'Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric', and five of them were collected and placed in her commonplace book by Sara Hennell, George Eliot's friend and Bray's sister-in-law. These were not critical essays, but they point to the possibility of other contributions to this newspaper during the next few years. However, I do not think that there can have been many because from early in 1848 George Eliot's duties as her father's housekeeper

were further burdened by his increasing ill-health. Her authorship of the review of J.A. Froude's Nemesis of Faith, 16 March 1849, which shows a confidence in style and tone not to be found in the early essays and only obtainable from a practiced writer, is fully authorised by letters.[1]

In May 1849 George Eliot's father died and after a long holiday abroad she returned to Coventry, restless and eager for occupation. In October 1850 she again met John Chapman, publisher of her translation (1846) of Strauss's Das Leben Jesu and friend of the Brays, and in the following year she began to work on An Analytical Catalogue of Mr. Chapman's Publications (1852), writing many of the summaries of individual works of which this catalogue consisted. In May 1851 Chapman bought the quarterly periodical the Westminster Review from W.E.Hickson. George Eliot's review of R.W.Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect, as Exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews (1850) had appeared in the Westminster Review in January 1851. While negotiating for the magazine Chapman obtained an agreement from Hickson that he would publish George Eliot's review of W.R.Greg's The Creed of Christendom (1851) in the Westminster Review, but it was supplanted by James Martineau's review, and was published in the Leader, 20 September 1851. In June 1851, George Eliot wrote the prospectus for the new edition

1 Haight, 1. 279,n.

of the Westminster Review and was its assistant editor from the first issue, January 1852, until after April 1854. One of her duties was to collect together the various reviews by different writers of the quarter's publications and to weave them together into the articles 'Contemporary Literature of England' and 'Contemporary Literature of America'. The articles on the literature of France were written entirely by G.H.Lewes from January 1852 to July 1853, and the articles on German literature entirely by Mrs. Sinnett.[1] Several of the reviews of English and American literature included in the Contemporary Literature articles have been attributed to George Eliot on the internal evidence of style, clearly unreliable evidence in view of her editing of the complete articles. I have preferred to accept the statement of Oscar Browning, the friend of her later years, who, in his Life of George Eliot (1890), maintained that she wrote nothing for the Westminster Review but the review of Carlyle's Life of Sterling (1851) in January 1852 until the series of review articles which began with 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé' in October 1854.[2]

In 1853 George Eliot met G.H.Lewes, then part-editor with Thornton Hunt of the Leader, and she wrote in the literary columns of that weekly newspaper during Lewes's spells of illness in October 1853 and in May and June 1854.[3]

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1 These articles have been attributed to George Eliot.
2 pp. 34-5. See Appendix below, p.240.
3 Between Jan. and May 1854, George Eliot was translating Feuerbach's Das Wesen des Christanthums. This work was published in July, and was the only book to appear under George Eliot's real name, Marion Evans.

Again there is no positive evidence with regards to her authorship of the separate reviews contained in these issues and evidence of style is again misleading, mainly because all her known articles for the Leader are written in a lighter vein than those in the Westminster Review and in these early reviews it is clear that she endeavoured to adapt her style to suit with Lewes's jovial manner. From 1855 identification becomes easier, both in the Leader and in the Westminster Review, for George Eliot's literary earnings are recorded in her diaries, though not in detail until 1856.[1] She contributed review articles in the Westminster Review from October 1854 to January 1857, and in October 1855 took over from Mrs. Sinnett the article on 'Belles Lettres', which, with separate articles on theology, science, etc., had superseded the old geographical division of current publications. George Eliot continued to write 'Belles Lettres' for seven issues until January 1857. In April and July 1856 the articles included reviews of books on Art and in January 1857 she also wrote the article of contemporary literature headed 'History, Biography, Voyages and Travels'. Meanwhile she contributed to the Leader, in October 1854, in March 1855 and then regularly from May 1855 until August 1856, separate reviews of single books or of two or more books of similar kind or interest. In April and May 1856 she contributed three articles to the Saturday Review.[2]

In October 1856 George Eliot began to

1 In July 1854, George Eliot and G.H.Lewes left England together, returning in March 1855.

2 G.S.Haight has attributed four articles to George Eliot in the Saturday Review. See Appendix, below, p.238.

write 'Amos Barton', the first of the Scenes of Clerical Life (1857). She wrote no more reviews for the Leader or the Saturday Review and her connection with the Westminster Review ended with the January 1857 issue. The only other published reviews [1] by George Eliot were the two contributed to the Fortnightly Review, which appeared in March 1865 under the editorship of G.H.Lewes. These reviews appeared above George Eliot's name, in accordance with the policy of the magazine. Those in the Westminster Review, the Leader and the Saturday Review were unsigned and it was not known that George Eliot had been a regular reviewer until after her death when, in 1884, C.L.Lewes published Essays and Leaves from a Notebook, which included only those essays and review articles from the Westminster Review, Fraser's Magazine, the Fortnightly Review, together with the 'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt' from Blackwood's Magazine, 1868, which George Eliot had wished to be republished and had herself edited for this edition.[2]

1 George Eliot contributed two non-critical essays to Fraser's Magazine in 1855 and four to the Pall Mall Gazette in 1865. See Appendix, below, pp. 231, 238.

2 An attempt was made by John Chapman to profit from George Eliot's success as a novelist with the republication of 'the five articles' which she contributed to the Westminster Review. In a letter, 16 Jan. 1860, he admitted that he had handed her the receipt which 'conveyed to me the entire copyrights in the articles', but he was willing to give her half profits. He added 'It would reflect equal credit on you and on the Westminster. - No, not equal credit for of course it would be chiefly yours'. (See Autographed Letter, 217, in University of London Library). The result of this request is to be seen in G.H.Lewes's Journal, Jan. 1860, in which he writes 'squashed that idea'. See A.T.Kitchel, George Lewes and George Eliot (1933) p. 196.

During her brief period as a literary critic George Eliot had reviewed a great variety of books on subjects which included art, theology, philosophy, history, mythology, science, natural history, voyages and travels, biographies, translations, works of scholarship, criticism, essays, novels and poetry. Many of these were written in French or German. My concern in this thesis is with her literary criticism, but the dividing line between what is literature and what is not is sometimes difficult to draw, for many of the books are of literary value despite their subject, while all of George Eliot's reviews are of use in revealing her critical tenets and methods. Therefore I have drawn freely for illustration upon the reviews of non-literary works.

But first in this introduction it is necessary to look at the two other sources of George Eliot's literary criticism. Her letters and her novels.

Literature occupied only a minor part of George Eliot's correspondence. It was a commentary, to those friends to whom literature was also one of the greatest pleasures of life, upon her private reading and upon some of the books she read as a critic and a novelist, rather than the detailed criticism which is to be found in many of Charlotte Bronte's letters. Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate from the letters a clear picture of George Eliot's tastes in literature and her judgments on her contemporaries and on past writers which adds greatly to any survey of her published criticism.

Like Maggie Tulliver George Eliot was from childhood an avid reader, but with far wider opportunities than her heroine.[1] She early learnt French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek and could read these languages with ease. Later, to further her studies for the writing of the Spanish Gypsy (1868) and Daniel Deronda (1876), she learnt Spanish and a little Hebrew. George Eliot's first letters were to her Evangelical friend and tutor, Maria Lewis, and they reveal literary tastes that inclined towards theology and religious biography, and towards the poetry of Young's Night Thoughts and Mrs. Hemans. But Maria Lewis's influence was not absolute. There is, in a letter written 16 March 1839, an amusing and revealing defence of the reading of works of fiction and poetry. George Eliot described some

> standard works whose contents are matter of constant reference, and the names of whose heroes and heroines briefly and therefore conveniently describe characters and ideas.

Her list of such works includes Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe, Gil Blas, Hudibras, Byron and Southey's Poetical Romances and the novels and poems of Walter Scott.[2]

George Eliot's friendship with the Brays and the Hennells, which began in 1841, altered the whole course of her life, for the change in her attitude towards revealed religion affected her reading habits and the Brays and Sara

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1 Mill on the Floss (1860), Book I, Chapter iii.

2 Haight, 1. 21.

Hennell directed her towards a wider field of literature and towards opinions no longer clouded by hazy principles of morality.[1]

During the period of her editorship of the Westminster Review and the main period of her reviews her reading was determined to a large extent by her work. Although very little selection was possible with regard to the books reviewed in 'Belles Lettres',[2] the subject of the review articles in the Westminster Review and some of the articles for the Leader were chosen by George Eliot. It is clear that the review article, 'Memoirs of the Court of Austria', in the Westminster Review, April 1855, and a number of reviews of books of German mythology, theological history and philosophy in the Leader in 1855 and 1856 are related to George Eliot's private reading in Austria and Germany in

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1 Joan Bennett, in her study of George Eliot. Her Mind and Her Art (1948), has pointed out that George Eliot's opinions in religion and literature were not suddenly changed by contact with the Brays. I agree that she had been drawing towards the new attitudes for some time, but the Brays and Sara Hennell confirmed and strengthened her convictions and made possible, by that personal support which George Eliot seems always to have needed in all the important decisions of her life, the positive action of renouncing her Christian beliefs. Similarly, I believe, her attitude towards literature became more stable through contact with minds as liberal as her own.

2 But see her review of Thoreau's Walden, below, p.211. and, clearly, the choice of the space to be allotted to each book is George Eliot's.

1854, and to the desire expressed in a letter to Sara Hennell from Berlin, 22 November 1854, in which she regretted that she was then unable to write on the 'new German books which would be fresh and instructive in an English review.'[1] George Eliot and G.H.Lewes early in their life together formed the habit of reading aloud. Their reading included many books on philosophy and science and George Eliot seems to have shared Lewes's enthusiasm for these studies. Later, during his illnesses and after his death in 1878, George Eliot's reading was directed more and more towards these subjects in order to help with the publication of his books. There is also a great deal of evidence in the letters and journals of her studies with regards to her own novels. She read English history and politics for Felix Holt (1866) and Italian and Spanish history and poetry and even books on period costume for Romola (1862 - 1863), and for the Spanish Gypsy (1868).

But throughout her letters there is evidence of George Eliot's reading for personal pleasure, reading which clearly divides into the constant re-reading of old favourites, the books of those of her contemporaries who were her personal friends and whose writing she admired and the more important current publications.

There is much also, in the letters written after the novels began, of her opinion of critics and periodicals and,

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[1] Haight, 11. 189.

on the whole, it is so antagonistic that it is difficult to reconcile it with the fact of her own early work as a critic and with her consent to the re-publication of some of these early review articles. An important reason for her dislike of critics is at one with her refusal to read the criticism of her own novels. It was, perhaps, partly due to her resentment at the part certain newspapers had played in circulating rumours that her books were written by a Mr. Liggins. [1] Certainly her refusal to read reviews of her own work dates from the time of the Liggins affair. [2] But I think that this reason can be over-stressed, for her distrust of periodicals occurs as early as March 1857, when in a letter to Sara Hennell she urged her friend;

> Don't let your soul be moved by newspaper criticisms ... It is only as a question of sale that such notices are at all important, and even in that light, they can't stop the sale of a book that really lays hold of the readers' minds. One person who has admired and enjoyed tells another, and by and bye Athenaeum, Spectator and Co. are forgotten. 3

Throughout her life she continued to read certain kinds of review selected for her by G.H.Lewes. A letter to David Kaufmann, 31 May 1877, explained her attitude as an author

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1 The Critic, Leader and Literary Gazette had all printed letters on the controversy despite letters from Blackwood and George Eliot to the Times declaring Liggins an imposter. An attack in the Athenaeum (2 July 1859), particularly wounded her.

2 The first indications appear in letters in June 1857. In a letter to John Blackwood, 5 July 1859, George Eliot declared herself sick of the affair; (Haight, 111. 110).

3 2 March 1857; (Haight, 11.305).

towards the critics. Her letter is an appreciation of Kaufmann's review of Daniel Deronda [1] and of his 'remarkable insight into the nature of art and the processes of the artistic mind'. She explained that his 'discriminating sensibility, the perfect response to the artist's intention,' was 'the fullest, rarest joy to one who works from inward conviction and not in compliance with current fashions.' She continued,

> ... the usual approximative, narrow perception of what one has been intending and professedly feeling in one's work, impresses one with the sense that it must be poor perishable stuff without roots to take any lasting hold in the minds of men; while any instance of complete comprehension encourages one to hope that the creative prompting has foreshadowed, and will continue to satisfy, a need in other minds. 2

Another letter, to C.L.Lewes, 20 June 1871, explains her attitude towards critics as it affected the reading public. She wrote,

> there is more than enough literature of the criticising sort urged upon people's attentions by the periodicals. To read much of it seems to me seriously injurious: it accustoms men and women to formulate opinions instead of receiving deep impressions, and to receive deep impressions is the foundation of all true mental power. 3

But it is clear that her strong and increasing antipathy is

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1 'George Eliot und das Judenthums', Monatschrift für Geschicte der Wissenschaft des Judenthums, 1877. See also a letter, 2 July 1859, to Emile Montégut, author of an article 'Le Roman Réaliste en Angleterre' in Revue des Deux Mondes (15 June 1859); (Haight, III. 109).

2 Haight, VI. 379.

3 Haight, V. 155.

directed towards certain kinds of criticism. A letter to Alexander Main, 2 May 1876, gives more specific detail of her dislikes. She described

> the ignorance, and recklessness, the lack of any critical principles by which to distinguish what is matter of technical judgment and what of individual taste, the ridiculous absence of fundamental comparison of one author with another -

and she concluded,

> You who are young may hope to do something towards making periodical writing a genuine contribution to culture. 1

When William Blackwood became editor of Blackwood's Magazine after the death of his uncle, George Eliot wrote to him, 17 December 1879, her hope that 'Maga' would avoid

> easily written criticism - a writing about and about, in place of giving an account of books. I think that mere criticism unless it be of the very highest order is the least beneficent of all writing, stimulating the practice of ignorant lazy judgment apart from any genuine impression. 2

I have read all the English fiction and all of the poetry reviewed by George Eliot and have examined the reviews of these books in the majority of the leading weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies, and can fully support George Eliot's view that much contemporary criticism was careless, non-discriminate, or biased by the predisposition of the writer. I have made use of this criticism throughout this thesis in order more clearly to illuminate George Eliot's own criticism, which was of the 'very highest order'. Her work is careful, consistent, always impartial, and, apart

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1 Haight, VI. 244-5.

2 Haight, VII. 228-9.

from an occasional lapse when the limited space of the 'Belles Lettres' article and the large pile of current publications on the reviewer's table forbade more than a mere listing of titles,[1] each book is described at least sufficiently adequately to give the reader an idea of its contents and its value in its own literary kind. The criticisms where possible are substantiated by extracts to show the variety and scope of the work. Here are no tabulated opinions. Her aim is to stimulate the reader and not to satiate or dull his curiosity towards a book. Each review or review article is in itself pleasurable reading with a wide field of reference to other literature and other arts, but George Eliot does not allow her personality to intrude upon her task as reviewer. The 'Belles Lettres' articles were especially well and unobtrusively written, and George Eliot took advantage of the coincidences of publication which allowed her to compare one work with another, to use the inferior writer to set off the brilliance of the greater.[2] This in general must have been the reaction of the contemporary reader to each of the reviews and review articles as they appeared unsigned in the Coventry Herald, the Westminster Review, the Leader and the Saturday Review.

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1 In 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, p.301, a scornful review of James Douglas's Passing Thoughts does not explain that it is a volume of essays.

2 Throughout this thesis I have given the reference 'Belles Lettres' rather than the Westminster Review because the individual reviews in the articles form a composite whole.

The modern reader can gather together all the reviews known to be by George Eliot from these sources and can add to them the two reviews which appeared under that name in the Fortnightly Review, the evidence of the literary opinion contained in the letters and, finally, the literary references contained in the novels.

George Eliot's use of literature in her novels is manifold, but is always an integral part of the story or of her method of narration. Literary reference is used to set her story in period, as in Adam Bede (1859) when Captain Donnithorne recommended the new publication, the Lyrical Ballads (1798) to the Reverend Irwine,[1] or when Mrs Transome in Felix Holt (1866) is stated to have preferred in her youth Southey's Thalaba to the Lyrical Ballads.[2] It is as natural a method of relating the small events of the story to the larger world of contemporary affairs as is the incident connected with the coming of the railway in Middlemarch (1871-2) [3] and it serves at the same time as comment on the tastes and education of the characters.

George Eliot also uses literary reference as a means of setting her story against a larger background of universal time. So the story of The Mill on the Floss gains deeper significance by the comparison of Mr. Tulliver's destiny with that of Oedipus[4] or with,

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1 Chapter v. 2 Chapter i.
3 Chapter lvi. 4 Book I, chapter xiii.

> that conspicuous, far-echoing tragedy, which sweeps the stage in regal robes, and makes the dullest chronicler sublime. 1

Again, in Middlemarch, Dorothea Brooke's unfortunate marriage with the 'dried bookworm'[2] Casaubon is shown in a more pathetic and ironical light by her vision of herself as enduring the burdens of life-long companionship with another 'judicious Hooker' or blind Milton.[3] The mottoes to the chapter headings of Felix Holt, Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda are chosen with care to form an additional comment on the events of the story and to give them wider application. The almost complete absence of literary reference in Silas Marner (1861) is, I believe, as deliberate as is the choice of the motto from Wordsworth on the title page of this moral fairy-tale, with its simple, singleminded and passionate characters to whom literature is a world apart.[4]

But it is the literary tastes and reading habits of her characters that are of the greatest importance in an assessment of the literary criticism contained in her novels. For as the characters parade their literary learning before us and each other, or, more privately, pursue the reading which influences their character and outlook on life, George Eliot comments on the taste and education of her contemporaries and of the past generation, the generation of her youth. There is little doubt that George Eliot realised the possible influence of literary reference in fiction on the readers

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1 Book III, chapter i. 2 Chapter ii.

3 Chapter ii. 4 See below, p. 123.

of that fiction. Her belated attempts to remove the Whitman motto from Daniel Deronda [1] are proof of this realisation. A study of the reading habits of her female characters is particularly significant of George Eliot's care that her books should not lead her readers to the wrong kind of literature or to false or stock attitudes to books. Perhaps the clearest instance of this concern is to be found in Felix Holt, in the persistent attack made by Felix on Esther Lyon's reading of that 'worldly and vain writer' Byron. [2] Esther was educated at a French Protestant school,[3] but she is very like that other young lady, Rosamund Vincey, who attended an academy where she was taught

> all that was demanded in the accomplished female - even to extras like getting in and out of a carriage. 4

Rosamund's favourite poem was Lalla Rookh,[5] and, although she read the poems of Scott, she also delighted in the poetry of L.E.L. and in the pictures and stories of the annual the Keepsake,[6] which George Eliot had aptly described as effeminate and feeble.[7] Mrs. Transome had

> secretly picked out for private reading the lighter part of dangerous French authors - and in company had been able to talk of Mr. Burke's style, or of Chateaubriand's eloquence. 8

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1 See below, p.164.
2 Chapter v. This is the Reverend Rufus Lyon's description of Byron.
3 Chapter vi.
4 Middlemarch, Chapter xi.
5 ibid., Chapter xvi.
6 ibid., Chapter xxvii.
7 In 'The Natural History of German Life', Westminster Review (July 1856), p.52.
8 Felix Holt, Chapter i.

George Eliot's part-sympathetic, part-ironical portrayal of Gwendoline's desire to impress Deronda with her erudition and good sense is an object lesson to any ill-educated young lady ambitious of self-improvement. She

> recalled the famous writers that she had either not looked into or had found the most unreadable,... carried up [to her own room] a miscellaneous selection - Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Butler, Burke, Guizot - knowing, as a clever young lady of education, that these authors were ornaments of mankind, feeling sure that Deronda had read them, and hoping that by dipping into them all in succession, with her rapid understanding she might get a point of view nearer to his level. 1

Maggie Tulliver was more fortunate in knowing a Bob Jakin to bring her the 'secret of life' in a copy of Thomas a Kempis's De Imitatione Christi,[2] and a Philip Wakem to aid her in the development of a wider and more sure literary taste.[3] So also Mary Garth became acquainted with good literature through Fred Vincey.[4] But Mary Garth and Maggie Tulliver had more native intelligence and good sense than Rosamund Vincey and Gwendoline Harleth. Indeed Mary, after her marriage to Fred Vincey, 'wrote a little book for her boys, called "Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch"', a book which was accredited by the people of Middlemarch to her husband, who 'had been to the University "where the ancients were studied"'. [5]

It is the people with the most leisure who are the

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1 Daniel Deronda, Chapter xliv.
2 Mill on the Floss, Book IV, chapter iii.
3 ibid., Book V, chapters i, iii, and iv.
4 Middlemarch, Chapters xii and xiv.
5 Middlemarch, 'Finale'.

greatest readers in George Eliot's novels: the young ladies, Captain Donnithorne, the Reverend Irwine, Mr. Trumbull the auctioneer of Middlemarch, pompous and always willing to air his literary knowledge, but kindly and, a sure sign of George Eliot's peculiar fondness for one of her characters, a lover of Scott,[1] But perhaps Mr. Brooke is the most well-read of all George Eliot's characters, in his own estimation, and he alone is sufficient warning against indiscriminate reading and false literary judgments. His extreme ignorance, made apparent to all because of his earnest pretensions to erudition and good taste, is at once amusing and alarming as when he names Wordsworth and Humphry Davy as the first and second poets of their day,[2] and suggests to Casaubon that Dorothea should amuse him by reading to him the novels of Smollett, which, he declared, are 'a little broad', but he added, 'she may read anything now she is married, you know.'[3] Clearly it is better to read no secular literature, like the Dissenting minister, the Reverend Rufus Lyon,[4] like Nancy Lammeter whose knowledge of profane literature 'hardly went beyond the rhymes she had worked in her large sampler',[5] like Mrs. Glegg, who 'was accustomed to lay open before her on special occasions' Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest,[6] or like Mr.

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1 ibid., Chapter xxxii.
2 ibid., Chapter ii.
3 ibid., Chapter xxx.
4 Felix Holt, Chapter xxvii.
5 Silas Marner, Chapter xi.
6 Mill on the Floss, Book I, Chapter xii.

Tulliver, who felt 'somehow a familiarity with' Jeremy Taylor 'because his name was Jeremy' like his own and who, both proud and puzzled by Maggie's love of books, declared 'the child 'ull learn more mischief nor good wi' the books.'[1] Others of George Eliot's characters who have little time to read include Adam Bede and Mr Garth, men not clever but deeply reflective and possessed of a natural wisdom that had no need of knowledge from books. George Eliot wrote to John Blackwood, 17 August 1859,

> I envy you the acquaintance of a genuine non-bookish man like Captain Speke. I wonder when men of that sort will take their place as heroes in our literature, instead of the inevitable "genius". 2

Such men had their place in George Eliot's novels.

But there were also less admirable characters who did not read, but who, nevertheless, possessed books. Such was Mr Featherstone, the rich miser of Middlemarch, whose shelves contained several volumes in dark calf.[3] In the Impressions of Theophrastus Such (1879) we are introduced to 'A Political Molecule', who

> bought the books he heard spoken of, arranging them carefully on the shelves of what he called his library, and occasionally sitting alone in the same room with them. 4

The literary tastes and opinions of George Eliot's characters are mostly presented to us in this unobtrusive manner. There

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1 ibid., Book I, Chapter iii.
2 Haight, III. 133. Captain Speke was the explorer of the sources of the Nile.
3 Chapter xii.
4 Chapter vii.

is no downright statement of the author's view of specific books or kinds of literature;[1] it is expressed in the tone of her description or comment, or in the character of the person who admits to reading this or that book.

George Eliot is nowhere a dogmatic critic; her views on literature are to be found in her reviews and discussions of individual writers and books rather than in separate statements as to the nature of art and its kinds or the function of the artist. Therefore it has been found most convenient in this thesis to survey George Eliot's reviews and comments on individual writers in the separate kinds of writing - novels, poetry and other prose works - rather than to attempt to collect and classify her views as to the separate kinds. Her critical criteria, apparent in all her writing, are discussed in the concluding chapter.

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1 There is, of course, comment in many of George Eliot's novels on the art of the novelist and his relation to his reader. But, apart from the digression in Adam Bede, Chapter xvii, this comment is seldom separable from the texture of the story.

CHAPTER I

George Eliot's criticism of fiction.

In the review article 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', Westminster Review, October 1856, written at the same time as 'Amos Barton', George Eliot wrote of the novel, 'there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements'. She maintained that the novel could take any form, but she pronounced that the right ingredients must be used, 'genuine observation, humour, and passion.' [1] The fragments of George Eliot's writings collected by C.L.Lewes and entitled Leaves from a Notebook include a discussion of the methods of storytelling, and again George Eliot held no dogmatic views. She wrote,

> Why should a story not be told in the most irregular fashion that an author's idiosyncrasy may prompt, provided that he gives us what we can enjoy? 2

In her discussion of the subject of Perversion in her review of that novel, she declared,

> genius is often greater than its intentions, and it is quite possible that a novelist should even make it his object to illustrate such a position as that "all fat people are virtuous, and all thin people vicious", and yet produce a very remarkable novel. For, if he had arrived at this conviction through his experience, he might reproduce that experience with artistic power; he might give us such admirable portraits of fat saints and thin sinners, and might throw such thrilling interest into the vicissitudes of their lives, that we should quite forget his mistake as to the foundation of ethics. 3

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1 pp. 442-61.
2 Essays and Leaves from a Notebook, pp. 300 - 1.
3 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856, pp. 258-9.

But if George Eliot had no rigid views as to the form of the novel, she held firm convictions with regards to the function of the novelist. The clearest statement of these views appears in a digression in Adam Bede, [1] in which she considers her own aims as a novelist. Answering an imaginary reader's protests at her representation of the Reverend Irwine she declared that she did not consider it 'the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be,' and so she would not 'select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman, and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions.' Her aim was rather 'to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind.' The imaginary reader further argued that the realities of life and character are seldom what 'enlightened opinions and refined taste' require and therefore should be modified in a novel in accordance with 'those correct views', so that the reader is left in no doubt as to which character he is to condemn and which to admire. But George Eliot insisted, 'fellow mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are'; they cannot be changed and must be tolerated, pitied and loved, for they are the persons amongst whom we live. The novelist must not turn his back on them in order to create imaginary worlds of perfect men and, in doing so, cause his reader 'to turn a harder, colder eye... on the

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1 Chapter xvii.

real breathing men and women', to chill them with indifference when he should cheer and help them with forbearance and 'outspoken, brave justice'. So George Eliot was content to tell a simple story, 'without trying to make things seem better than they were'. Her only fear was that she would falsify the picture, for, she declared, exact truth even about one's own feelings, is difficult. Elaborating on this necessity for truth in art she explained that it was because of her love for the 'rare, precious quality of truthfulness' that she delighted in Dutch paintings, preferring the homely details of village life and people to all the heroes and warriors. She argued that there is beauty in the lives of even 'clumsy, ugly people', in the 'deep human sympathy' as well as in the perfection of form or face, and she pronounced it the duty of art to reveal it. She continued,

> In this world there are so many of these common coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore let Art always remind us of them; therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things - men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them.

A conversation with George Eliot recorded by Emily Davies, in a letter to Jane Crowe, 21 August 1869, throws further light on George Eliot's opinion of the task of the novelist who treats of 'commonplace things'. Emily Davies wrote,

> we got to talk of fiction, and she was eager to explain the difference between prosaic and poetical fiction -

> that what is prosaic in ordinary novels is not the presence of the realistic element, without which the tragedy cannot be given - she herself is obliged to see and feel every minute detail - but in the absence of anything suggesting the ideal, the higher life. 1

George Eliot had already discussed the necessity for truthful reprentation in Art when dealing with working class people in the review article 'The Natural History of German Life', Westminster Review, July 1856. [2] Her picture of the 'slow utterance, and the heavy slouching walk' of the English peasant and of the uncouth revelry of hay-makers seems very far from the conception of the beauty contained in the ugliest lives which she expressed in Adam Bede. But in this article she is concerned to show how the artist and writer have continually misrepresented the countryman, and has painted idyllic ploughmen and shepherds, innocent and moderate in their amusements and happy in their daily occupations. She pointed to the general ignorance which accepts without question the portrait of 'a peasant girl who looks as if she knew L.E.L's poems by heart'. George Eliot maintained that this cockney sentimentality and unreality is a 'grave evil' in social novels, which 'profess to represent the people as they are.' She submitted that

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our

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1 Barbara Stephen, Emily Davies and Girton College (1927), p. 183.

2 pp. 51-79. This article is a review of two books by W.H.Riehl, Die Bürgerliche Gesellschaft, and Land und Leute. In Essays (1884) it is entitled The Natural History of German Life: Riehl.

> sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as great artists can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment.

Through such pictures, she continued,

> more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical disertations. Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men 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 <u>is</u> 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.

As in her statement in <u>Adam Bede</u>, George Eliot emphasised that the artist must not deviate from truth in order to point a moral.

> The thing for mankind to know is, not what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks <u>ought</u> to act on the labourer or the artisan, but what are the motives and influences which <u>do</u> act on him. We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness. 1

These views on the function of Art are inherent in all George Eliot's literary criticism. I have described them here in full, because they are particularly relevant

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1 See also George Eliot's letter to Charles Bray, 5 July 1859, (Haight, III. 111), below p. 221.

to an appreciation of her reviews of individual novels and to the mature judgments of novels and novelists contained in her letters. They are the reasons for her demand for 'genuine observation, humour, and passion' as the right ingredients of the novel, whatever the subject or method of narration. Any novel which contained any one of these ingredients is certain of praise from George Eliot, while any novelist, however excellent in other ways, is blamed for false or weak representation of character or incident. This is seen as clearly in her opinions of novelists which she did not review as in those which she did review.

The novel occupies a relatively small space in any list of George Eliot's private reading, mainly because while she was writing her own novels she would not 'risk the reading of other English fiction'. [1] It is clear from her letters that some novels were sent to her by authors, their friends and publishers, but even the fiction of her own friends sent to her in this way was often returned unread.[2] She did, however read some of the fiction published by Blackwoods, her own publisher, who occasionally asked her opinion of a new author whose work was appearing in the current numbers of Blackwood's Magazine, and she also examined new fiction such as Mallock's New Republic

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1 A letter to J. Blackwood, 15 Dec 1875; (Haight, VI. 199).

2 There is an amusing account of the return of one of Henry James's books unread, into the unsuspecting hands of the author, in James's recollections of George Eliot, The Middle Years (1917), Chapter v.

(1877) which created a sensation in the literary world. But while there is little mention of contemporary novels in the later letters, there is continued reference to the fiction she had read as a girl. Her love for Defoe, Swift, Bunyan, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, Goldsmith, Johnson, Jane Austen and Scott appears in journals and letters in her constant re-reading, and in all of her writings as a grateful remembrance of past joys. Writing to John Blackwood, 7 February 1875, of her unwillingness to read contemporary fiction she admitted to re-reading Rasselas, 'with a desire to renew my childish delight in it, when it was one of my best-loved companions'. [1] In her review of Perversion she wrote of the Vicar of Wakefield as

> never threadbare, though we began to read it when we were eight years old ... it is as inexhaustible as a really fine melody. [2]

In Middlemarch she wrote of Fielding's leisure to digress 'in all the lusty ease of his fine English'. [3]

There is more specific detail of her opinion of Richardson. In a letter to Sarah Hennell, 13 October 1847, she wrote that she 'had no idea that Richardson was worth so much'. Her friend had lent her a copy of Sir Charles Grandison and her judgment is spontaneous - 'The morality is perfect - there is nothing for the new lights to correct.' [4]

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1 Haight, VI. 123.
2 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856, p.258.
3 Chapter xv.
4 Haight, I. 240.

Her opinion did not change. On 30 October 1852, she wrote to Bessie Rayner Parkes, 'I should be sorry to be the heathen that did not like that book'. She added, 'I don't like Harriet Byron much, she is too proper and insipid. Lady G. is the gem, with her marmoset'. [1] A more melancholy note is heard in a letter to Mrs. Bray, 21 December 1876:

> It is a solace to hear of anyone's reading and enjoying Richardson. We have fallen on an evil generation who would not read 'Clarissa' even in an abridged form. [2]

Sterne is frequently quoted in the letters and the novels, although in Leaves from a Notebook, in her discussion on the methods of story-telling, George Eliot pronounced that the objections to Tristam Shandy lay in the quality of the interrupting matter rather than in the fact of the interrupting. [3]

It is to be regretted that George Eliot left no criticism of Jane Austen's novels. Her regard for them is to be seen in her constant reading of them. Her journals show that in 1857 she read Northanger Abbey, Persuasion, Emma, Sense and Sensibility, and in 1874 and 1875 Persuasion, Emma, and Mansfield Park. [4] In her review of Beyminstre she classed Jane Austen with Balzac as having set too high a standard in that genus of the novel that 'depends for its interest on the delineation of quiet provincial life'. [5]

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1 Haight, II. 65.
2 Haight, VI. 320.
3 p. 301.
4 Haight, II. 319,n; 326; VI. 75-6,n; 171.
5 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856, p.262.

For George Eliot the greatest of English novelists was and remained Walter Scott. There are more quotations from and references to his works in her letters, novels and reviews than to any other novelist. Scott was one of those authors whose works she named as standard reference books in her letter to Maria Lewis, 16 March 1839.[1] He was also her father's favourite and during his illness George Eliot read the novels aloud to him. In a letter to Alexander Main, 9 August 1871, she described these readings and remarked,

> No other writer would serve as a substitute for Scott, and my life at that time would have been much more difficult without him. It is a personal grief, a heart-wound to me when I hear a depreciating or slighting word about Scott. [2]

Later George Eliot performed the same office for G.H.Lewes reading to him Old Mortality and the Fair Maid of Perth when he was too ill to listen to anything else.[3] In 1859 they read together Lockhart's Life of Scott (1837) and George Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell, 19 February, 'he loves Scott now as well as I do'. [4] In July 1871 George Eliot was invited to the Scott Centenary celebrations in Edinburgh, and despite the hardship of the journey, she decided to attend, for, she wrote to Mrs. Bray, 25 July, 'I worship Scott so devoutly', and she added that she hoped to have 'a good happy cry at seeing any honours done to his memory'.[5]

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1 Haight, I.21. See above, p. 7.
2 Haight, V. 175.
3 Letter to Mrs. Bray, 13 Sept.1855; (Haight, II. 215).
4 Haight, III. 16.
5 Haight, V. 170.

In the end she was unable to attend. There is no lack of more detailed criticism. In her review of Westward Ho! in 'Belles Lettres' she pronounced that Scott 'remains the unequalled model of historical romancists'. [1] In her review of Dred she specified the finest parts of Scott as the battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Brigg, the character of Balfour of Burley and the trial of Ephraim Macbriar. [2] In her review of Doctor Antonio she stated that these scenes of the battles and the trial of the Covenanters in Old Mortality tower above the sorrows of Scott's lovers as 'truth that towers above the mere fiction of the novel'. [3] George Eliot also praised Scott as one of the few writers who in their dialogue 'dare to be thoroughly familiar'. [4] Her only expression of condemnation occurs, together with another statement of her regard, in a letter to John Blackwood, 15 February 1861.

> Dearly beloved Scott had the greatest combination of experience and faculty - yet even he never made the most of his treasures, at least in his mode of presentation. 5

George Eliot throughout her life read widely among foreign novelists and her knowledge and appreciation of Balzac and of George Sand was as great as of Scott. In her review of the Shaving of Shagpat in 'Art and Belles

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1 July 1855, p. 290.
2 'Belles Lettres', Oct. 1856, p. 572.
3 'Belles Lettres', Jan. 1856, p. 300.
4 Letter to M. d'Albert-Durade, 29 Jan. 1861; (Haight, III. 374).
5 Haight, III. 378.

Lettres' she classed Balzac with Scott, Dickens, and Currer Bell as one of the 'real "makers"'. [1] Eugénie Grandet (1833) was one of the books she read with J.W.Cross during their visit to France in the first days of their marriage,[2] In a letter to M. d'Albert-Durade, 29 January 1861, she wrote that Balzac and George Sand dare 'to be thoroughly colloquial, in spite of French strait-lacing.'. [3]

Among the young women in England who avidly read all of George Sand's works were George Eliot and Sara Hennell, whose letters to each other contained many references to individual books and characters. In a letter, 9 February 1849, George Eliot explained to her friend that, although she would not use George Sand's writings as 'a moral code or text book', she did not care whether her opinions on marriage were correct or whether the design of her stories was wholly unplanned, as seemed to her most likely. She wrote,

> it is sufficient for me as a reason for bowing before her in eternal gratitude to that 'great power of God' manifested in her ... to delineate human passion and its results - and ... some of the moral instincts and tendencies - with such truthfulness such nicety of discrimination such tragic power and withall such loving gentle humour that one might live a century with nothing but one's own dull faculties and not know so much as ... six pages will suggest. 4

In her review article 'Women in France: Madame de Sablé'

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1 April 1856, p.638.
2 Haight, VII. 273. George Eliot seems always to have read the literature of the country in which she was staying during her many visits to the Continent.
3 Haight, III. 374.
4 Haight, I. 277-8.

in the Westminster Review, July 1854,[1] George Eliot wrote that in literature, 'we must turn to France for the highest examples of womanly achievment' and she pronounced,

> George Sand is the unapproached artist who, to Jean Jacques eloquence and deep sense of external nature unites the clear delineation of character and the tragic depth of passion. 2

It would be interesting to hear George Eliot's comment on two other French novels that we know she read. Her journal, 11 August 1867, records that she read Manon Lescaut,[3] but, unluckily there is no further mention of the book. Oscar Browning in his Life of George Eliot (1890) gives fuller and more tantalizing information concerning her reading of Benjamin Constant's Adolphe (1816), a copy of which he declares to have seen in George Eliot's possession 'interlined and marked by her in every page, and thumbed as almost to fall in pieces'.[4] A sentence from Constant is used by George Eliot as a motto for a chapter in Felix Holt.[5]

George Eliot reviewed very few of the great contemporary novels, but her letters contain sufficient comment to render possible a survey of her opinion of the major Victorian novelists.

Even at this time Thackeray and Dickens were ranked both first and together by critics. Each had his ardent

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1 pp. 448-473.
2 p. 450.
3 Haight, IV. 386.
4 p. 147.
5 Chapter L.

supporters who decried the merits of the other. Bulwer Lytton came some way behind but was nevertheless placed on an eminence above other living novelists. [1]

George Eliot ordered a copy of Scenes ~~from~~ of Clerical Life to be sent to Dickens and Thackeray, and on receiving Dickens's letter of appreciation of her work she wrote to John Blackwood, 21 January 1858, 'There can hardly be any climax of approbation for me after this'.[2] She was very anxious to hear Thackeray's opinion and when John Blackwood wrote, 8 June 1857, to tell her 'Thackeray is I think rather disposed to claim you as a disciple of his',[3] she replied, 11 June, that she was not conscious of being in any way a disciple,

> unless it constitute discipleship to think him, as I suppose the majority of people with any intellect do, on the whole the most powerful of living novelists. [4]

Of individual novels Henry Esmond (1852) was most discussed in the letters, although her verdict on first reading it was hardly favourable. She described it to the Brays, 13 November 1852, as

> the most uncomfortable book you can imagine ... The hero is in love with the daughter all through the book, and marries the mother at the end. [5]

Her remarks to Mrs Bray, 19 May 1854, were in similar vein. Describing Harriet Martineau's dislike of Vanity Fair (1847-8)

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1 The author of the article 'Mr.Thackeray and His Novels' in Blackwood's Magazine (Jan. 1855), pp. 86-96, ranked Bulwer Lytton foremost.
2 Haight, ll. 424.
3 Haight, ll. 345.
4 Haight, ll. 349.
5 Haight, ll. 67.

and preference for Henry Esmond, she could not agree with her, but found the same spirit and the same characters in the two books:

> Lady C[astlewood] is Amelia, Esmond is Dobbin, and Trix is Becky - pure egoism - in the one instance an adventuress trying to become a great lady, in the other, a born great lady whose selfish duplicity consequently takes a different turn. 1

Her later view of Henry Esmond was more discriminating. In the Leader review of Westward Ho! she declared that Esmond is the better historical fiction - 'the illusion of living in a past age is so delightfully kept up'. 2 A letter to C.L.Lewes, 21 June 1863, expressed her pleasure at his appreciation of Henry Esmond and she named it a fine book.3

Both Dickens and his writings were well known to George Eliot and her letters contain many references to his books and characters, though very little opinion of his merits. But in her review in the Leader, 2 August 1856, of The Lover's Seat[4] she praised the author, Kenelm Henry Digby, for his discernment in pointing to one of Dickens's great qualities. Digby wrote that Dickens 'not only sees but forces us to see goodness in very minute things'. A most acute criticism of Dickens appeared in the review article, 'The Natural History of German Life', Westminster Review, July 1856, in the discussion on the necessity for

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1 Haight, II. 157.
2 19 May 1855, pp. 674-5.
3 Haight, IV. 90.
4 pp. 735-6.

truthful representation in 'social novels'. [1] She acknowledged Dickens, who is not named, as

> one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character - their conceptions of life, and their emotions - with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies.

She admitted that he could 'copy Mrs. Plornish's colloquial style with the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture', [2] and that there was the 'same startling inspiration' in his description of the gestures and phrases of Boots as in the speeches of Shakespeare's mob, but, she decided,

> he scarcely ever passes from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic, without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness .

Only the 'precious salt of his humour', compelling him to reproduce external traits, acted as a corrective to

> his frequently false psychology, his preternaturally virtuous poor children and artisans, his melodramatic boatmen and courtezans

and to the 'miserable fallacy that high morality and refined sentiments can grow out of harsh social relations, ignorance, and want'.

George Eliot had not the high opinion of Bulwer Lytton held by some of his contemporaries. Writing to Sara Hennell, 2 March 1858, she commented on his picture 'he looks more

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1 pp. 54-55.
2 Little Dorrit (1855-7).

of a sham even than his novels'. [1] But, later, her opinion modified, and she wrote to John Blackwood, 9 July 1860, in answer to Bulwer's detailed remarks on the Mill on the Floss,[2] that it was good to hear the conclusions of 'a highly accomplished mind'.[3] She did not approve of his novel A Strange Story,[4] which was appearing as a serial in All the Year Round, 1861, and she wrote to Sara Hennell, 6 December, of 'its air of lofty science along with representations of preternatural power' as of unwholesome tendency for popular reading and wicked if it were not done by Bulwer in perfectly good faith. She added,

> I have a great respect for the energetic industry with which he has made the most of his powers. He has been writing diligently in very various departments for more than thirty years, constantly improving his position, and profiting by the lessons of public opinion and of other writers. [5]

His last novel, Kenelm Chillingly (1873), was sent by Blackwood to George Eliot and she wrote in reply, 21 April 1873, that she had had great pleasure in

> the purity and elevation of tone - its catholic view of life, free from all snobbishness or bitterness of partisanship.

She concluded with the opinion that none of his writings was 'more harmonious with the closing epoch of a long career'. [6]

Anthony Trollope was one of the few of her contemporaries

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1 Haight, 11. 439.
2 Haight, 111. 314-5 n.
3 Haight, 111. 318.
4 Published in 2 vols., 1862.
5 Haight, 111. 468-9.
6 Haight, V. 402-3.

whose novels George Eliot continued to read throughout her life, mainly because of her personal affection for 'our excellent friend' whom she described as 'one of the heartiest, most genuine, most moral and generous men we know.'.[1] Writing to Sara Hennell, 14 January 1862, she recommended Orley Farm,[2] which she admired very much, with the exception of the part about 'Moulder and Co.', and commented,

> Anthony Trollope is admirable in the presentation of even, average life and character, and he is so thoroughly wholesome-minded that one delights in seeing his books lie about to be read. 3

A longer criticism occurs in a letter written to Trollope himself, 23 October 1863, thanking him for sending her a copy of Rachel Ray (1863). She compared it to the Small House at Allington (1864) which, she wrote, is 'peculiarly felicitous in its conception, and good for all souls to read'. She wrote of Rachel Ray that she admired the skill shown in organising the

> thoroughly natural everyday incidents into a strictly related, well-proportioned whole, natty and complete as a nut on its stem.

But, she told Trollope, it was the tone of his books that had most impressed her and she declared that in reading them 'people are breathing good bracing air' and she pronounced that his novels

> are filled with belief in goodness without the slightest tinge of maudlin. They are like pleasant public gardens, where people go for amusement and, whether they think of it or not, get health as well. 4

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1 Letter to M. d'Albert-Durade, 23 Sept.1862; (Haight,IV.59).
2 Published in monthly parts, Mar. 1861 - Oct. 1862.
3 Haight, IV. 8-9.
4 Haight, IV. ~~292.~~ 110.

It is clear that George Eliot was alarmed at Trollope's rate of output, for, on hearing of his retirement from the Post Office in order to devote more of his time to writing, she wrote in a letter to John Blackwood, 18 October 1867,

> it seems to me a thing greatly to be dreaded for a man that he should be in any way led to excessive writing. 1

George Eliot's criticism of Disraeli's novels was very severe, although on reading Sybil (1845) she wrote to Mrs. Bray, 25 May 1845,

> I am not utterly disgusted with Disraeli. The man hath good veins... but there is not enough blood in them. 2

Of Tancred (1847) she wrote, in a letter to Mary Sibree, 10 May 1847, that it was 'much more detestable stuff than ever came from a French pen', and she found fault with Disraeli's impertinent expressions and supercilious air towards 'all other men and things'. [3] She wrote Sara Hennell, 27 November 1847, 'I am provoked with you for being in the least pleased with Tancred,', and inquired whether Sara had found any 'lofty meaning in it or any true picturing of life.'.[4] A fuller criticism appeared in a letter to John Sibree, 11 February 1848, in which she pronounced that Disraeli 'is unquestionably an able man', but she deplored his 'windy eloquence' and his view of the Hebrew race. She commented 'everything specifically Jewish is of a low grade', [5] a strangely ironical judgment from the future author of Daniel Deronda.

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1 Haight, IV. 392.
2 Haight, 1. 192-3.
3 Haight, 1. 234-5.
4 Haight, 1. 241.
5 Haight, 1. 245-7.

In a letter to John Blackwood, 25 February 1876, she compared her own Jewish character, Mordecai, to Disraeli's Sidonia, and complained,

> Doubtless the wider public of novel-readers must find more interest in Sidonia than in Mordecai. But then, I was not born to paint Sidonia. 1

When John Chapman wrote to George Eliot to suggest that he should approach Charlotte Bronte to write an article for the Westminster Review on modern novelists, George Eliot condemned the proposal, 20 June 1851, because 'She would have to leave out Currer Bell, who is perhaps the best of them all'. [2] George Eliot's opinion had changed radically from the time when she had first read Jane Eyre (1847) and wrote to Charles Bray, 11 June 1848, to enquire what he admired in it:

> All self-sacrifice is good - but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcass. However the book is interesting - only I wish the characters would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports. 3

But the publication of Villette (1853) had a different welcome from George Eliot. She wrote to Mrs. Bray, 15 February 1853,

> I have only just returned to a sense of the real world about me for I have been reading Villette, a still more wonderful book than Jane Eyre. There is something almost preternatural in its power. 4

In another letter to the Brays, 12 March 1853, she exclaimed

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1 Haight, Vl. 223.
2 Haight, l. 355.
3 Haight, l. 268.
4 Haight, ll. 87.

'Villette - Villette - have you read it?' [1] In her section on the novel in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856, she mentioned the cheap edition of Villette just published, and added that she would rather read it for the third time than most novels for the first time. [2]

Of Mrs. Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Bronte (1857) George Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell, 16 April 1857, that the first part was 'poetic as one of her own novels'.[3] Mrs Gaskell wrote to express her pleasure in Adam Bede and the Scenes of Clerical Life, and George Eliot replied, 11 November 1859,

> I was conscious, while the question of my power was still undecided for me, that my feelings towards Life and Art had some affinity with the feeling which had inspired "Cranford" and the earlier chapters of "Mary Barton". 4

Her earliest appreciation of Mrs. Gaskell was also her fullest criticism. It occurred in a letter to Mrs. Taylor, 1 February 1853, when she wrote of Ruth (1853): 'It's style was a great refreshment to me, from its finish and fulness', and was a contrast to the usual 'false and feeble representations of life and character that most feminine novels give'. But she added,

> 'Ruth', with all its merits, will not be an enduring or classical fiction - will it? Mrs. Gaskell seems to me constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts - of "dramatic" effects. She is not contented with the subdued colouring - the half tints of real life. Hence she agitates one for the moment, but she does not secure one's lasting sympathy; her scenes and characters do not become typical.

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1 Haight, 11. 92.
2 p. 301.
3 Haight, 11. 319.
4 Haight, 111. 198; Cranford was published 1853 and Mary Barton 1848.

George Eliot continued this letter with praise for Mrs. Gaskell's 'pretty and graphic' touches of description and pointed to the description of the little attic in the minister's house in Ruth, to the 'rich humour of Sally' and to the 'sly satire in the description of Mr. Bradshaw'. She concluded 'Mrs. Gaskell has certainly a charming mind, and one cannot help loving her as one reads her books'. [1] Her opinion did not change. On 10 March 1863, she wrote to George Smith,[2]

> I hope "Sylvia's Lovers" is finding a just appreciation. It seems to me of a high quality both in feeling and in execution - so far as I have read. 3

One woman writer whose books are now forgotten was a firm favourite with George Eliot. Anne ~~Ritchie~~ Thackeray was, with 'bits of Mr. Trollope',[4] the only contemporary novelist she read consistently during the years when she was writing her own novels, perhaps because these very pleasant novels dealt truthfully with the lives and experiences of ordinary people.

There is an interesting remark in George Eliot's letter to M. d'Albert-Durade, 7 June 1860, concerning her own novels in relation to those of Miss Mulock, the authoress of John Halifax, Gentleman (1856). She declared that 'the most ignorant journalist in England' would hardly think of

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1 Haight, II. 86.
2 Smith and Elder published Sylvia's Lovers (1863) and also Romola.
3 Haight, IV. 79.
4 Haight, VI. 123.

calling them rivals. She called Miss Mulock 'a writer who is read only by novel readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture'. [1]

It would be interesting to know more fully George Eliot's opinion of T.A.Trollope's La Beata. A Tuscan Romeo and Juliet (1861) which she read in July 1861. She wrote to Trollope's wife, 5 July, to express her pleasure in it.[2]

Another minor novelist in whose books George Eliot found relaxation was Lawrence W.M.Lockhart, whose Double and Quits was serialised in Blackwood's November 1868 - April 1869. She wrote to John Blackwood, 15 December 1868, 'If your friend Capt. Lockhart talks half as well as he writes, he must be a glorious companion', and told Blackwood to bring him to meet her.[3] Double and Quits is, indeed, 'cheerful reading';[4] it is a humorous, intelligent and thoroughly engaging story of the confusion that arose and the friendship that ensued between two young guardsmen of identical appearance.

One of the people to whom George Eliot sent a copy of Adam Bede was Dr. John Brown, the author of Rab and His Friends (1859). [5] In a letter to John Blackwood, 13 February 1859, George Eliot asked her publisher to explain the reason for her gift and to thank Brown for his 'little parcel with

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1 Haight, III. 302.
2 Haight, III. 435; This novel has been called 'the germ of Romola'.
3 Haight, IV. 495.
4 See letter to J. Blackwood, 31 Dec. 1868; (Haight, IV. 501).
5 Haight, III. 6n.

"Rab" inside and a kind letter from Rab's friend.' She had read only an account of the story, had wished that she had it in order to read it at full length, 'and I thought to myself, the writer of "Rab" would perhaps like "Adam Bede".'. She continued that Brown would understand her 'peculiar pleasure' in receiving his book. She had read it twice,

> once aloud, and once to myself, very slowly, that I might dwell on the pictures of Rab and Ailie, and carry them about with me more distinctly. I will not say any commonplace words of admiration about what has touched me so deeply: there is no adjective of that sort left undefiled by the newspapers. The writer of "Rab" knows that I must love the grim old mastiff with the short tail and the long dewlaps - that I must have felt present at the scenes of Ailie's last trial. 1

This very short story of an old mastiff dog, Rab, and his mistress, Ailie, the wife of a carrier, who dies after an operation for cancer, is full of quiet pathos, dignity and gentle realism. It was immensely popular.

There is little record of George Eliot's reading among American novelists, though her letters record the visits of Henry James[2] and Bret Harte[3] to the famous Sunday receptions at the Priory. But there is no doubt as to her high regard for the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Writing to Mrs. Taylor, 19 August 1852, she admitted that she had not read the Blithedale Romance (1852), though the reviews had whetted her curiosity concerning it, and she spoke of Hawthorne as 'a grand favourite of mine' and added, 'I shall be sorry if

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1 Haight, III. 13-14.
2 Haight, VII. 20 n.
3 Haight, VII. 241 n.

he do not go on surpassing himself'.[1] In her review of Hiawatha in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856, she ranked the Scarlet Letter (1850) with Longfellow's poem as 'the two most indigenous and masterly productions in American literature'. [2] Stormy weather in March 1857 in Penzance found George Eliot and G.H.Lewes waiting for a calm crossing to the Scillies and reading again the Scarlet Letter. [3]

Turgenev was a frequent visitor at the Lewes's and their journals and diaries record their reading of Pounine et Barbourine, Nouvelles Muscovite, Recit d'un Chasseur, and Terres Vierges.[4] Oscar Browning in his Life of George Eliot described a dinner at Mr. Bullock's in October 1878, at which G.H.Lewes proposed Turgenev's health as the greatest of living novelists, a compliment which the Russian writer repudiated in favour of George Eliot, who was also present.[5]

The most important of the works of fiction reviewed by George Eliot during her brief period as a critic were J. A. Froude's Nemesis of Faith (1849), Charles Kingsley's Westward Ho!(1855), George Meredith's first novel, The Shaving

1 Haight, 11. 52.
2 p. 297.
3 Haight, 11. 311 n; I think there can be little doubt that George Eliot was not the author of the review of the Blithedale Romance in the 'Contemporary Literature of America', Westminster Review (Oct. 1852), in which Hawthorne's moral faculty is described as morbid and weak. See Appendix, below, p.240.
4 George Eliot's use of the French titles would imply that she read them in French, although English translations of the Sportsman's Sketches and Virgin Soil were available.
5 p. 129.

of Shagpat, an Arabian Entertainment (1855), Wilkie Collins's collection of short stories, After Dark (1856), Harriet Beecher Stowe's Dred: a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp (1856), Charles Reade's It is Never Too Late to Mend: A Matter of Fact Romance (1856). a short story by Stendhal, 'Ernestine, ou la Naissance de l'Amour', which was published in De l'Amour (1822), and two stories by Henry Murger, Le Dernier Rendezvous. La Resurection de Lazare (1856).

Froude's Nemesis of Faith was the first novel George Eliot reviewed. Froude had sent a copy of the book through his publisher, John Chapman, to the anonymous translator of Strauss and when her review appeared in the Coventry Herald, 16 March 1849, he recognised her as the author and wrote, again through Chapman, asking her to reveal her identity.[1] In June of that year they met at the Bray's and while George Eliot was assistant editor of the Westminster Review Froude was a frequent contributor. On the publication of Scenes of Clerical Life George Eliot returned Froude's early compliment by sending him a copy of the book through her publisher, John Blackwood,[2] and when, for the second time Froude wrote to express his delight and gratitude, she asked Blackwood, 30 September 1858, to reply for her and to tell him;

> my reason for sending my book to Mr. Froude was a literary admiration of long standing - an admiration which gives a

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1 Haight, 1. 279 n.
2 Haight, 11. 418.

> peculiar value to the fact that the reading of my book has made him wish to know me

but she still wished to maintain her incognito.[1] A copy of Adam Bede also was sent to Froude.[2]

The Nemesis of Faith caused considerable consternation, both at Oxford, where it was publicly burnt in Exeter College hall and its author forced to resign his Fellowship of that college, and in literary circles, although not all the newspapers and periodicals seem to have noticed it.[3] The majority of those that did were strongly opposed to the views expressed in it. The Edinburgh Review, October 1849, noticed it with other religious books and tracts, solely in order to modify 'one or other of these monstrous forms of unbelieving belief and Christian infidelity'.[4] The Eclectic Review, the monthly periodical of Dissent, reviewed the second edition, September 1850, with other religious books, and found the story 'too full of revolting incident to be instructive' and decided it had been better left unwritten.[5] The Christian Observer, January 1850, also reviewing the second edition, declared,

> it possesses all the melancholy and fearful interest that must attach to an attempt to sap the foundations of all religion, natural as well as revealed.

This critic proceeded 'as our duty' to defend Christianity

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1 Haight, ll. 482.
2 Haight, lll. 6 n.
3 I have found no review in the Times, Quarterly Review, or, even, the Athenaeum.
4 pp. 293-356.
5 pp. 258-283.

against Froude's 'vulgar and quibbling' objections, first giving a sketch of the plot of the novel to aid those who 'deem it neither safe nor wise to read or to possess works of this description'.[1] Tait's Edinburgh Magazine gave an unusual number of pages in two consecutive issues [2] to a protest against the 'reckless profanity' and 'most impious, frontless piece of writing' and to a definition of God and His Love, concluding,

> if we have counteracted in any degree the pernicious tendency of "The Nemesis of Faith", and added another stone to the already massive and stable structure of the Christian evidences, we have received our reward.

Fraser's Magazine, May 1849, was rather more favourable. Its reviewer pointed to much wholesome moral advice in parts of the book, and pronounced that the story would be a warning to the weak-hearted, and to believers

> in its soul-baring truthfulness, a quite invaluable record of the fiery struggles and temptations through which the youth of this nineteenth century has to force its way in religious matters'.

Yet the critic declared, 'its publication is a sin, not to be justified or palliated, but to be repented of'.[3]

All the reviews were full of praise, however, for the captivating style of the book and found it full of eloquence, of lovely and passionate language, although these gifts of rhetoric clearly made his opinions the more dangerous. But the Unitarian quarterly, the Prospective

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1 pp. 16-35. George Eliot's poem, 'Knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle', signed M.A.E. was published in the Christian Observer (Jan.1840), p.38 .
2 June 1849, pp.376-382; July 1849, pp. 421-4.
3 pp. 545-560.

Review, reviewing Nemesis of Faith together with Froude's earlier novel, Shadows of the Clouds,[1] disagreed with Froude's views, but found

> so great literary ability, so much insight into right and wrong, so much freshness of mind, such humane sentiment, so much of the tender and poetical, so strong a religious bias, and such freedom from authoritative trammels

that he hoped soon to read a new book by Froude and thought he had 'a noble work to perform in kindling English hearts to pure and high aspirations'.[2] The Westminster Review and Foreign Quarterly gave small space to the Nemesis of Faith and found its merits less striking than the notoriety it had inspired, but this reviewer praised Froude's 'earnestness and good faith' and named it a book 'that will be highly prized by really ardent and honest enquirers after religious truth'.[3] There was a longer article by Geraldine Jewsbury in January 1850, in which she discussed the Nemesis of Faith together with J.H.Newman's Loss and Gain (1848) under the heading 'Religious Faiths and Modern Scepticism'.[4] Only one reviewer, the Spectator, 10 March 1849, refused to enter into discussion on the theological content of the book, preferred to describe its merits as literature and found it had all the first requisites of a book: 'It has power, matter, mastery of subject, with that largeness that must arise from the writer's mind'.[5]

1 This book was published in 1847, under the pseudonym Zeta.
2 pp. 163-183.
3 In 'Miscellaneous Notices', April 1849, p.258. This periodical was then under the editorship of W.E.Hickson.
4 pp. 379-407.
5 pp. 228-9.

Like the Spectator's critic George Eliot would not discuss the contents of the book.[1] She declared,

> Much there is in the work of a questionable character; yet more which hardly falls within the scope of a newspaper editor's notice; but its trenchant remarks on some of our English conventions, its striking sketches of the dubious aspect which many charactered respectabilities are beginning to wear under the light of this nineteenth century, its suggestive hints as to the necessity of re-casting the currency of our religion and virtue, that it may carry fresh and bright the stamp of the age's highest and best idea, - these have a practical bearing, which may well excite the grave, perhaps the alarmed attention of some important classes among us. We will resign the work into the hands of judges of more ability, and more unquestioned credentials.

Nor did George Eliot discuss the structure of the novel, its plot, its characters or its style. She is rather concerned to express her personal delight in the book, and the review is a bubbling over of the enthusiasm she communicated to Sara Hennell in a letter, 18 April 1849, in which she quoted from Keat's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', equating herself with 'the watcher of the skies' and 'stout Cortez'. Clearly the Nemesis of Faith had aroused her interest in Froude's earlier novel, for she told Sara to read Shadows of the Clouds:

> - it produces a sort of palpitation that one hardly knows whether to call wretched or delightful. I cannot take up the book again though wanting very much to read it more closely. 2

Her review of Nemesis of Faith reveals a similar emotional response. It begins:

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1 In her review in the Coventry Herald (16 March 1849), p.2.

2 Haight, 1. 280.

> On certain red-letter days of our existence, it happens to us to discover, among the spawn of the press, a book which, as we read, seems to undergo a sort of transfiguration before us. We no longer hold heavily in our hands an octavo of some hundred pages, over which the eye laboriously travels, hardly able to drag along with it the restive mind; but we seem to be in companionship with a spirit, who is transfusing himself into our souls, and so vitalizing them by his superior energy, that life, both outward and inward, presents itself to us in higher relief, in colours brightened and deepened - we seem to have been bathing in the pool of Siloam, and to have come forth seeing. The books which carry this magic in them are the true products of genius, and their influence, whether for good or evil, is to the influence of all the respectable results of mere talent and industry, as the mighty Nile to the dykes which receive and distribute its heaven-fed waters. Such a book is the Nemesis of Faith. We are sure that its author is a bright particular star, though he sometimes leaves us in doubt whether he be not a fallen "son of the morning".

I have quoted in full George Eliot's review of this novel because it was the first she reviewed and because it is very different in tone from her later and more responsible work for the Westminster Review, and, even, for the Leader and yet, full though it is of youthful exuberance and gratitude for a book she personally enjoyed, it contains an opinion of 'the true products of genius, and their influence .. for good or evil' which she was to maintain throughout her critical career.

Charles Kingsley's Westward Ho! was reviewed by George Eliot in the Leader, 19 May 1855,[1] and she commended it as 'a worthy and very brilliant book'. A second review appeared in her first number of the 'Belles Lettres', July 1855,[2]

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1 pp. 474-5.
2 pp. 288-294.

in which she hailed it as an 'unmistakeable mushroom' amongst the 'plentiful dubious fungi' which were the 'ordinary quarter's crop of novels'.

Westward Ho! received wide notice as did all of Kingsley's novels, for he was ranked by some critics with Dickens and Thackeray as a writer of pure and noble purpose,[1] of 'pure rich spirit',[2] a great critic of modern life, introducing living Christian principles into daily life.[3] Other reviewers however seized every opportunity to revile Kingsley, his Broad Church principles and 'muscular Christianity'.[4] But all of these critics were unanimous with the less partial reviewers in praising the vigour and manliness of his style in all of his writings, the versatility of his gifts, and, above all, the beauty of his descriptive passages. The majority considered that Westward Ho! was his best work, although there were dissenting voices who disliked Kingsley's handling of the subject, considered his material ill-digested, the whole too modern in tone,[5] or the comparison between Elizabethan and modern life false and biased.[6] The majority

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1 National Review (July 1855), pp.124-161, reviewing 'Novels and Poems of the Rev. C. Kingsley'.
2 Church of England Quarterly (April 1855), pp. 493-5.
3 Dublin University Magazine in two consecutive articles on 'The Genius of Rev. Charles Kingsley', (June 1857), pp. 699-710, and (July), pp. 40-51. See also Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (October 1855), pp. 604-12.
4 Christian Observer (June 1857), pp. 415-9, reviewing Two Years Ago (1857).
5 The Critic (1 May 1855), pp. 202-3; Literary Gazette (12 May 1855), pp. 291-3.
6 Examiner (2 June, 1855), p.341.

disapproved of the partisan account of the Jesuit characters of the novel,[1] and George Eliot was in complete accord with these opinions. She wrote, in 'Belles Lettres',

> In these two points - his fierce antagonism and his perpetual hortative tendency - lie, to our thinking, the grand mistakes which enfeeble the effect of all Mr. Kingsley's works.

She declared that the 'battle and the chase' against capitalists, Jesuits and the devil seemed necessary to Kingsley's existence, that he seemed never able to resist the desire to 'improve the occasion' with a homily, regardless of the artistic necessities of plot or incident. She named him 'superlatively a preacher' but added 'he theorizes illogically and moralizes absurdly'. She pronounced,

> If he would confine himself to his true sphere, he might be a teacher in the sense in which every great artist is a teacher - namely, by giving us his higher sensibility as a medium, a delicate acoustic or optical instrument, bringing home to our coarser senses what would otherwise be unperceived by us.

But when riding his hobby-horse, George Eliot decided, he became a feeble imitator of Carlyle, his 'impetuosity' giving him

> an affinity for Carlyle's faults - his one-sided judgment of character and his undiscriminating fulminations against the men of the present as tried by some imaginary standard in the past.

Kingsley's genius lay in another direction, and his merits were far below those of Carlyle. Turning to Westward Ho! George Eliot praised the choice of subject as

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1 Times (18 Aug. 1855), p.6; Athenaeum (31 March 1855), p. 376.

> unhackneyed ... unsurpassed in the grandeur of its moral elements, and the picturesqueness and romance of its manner and events.

She thought that he had brought both care and genius to the task and had captured the spirit of the Elizabethan age by feeding 'his strong imagination with all accessible material.' The tropical scenes were as present to him as the scenes of his native Devonshire and both were vividly described. His sea descriptions seemed real and not as if learned by rote 'over the desk'. George Eliot criticised the construction of the story, which she declared was always Kingsley's weak point, and, although she judged this novel an improvement on Yeast (1851)[1] and Alton Locke (1850) in this respect, she objected to the denouement, in which she perceived a resemblance to Jane Eyre. Moreover, she decided, Kingsley's strong loves and strong hatreds prevented his successful characterisation and 'we can no more believe in and love his men and women than we could believe in and love the pattern-boy at school'. But, for George Eliot, the beauties of Westward Ho! were plentiful. She declared him almost without rival in the 'truthfulness and beauty of presentation' of a single passion or motive of action, and she pointed to the

> felicity with which Mr. Kingsley has seized the style and spirit of the Elizabethan writers and reproduced them in the poetry and supposed quotations scattered throughout his story.

But, above all she admired Kingsley's scene-painting, and

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1 Yeast. a Problem was first published in Fraser's Magazine, 1848. It was revised and republished in 1851.

cited the scene in the wood in Alton Locke[1] and the hunt in the beginning of Yeast as unforgettable. She quoted a long extract from the description of Sir Richard Grenvile's home in Westward Ho! Returning to his faults George Eliot lamented the waste of a good historical subject because of the spirit of partisanship and the perpetual homilies. She wrote,

> His view of history seems not essentially to differ from that we have all held in our childish days, when it seemed perfectly easy for us to divide mankind into the sheep and the goats,

and her review ended with a discussion of the flaws in this sort of historical reasoning.

George Eliot's Leader review of Westward Ho! is written in a very different tone from that of 'Belles Lettres', but though in lighter vein it is in essentials the same opinion. She began by recognising Kingsley's right to be a novelist with a purpose, and she described that purpose with some of the heartiness of manner that she ascribed to Kingsley. Writing of his choice of subject she described the Elizabethan age as an age of burning vitality and energy, and praised Kingsley's choice of its naval history as being the most vital and exciting. She quoted long extracts to show the variety and richness of Kingsley's portraits, and declared, 'A homely reality distinguishes the book.' But as in 'Belles

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1 This scene was singled out by George Eliot in the discussion of the neeessity for truthful representation in art in 'The Natural History of German Life'. It was an example of the 'picture of human life such as a great artist can give.' see above, p. 25.

Lettres' George Eliot stressed her view that 'the art of the book suffers' from the over-earnestness of the preacher and from Kingsley's over-emphasis that his heroes are good and his villains wicked. She declared that 'Art is art, and tells its own story.' But praise is the dominating tone of this review and George Eliot pointed to 'the manly earnestness, the glowing vivacity, the hearty humanity and the glorious bits of vivid painting.' She noted Kingsley's gift for portraying the dramatic incident and cited especially the scene in which Salterne informs Amyas Leigh of Rose's elopement with Don Guzman. It was, she pronounced, sufficient to move any woman to tears and confessed that the 'adamantine reviewer' had experienced 'manly emotion' over this scene.

George Eliot's letters bear out the division of feeling she experienced with regards to Kingsley's novels. She wrote to Mrs. Taylor, 1 February 1853, of being 'in love with Kingsley's genius', and '"riled" by his faults'. [1]

A brief and laudatory review of The Heroes appeared in 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856. [2]

George Meredith's Shaving of Shagpat was almost unnoticed by the reviewers. George Eliot reviewed it in both Leader, 5 January 1856, [3] and 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856.[4] Otherwise only the weeklies gave it space.

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1 Haight, 11. 86.
2 p. 643.
3 pp. 15-17.
4 pp. 638-9.

The Athenaeum, 5 January 1856, devoted two columns to its praise, judging it a successful imitation of Oriental fiction. [1] The Examiner, 29 December 1855, pronounced it a charming book which gave 'full play to a lively, cultivated, and active fancy'. [2] But the Critic, 1 January 1856,[3] and the Spectator, 29 December 1855,[4] thought the book a mistake and the imitation of Eastern mode of thought and style only superficial. Only the Saturday Review, 19 January 1856, recognised it as the work of genius, naming it, 'the work of a poet', charming and original.[5]

In both the Leader and 'Art and Belles Lettres' George Eliot was full of praise for Meredith's delightful fantasy. The Leader review began on a very solemn note with a discussion of the East and the 'good things' produced by that 'elder region of the earth.' But her tone became lighter as she introduced the Shaving of Shagpat as a 'new pleasure... so intensely Oriental in its conception and execution' that the author was wise to prefix the statement declaring its originality. She declared that it was no servile imitation, 'no patchwork of borrowed incidents.' Mr. Meredith had been inspired by Arabian fictions and had used Oriental forms as a native would have used them, and George Eliot admitted that, throughout her reading, she had not once

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1 pp. 6-7.
2 p. 821.
3 p. 16.
4 In 'Publications Received', p. 1366.
5 p. 216.

noted any incongruity between thought and form:

> in exuberance of imagery, in picturesque wildness of incident, in significant humour, in aphoristic wisdom, the "Shaving of Shagpat" is a new Arabian Night.

The only difference was of high merit, the 'exquisite delicacy of his love incidents and love scenes'. Refusing to forestall the reader's pleasure by a relation of the story, George Eliot described the method of composition and suggested that there were deeper meanings in the story for those who required them, while no didacticism or moralising marred the design.

> Our imagination is never chilled by a sense of allegorical intention predominating over poetic creation.

She praised the narrative for its concrete vividness and the imagery for its freshness and vigour, substantiating these statements with several passages of description and of imagery, 'exquisitely poetical' or 'ingenious and pithy'. She wrote,

> one of the rarest charms of the book is the constant alternation of passion and wild imaginativeness with humour and pithy, practical sense.

She admired Meredith's inclusion of lyrical fragments as adding emphasis to an incident, lending a loftier tone to the descriptions and more intense utterance to the scenes of passion. She named 'Bhanaver the Beautiful' as 'the brightest gem' among the minor tales and extracted for quotation a long poem from that story, and a passage from the 'Punishment of Khipil the Builder' as an example of the 'humorous apologue'.

George Eliot's review in 'Art and Belles Lettres' was shorter and less exuberant. She admitted to feeling 'rather a languishing interest' towards the end of the book, when the details of the action became too involved, but, she added, 'where is the writer whose wing is as strong at the end of his flight as at the beginning?' As in the Leader, she stressed that the Shaving of Shagpat was no slavish imitation of Oriental fiction, but had been prompted 'from genuine love and mental affinity', was a similar creation to the Arabian Nights, 'inspired by a thorough and admiring study'. The review continued with a description of the work and of the character of Shagpat and the task of Shibli, the barber, told briefly to indicate the intricacies and variety of the plot and its fantastic element, and, by interweaving a few sentences from the original with her description, George Eliot managed to convey something of the delights of the book. She mentioned the digressive tales which serve 'as pleasant landing-places on the way', and again chose to mention the tales of Bhanaver and of Khipil to illustrate the humorous and the wilder, imaginative parts of the book. There is no indication in the letters that George Eliot read Meredith's later novels. Meredith succeeded George Eliot as author of 'Belles Lettres' from April 1857.

George Eliot ended her review of the Shaving of Shagpat in 'Art and Belles Lettres',

> But perhaps, reader, you are too severely rational to revel in the fantastical impossibilities of an Arabian Entertainment; you have no sympathy with the "grotesque ideal?" In that case you will find something more to your taste in the ingeniously conceived possibilities of Mr. Wilkie Collin's "After Dark".

Apart from George Eliot's review,[1] After Dark, an early work of Wilkie Collins, was noticed only by the weeklies, perhaps because the stories were, in the main, a republication from Household Words.[2] George Eliot shared the general opinion of these reviewers that the setting of the tales was the most original and pleasing part of the book.[3] She outlined the 'charmingly simple narrative' of the device used by Collins to link his stories, and noted that the narrator's supposed occupation of painter gave him

> two sources of unusual knowledge about men and their fortunes - observation of his sitters themselves, and a peculiar opportunity of learning what they have to tell about others.

She found the prologue to each tale, the painter's description of his sitters and their subsequent conversation, carefully and agreeably written, with 'the negative charm' of being free from affectation. Of the stories themselves she preferred the 'Terribly Strange Bed' - a short but very effective thriller, told with skilful economy of detail, 'Gabriel's Wedding' - a story depending more for its excitement on the supernatural and describing the passions of a

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1 pp. 639-40.
2 1853-5.
3 Leader (8 March 1856), pp. 232-3; Spectator (1 March 1856), pp. 252-3; Examiner (1 March 1856), p. 133.

family of Breton fishermen, and the 'Yellow Mask' - a less successful and rather contrived tale. They were, as George Eliot remarked, 'strong draughts to any one who has been nauseated by the copious drawing-room slip-slop of three-volumed novels'. She added that Collins 'seeks his moving incidents in modern life'.

Comparing Collins to Edgar Allan Poe George Eliot praised Poe for his efforts of genius in reconciling the two tendencies of mystery stories, 'to appal the imagination and yet satisfy the intellect'. She considered that Collins followed Poe in this respect, but was most successful when he payed no tribute to rationalism and gave the rein to his faculty to make the flesh creep. This was most admirably done in the best of his tales, George Eliot considered, and she added,

> he knows how to give the thrill of terror, without mingling that sort of offence to refined sensibilities which causes terror to pass into horror and disgust.

George Eliot decided that the great merit of these tales lay in 'the effective presentation of a mystery or the effective working up of striking situations', and their chief defect in the neglect of character and detail. She pronounced that he 'does not care to interest us in his personages, but only in what happens to them'. Certainly the characterisation in the introduction and prologues to the tales is both more elaborate and more subtle than in the tales.

Later Collins was to become a personal friend of George Eliot and of G.H.Lewes,[1] but there is no record of George Eliot's opinion of his later novels. A letter from Lewes to his son, Charles, 10 May 1862, reports that they were reading No Name, which was appearing as a serial in All the Year Round and records, 'it gets rather dreary.'[2] Another letter from Lewes to John Blackwood, 27 February 1877, proposing a cheap edition of George Eliot's works, classed Collins with Mrs. Henry Wood and Miss Braddon, the author of Lady Audley's Secret (1862), and suggested that if their novels could sell at six shillings, then so could George Eliot's.[3]

After the tremendous success of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852),[4] Mrs. Stowe's second novel, Dred; a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp, was eagerly awaited. George Eliot began her review in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856,[5] with the statement:

> for the last three weeks there have been men, women, and children reading it with rapt attention - laughing and sobbing over it - lingering with delight over its exquisite landscapes, its scenes of humour, and tenderness, and rude heroism - and glowing with indignation at its terrible representation of chartered barbarities.

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1 Haight, III. 178.
2 Haight, IV. 32.
3 Haight, VI, 345.
4 The Christian Observer (Feb. 1857), in its review of Dred, pp. 115-26, wrote that the circulation of Uncle Tom's Cabin exceeded that of any book except the Bible.
5 pp. 571-3.

Unlike the majority of the critics George Eliot refused to consider Dred in the light of the success of Uncle Tom's Cabin,[1] or in relation to Mrs. Stowe's political opinions,[2] preferring to judge it on its own merits as a new novel.

The merits of Dred are considerable, and, if today it is completely forgotten, it is surely because Uncle Tom's Cabin is seldom read and if read is sufficient to satisfy the reader's appetite and interest in that genre of fiction. But Dred is not, as many critics avowed, a repetition of Uncle Tom's Cabin. It treats of slavery, but it treats of it from the view-point of the slave owner, showing the corrupting power of slavery upon the white owner and upon the 'poor whites'. Nor are the characters duplicated from the first novel as certain reviewers maintained.[3] Apart from the strange figure of Dred himself and of the hero, Clayton, who is merely a mouthpiece for Mrs. Stowe's opinions on slavery, all the characters are vital and individual. As George Eliot argued,

> Looking at the matter simply from an artistic point of view, we see no reason to regret that Mrs. Stowe should keep to her original ground of negro and planter life,

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1 Edinburgh Review, in an article, 'The Political Crisis in the United States' (Oct. 1856), pp.561-97; Critic (15 Sept. 1856), p.443; and Spectator (13 Sept. 1856), pp. 981-3, were united in regarding Dred a failure.

2 Dublin University Magazine, in an article, 'Slavery' (Dec. 1856), pp. 675-90.

3 Leader (6 Sept. 1856), pp. 856-7, considered that only Dred himself was an original figure. See also Athenaeum (30 Aug. 1856), pp. 1079-80.

> any more than that Scott should have introduced Highland life into "Rob Roy" and "The Fair Maid of Perth", when he had already written "Waverly". Mrs. Stowe has invented the Negro novel, and it is a novel not only fresh in its scenery and its manners, but possessing that conflict of races which Augustin Thierry has pointed out as the great source of romantic interest,

and George Eliot added that it was foolish to condemn Mrs. Stowe as unable to write any other kind of novel when 'her genius seems to be of a very special character', and that, whatever else she might write, her two novels

> will assure her a place in that highest rank of novelists who can give us a national life in all its phases - popular and aristocratic, humorous and tragic, political and religious.

Again George Eliot compared Mrs. Stowe with Scott as sharing with him and even surpassing him in

> the exhibition of a people to whom what we may call Hebraic Christianity is still a reality, still an animating belief, and by whom the theocratic conceptions of the Old Testamant are literally applied to their daily life.

She rightly pointed to the character of Dred, the death scenes in the swamp, and the Camp Meetings as bearing comparison with Scott's finest scenes, the character of Balfour of Burley, the battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Brigg, and the trial of Ephraim Macbriar. She considered that

> The strength of Mrs. Stowe's own religious feeling is a great artistic advantage to her here; she never makes you feel that she is coldly calculating an effect, but you see that she is all a-glow for the moment with the wild enthusiasm, the unreasoning faith, and the steady martyr-spirit of Dred, of Tiff, or of Father Dickson.

George Eliot also noted that Mrs. Stowe's 'keen sense of humour ... preserves her from extravagance and monotony, ...

her dramatic instinct is always awake' to create and maintain specific characters and dramatic dialogue, and she praised this quality as 'all the more remarkable in novels animated by a vehement polemical purpose.' Her one objection to Dred was in Mrs Stowe's presentation of the negro as entirely amiable. She pointed to the 'argumentative suicide involved in this one-sidedness', which would prove that 'slavery has answered as moral discipline' and is a '"Christianizing Institution"' as its upholders maintained. George Eliot also pointed out that by her partiality Mrs. Stowe had lost

> the most terribly tragic element in the relation of the two races - the Nemesis lurking in the vices of the oppressed.

Her opinion of Mrs. Stowe did not change, and when Mrs. Stowe wrote to her an appreciation of her novels, George Eliot replied, 8 May 1869, and wrote of 'the joyous, tender humour' of her books. [1] A regular, though infrequent correspondence was maintained between the two women, and in a letter, 24 June 1872, George Eliot wrote of her pleasure in descriptions of American forests, and added, 'I dwelt on the descriptions in 'Dred' with much enjoyment.' [2]

George Eliot followed her review of Dred with a notice of Charles Reade's It is Never Too Late To Mend,[3] which was acclaimed by the majority of the critics as remarkable,

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1 Haight, V. 31.
2 Haight, V. 279-80.
3 pp. 573-5.

vigorous and interesting. The Critic, 15 August 1856, pronounced it one of the few first rate novels they had ever read; [1] while the Irish Quarterly Review, December 1856, declared that Reade now stands near the great novelist Dickens 'in his palmiest mood.' [2] Only the Edinburgh Review, July 1857, in an article entitled 'The Licence of Modern Novelists', [3] expressed disfavour, and condemned the book on the grounds of Reade's exaggerated account of the incidents of Birmingham Gaol, [4] an account 'so grave, so unjust, so cruel, that we think it the duty of criticism to expose' it. The otherwise general tone of praise was, however, modified by accusations of melodramatic exaggeration [5] and love of theatrical effect and theatrical style, [6] and George Eliot was in complete accord with these critics. But her review began with a just appraisal of the many excellencies of the book. She praised the 'fine situations, fine touches of feeling, and much forcible writing' and admitted that she pursued the story with eagerness to its end, finding the prison scenes particularly enthralling. She commended the 'truthful well-observed touches' in the scenes of

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1 pp. 394-5.
2 In an article entitled 'Novels of the Day', pp. 766-79.
3 pp. 124-156.
4 The report of the Royal Commission on conditions in Birmingham Gaol is dated 25 Jan. 1854.
5 Examiner (23 Aug. 1856), pp. 533-4.
6 Athenaeum (9 Aug. 1856), pp. 990-1; Spectator (16 Aug. 1856), pp. 877-8.

English farm life in the beginning of the book and praised the character of the Australian aborigine, Jackie, as 'thoroughly fresh character ... drawn with exquisite yet sober humour.' She declared,

> In short, "It is Never Too Late Too Mend" is one of the exceptional novels to be read not merely by the idle and the half-educated, but by the busy and the thoroughly informed.

But, George Eliot decided, Reade's novel never rose above the level of cleverness. There was remarkable talent and the consequent effective use of materials, but

> nowhere ... the genius which absorbs material, and reproduces it as a living whole, in which you do not admire the ingenuity of the workman, but the vital energy of the producer.

George Eliot at this point compared Reade with Mrs. Stowe, naming the author of Dred as a genius who

> seems for the moment to glow with all the passion, to quiver with all the fun, and to be inspired with all the trust that belong to her different characters; she attains her finest dramatic effects by means of her energetic sympathy, and not by conscious artifice: Mr. Reade, on the contrary, seems always self-conscious, always elaborating a character after a certain type, and carrying his elaboration a little too far - always working up to situations, and over-doing them.

Writing for the theatre had misled him into the use of exaggerated contrasts and effects which were acceptable on the stage as a 'sort of rapid symbolism', a 'sum of less concentrated particular', whereby the audience could immediately recognise the general traits of a character. [1] She cited an example of Reade's dialogue to stress her point

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1 See below, George Eliot's discussion of Lessing's Laokoon, p. 105.

and to show the unconscious naivety of some of Reade's scenes. As she declared 'In everything Mr. Reade seems to distrust the effect of moderation and simplicity'. She praised the simple characters who were the hero and heroine, but found their effect counterbalanced by the introduction of the Jew and Machiavellian villain into their rural home. She noted that Reade's indignation at wrongs and injustices was overstressed:

> he lashes himself into a fury ... confounding the importance of the effect with the importance of the cause.

George Eliot was particularly caustic concerning Reade's strange use of capitals and italics, a use completely in accordance with the melodramatic tone of the novel. But despite all her fault-finding George Eliot pronounced It is Never Too Late Too Mend a novel that had given her much pleasure and aroused 'healthy feeling'.

Her later views of Reade were less kind. Writing to Sara Hennell, 17 January 1858, she inquired

> How could you waste your pretty eyes in reading 'White Lies'? Surely they are too precious to be spent on the inflated plagiarisms of a man gone mad with restless vanity and unveracity. 1

In the section entitled 'Story-Telling' in Leaves from a Notebook George Eliot wrote,

> Spirited narrative, without ~~much~~ more than a touch of dialogue here and there, may be made eminently interesting, and is suited to the novelette. Examples of its charm are seen in the short tales in which the French have a mastery never reached by the English.

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1 Haight, II. 472. White Lies was published in 3 vols. in 1857. For an account of Reade's lawsuits on the question of his alleged plagiarism, see Malcolm Elwin, Charles Reade (1931), Chapter v.

She decided that the French story-tellers had the advantage because they had a

> delightful gaiety ... a certain charm, an agreeable mode of handling which lends attractiveness to all subjects even the most serious. 1

An endorsement of the opinion occurred in a brief appreciation of Stendhal's story 'Ernestine, ou la Naissance de l'Amour' in George Eliot's review of De l'Amour, 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, [2] of which it formed a part. This story is a masterpiece of carefully selected incident, and truthful observation of character and conduct, simply and delicately written. George Eliot referred to it as 'a little bit of graceful fiction', and pointed out that it was only thirty pages long, yet told the

> story of a naive, girlish passion ... with far more finish, that is, with more significant detail, than most of our writers can achieve by the elaboration of three volumes.

An opposite opinion was given of two stories by Henry Murger, Le Dernier Rendezvous and La Resurection de Lazare. In a review in the Saturday Review, 17 May 1856, [3] which was headed, with intentional irony, 'Pictures of Life in French Novels', George Eliot pronounced both stories absurd and uninteresting unlike his Vie de Bohême (1847-9), in which, she declared, Murger had given an 'abundance of that intentional absurdity which is the privilege of wit'. The greater part of this review consists of a résumé of the plot of La

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1 p. 300.
2 pp. 642-3.
3 pp. 69-70.

Resurection de Lazare, revealing an extravagant unreality which, George Eliot judged, was not intended by Murger. In a shorter account of the other story she clearly selected the more absurd details of the plot.

A large proportion of the minor novels reviewed by George Eliot were by women, a fact that was probably due to the chances of publication than to any specific choice on the part of George Eliot. But the review article 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', Westminster Review, October 1856, which was in fact a review of six current anonymous publications,[1] was suggested to John Chapman by George Eliot, as a possible 'vehicle of some wholesome truth as well as of some amusement'.[2] The article is very amusing, but there is a strong current of seriousness occasioned by the 'wholesome truths' and condemnations. George Eliot realised that 'silly novels by lady novelists' could do irrevocable harm to the cause of the cultural emancipation of women, a cause very dear to her. In her review article 'Women in France: Madame de Sablé', Westminster Review, October 1854, George Eliot had written of the special part to be played by women in literature, and declared,

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1 Compensation. A Story of Real Life thirty years ago, was written by Lady Henrietta Chatterton.
Rank and Beauty, or the Young Baroness.
Laura Gay.
The Enigma: a Leaf from the Chronicles of Wolchorley House.
The Old Grey Church, was written by Lady Caroline Lacy Scott.
Adonijah. A Tale of the Jewish Dispersion, was written by J.M.Strickland.

2 Haight, II. 258.

> Let the whole field of reality be open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental modification, instead of being as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life. Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise for the harvest of human happiness. 1

Now, in 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists',[2] she stated her belief that a man might form a high opinion of the intelligence and capabilities of women by meeting with a woman of highly cultured mind, while silly feminine novels, on the other hand, would merely encourage him in the belief that women were lacking in the essential moral qualities and, however well educated, would remain unable to use their knowledge to good purpose. She urged that,

> every critic who forms a high estimate of the share women may ultimately take in literature, will, on principle, abstain from any exceptionable indulgence towards the productions of literary women.

George Eliot noted that most of the 'silly novels' were written by women of wealth and leisure, and not, as might have been expected, by widows supporting themselves on their earnings. It seemed that the sole reason for the appearance of 'silly novels' was the 'foolish vanity of wishing to appear in print', which, George Eliot declared,

> instead of being counterbalanced by any consciousness of the intellectual or moral derogation implied in futile authorship, seems to be encouraged by the extremely false impression that to write <u>at all</u> is a proof of superiority in a woman.

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1 p. 473. See below, p. 205.
2 pp. 442-61.

She believed that the average intelligence of women was unfairly represented among novelists, that the majority of lady novelists were very much below the average, while the few ranked above it and provided a 'cluster of great names' among the very finest of novelists. She admitted that the novel offered temptations to incompetent authors as did no other literary form, because of its lack of 'rigid requirements' and specific techniques. There were no 'external criteria to prevent a writer from mistaking foolish facility for mastery.'

George Eliot's conclusions were foumded on a detailed study of the six novels, in which she pointed to certain faults which are characteristics of all such novels. She also showed that individually these novels were representative products of different kinds of 'silliness'; 'the frothy, the prosy, the pious or the pendantic', and a composite form of all these. It would be impossible adequately to summarize George Eliot's opinions on the plot, characters and dialogue of these novels, for her analysis is a masterpiece of caustic wit enlivened further by judiciously selected quotations from the six novels. Only once is her scorn mitigated by faint praise, when she commented on Rank and Beauty, the 'dialogue is more natural and spirited; there is some frank ignorance, and no pedantry.' For George Eliot's main attack was directed against the two faults of absurd unreality and ignorance masquerading as erudition. She wrote that although the 'mind and millinery' species of

'silly novel' dealt mainly with 'very lofty' society their authors' knowledge of peers was as negligible as their knowledge of tradesmen,

> Their intellect seems to have the peculiar impartiality of reproducing both what they have seen and heard, and what they have not seen and heard, with equal unfaithfulness.

Their amazing ignorance of science and of life led another kind of 'silly novelist' to express views on the 'knottiest moral and speculative questions', in which they mistook 'vagueness for depth, bombast for eloquence, and affectation for originality.' The Enigma was chosen to represent this 'oracular species' of novel, and George Eliot wrote of it,

> The style of this novel is quite as lofty as its purpose; indeed, some passages on which we have spent much patient study are quite beyond our reach, in spite of the illustrative aid of italics and small caps.

But in each of these novels the heroine's supposed erudition is equalled only by her beauty and more feminine accomplishments, and George Eliot wrote,

> Greek and Hebrew are mere play to a heroine ... as her intellect has probably been early invigorated by an attention to costume and deportment, we may conclude that she can pick up the Oriental tongues, to say nothing of their dialects, with the same aërial facility that the butterfly sips nectar.

The diction of these novels was inflated to match the pedantry, and George Eliot described some typical examples,

> the sun is a luminary that goes to his western couch, or gathers the rain-drops into his refulgent bosom; life is a weary boon, etc.

The plots of all the 'silly novels' are equally absurd. The heroine of Rank and Beauty fell in love with the Prime

Minister solely through newspaper accounts of him, and at the end of three volumes is married to this young and handsome statesman. Even those novels whose subject was the Evangelical Church, which George Eliot dubbed 'white neck-cloth' species of novel, were 'a kind of genteel tract' dealing with high life, and she protested,

> The real drama of Evangelicalism - and it has abundance of fine drama for any one who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it - lies among the middle and lower classes. 1

But the 'least readable of silly women's novels' were, George Eliot maintained, the 'modern-antique species', which she declared, are 'a ponderous, a leaden kind of fatuity'. The finest attempts to recreate the past could only be approximate, and such an attempt 'is always more or less an infusion of the modern spirit into the ancient form'. She maintained that this form of literature could only be justified by the rarest concurrence of acquirement with genius. Of Adonijah, the representative of this species, she wrote that a 'tolerably well informed school-girl' would know more on the subject. It was the

> feeblest kind of love-story, supposed to be instructive, we presume, because the hero is a Jewish captive, and the heroine a Roman vestal.

It was written in 'that peculiar style of grandiloquence which is held by some lady novelists to give an antique colouring.'

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1 George Eliot wrote this article while she was writing the first of the Scenes of Clerical Life. See also her review of Rachel Gray, below, p. 81.

George Eliot's criticisms are cruel but wholly justified. Her analysis of plots, description of character and quotations from narrative and dialogue make amusing reading, but the novels themselves are so completely divorced from reality and common-sense and are relieved by so little conscious humour, as to be merely dull and insipid. They reveal, as George Eliot pronounced,

> a want of intellectual power ... want of those moral qualities that contribute to literary excellence - patient diligence, a sense of the responsibility involved in publication, and an appreciation of the sacredness of the writer's art.

Of other novels by lady novelists reviewed by George Eliot only a few could be categorised as 'silly'. My First Season (1855)[1] was dismissed, 'Belles Lettres', January 1856,[2] as 'frothy', and not to be recommended as 'a companion even to idle persons'. Deverell (1856) [3] is described at greater length, 'Belles Lettres', January 1857,[4] and George Eliot gave extracts from the 'abundance of fine writing and an original use of language'. She wrote, 'of the proud passionate beauty we read, that her "filled eye rolled inwardly to feed on her heart"'. George Eliot wrote of the milk-and-water triviality of Married Women,[5] 'Belles Lettres', ~~and Art'~~, July 1855,[6]

> We suppose there is still a public for novels like this among the clients of the circulating libraries in

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1 This novel was not written by Beatrice Reynolds, whose name appears on the title page, but by E.S. Sheppard.
2 p. 300.
3 3 Vols, anon.
4 p. 322-3.
5 I have been unable to trace this novel.
6 p. ~~262.~~ 296.

> provincial towns; and, after all, an interest in such feeble creations is better than blank ennui or indulgence in acrid gossip.

She is kinder to Beyminstre,[1] 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856,[2] which

> depends for its interest on the delineation of quiet provincial life ... in which Miss Austen and Balzac have given us too high a standard to allow of our being easily satisfied.

She admitted that the writer had 'one essential faculty of the novelist', the power of telling a story dramatically. But she found, together with an 'absence of the creative power that produces vivid conceptions in the reader', the more positive faults of 'exaggeration and absurdity' and she gave as an example 'the description of the heroine's complexion as having the "transparent radiance of a ground-glass lamp"'.

Not all the minor novels written by women were 'silly', however, and George Eliot found considerable merit in some of them. Tender and True.. a Colonial Tale (1856) [3] was given a favourable notice in 'Belles Lettres', January 1857.[4] It was not, George Eliot assured her readers, 'a novel of the sickly sentimental order', as its title implied. She described it as 'an unaffected attempt to exhibit the trials and vicissitudes of married life', and wrote,

> There is no fine writing in it, no pretensions to any kind of loftiness. The hero and heroine belong to middle life.

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1 The author was Ellen Wallace.
2 p. 262.
3 Anonymous. It was written by Catherine Ellen Spence.
4 p. 322.

But, as George Eliot pointed out the novel is 'agreeable, but feeble'. The writer had a 'real sense of character', and the misunderstandings that occur between the too tender wife and the true but undemonstrative husband arise naturally out of their characters, and are well and consistently handled. But there is no 'vigorous artistic power'. George Eliot singled out one specific fault in the novel, 'because it is a frequent one with lady-novelists'. It concerned a conversation between a young lady and an intellectual agnostic, and arose because the authoress had not thoroughly understood the situation and characters concerned. George Eliot wrote on the authoress's handling of this situation:

> She is not bound to be a metaphysician, but she <u>is</u> bound not to venture on representations for which she draws her materials from no other source than ignorance.

Perhaps the most important of those lady novelists whose work George Eliot considered as above the 'standard of ordinary feminine novelists' was Geraldine Jewsbury, whose novel, <u>Constance Herbert</u>, was reviewed at some length in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855.[1] It was a three-volumed novel written around the subject of hereditary insanity. It described the trials and final happiness of three women who for different, sound moral reasons, including that of the possibility of insanity, rejected the offers of marriage from suitors who subsequently proved themselves of worthless character. This novel was warmly acclaimed by the majority

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1 pp. 294-6.

of the reviewers, who welcomed its 'calm and beautiful morality'.[1] The Times reviewer wrote that in this novel Geraldine Jewsbury 'represents deviations from the straight rule of right and wrong not only as fatal but disagreeable'.[2] George Eliot, however, strongly disapproved of the moral underlying this story and expounded by the authoress in her 'Envoi', which was that nothing renounced for the sake of a higher principle will prove to have been worth the keeping. Her review was concerned to prove that Geraldine Jewsbury had been led by this false principle to create unreal events and characters as well as to undermine the 'beauty and heroism of renunciation'. She admitted,

> This is a grave question to enter on à propos of a novel; but Miss Jewsbury is so emphatic in the enunciation of her moral, that she forces us to consider her book rather in the light of a homily than of a fiction - to criticise her doctrine rather than her story.

George Eliot considered that this novel was not equal to the standard of the writer's other novels, but was still so far above the level of other feminine novels that it could be judged with some severity. There was much to please in this novel, George Eliot considered. The style was agreeable, there were

> some noble sentiments expressed in the quiet, unexaggerated way that indicates their source to be a deep spring of conviction and experience, not a mere rain-torrent of hearsay enthusiasm.

But George Eliot pointed out that these merits were not

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1 Athenaeum (24 March 1855), pp. 343-5.
2 1 June 1855, p.10. This review is favourable despite an underlying tone of irony.

enough to make a good novel. She regretted that Miss Jewsbury had wasted her talents for the sake of teaching such copy-book morality. She remonstrated with Miss Jewsbury on the too partial portrayal of her female characters and pointed out that nearly all the male characters of the book were 'weak, perfidious, or rascally', and commented,

> we care too much for the attainment of a better understanding as to woman's true position, not to be sorry when a writer like Miss Jewsbury only adds her voice to swell the confusion on this subject. 1

George Eliot also devoted several pages of her limited space in 'Belles Lettres' to another novel which had for its main theme the question of women's rights. Hertha, written by the Swedish novelist and feminist Fredrika Bremer, and translated into English by Mary Howitt (1856), received very little notice from the reviewers. George Eliot began her review, October 1856,[2] by recalling the furore created by Miss Bremer's Swedish novels ten years before, and how quickly it had died down till now,

> No one quotes them, no one alludes to them: and grave people who have entered on their fourth decade, remember their enthusiasm for the Swedish novels among those intellectual "wild oats" to which their mature wisdom can afford to give a pitying smile.

George Eliot had met Fredrika Bremer in October 1851 at John Chapman's where the Swedish authoress had been a guest, and she had written to Charles Bray, 8 October,[3] her impressions of the 'great little authoress'.[4] Now, in her

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1 See above, George Eliot's comments on 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' pp. 69-70.

2 pp. 575-8.

3 Haight, 1. 366.

4 See letter to Sara Hennell, 13 Oct. 1851; (Haight, 1. 368).

review of the latest work, she analysed the reasons for her former admiration. She decided that Fredrika Bremer had had the advantage of describing manners which were fresh to the English public, and possessed the unusual gifts of

> lively imagination, poetic feeling, wealth of language, a quick eye for details, and considerable humour, of that easy, domestic kind which throws a pleasant light on every-day things.

The besetting fault, however, was 'a rank growth of sentimentality' and George Eliot pointed to the strange mixture of 'the vapourishly affected and unreal with the most solid Dutch sort of realism'. George Eliot found fault with this authoress as she did with Geraldine Jewsbury for using the novel to expound a theory. Hertha had been written 'not simply from an artistic impulse'. She gave Miss Bremer great credit for her work in advocating the liberation of women from legal and educational restrictions, and she praised the 'many wise and noble things she says in "Hertha"', but she regretted that the writer had not presented her views in the '"light of commonday", rather than in the pink haze of visions and romance'. To support her claim that the writer had surrounded important questions with 'a cloudy kind of eloquence', George Eliot gave a brief summary of the story which is at once absurd and romantic and heavily weighted with didacticism. As George Eliot maintained, it was useless to advocate in a novel woman's right to nurse the sick and the wounded and then to associate that right with the vicissitudes of a sentimental love-story. She

declared that women had already shown themselves 'emotional, and rhapsodic, and spiritualistic', but had yet to prove they 'are capable of accurate thought, severe study, and continuous self-command'. George Eliot ended her review with praise for the 'many just and pathetic observations that Miss Bremer puts into the mouth of her heroine', and she quoted from one that complained of the neglect of women's education in the Natural Sciences. It is a wise and eloquent plea, as are many of Hertha's monologues, but totally unsuited to this kind of romance.

Julia Kavanagh's Rachel Gray reviewed by George Eliot in the Leader, 5 January 1856,[1] is similar in kind to Constance Herbert and to Hertha in that its main purpose is didactic. It is the story of a young dressmaker, neither beautiful nor especially gifted, and her devotion to her father, who is wholly indifferent to her, but who comes to need her care. The story of a shopkeeper, whose love for his rather shallow and unaffectionate daughter is clearly in apposition to Rachel's relationship with her father, provides a more interesting theme. His vain attempts to maintain his shop in competition with more wily and prosperous grocers are at once pathetic and amusing. The moral preached in this story is that of resignation, obedience to the dictates of duty and belief in the consoling influence of God. George Eliot had nothing but praise for the purpose of the novel, and for the ingredients of the story. She

1 p. 19.

commended it because it did not treat of a fine lady's sorrows, 'the sufferings and temptations of a destitute needlewoman', or 'the refined sentiments and heroic deeds of navvies and rat-catchers', and because

> it occupies ground which is very far from being exhausted, and it undertakes to impress us with the every-day sorrows of our commonplace fellow-men, and so to widen our sympathies.

Other critics also praised the simplicity of the story, and they found the execution equally excellent and pleasurable. The Critic, 1 January 1856, pronounced it 'a wholesome book, ministering to the finest of human affections, and cultivating all virtuous aspirations', [1] while Dublin University Magazine, January 1856, declared that there was'no parallel to "Rachel Gray", in respect to purity of colouring and artlessness of style, save in the "Vicar of Wakefield".' [2] Only the Saturday Review, 22 December 1855,[3] was in agreement with George Eliot in condemnation of the unreal nature of the book. George Eliot considered it a complete failure, realised that Rachel's religion was abstract, and divorced from all 'sectarian idiom', and commented that religion with the uneducated is always strongly attached to a Church or sect.[4]

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1 pp. 15-16. See also the Gentleman's Magazine (March 1856), p. 282; the North American Review (April 1856), p. 579; the Examiner (5 Jan. 1856), p.6.

2 pp. 121-3.

3 pp. 142-3.

4 It would be interesting to compare Rachel Gray with Dinah Morris of Adam Bede. See also George Eliot's review of 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', above p.73.

She judged that the 'mere novel reader, who cares only for excitement or amusement' would find little of interest in this novel, for it was

> of that quiet kind, which depends for its pathos and its humour on the delicate and masterly treatment of slight details.

But, she pronounced 'in this sort of treatment it is altogether deficient'. Her review ends with an expression of distaste at the disagreeable duty of condemning this novel and hoped that 'better things' would emerge from Julia Kavanagh's 'talents and diligence'.

The only writer whose books George Eliot persistently noticed [1] during her brief period as writer of 'Belles Lettres' was another novelist whose books she considered ranked above the level of the circulating library and, like Julia Kavanagh's, dealt with the lives of ordinary people and had a strong moral flavour. Although Harriet Parr wrote under the pseudonym of Holme Lee, George Eliot soon realised that her style was 'unmistakeably feminine'.[2] The first novel by Holme Lee that she reviewed, in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855,[3] was Thorney Hall: a Story of an Old Family, which was the authoress's second novel.[4] It is an autobiographical family chronicle, in one volume, of trivial events,

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1 Holme Lee's novels did not receive many notices apart from the usual weeklies.
2 In her review of Gilbert Massenger, 'Belles Lettres', Jan. 1856, p. 300.
3 p. 296.
4 Her first was Maud Talbot (1854).

with plausible yet badly selected and stock characters and situations. The worst fault is that of style, which is platitudinous and gives a touch of sentimentality to an otherwise readable novel. As George Eliot pronounced it was most suitable to

> those who are looking out for a one-volumed novel, which will not disturb the initiation of the digestive process, and is likely by-and-by, to lull them into their siesta.

She added that its merits were of the negative kind; it was 'not sentimental, not inflated, not religio-didactic'; but that it failed to make good its pretensions to be a 'story of ordinary life, with its inward and outward trials, its mistakes and misfortunes' because 'its scenes and characters are vague and shadowy'.

Gilbert Massenger,(1855) Holme Lee's next novel, again in one volume, was given a rather longer notice in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856.[1] It showed a great improvement on Thorney Hall, having the advantage of a more definite theme, that of the possibility of hereditary madness and the problems of conscience involved, which as George Eliot noted, had already been chosen by Geraldine Jewsbury in Constance Herbert. Holme Lee handled the rather sombre subject well, the narrative is simpler and less digressive than in her previous novel, the characterisation is firmer, and, as George Eliot commented,'the writer of "Gilbert Massenger" has excellent moral taste.' She added,

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1 p. 300.

> There is no exaggeration in her sentiments, no impotent ambition in her style, and her narrative is easy and agreeable.

The third and final novel of this authoress that was reviewed by George Eliot, 'Belles Lettres', January 1857,[1] was Kathie Brande, a Fireside History of a Quiet Life (1856). It was a more ambitious attempt in two volumes and again showed improvement in the construction of story and in the handling of characters. But, as George Eliot showed in her brief outline of the plot, the story was 'neither new nor entertaining', and was indeed a regression to the romantic and unreal events of Thorney Hall. George Eliot noted the 'many evidences of good feeling and good sense displayed by the writer', and admitted that it was

> distinguished from the generality of women's novels by its absence of affectation, maudlin sentimentality, and dogmatic assertions on philosophical, political, and religious points.

But she pointed to a 'radical defect' in the novel and enlarged upon it in some detail, because she considered that this fault was to be found in 'ninety-nine novels out of every hundred'. For the reason quoted by George Eliot above and also because her criticism here is complementary to her discussion of the difference between creative power and the mere 'writing about' a situation expressed in the comparison between Charles Reade and Mrs. Stowe,[2] I intend to discuss this criticism in some detail.

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1 pp. 320-2.
2 See above, p. 66.

George Eliot selected as illustration Holme Lee's handling of the two main incidents of the story, the shipwreck in which the hero, 'the curate ... saves everybody at the peril of his life', and the burning of York Minster. George Eliot pointed out that these incidents which were

> sufficiently unusual to have called forth all the writer's care, are slurred over almost as carelessly as if they had been every-day occurrences.

George Eliot's accusation is entirely just. The scene of the shipwreck is absurd because of the exaggerated behaviour of the characters. The burning of York Minster could have been the central incident of the story for the city of York was the centre of Kathie Brande's life, the scene of her happiest moments with her lover; the Minster, in whose shadow she lived, the scene of her ultimate reunion with him. But Holme Lee at this point destroyed the atmosphere with which she seemed so carefully to have surrounded her heroine. Kathie is woken by the light and heat of the flames and goes out into the street to watch the conflagration; she meets with another and wholly unreal character and they discuss, not the catastrophe they are witnessing, but a wholly irrelevant matter. It is as if the cathedral were burnt every night of their lives. As George Eliot commented, Holme Lee had neither vividly realised nor vividly presented the scenes

> either through their typical details or through the emotions which such scenes would inevitably raise in the minds of the sensitive spectator.

And she added,

> An artist would have suffered his imagination to dwell on such scenes until, aided by his knowledge, either direct or indirect, the principal details became so vividly present to him that he could describe as if he saw them, and we should read as if we saw them too. But Holme Lee has rested satisfied with the general effect likely to be produced by a recital of the calamities, and in so far she has abdicated the artist's place.

George Eliot continued by pointing to 'an analogous want of truth - or vivid realisation-' in the presentation of character,

> We do not live in the company of the personages; we do not hear them speak: we do not joy with them, and suffer with them

and to this she attributed 'the heaviness of these volumes'. She argued that Holme Lee's choice of subject, the 'fireside history of a quiet life' should have warned her that

> here more than elsewhere vivid reality was indispensable. When the imagination is actively creating unusual characters and startling incidents, we do not so closely scrutinize probability and truthful representation; but when the imagination moves amidst ordinary realities, if it does not realize them vividly, the result is inevitable weariness.

Erlesmere was the first novel of L.S.Lavenu. It was published in two volumes in 1856 and received scant notice from the critics. George Eliot, reviewing it in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856,[1] 'side by side with the latest publication of a very mature authoress', Fredrika Bremer's Hertha, found it a novel of 'remarkable promise'.

> It bears the stamp of unusual insight and culture, and of a mind that possesses some important qualifications of the novelist. ... the style is vigorous and often

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1 pp. 578-9.

> graceful, the dialogue easy and appropriate. The writer has a sense of character and an eye for characteristics, she knows what she means to paint, and her touches, though not always felicitous, are laid on with a firm hand.

But, as George Eliot realised, Erlesmere was not likely to be popular. It is a psychological novel; its theme the effect of birth and environment on the character of three young people, two wholly dissimilar brothers and a wilful girl. The story is carefully thought out and the incidents are selected with an eye to the shape and balance of the whole. The characters, though clearly illustrating the author's theme, are distinct from first to last and engage our sympathies and interest. The authoress has some interesting theories on education, she has considerable knowledge of character motivation, and her general culture is both wide and deep. Her use of literature in the text of the book and in mottoes for chapter headings is always appropriate and never superimposed on the story as is the discussion of literature in most of these minor Victorian novels. She has both wit and humour and the rather sombre story is enlivened by an undercurrent of irony. This novel was indeed written for the

> novel reader extraordinary, who is keenly alive to every trait of originality, who detects at once the touch of the true artist.

But, as George Eliot added, that reader will be disappointed that the writer

> had recourse at last to melodramatic effects which are as hackneyed as other parts of the book are fresh and spontaneous.

In all justice to the writer, this ending is entirely in keeping with the psychology of the characters.

George Eliot wisely decided that this was not a good novel. She pointed to minor defects of style in the early chapters of the novel, remarked that the 'priggish Emersonian' tutor to one of the boys was only 'moderately agreeable', and detected a certain crudity in the 'picture, as a whole.' But she concluded,

> Nevertheless, the author of "Erlesmere" is one of that minority among novelists to whom such readers will say, "More, give me more." Her first attempt is not itself satisfactory, but it creates a belief in her powers.

George Eliot had no such reservations about Ashford Owen's A Lost Love which she reviewed in 'Belles Lettres', October, 1855.[1] It was one of the few novels to which she gave unqualified praise. This simple, gracefully told story of a woman's love and renunciation of that love for the sake of other's happiness was deservedly acclaimed by the critics.[2] George Eliot commended it because it was 'unpretending' and because it was 'a real picture of a woman's life'. Her description of the heroine and her story is perhaps the most sensitive of all her critical writings and deserves to be given at length:

> not a remarkable woman, not one of those heroines who have such amazing moral strength that they despise happiness and like to be disappointed, or who are so wonderfully intellectual as to give even serious views of "female competition"; yet not a commonplace woman,

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1 pp. 610-11.

2 Reviewing A Lost Love in the first number of the Saturday Review (3 Nov.1855), pp.17-8, Walter Bagehot pronounced it 'a work of genius and sensibility'.

> but one who, while loving and thirsting to be loved, can give up her one hope in life when sympathy and good sense demand it, without having any fine theories about her deed, or any consciousness that she is doing something out of the common,-one with no great culture and no great powers, but with that true freshness and simplicity which makes any mind original and interesting. Such is Georgy, the heroine of"A Lost Love"; a parasitic plant, but a vigorous one, with a strong preference of that particular tree to which it will cling. The story is a melancholy one, but without any exaggerated sorrows; the tragic notes in it belong to that "still sad music of humanity", which seems to make hardly a perceptible element in the great world-symphony. But every tender and watchful nature has an ear for such notes; and Georgy's tale will remind most readers of something they have seen in life.

George Eliot's concluding remarks on this novel provide a fitting end to this survey of her criticism of feminine novelists which began with 'silly novels by lady novelists':

> The author is unquestionably a woman, and writes like one in the best sense, namely, by keeping to the delineation of what a woman's experience and observation bring within her special knowledge.

Perhaps the most controversial of the current novels by male novelists reviewed by George Eliot was Perversion; or the Causes and Consequences of Infidelity. A Tale for the Times, written anonymously by the Reverend W.J.Conybeare. It was the study of the careers of two young men, both per-verted from the Christian faith, and of the various sects and creeds open to them in contemporary life - it even included an account of the Mormons. Perhaps because of its subject, the book received wide notice from the reviewers; although very few approved of it. The general opinion was that it revealed a 'thoroughly debased view of human nature'[1]

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1 North British Review, in an article 'Religious Novels' (Nov. 1856), pp. 209-27.

was 'intolerant and irreverent', and that the 'perversion' was in the mind of the writer.[1] Yet nearly all found something to commend in this very unpleasant book, and wrote at length on the author's skill and unflagging energy,[2] the good style and the fresh feeling,[3] or on 'the remarkable insight into character'.[4] George Eliot was in agreement with the majority decision in disliking the tone and the content of the book. In her review in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856,[5] she pronounced the 'moral odour' bad and thought most readers would be

> puzzled to understand the writer's mode of "illustrating" the moral benefits of Christianity, since his Christians seem on the whole no better than his infidels, and a great deal more silly. The impression likely to be left by "Perversion" is not so much that only Christians are good, as that most men are good for nothing; and we should imagine that dislike to people in general is a much stronger feeling with the author than attachment to Christians in particular.

She especially disliked the scenes of Mormon life, which, she wrote,

> are a very vulgar treatment of a grave as well as curious phenomenon which wise people will let alone until we have more authentic information.

The greater part of George Eliot's long review was taken up with a detailed account of the plot of the novel which, as she wrote, is 'not in itself ingenious or interesting', but which offered good situations and opportunities that the

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1 Edinburgh Review (Oct. 1856), pp. 518-31.
2 Spectator (24 May 1856), pp. 568-9.
3 North British Review (Nov. 1856), pp. 209-27.
4 Church of England Quarterly Review (July 1856), p.250.
5 pp. 258-61.

author had failed to grasp. The book read like the sketch of a novel, George Eliot decided. The scenes were described and not presented and she especially cited the scenes of school-life and the home life of the young brother and sister. She regarded it as sufficiently indicative of the author's 'deficiency' that there is hardly any dialogue in the first volume. She also found fault with the 'coarse, and often feeble' characterisation, the satire 'without finesse', and the fact that there was 'little appeal to the emotions' until the third volume, the first two volumes being of an 'unamiable dullness, occasionally relieved by unamiable cleverness'. George Eliot could not agree with those critics who had commended the 'mere "writing"' of the book, and she admitted that she would not have noticed it had they not especially pointed to it, 'dazzled, we must think, by rumours of distinguished authorship'.

Another novelist who had failed to take the opportunities offered by his plot and who had filled in what was a vigorous outline with feeble detail was Talbot Gwynne in Young Singleton, reviewed by George Eliot in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856.[1] She pointed out that the author had discovered a fresh and excellent subject and she outlined briefly the story of the 'unheroic hero' of 'morbid vanity' and hatred for all who 'consciously or unconsciously thwarted this vanity'. She justly praised the striking and natural situations, the specific characters, but pointed to an

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1 p. 575.

incompleteness in the whole, which reminded her 'of a play schemed by an able dramatist but written by an inefficient collaborator'.

Aspen Court. A Story of Our Own Time was another novel which George Eliot found 'as far as possible from boring' while it was being read, but forgotten as soon as laid down. This novel by Shirley Brooks[1] had first appeared in Bentley's Miscellany,[2] and George Eliot wrote, 'Belles Lettres', October 1855,[3] of the three volumes that,

> Like all fiction written for periodical appearance, it bears the stamp of that demand for periodical effect, which opposes itself to a natural development of character and incident; ... is under a disadvantage when read consecutively.

But George Eliot's main complaint against this amusing, but rather wearisome book, was that it showed 'no grasp of character, no close, genuine presentation of life'. She admitted that the writing was 'unusually smart', that the story was what it professed to be: 'a story of our own day', and that the scenes and characters were a varied portrait of the contemporary world. But she decided that 'these scenes, one and all, are vitiated by the constant presence of unreality'. The great merit of the book was its lively writing, and George Eliot extracted some examples to substantiate her claim. But, she pronounced, the great defect was 'a want of earnestness as a background to the liveliness'.

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1 Charles William Shirley Brooks, editor of Punch, 1871.
2 1853-4.
3 pp. 611-2.

Maurice Elvington; or, One out of Suits with Fortune, An Autobiography [1] was deservedly dismissed in a few words by George Eliot in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856.[2] It was, as she wrote, a novel that began smartly but became rapidly dull. It is a poor attempt in the same kind as Aspen Court. But George Eliot pointed to the merit revealed in the portrait of the lawyer, Mr. Gently and his family, who are described with some care and sympathy.

She had no such praise for the American novel Our World, or the Democrat's Rule by 'Justia, a know-nothing',[3] which she condemned in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855,[4] for 'the perverted feeling' shown in the choice of subject, and in the scenes 'more painful than the most painful in "Uncle Tom's Cabin"'. George Eliot's disapproval is entirely justified, for the novel has for its main theme the brutalities of the slave markets and the writer has obvious relish for the more cruel aspects of this subject.

George Eliot always welcomed fiction that had an original setting or which offered the charm of novelty to an English reader. For this reason she had commended the Australian scenes of It is Never Too Late to Mend and Tender and True and, in 'Belles Lettres', October 1855,[5] she turned with interest to the writings of the Flemish author, Hendrick

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1 This novel is described on the title page as 'Edited by Wilfred East.'
2 p. 262.
3 The author was Francis Colburn Adams.
4 p. 296.
5 pp. 612-3.

Conscience, whose 'Tales and Romances' had been translated into English as part of a series called 'The Amusing Library'. In this review she admitted that despite the high praise given to these books she did not expect anything very powerful or original from a literature 'born no longer since than 1830'. But she did expect 'from a novelist, of all writers .. something indigenous and characteristic', and she had to admit herself disappointed with Conscience. She had been unable to finish reading the two intensely melodramatic and unreal historical novels, Veva; or the War of the Peasants, and The Lion of Flanders. She pronounced the two short stories The Curse of the Village and The Happiness of Being Rich, which appeared together in one volume, as little more than apologues, their psychological interest being 'not much above that of the moral fairy tale.' Clearly George Eliot's condemnation is strongly urged only because the tales had received such extravagant praise in the preface to the series.[1]

Another translation, of Emile Souvestre's volume of rather sentimental sketches and tales of peasant life and superstitions called Brittany and La Vendée, was reviewed more briefly but with enthusiasm, in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855.[2] George Eliot welcomed the work of this French author and named him 'deservedly a favourite writer in England'.

Another foreign writer who, George Eliot wrote, was

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1 Preface to Veva; or the War of the Peasants, p. iii.
2 p. 297.

deservedly celebrated in England for his stories of peasant life was Berthold Auerbach, whose volume of short stories Schatzkästlein de Gevattersmann, was reviewed by her in the Leader, 19 July 1856.[1] She declared that the principal defect of his fictions was

> a too predominant moralizing tendency which often leads him to sacrifice truthful representation to the desire of enforcing a lesson.

She moted that he was occasionally divided between the desire to write tales about the poor in order to convey a moral lesson to the rich and a desire to write moral tales for the poor themselves. But she decided Auerbach was 'too sincere and loving a student of popular manners and character' not to produce some 'striking and truthful sketches' and the rest of this article is taken up with a detailed sketch of one of the stories, which, in George Eliot's translation, is powerful and pathetic.

A collection of short stories by Leon Gozlan, La Folle du Logis, was reviewed by George Eliot in the Leader, 26 April 1856,[2] in the same manner. She described the stories as new versions of the 'entomological tragi-comedy which has many parodies in human society', the story of the blue-bottle and the spider, and compared their author with Balzac in his Scènes de la Vie de Provence. But the greater part of the article consisted of a condensed account of one of the stories, an amusing tale of human intrigue and folly.

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1 In an article headed 'A Tragic Story', p. 691.
2 pp. 401-2.

This was a novel way of introducing English readers to foreign books; it gave the ordinary reader of the Leader an interesting and amusing sample of foreign literature and encouraged those with any knowledge of languages to attempt the stories for themselves.

Another French story, Tolla by Edmond About, was highly praised by George Eliot in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, [1] and again when the translation was published (1855), she recommended it, 'Belles Lettres', January 1856, as

> a delightful tale ... one of the few French fictions which can do no harm to the most inexperienced reader. [2]

Tolla was well received by the few critics who noticed it, [3] and deservedly so. It was a short novel, set in the high life of contemporary Roman society, yet telling a very simple story of a young girl's love for a selfish weak-willed and charming young man, too easily separated from her by both their relatives, of her grief at his parting from her and at his seemingly casual attitude towards their relationship, and of her death, hastened by a fever. This unoriginal story is beautifully told in a manner that, even in translation, has a gentle grace underlined by a subtle irony. There is humour in the portrait of Roman society, and in the intrigues of the Roman matrons in their attempts to find suitable husbands for their daughters. There is excellent

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1 p. 306.
2 pp.300-1.
3 Examiner (5 Jan. 1856), p.6; Athenaeum (13 Oct. 1855), p.1179; Saturday Review (12 Jan. 1856), pp. 195-6.

characterisation in the portrait of the two lovers; the hero's mingled indolence, sensuality, and embarrassment at his own passion is well matched by the gentle and uncomplicated nature of Tolla.[1] There is one character who, to the modern reader, strikes a discordant note of sentimentality and melodrama in this otherwise excellent novel. But George Eliot thoroughly approved of this devoted peasant servant, and comparing the hero to George Sand's André (1835) judged,

> the delicacy of the touches which indicate the love of the peasant ... for his high-born mistress, is a kind of excellence which Sand has never attained.

George Eliot had nothing but praise for Tolla. She considered that the story was of absorbing interest because of the artistic mastery of the writer. She commended 'the living unexaggerated reality of the characters', the way in which the reader was transported beneath the skies of Italy and the

> pure and tender spirit which breathes through the whole narrative, and tempers the French point and vivacity of the style.

She concluded with the hope that this was only the first of many such tales to come from M. About's pen; 'a bit of virgin gold like this tells of a rich mine to be worked'.

Perhaps the most interesting of all George Eliot's reviews of works of fiction was her review of Doctor Antonio (1855) in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856,[2] because, although her general assessment of this novel was no less discerning

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1 The Critic (15 Dec. 1855), p.620, pronounced the hero commonplace, the heroine 'bread-and-butterish' and demanded of the plot, 'Could anything be more unromantic?'

2 pp. 299-300.

than that of her other reviews of fiction, it is the only instance in which her judgment is seriously at fault.

Doctor Antonio was the second English novel of an Italian, Giovanni Ruffini,[1] and, like Tolla, its setting is Italy and it is primarily a love story. But, unlike Tolla, the details of the plot are improbable and absurd, and George Eliot asked plaintively,

> When will novelists give up introducing their heroes and heroines by means of runaway horses and broken-down carriages?

But once the Italian hero has set the leg of the young heroine, broken in the accident to the carriage, and has installed her and her father in a peasant's cottage in the beautiful Italian country-side the novel becomes and remains engrossing. Doctor Antonio endeavours to amuse his patient and to distract her mind from the serious nature of her injury, and, in talking to her of the wonders of the Italian scene, of the natural history he knows as a man of science, of the troubles of the Italian people and their struggles for political freedom and of his own part in that struggle, he finds a listener so sympathetic and gentle that he falls in love with her. His tale shows her the nobility of his character and she loves him in her turn. The lovers, who, in their mutual regard and sympathetic feeling for one another, never need to speak of their love, are separated in a melodramatic manner. Lucy marries another, who, as

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1 It was published anonymously.

George Eliot commented, 'conveniently' leaves her a widow. She returns to Italy and is reunited to Doctor Antonio in the midst of the Neapolitan rising of 1848. He is captured and imprisoned, and the story ends with his refusal to attempt the escape organised by Lucy, preferring to remain with his fellow political prisoners and to hope for the eventual liberty of all Italy. The latter part of this otherwise excellent book is marred by a long account of the trials of the prisoners in which the hero hardly figures. The earlier descriptions of the political struggle as told by Doctor Antonio to Lucy are an integral part of the book and if they are a kind of propaganda they are matched by the Doctor's long dissertations on natural scenery and art, on Italian religious feeling and the conditions of peasant life. Indeed the novel is nothing if not instructive. But, as George Eliot remarked 'the superiority of the writing ... carried us forward' through the romantic and the instructive parts of the novel. George Eliot named it the most interesting novel of the season and declared that there was 'no mistaking the presence of a vigorous and remarkable mind'. She noted that the writing throughout was 'idiomatic, vigorous, and picturesque', and commended the characterisation of the lovers, who she said were 'very unlike the characters usually found in novels', and were 'touched with extreme delicacy of observation'. But she found fault with the character of Lucy's father, and wrote

> our objection to this Baronet is not that he is proud and absurd, but that he is not a human being.

George Eliot particularly pointed to the most delicately handled and interesting part of the novel, the growing passion of Doctor Antonio and Lucy, which, as she says,

> gradually unfolds itself before our eyes as it grows up in their hearts. The word love never passes between them, and yet we are made to feel their love perhaps all the more from this reticence.

However for George Eliot

> the culminating point of interest in the book is where the writer, forsaking the function of a novelist, and sternly taking up that of the historian, presents us with a picture of the Neapolitan revolution, and the ghastly iniquity of Neapolitan trials. Here is truth that towers above the mere fiction of the novel, as the battle of Drumclog and the trial of Covenanters tower above the sorrows of Henry Morton and Edith Bellenden in "Old Mortality".

Other critics were more perceptive. The North British Review, February 1856, while in perfect sympathy with the hopes expressed in the novel for the political freedom of Italy, yet realised that the trial scenes marred 'the unity of plan which distinguishes the rest of the work'. [1] The Athenaeum, 1 December 1855, declared that the tragedy at the end of the book was 'too painful for the ephemeral interest of a work of fiction' and decided that 'as a matter of Art a novel has no business to wind up with a lengthened police report'. [2]

George Eliot's comparison of the trial scenes in Doctor Antonio with those in Old Mortality is also ill-chosen, for Henry Morton is never far from the scene in Scott's story,

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1 In an article reviewing 'Doctor Antonio and The History of Piedmont,' pp. 537-48.
2 pp. 1400-1.

and his part in the battles and trials is considerable. Moreover the leading Covenanters whose trials we witness have leading parts in the story, whereas Doctor Antonio is the only political figure we meet in Ruffini's story and our interest in the trials is distinct from our interest in the fiction and its characters.

Perhaps George Eliot's strange judgment can be better understood if it is considered together with her praise in the Leader, 17 May 1856, of that part of Margaret Fuller Ossoli's At Home and Abroad [1] which dealt with the events in Rome of 1847-1848, and with her recommendation in the Leader, 30 August 1856, of Felice Orsini's The Austrian Dungeons in Italy: a Narrative of Fifteen Months' Imprisonment and Final Escape from the Fortress of S. Giorgio, [2] Both these books were praised by George Eliot because they related realistically and vividly recent events which had been witnessed or experienced by two able writers. Of Margaret Fuller's narrative George Eliot wrote,

> A description, however fragmentary and imperfect, of the events in Rome ..., written on the spot by a foreign resident who could both feel and think forcibly, must have an interest quite apart from any special interest in the writer. It will bring those events nearer to the imagination of the ordinary reader, and help him to make a picture of what has hitherto perhaps been a rough diagram in his mind.

George Eliot quoted part of Margaret Fuller's long description of the departure of Garibaldi and his soldiers from Rome, which was, as she named it, 'a fine mixture of the pathetic

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1 p. 475.
2 p. 835.

and picturesque'. Clearly Giovanni Ruffini's narrative of the Neapolitan trials have the same value for George Eliot, a value that for the moment sets aside the necessities of her art. Her view of the importance of biography,[1] and of historical fiction as the highest attainment of the novelist[2] - an opinion which probably more than anything else, motivated the writing of Romola - has occasioned this one error of judgment. It is also linked with her demand for truthful representation in art and with the preference for fiction that dealt with the lives of ordinary men and women expressed in Adam Bede,[3] the review article 'The Natural History of German Life',[4] and in the review of Rachel Gray.[5] But, with this one exception, this demand and preference enabled her to point unerringly at the artistic defects: the moralizing tendency, the shadowy figures or unrealistic incidents, in all the fiction that she reviewed, and, at the same time, allowed her to perceive beauty in a variety of kinds of novels.

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1 See below, pp. 195-203.
2 See above, George Eliot's review article 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', p. 13.
3 Chapter xvii. See above, pp. 22-3.
4 See above, pp. 24-5.
5 See above, pp. 80-1.

CHAPTER II

Of Poetry and Drama

George Eliot's views on poetry are to be found inherent in her opinions of individual poets, in letters, novels and critical writings, rather than in any explicit statement as to the nature of poetry or the function of the poet. But, from a few scattered remarks it is possible to discover that, for George Eliot, poetry was the highest form of literature.

In the prefatory remarks to her review of the quarter's selection of minor poets, 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, George Eliot described the true poets as those 'who witch the world with noble song'.[1] In a letter to Mrs. Ponsonby, 11 February 1875, she wrote,

> Consider what the human mind en masse would have been if there had been no such combination of elements in it as has produced poets. All the philosophers and savants would not have sufficed to supply that deficiency. And how can the life of nations be understood without the inward light of poetry - that is, of emotion blending with thought? 2

In her review of Maud, and Other Poems, 'Belles Lettres', October 1855,[3] she wrote,

> Thought and feeling, like carbon, will always be finding new forms for themselves, but once condense them into the diamonds of poetry, and the form, as well as the element, will be lasting. This is the sublime privilege of the artist - to be present with future generations, not merely through the indirect results of his work, but

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1 pp. 646.
2 Haight, VI. 124.
3 p. 596.

> through his immediate creations; and of all artists the one whose works are least in peril from the changing conditions of humanity, is the highest order of poet, who has received:-
>
> "Aus Morgenduft gewebt und Sonnenklarheit
> Der Dichtung Schleier aus der Hand der Wahreit". [1]

It is no wonder that George Eliot was unable to appreciate the opinions of those who would deride her for writing the Spanish Gypsy in preference to a more popular and lucrative novel.[2] When George Eliot sent to John Blackwood, 6 March 1874, the collection of poems, The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems (1874), she told him that each of these poems represented

> an idea which I care for strongly and wish to propogate as far as I can. Else I should forbid myself from adding to the mountainous heap of poetical collections. [3]

In a letter to James Thompson, 30 May 1874, George Eliot expressed her pleasure in The City of Dreadful Night,[4] but hoped that Thompson would soon write

> more heroic strains with a wider embrace of human fellowship in them ... To accept life and write much fine poetry, is to take a very large share in the quantum of human good. 5

There are very few statements on the art of poetry in George Eliot's writings. Her review of Dobell's England in Time of War[6] began with a discussion of the distinction made by

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1 These lines from Goethe's 'Zueignung' (1784) written for his semi-autobiographical work, Dichtung und Wahrheit, have been translated,
Woven from the morning fragrance and sun's brightness
The veil of poetry from the hand of truth.

2 See her letter to Mrs.Bray, 7 May 1858; (Haight, IV. 438).

3 Haight, VI. 25-6.

4 This poem had been published in serial form in the National Reformer, 22 March - 17 May 1874.

5 Haight, VI. 53.

6 'Belles Lettres', October 1856, pp. 566-70.

Lessing in his essay Laokoon (1766) between the methods of presentation of the plastic arts and of poetry. She wrote of the 'acumen and the aptness of illustration' with which Lessing indicated how the difference in the materials used by the sculptor and the poet, and their distinct modes of appeal to the mind, involved a difference in their treatment of the subject of the deaths of Laocoon and his sons. Summarizing Lessing's essay George Eliot continued, Virgil by his choice of words, was able to suggest a detail of Laocoon's agony which could 'intensify in our imagination the conception of suffering'. But the sculptor did not attempt to render the same detail, for its result would have been only 'rigid ugliness'. A similar difference is found between the methods of the poet and the dramatist. She quoted Lessing '"It is one thing to be told that some one shrieked, and another to hear the shriek itself."' The narrative suggests and addresses itself to the imagination, while the 'dramatic representation attacks the sense.' [1] The poet, on the other hand, would be mistaken if he tried to adopt all the symbolism and detail used by the sculptor or painter,

> since he has at his command the media of speech and action, and it is the absence of these which their symbolism is intended to supply.

In many of her reviews of poetry George Eliot makes

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1 See George Eliot's discussion of Charles Reade's misuse of theatrical effects in his novel It is Never Too Late to Mend; above, p.66 , and her opinion of Mrs.Gaskell's Ruth, above, p.40.

a comparison between lyric poetry and song. In this review of Dobell's poems she declared that it is the device of iteration which, 'under proper restraint', marks the 'delicately-shaded boundary' between poetry and song. She described Tennyson's 'Blow, bugles, blow', as the

> song of speech in its utmost legitimate affinity with the song of pure sound; just indicating that surplus of sensation and emotion which transcends the power of articulate language and awaits its full expression in music.

Commending Robert Bell for leaving Chaucer's orthography intact in his edition of Chaucer in the 'English Poet's' series, George Eliot wrote that with Chaucer,

> as with all true poets, the minutest details of language are as essential to his creation as the skin to the beauty of the human form. 1

In her criticism of Wallis's translation (1856) of Heine's Buch der Lieder[2] George Eliot provided an amusing example of the alteration of a poet's language. She offered as substitute for Lovelace's famous lines:

> I could not love thee, dear, so well
> Loved I not honour more,

the following

> never-to-be-quoted paraphrase,
> "My love would be inferior, dear,
> Were honour not supreme."

To appreciate George Eliot's wide taste in poetry it is only necessary to examine the mottoes used by her as chapter headings for Felix Holt, Middlemarch and Daniel

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1 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, p. 299-300.
2 Saturday Review (26 April 1856), pp. 523-4.

Deronda.[1] Shakespeare occurs most frequently. The list also includes Chaucer, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Nicholas Breton, Marlowe, Donne, Jonson, Milton, Sir Henry Wotton, Sir Charles Sedley, Goldsmith, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Walt Whitman, Dante, Goethe, Heine, La Fontaine, Alfred de Musset, Sophocles and AEschylus.

George Eliot's letters and journals reveal a constant reading of Greek tragedy. Aristotle's Poetics are read more than once. The result of this reading is to be seen in many of her novels.[2] But there is also more specific criticism.

In an article in the Leader, 29 March 1856, 'The Antigone and its Moral',[3] which was ostensibly a review of a school edition of the play, George Eliot pronounced the Antigone one of the finest tragedies of the single dramatic poet who could be said to stand on a level with Shakespeare. She declared, 'Sophocles is the crown and flower of the classical tragedy as Shakespeare is of the romantic'. Discussing the passion and poetry of the play and its perennial appeal to human nature, she wrote that only a superficial view could consider it foreign to modern sympathies. She disagreed with the preface to this edition which insisted that

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1 The major part of the poetry used in the mottoes was by George Eliot. Much of it was used by Alexander Main in the George Eliot Birthday Book (1878).

2 See above, p.14-15.

3 p. 306.

the theme of the play was the reverence for the dead. She declared that it was rather the conflict between Antigone's duty to her brother, her reverence for the dead and for the gods, and the duties of citizenship. She denied that Creon was a tyrant and Antigone his innocent victim and maintained that a great writer does not use such coarse contrasts. Sophocles power was seen in the touches by which he portrayed the protagonists both contending for what they believed to be right, aware of their disobedience to other ethical laws, and strengthened in their resolve by that consciousness. She opposed the view that saw the contest between Creon and Antigone as a result of Greek polytheism. She wrote,

> Is it not rather that the struggle between Antigone and Creon represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs. Until this harmony is perfected, we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a great wrong.

George Eliot judged that the struggle between Antigone and Creon is always renewed; man must dare to be right and dare to be wrong, for neither man nor society could ever be a blameless martyr any more than Antigone was wholly blameless or Creon wholly cruel. She concluded,

> Perhaps the best moral we can draw is that to which the Chorus points - that our protest for the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence and that the lofty words μεγάλοι λόγοι are not becoming to mortals.

There is an interesting endorsement of this view of Greek tragedy as the irreparable collision between the

individual and the general duty in George Eliot's 'Notes on the Spanish Gypsy', which was first published by J.W. Cross.[1] George Eliot considered that all great tragedies were modelled on this plan. She declared that the collision of Greek tragedy was often between some hereditary Nemesis and the peculiar individual lot. In the Oresteia, the two clashing duties were Orestes necessity to avenge the murder of his father upon his mother and the vengeance consequent upon that second murder. In Prometheus the tragedy lay in the ineffectual struggle to redeem man against the 'stronger adverse ordinances that govern the frame of things with a triumphant power'.

Discussing modern tragedies George Eliot described Othello in the same terms. She wrote,

> A story simply of a jealous husband is elevated into a most pathetic tragedy by the hereditary conditions of Othello's lot, which give him a subjective ground for distrust.

This is the only specific critical evaluation of a play by Shakespeare to be found in George Eliot's writings. But her knowledge and appreciation of him is to be seen in her frequent quotations and references from all his works. An early reference in a letter to Maria Lewes, 16 March 1839, is significant of her literary judgment at that time. Writing of those books that were standard works of reference she declared,

Shakespeare has a higher claim than this on our attention

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1 J.W.Cross, George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters, 3 vols. (1885), III. 42-9.

> but we have need of as nice a power of distillation as the bee to suck nothing but honey from his pages. 1

George Eliot and G.H.Lewes's journals record the frequent reading of Shakespeare's plays, and, in a letter to Sara Hennell, 5 December 1859, George Eliot wrote,

> In opposition to most people who love to read Shakespeare I like to see his plays acted better than any others: his great tragedies thrill me, let them be acted how they may. I think it is something like what I used to experience in old days in listening to uncultured preachers - the emotions lay hold of one too strongly for one to care about the medium. Before all other plays I find myself cold and critical, seeing nothing but actors and "properties". 2

She had described her disappointment at the acting of Ira Aldridge in scenes from Shakespeare in a letter to Sara, 24 February 1857, but had commented, 'Shakespeare moves one through the worst actor that can pronounce English'. 3

George Eliot's liking for national songs and ballads is to be seen in her notice of Bell's Early Ballads, Illustrative of History, Traditions, and Customs (1856) 4 despite her derogatory remarks on the monotony of the burden of these English and Scottish ballads in her review, in the same quarter, of Dobell's England in Time of War. 5 In 'Belles Lettres', January 1857, she reviewed Rouman Anthology; or,a Selection of Rouman Poetry, ancient and modern. 6 She judged that to read this book was an interesting way of

1 Haight, 1. 22. See above p.7.
2 Haight, 111. 228.
3 Haight, 11. 301.
4 'Belles Lettres', October 1856, p.571.
5 ibid., p. 567. See below, p.152.
6 pp. 315-9.

comparing national literatures. She pointed to a 'deep and fervid patriotism' as the distinguishing feature of this poetry and indicated the tender sadness of a settled melancholy in the ancient ballads. Her long review included summaries of some of the folk ballads, and much quotation. Writing to Alexander Main, 29 March 1872, George Eliot recommended him to read a similar collection, W.R.S.Ralston's Songs of the Russian People (1872), which, she declared, contained 'some exquisite bits of true lyric poetry'. [1]

Elizabethan and Jacobean poets are frequently quoted by George Eliot's characters. Ladislaw cited Drayton's lines:

> Queens hereafter might be glad to live
> Upon the alms of her superfluous praise. [2]

Drayton's Polyolbion is used by George Eliot as motto for the title page of Felix Holt. In Middlemarch, she writes of Daniel's sonnet sequence, Delia, that it would be rash to conclude that there was no passion in them merely because they sound like the 'thin notes of a mandolin'. [3] Joseph Jacobs described a conversation with George Eliot in which she declared her preference for the Elizabethan songs over those of contemporary poets. He records her as naming the Elizabethan songs, 'gems of literary art, yet trilled forth as naturally as a bird's carol'.[4]

In a letter to Mrs. Congreve, 22 January 1872, George

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1 Haight, V. 262.
2 Middlemarch, Chapter xlvii.
3 ibid., Chapter v.
4 In the introduction to George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, Browning, and Newman (1891).

Eliot referred to Milton as her 'demi-god'. Quotations from his poetry abound throughout her writings.[1] Writing to William MacIlwaine, 10 August 1868, she expressed her belief that Milton wrote his grand verse partly by

> listening for new melodies and harmonies with instructed ears. He is very daring, and often shocks the weaklings who think that verse is sing-song. 2

George Eliot seems to have shared Matthew Arnold's dislike of the poetry of the previous century.[3] In her essay on Young in the Westminster Review, January 1857,[4] she wrote of the 'felicitous epithets' and 'pregnant lines' in Pope's satires as having 'enriched the speech of educated men.'. But she considered that Young's satires on women were superior to those of Pope, and commented that Pope's exaggeration of the extent to which the "ruling passion" determines the conduct of the individual was a basic 'psychological mistake'. [5]

Young and Cowper were among the favourite poets of George Eliot's youth. Her letters to Maria Lewis contain many quotations from both poets. Writing to Maria Lewis, 23 October 1841, she referred to Young as the 'prophet of Selwyn'.[6] Her opinion of Cowper was to remain constant but her high regard for Young was to undergo a complete reversal. Her long scathing article in the Westminster

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1 Haight, V. 238.
2 Haight, IV. 469.
3 See 'Gray', Essay in Criticism. Second Series (1888).
4 pp. 1-42.
5 pp. 23-4.
6 Haight, 1. 117. Young was rector of Welwyn, not Selwyn.

Review, January 1857,[1] is, perhaps, the obvious outcome of her early reverence for him. The title of this essay, 'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young', reveals the mainspring of her revulsion and the reason for the violence of her attack.[2] For her mature judgment and principle had taught her that what she had considered the great piety and wisdom of the preacher and poet was merely an excess of egoism, worldly self-seeking and the view that immortality and the blessings of the next world were the only reward of virtue in this. She wrote that most of Young's biographers and critics set out from the supposition 'that he was a great religious teacher, and that his poetry is morally sublime', and had toned down his failings to suit this conception. She continued,

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1 pp. 1-42. It was, ostensibly, a review of six books: Young's Works (1767); Johnson's Lives of the Poets, edition of 1854; Dr. Doran's 'Life of Edward Young', prefixed to Night Thoughts (1853); Spence's Anecdotes (1820); Nichol's Literary Anecdotes (1812-5); the Gentleman's Magazine (1782), which contained various letters and anecdotes on Young. The edited version of this article, which appeared in Essays (1884) contains three kinds of correction: simplification of word and phrase, ommission or alteration necessary to render it less obviously an article for periodical publication - the editorial 'we' is removed,-and ommission of sentences or short passages which might be considered irreverent or over-abusive.

2 A similar attack is made on a contemporary popular preacher in the review article, 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming', Westminster Review (Oct. 1855), pp. 436-462.

> For our own part, we set out from precisely the opposite conviction - namely, that the religious and moral spirit of Young's poetry is low and false; and we think it of some importance to show that the "Night Thoughts" are the reflex of a mind in which the higher human sympathies were inactive. 1

She admitted that this judgment was entirely opposed to her youthful opinion and enthusiasm, and that the 'sweet garden-breath of early enjoyment lingers' over much of this poem and over A Poem on Last Day (1713), Young's earliest poem, and gave 'an extrinsic charm to passages of stilted rhetoric and false sentiment.'. She continued,

> the sober and repeated reading of maturer years has convinced us that it would hardly be possible to find a more typical instance than Young's poetry, of the mistake which substitutes interested obedience for sympathetic emotion, and baptizes egoism as religion.

George Eliot also admitted that Young was unmistakeably a poet, that his verse had the 'real spark of Promethean fire', but, she declared, his Muse had 'never stood face to face with a genuine, living human being'.

In a detailed study of Young's life and his early dedicatory odes and poems, George Eliot pointed to the indications of the vanity, worldliness, indelicacy and lack of true moral sense to be found in these early works as in his actions. For, she declared,

> while no poet seems less easy and spontaneous than Young, no poet discloses himself more completely.

She commented,

> Men's minds have no hiding-place out of themselves - their affections do ~~not~~ but betray another phase of their nature.

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1 The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality (1742-5).

She pronounced the early poems 'feeble and tasteless verse', full of bombast and 'inflated panegyric', written only to compliment the rich and influential men of his age in the hope of preferment or office. She pointed to the 'lunatic flattery' of George the First in the seventh satire (1726), which was dedicated to Sir Robert Walpole. She concluded that Young had entered the Church, in 1730, only because it was the next best means of rising in the world after his failure to secure court office.

Night Thoughts was written when Young was sixty, but George Eliot could find a difference only in the degree not the kind of power between this and his early poetry. She pointed to

> the same narrow circle of thoughts, the same love of abstractions, the same telescopic view of human things, the same appetency towards antithetic apothegm and rhapsodic climax.

She indicated some fine passages in the tragedies which were similar to parts of the Night Thoughts, but, she declared, his characters were shadowy figures 'excogitating epigrams or ecstatic soliloquies by the light of a candle fixed in a skull.' His earliest poem, The Last Day, revealed, in the midst of

> uneasy rhymes, inappropriate imagery, vaulting sublimity that o'erleaps itself, and vulgar emotions,... an occasional flash of genius, a touch of simple grandeur which promises as much as Young ever achieved.

George Eliot considered that in all the rhymed poems Young suffered from the constraint of his chosen form. This

was particularly noticeable in the satires. For, she declared, satire demands, more than any other form of poetry, the art which conceals art, and when a witticism limped or stumbled over rhyme the 'electrifying effect' necessary to satire was counterbalanced. But there were other and deeper reasons that prevented Young from being a satirist of a high order. She wrote that his satire had

> neither the terrible vigour, the lacerating energy of genuine indignation, nor the humour which owns loving fellowship with the poor human nature it laughs at; nor yet the personal bitterness which, as in Pope's characters of Sporus and Atticus, ensures those living touches by virtue of which the individual and particular in Art becomes the universal and immortal.

Young could never describe a real and complex human being. All he could do, and that with great success, was paint the obvious types and manners. There was neither emotion nor felicitous epithet in his satire. His wit was never more than the mere cleverness of an 'antithetic combination of ideas'. This, she judged, was the basis of the neatness and finish of his portraits.

Returning to Night Thoughts, George Eliot declared that the first two books contained enough of genuine sublimity and sadness to bribe the reader into a too favourable judgment of the poem as a whole.[1] She pointed out that Young had only a few things to say: that life is vain, death imminent, virtue wisdom, man immortal, friendship sweet, and that the source of virtue is the contemplation of death

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1 The quotations in George Eliot's early letters are from all the nine books of the poem.

and immortality. These he had said in the first two books and said them in his finest manner.

George Eliot noted that the poem was supposed to have been inspired by Young's grief at the deaths of his wife, her daughter and son-in-law, a grief which can be heard in the genuine cry of pain in many of the lines in these first books. But there were traces of artificiality in the emotional passages which frequently declined into rhetoric. Moreover, the long passages of didacticism rendered the reader more cold and critical, more able to discern the affectation in the midst of what appeared to be genuine emotion.

George Eliot pronounced that Young's most striking characteristic was his '<u>radical insincerity as a poetic artist</u>'.[1] She judged that this insincerity, added to the 'thin and artificial texture of his wit', was the cause of his grandiloquence, his 'bombastic absurdity'. He was too much concerned with the effect of what he was saying to write what he really felt or saw. She enlarged on this point:

> Here lies the distinction between grandiloquence and genuine fancy or bold imaginativeness. The fantastic or the boldly imaginative poet may be as sincere as the most realistic: he is true to his own sensibilities or inward vision, and in his wildest flights he never breaks loose from his criterion - the truth of his own mental state.

The 'disruption of language from genuine thought and feeling'

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1 The underlining in this and other quotations are George Eliot's.

in Young's poetry betrayed him into absurdity all the more because he habitually dealt with abstractions such as virtue, religion, life, death, immortality, and not with concrete subjects or specific emotions. George Eliot quoted two lines from the poem:

> His hand the good man fixes on the skies,
> And bids earth roll, nor feels her idle whirl,

which, she declared, might pass for sublime poetry unless the reader paused to realise the complete improbability of the image.[1] Examples of 'such vicious imagery' were to be found on every page of Night Thoughts together with assertions more simply phrased but no less false.

Discussing Young's concentration on the joys of eternity and his lack of sympathy with human joys and sorrows, George Eliot related this to his false ethical values, his 'egoism turned heavenwards'. She also noted a connection between Young's didacticism and his lack of sympathetic emotion, which she defined as the morality of Art. She declared,

> the products of Art are great in proportion as they result from that immediate prompting of innate power which we call Genius, and not from laboured obedience to a theory or rule. [2]

So Young who perpetually interrupted his 'highest flights of contemplation' with a sermon or a rebuke had little

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1 George Eliot's brief analysis of these lines is quoted by G.H.Lewes in Chapter iii of his 'Principles of Success in Literature', Fortnightly Review (15 July 1865), pp. 572-589.

2 In Essays (1884), the words 'which we call Genius', are omitted, probably because the idea is repeated in the following paragraph.

energy left for simple feeling. She judged that no poet had absorbed less of the health and beauty of the common objects of Nature. The result of this lack of sympathy with man and nature and of the constant didacticism was to be seen in the monotony of his verse with its disconnected sentences, and pauses recurring at the end of every line. How very different, she exclaimed, from the 'easy graceful melody' of Cowper's blank verse.

Comparing Young's Night Thoughts and Cowper's The Task (1785), George Eliot pointed to the complete antithesis between the two poets, despite the superficial similarities in kind in these two poems. She declared that both poems were primarily didactic and contained occasional flashes of satire, while both authors wrote from a fundamental belief in Christianity. But Cowper, though of Calvinist persuasion and subject to insanity and periods of despondency, yet, by reason of his 'lovely, sympathetic nature', wrote poetry that was sincere and full of love and compassion towards his fellow-man and towards Nature. She wrote,

> No object is too small to prompt his song - not the sooty film on the bars, or the spoutless teapot holding a bit of mignionette that serves to cheer the dingy town-lodging with a "hint that Nature lives"; and yet his song is never trivial, for he is alive to small objects, not because his mind is narrow, but because his glance is clear and his heart is large.

Cowper did not glance superciliously at the '"brutes and the "stalls"', he showed us the tragedy of the rifled hen-roost, the cattle waiting in the cold winter morning and

the squirrel that he had noted on his morning's walk.

George Eliot continued,

> And then he passes into reflection, not with curt apothegm and snappish reproof, but with that melodious flow of utterance which belongs to thought when it is carried along in a stream of feeling.

George Eliot pointed to Cowper's interest in the humblest of his fellows and she declared,

> he compels our colder natures to follow his in its manifold sympathies, not by exhortations, not by telling us to meditate at midnight, to "indulge" the thought of death, or to ask ourselves how we shall "weather an eternal night", but by presenting to us the object of his compassion truthfully and lovingly.

Cowper's satire and remonstrances were always aimed at a specific vice or folly and were never vague. His interest in the sorrows and sufferings of this world were roused not by some abstract notion of virtue or piety, but because,

> "I was born of woman, and drew milk
> As sweet as charity from human breasts."

George Eliot's essay on Young ends with the sum of her comparison between him and Cowper:

> In Young we have the type of that deficient human sympathy, that impiety towards the present and the visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the unknown: in Cowper we have the type of that genuine love which cherishes things in proportion to their nearness, and feels its reverence grow in proportion to the intimacy of its knowledge.

It is significant that Mr. Brooke is the only one of George Eliot's characters who admits to an acquaintance with the poetry of Young.[1]

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1 Middlemarch, Chapter xxxix.

There were other poets whom George Eliot read avidly in her youth and scorned in maturer years. Among them were Felicia Hemans, Thomas Moore of Lalla Rookh (1817), Southey and Byron. The more frivolous of George Eliot's heroines read Lalla Rookh and the Poetical Romances of Southey and Byron,[1] which latter she herself named among the standard works necessary for all men to know.[2]

Felix Holt at his first meeting with Esther Lyon had picked up for her a copy of Byron's poems that had fallen out of her work-basket. He exclaimed at her choice of reading and named Byron

> A misanthopic debauchee, ... whose notion of a hero was that he should disorder his stomach and despise mankind. His corsairs and renegades, his Alps and Manfreds, are the most paltry puppets that were ever pulled by the strings of lust and pride. 3

It is a strange beginning for their friendship. But later in the story, George Eliot, commenting on Esther's growing love for Felix, wrote,

> her conception of what a happy love must be had become like a dissolving view, in which the once-clear images were gradually melting into new forms and new colours. The favourite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night's decorations seen in the sober dawn. 4

Writing to Mrs. Bray, 23 August 1869, George Eliot admitted that she had been re-reading a good deal of Byron lately 'in order to form a fresh judgment', but she declared

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1 See above, p. 16.
2 In a letter to Maria Lewis, 16 March 1839; (Haight, 1.21), see above, p. 7.
3 Felix Holt, Chapter v.
4 ibid., Chapter xxii.

that he and his poetry 'have become more and more repugnant to me of late years'.[1]

A letter to Sara Hennell, 21 September 1869, expressed a similar lack of sympathy with 'the high-flown stuff' that had recently been written on Byron. She commented,

> He seems to me the most vulgar-minded genius that ever produced a great effect in literature. 2

A further reason for George Eliot's dislike of the poetry of Byron, Southey and some of the poetry of the previous century is given in Theophrastus Such. In 'A Man Surprised at His Originality' she described Lentulus's

> general notion of poetry as the use of artificial language to express unreal sentiments,

and noted that he had read only such poems as Gray's 'Ruin Seize thee, ruthless King', Thomas Campbell's 'Pleasures of Hope', Lalla Rookh, and 'The Giaour'. 3

After Shakespeare Wordsworth is the poet most frequently quoted and referred to by George Eliot in all her writings. Already in 1839 she declared that her mind was full of scraps of Wordsworth,[4] and in a letter to Maria Lewis, 22 November 1839, describing her recent visit to London, she wrote,

> I have been so self-indulgent as to possess myself of Wordsworth at full length. 5

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1 Haight, V. 54. Her journal, 23 Jan.1869, records the reading of Don Juan; (Haight, V. 6).
2 Haight, V. 56-7. Both these letters discussed an article, 'The True Story of Lady Byron's Life', in Macmillan's (20 Sept. 1869), pp. 377-396.
3 Chapter iv.
4 In a letter to Maria Lewis, 4 Sept. 1839; (Haight, 1. 29).
5 Haight, 1. 34.

Wordsworth was one of the few authors whom George Eliot read in the weeks after Lewes's death.[1] In her review article 'The Natural History of German Life', she cited Wordsworth's 'The Reverie of Poor Susan' as an example of the truthful representation of the ordinary people. [2] Lines from Wordsworth's 'Michael' are used as motto for Silas Marner,[3] and, in a letter to John Blackwood, 24 February 1861, George Eliot wrote of the story,

> I should not have believed that anyone would have been interested in it but myself (since William Wordsworth is dead). 4

In her review of Matthew Arnold's Poems George Eliot wrote that Arnold reminded her of Wordsworth in the 'expression of exquisite sensibility united with deep thought'.[5]

But George Eliot's appreciation of Wordsworth was not confined to the moral qualities of his work. Writing to Frederic Harrison, 19 April 1880, she expressed a preference for Moxon's one-volume edition (1845) of Wordsworth to any selection:

> No selection gives you the perfect gems to be found in single lines, or in half a dozen lines, which are to be found in the "dull" poems. 6

She criticised Arnold's selection (1879) for not including

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1 J.W.Cross, George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters, ~~and Letters,~~ 3 vols. (1885), III. 359-60. The others were Dante, Chaucer and Shakespeare.
2 Westminster Review (July 1856), p.54. See above, p. 25.
3 On the title page. See above, p.15.
4 Haight, III. 382.
5 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, p. 298.
6 Haight, VI. 261-2.

the sonnets, 'I grieved for Buonoparte' and the 'magnificent Toussaint l'Ouverture', of which she declared, 'I don't know where there is anything finer than the last eight lines'. In this letter George Eliot quoted some lines from the Prelude which contained a 'bit of brickwork' in the rock of the poetry.[1] She had used this metaphor in her comparison of Wordsworth and Browning in her review of Men and Women, in which she had pronounced that, although Wordsworth was, 'on the whole, a far more musical poet', there was no line of Browning's

> so prosaic as many of Wordsworth's, which in some of his finest poems have the effect of bricks built into a rock. [2]

George Eliot reviewed the major poets whose works were published during her brief period of critical writing and her letters give some evidence of her reading of Victorian poets, major and minor.

In a letter to Mrs Congreve, 23 February 1862, George Eliot expressed her pleasure in the notices of Clough in the periodicals. She declared that she had been deeply touched by the 'little poem ... about parted friendships',[3] Clough's 'Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth', which had been printed in the Spectator, 23 November 1861. Her journal, 23 January 1869, records the reading of Clough's poems.[4]

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1 Book VIII. 608-615. The 'bit of brickwork' is 'with aid derived from evidence'.
2 'Belles Lettres', Jan. 1856, p.295.
3 Haight, IV. 17. Clough's Poems had been published posthumously, 1862.
4 Haight, V. 6.

Many poets sent their volumes of poems to George Eliot. One such was William Allingham, who sent her the second edition (1869) of his Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland (1864). Writing to thank him for the gift, 26 March 1869, George Eliot told him

> its wisdom and fine sympathies have cheered me greatly. In the far off days of my early teens I used to enjoy Crabbe, but if my imperfect memory does him justice, your narrative of homely life is touched with a higher poetry than his. 1

Writing to Mr. and Mrs. C.L.Lewes from Germany, 27 June 1868, George Eliot described her and Lewes's morning walks and declared that William Morris's 'charming poem', The Earthly Paradise had been their companion.[2]

More detail is given of George Eliot's opinion of Rossetti's poems in a letter to him, 8 May 1870, thanking him for sending her his Poems (1870). She explained that she and Lewes had returned from the Continent only recently, and that she had not had time to do more than glance through his poems,

> as they ought not to be read - hurriedly. But even in this way I have received a stronger impression than any fresh poems have for a long while given me, that to read once is a reason for reading again.

She added that the 'Sonnets Towards the House of Life' attracted her particularly and had given her the promise of a delight to come. [3]

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1 Haight, VI. 33.
2 Haight, IV. 454. Vols. 1 - 11 of Morris's Earthly Paradise were published 1868.
3 Haight, V. 93.

James Thompson sent George Eliot his 'The City of Dreadful Night, and writing to thank him, 30 May 1874, George Eliot told him that her mind responded 'with admiration to the distinct vision and grand utterance in the poem'. But she hoped that his 'passionate energy' would soon turn to more heroic subjects that embraced a wider human fellowship.[1]

Frederick Locker also sent George Eliot a volume of his poetry, a new edition (1870) of his London Lyrics, and George Eliot wrote, 13 June 1870, to express her pleasure in 'their delicate and tender charm.'.[2]

John Blackwood sent George Eliot a copy of Robert, Lord Lytton's Fables in Song (1874). Acknowledging them, 20 February 1874, she commented that they were full of graceful fancies and charming verse, but lacking in definiteness and weight.[3]

Blackwood also asked George Eliot's opinion of a young poet whose Poems and Songs were published by him in 1862. This was David Wingate, a collier, and George Eliot, in a letter to Blackwood, 28 February 1862, expressed her strong interest in him. She declared that there was a 'charming purity of sentiment' and absence of maudlin pathos in all of them, and added that perhaps only those people who knew the characteristics of a coal district could quite appreciate

1 Haight, VI. 53. See above, p. 104.
2 Haight, V. 103.
3 Haight, VI. 23.

'the high superiority of nature indicated by such poems from the mind of a collier.' She admitted herself envious of Blackwood's opportunity to help such a man.[1]

Matthew Arnold's Poems. Second Series were reviewed by George Eliot in her first number of 'Belles Lettres', July 1855.[2] She wrote,

> If we had written of these poems after reading them only once, we should have given them a tepid kind of praise, but after reading them again and again, we have become their partizan, and are tempted to be intolerant of those who will not admit their beauty.

Very few of the reviewers had admitted the beauty of Arnold's poems.[3] From the anonymous publication of The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems (1849), he had been treated with derision or mild and damning praise. His poems were described as vague and dreamy,[4] 'cold and colourless',[5] full of gloom and despondency[6] and devoid of the true poetry of song.[7] He was accused of imitation of Tennyson, lack of individuality in his imitation of the classic metres and subjects,[8] possessing only a 'refined indolence' which led

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1 Haight, IV. 18-9.
2 pp. 297-9.
3 Perhaps the most discerning of the reviewers were William Rossetti, reviewing the Strayed Reveller and Other Poems, in the Germ (Feb. 1850), pp. 84-96, and the Edinburgh Review (Oct. 1856), pp. 358-60, reviewing Poems. Second Series (1855) and Poems (1854).
4 Spectator (3 Dec. 1853), pp. 5-6, reviewing Poems (1853).
5 Eclectic (March 1855), pp. 276-84, reviewing Poems. Second Series.
6 Blackwood's Magazine (Sept. 1849), pp. 340-6, reviewing The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems.
7 Leader (3 Dec. 1853), pp. 1169-71, reviewing Poems (1853). This is probably by G.H.Lewes.
8 Blackwood's Magazine (March 1854), pp. 303-14, reviewing Poems (1853).

him to an unawareness of true human feeling.[1] Even those reviewers who had welcomed him as unquestionably a poet, or who had perceived some beauty in individual poems, decided that he would never be a popular poet. The majority allowed him to be a man of considerable culture and learning, but found a 'too rigid formalism'[2] in his verse, and all discussed and condemned his introduction of Greek metres into English verse.[3]

George Eliot's voice is heard in this particular chorus of disapproval. She pronounced that Arnold's one defect was his want of rhythm, 'of that rhythm which is music to an English ear'. She concluded from his persistent imitation of classical metres that he

> lacks that fine sense of word-music, that direct inspiration of song, as distinguished from speech, which is the crowning gift of the poet.

George Eliot's description of the first impressions produced by Arnold's poems perhaps indicates the reason for the general disapprobation and lack of discernment of the reviewers. She declared that a first reading revealed the

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1 North British Review (May 1853), pp. 209-14, reviewing The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems and Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems (1852). See also Clough's review of these two volumes in North American Review (July 1853), pp. 1 - 30.

2 Examiner (6 Oct. 1855), p. 628, reviewing Poems. Second Series.

3 See J.A.Froude's sensitive review of the first three volumes, Westminster Review (Jan. 1854), pp. 146-159; and Goldwin Smith in the Times (4 Nov. 1853).

poems as 'tame and prosaic', despite the thought contained in them, which she declared 'is always refined and unhackneyed, sometimes new and sublime'. She continued,

> But when, simply for the sake of converse with a nature so gifted and cultivated as Mr. Arnold's, we linger over a poem which contains some deep and fresh thought, we begin to perceive poetic beauties - felicities of expression and description, which are too quiet and subdued to be seized at the first glance. You must become familiar with his poems before you can appreciate them as poetry, just as in the early spring you must come very near to the woods before you can discern the delicate glossy or downy buds which distinguish their April from their winter clothing. He never attains the wonderful word-music of Tennyson ... but his combinations and phrases are never common, they are fresh from the fountain, and call the reader's mind into new activity.

Discussing this volume of poems, George Eliot judged that there was no poem in it so fine as 'Sohrab and Rustum' or as 'Tristram and Iseult',[1] but she pointed to 'Resignation' and to two songs from Empedocles on Etna as

> favourable specimens of the author's power in two directions - the expression of exquisite sensibility united with deep thought, in which he reminds us of Wordsworth, and the revivifying of antique conceptions by freshly-felt descriptions of external nature and masterly indications of permanent human feeling, after the manner of Tennyson.

She quoted at length from 'Resignation', beginning with the lines

> The Poet, to whose mighty heart
> Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,
> Subdues that energy to scan
> Not his own course, but that of Man.[2]

George Eliot's review is followed by some scathing remarks

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1 'Tristram and Iseult' appeared in Empedocles on Etna, and other Poems (1852), 'Sohrab and Rustum' in Poems (1853.

2 Fraser's Magazine (May 1849), pp.575-80, had named this poem 'a yawn thirteen pages long'.

on some other volumes of verse published that quarter, and these comments and her citations from this 'chickweed or dandelion' of the usual quarter's 'crop' of poetical works further emphasises her praise of Arnold. 1

A brief mention of Matthew Arnold occurs in George Eliot's Journal, 6 February 1869. She writes that she had been looking through his poems and found the 'earlier ones very superior to the later'.[2]

In 'Belles Lettres', October 1855,[3] George Eliot reviewed Tennyson's Maud, and Other Poems. She began,

> If we were asked who among contemporary authors is likely to live in the next century, the name that would first and most unhesitatingly rise to our lips is that of Alfred Tennyson. He, at least, while belonging emphatically to his own age, while giving a voice to the struggles and the far-reaching thoughts of this nineteenth century, has those supreme artistic qualities which must make him a poet for all ages. As long as the English language is spoken, the word-music of Tennyson must charm the ear; and when English has become a dead language, his wonderful concentration of thought into luminous speech, the exquisite pictures in which he has blended all the hues of reflection, feeling, and fancy, will cause him to be read as we read Homer, Pindar, and Horace.

She continued with a description of the highest order of poet[4] as the artist least in danger from the changing conditions of humanity, and declared that, in the eyes of all competent judges, Tennyson was such a poet. She described the beauty of some of his earlier poems:

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1 See below, p. 179.
2 Haight, V.II. The first Collected Edition of Arnold's Poems appeared in 1869.
3 pp. 596-602.
4 See above, p. 104.

> His "Ulysses" is a pure little ingot of the same gold that runs through the ore of the Odyssey. It has the "large utterance" of the early epic, with that rich fruit of moral experience which it has acquired thousands of years to ripen. The "Morte d'Arthur" breathes the intensest spirit of chivalry in the pure and serene air of unselfish piety; it falls on the ear with the rich, soothing melody of a Dona Nobis swelling through the aisles of a cathedral. "Locksley Hall" has become like Milton's minor poems, so familiar that we dare not quote it; ... Then there are his idyls, such as the "Gardener's Daughter", - works which in their kind have no rival, either in the past or present ... "The Princess", too, with all that criticism has to say against it, has passages of inspiration and lyrical gems embedded in it, ... But, last and greatest, came "In Memoriam", which to us enshrines the highest tendency of this age, as the Apollo Belvedere expressed the presence of a free and vigorous human spirit amidst a decaying civilization. Whatever was the immediate prompting of "In Memoriam", whatever the form under which the author represented his aim to himself, the deepest significance of the poem is the sanctification of human love as a religion. 1

I have quoted at length from George Eliot's introductory statement, not merely because her review of Maud, as derogatory as that of the majority of her contemporaries,[2] was one of her two great errors of critical judgment,[3] but also because, in discussing so fully the previous work of the author whose new book is under review, George Eliot was going against her normal practice. She continued this review:

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1 'Ulysses', 'Locksley Hall', 'The Gardener's Daughter' and 'Morte d'Arthur' were published in Poems (1842); The Princess in 1847, and In Memoriam in 1850.

2 E.S.Dallas in the Times (25 August 1855), p.8; Edinburgh Review (Oct.1855), pp. 498-520, reviewing Maud, and Other Poems, In Memoriam and the sixth edition of Poems. The critic of the Irish Quarterly Review (Sept. 1855), pp. 453-72, named the poem 'maudlin semi-insanity'.

3 See George Eliot's review of Doctor Antonio, above, pp.97-102.

> We could not prevail on ourselves to say what we think of "Maud", without thus expressing our love and admiration of Tennyson.

She explained that men's judgments were too often determined by the unsuccessful work of the day, the author's previous writings being for the moment forgotten. She judged that Maud could not be anything but prejudicial to Tennyson's fame, 'even in the light of the most reverential criticism'.[1]

Discussing her general impression of the poem, she declared that it contained only a few lines that did not fall below his previous work, and, on the whole, there was nothing that had not already been said better or that had not been better left unsaid. She had found none of the

> finest sentiments that animate his other poems ... the wide-sweeping intellect, the mild philosophy, the healthy pathos, the wondrous melody.

She declared that she wished to forget the poem with its

> narrow scorn which piques itself on its scorn of narrowness, and a passion which clothes itself in exaggerated conceits. ... its tone is throughout morbid; it opens to us the self-revelations of a morbid mind, and what it presents as the cure for this mental disease is itself only a morbid conception of human relations.

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1 W.C.Roscoe in the National Review (Oct. 1855), pp.377-410, declared that Maud would not add to Tennyson's reputation. See also the Quarterly Review (Oct. 1859), pp. 454-85, reviewing all of Tennyson's work.
I have found only three favourable notices of Maud: the Examiner (4 August 1855); pp.483-4, the Spectator (4 August 1855); pp. 813-4, the Leader (4 August 1855), pp. 747-8. This is probably by G.H.Lewes.

Her review continued with an examination of the plot and texture of the poem. Her analysis is hardly less unfair than that of Tait's Edinburgh Magazine or Blackwood's Magazine.[1] She described the poem as opening 'like the gates of Pandemonium "with horrid discord and jarring sound"', and declared,

> It is impossible to suppose that, with so great a master of rhythm as Tennyson, this harshness and ruggedness are otherwise than intentional; so we must conclude that it is a device of his art thus to set our teeth on edge with his verses when he means to rouse our disgust by his descriptions; and that, writing of disagreeable things, he has made it a rule to write disagreeably.

She considered these opening hexameters as weak in logic but so strong in expression as to 'eat themselves with phosphoric eagerness into our memory, in spite of our will.' Throughout, her description of the story and characters is enhanced by quotation from the more violent and abusive parts of the poem. The first lines of any beauty in the poems were, she judged, the description of Maud's 'cold and clear-cut face'. She also indicated the lyric 'O let the solid ground' as agreeable and reminiscent to readers of German of Theckla's song.[2] The 'rather silly outburst, in which he requests the sky to '"Blush"',[3] was atoned for, George Eliot pronounced, by the very fine section beginning

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1 Sept. 1855, pp. 531-9; Sept. 1855, pp. 311-21.
2 From Schiller's first book of Lieder.
3 Blackwood's, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, Eclectic (Nov. 1855), pp. 568-75, all condemned this lyric as 'twaddle'.

'I have led her home, my love, my only friend' and she quoted the last stanza. She also extracted two stanzas from 'Come into the garden, Maud', which poem, she agreed, had 'been deservedly admired and quoted by every critic'. She pointed to the exquisite description in the second stanza, 'where the music of the verse seems to faint and die like the star'. But, she added, the whole poem was inferior to the 'Talking Oak'.[1] She declared that the sensibility of the flowers in Maud's garden was less credible than the 'thrills felt to his "inmost ring" by the "Old Oak of Summer Chace"'.

Clearly, for George Eliot, as for many of the critics,[2] the basis of her dislike of Maud was Tennyson's complaint against the 'long, long canker of Peace'. She specified and quoted from many of these passages and concluded,

> it remains true, that the ground-notes of the poem are nothing more than hatred of peace and the Peace Society, hatred of commerce and coal-mines, hatred of young gentlemen with flourishing whiskers and padded coats, adoration of a clear-cut face, and faith in War as the unique social regenerator.

She added,

> it, perhaps, speaks well for Tennyson's genius, that it has refused to aid him much on themes so little worthy of his greatest self.

But she also objected to some of Tennyson's minor thrusts at social grievances and inequalities. She described his

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1 Poems (1842.)

2 Goldwin Smith's unfavourable review in the Saturday Review (3 Nov. 1855), pp.14-15, was headed 'The War Passages in "Maud"'.

denunciation of 'new-made fortunes, new titles, new houses, and new suits of clothes,' as an 'immense expenditure of gall on trivial social phases'. It seemed to her 'intrinsically petty and snobbish' of the poet to write thus, and she considered that Tennyson's gall overflowed, 'without any visible sequence of association' on Mr. Bright.

George Eliot's review reveals a blind unwillingness to realise Tennyson's purpose or to appreciate his method in the poem. Turning to the smaller poems that made up the volume, she dismissed them as not 'remarkable enough to be ranked with the author's best poems of the same class.' She described 'The Brook' as 'rather a pretty idyll', 'The Daisy' as a 'graceful, unaffected recollections of Italy', and only mentioned the 'well-known' 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington'. From Maud, and Other Poems, George Eliot passed to a 'still greater poet', Milton, with the comment that perhaps one day Maud would have the historical value which belonged to some of the verses Milton had 'thought it worth while to print'.

There is no further comment on Maud in George Eliot's writings. But her opinion may well have been modified by time, for she was present at many of the famous readings by Tennyson of his own poems, readings which, almost invariably, included Maud.

The general appraisal of Tennyson's genius with which George Eliot had commenced her review of Maud , is endorsed

in all of her writings. In her review of Dobell's England in Time of War she wrote of the device of iteration,

> which, under proper restraint, forms the delicately-shaded boundary where lyric poetry melts into music proper

and she cited as example Tennyson's song from The Princess, 'Blow, bugles, blow'.[1] A description of a conversation held with George Eliot in 1877, on the subject of lyric poetry is given by Joseph Jacobs. He maintained that George Eliot spoke of modern songs as inferior in sweetness to Elizabethan lyrics, declaring that even Tennyson's songs in the 'Princess' were unequal to them.[2] Writing to J.W.Cross, 6 November 1877, George Eliot expressed disagreement with the view that Tennyson's Idylls of the King[3] were 'de haut en bas' and declared that, while she considered In Memoriam as

> the chief of the larger works, and that while I feel exquisite beauty in passages scattered throughout the Idyls, I must judge some smaller wholes among the lyrics as the works most decisive of Tennyson's high place among the immortals.

She added that she thought Tennyson's dramas

> such as the world should be glad of - and would be if there had been no pre-judgment that he could not write a drama. 4

During the last month of her life George Eliot read Tennyson's latest work, Ballads and Other Poems (1880), and her Diary, 29 November 1880, records that she especially liked 'The

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1 'Belles Lettres', Oct. 1856, pp. 566-70. See below, p. 151.
2 In the introduction to George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, Browning ~~and~~ Newman (1891).
3 Idylls of the King were published in 1859 and Tennyson added others in 1869, 1872 and 1885.
4 Haight, VI. 415-6.

First Quarrel.'[1]

Mrs. Browning's reputation as a poet was already well established by the time Aurora Leigh (1856) was published, and the majority of the critics accepted it as confirmation of her position as the 'first poetess' of her own age.[2] Reviewing the poem in 'Belles Lettres', January 1857,[3] George Eliot wrote of the 'profound impression' it had produced in her. She declared,

> Other poems of our day may have higher finish, or a higher degree of certain poetic qualities; but no poem embraces so wide a range of thought and emotion, or takes such complete possession of our nature. Mrs. Browning is, perhaps, the first woman who has produced a work which exhibits all the peculiar power without the negations of her sex; which superadds to masculine vigour, breadth, and culture, feminine subtlety of perception, feminine quickness of sensibility, and feminine tenderness. 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.

George Eliot's private opinion of Aurora Leigh confirms this 'extravagant praise'.[4] Recommending the poem in a letter to Sara Hennell, 24 November 1856, she wrote,

> I wish I had seen Mrs. Browning, as you have, for I love to have a distinct human being in my mind, as the medium of great and beautiful things. 5

Again, on 24 December 1856, she wrote to her friend and

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1 Haight, VII. 341.
2 Saturday Review (27 Dec. 1856), pp. 776-8; North American Review (Oct. 1857), pp.415-41, reviewing Poems (1857); G.H.Lewes in two consecutive articles in the Leader (29 Nov. 1856), pp. 1142-4, (6 Dec. 1856), pp. 1169-70.
3 pp. 306-10.
4 See Haight, 11. 278 n.
5 Haight, 11. 278.

expressed her pleasure that Sara had read the poem. She commented, 'such books are among the great blessings of life.'[1] On 5 June 1857, she wrote to Sara that she was reading Aurora Leigh for the third time,

> with more enjoyment than ever. I know no book that gives me a deeper sense of communion with a large as well as beautiful mind. It is in the process of appearing in a third edition, and no wonder. 2

Despite their admiration of Aurora Leigh, the reviewers found grave faults in the subject and in the manner of the poem. The Athenaeum, 22 November 1856, regretted that Mrs. Browning had used Milton's organ of blank verse for such a melodramatic plot, which the critic described as a mixture of the 'grandeur of passion and pettiness of modes and manners.' [3] Blackwood's Magazine, January 1857, described the story of the poem as fantastic, unnatural and exaggerated, and all the worse because it professed to be a tale of contemporary life.[4] The North British Review, February 1857, objected to some of Mrs. Browning's views on life and art, and to her sweeping condemnations of the normal conventions of society.[5] George Eliot also found 'nothing either fresh or felicitous in structure or incident' and she regretted that Mrs. Browning had 'added one more to the imitations of the catastrophe in "Jane Eyre"' in the blinding of the hero. She wrote,

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1 Haight, 11. 282.
2 Haight, 11. 342.
3 pp. 1425-7.
4 pp. 23-41. This is by W.E.Aytoun.
5 pp. 443-62.

> the outflow of love and compassion towards physical ills is less rare in woman than complete sympathy with mental sorrows. Hence we think the lavish mutilation of heroes' bodies, which has become the habit of novelists, while it happily does not represent probabilities in the present state of things, weakens instead of strengthening tragic effect; and, as we say, we regret that Mrs. Browning has given this habit her strong sanction.

Almost every critic of Aurora Leigh found fault with the manner and expression of the poem, and many considered these faults merely an exaggeration of similar deficiencies and affectations in the earlier poems.[1] The accusations included bombast, harshness of word and line, obscurity in dialogue and description,[2] coarse and tasteless language [3] and 'slip-shod English, garnished with a plentiful sprinkling of unusual words.'[4] But the same reviewers also pointed to the many beauties of language and imagery in Aurora Leigh and they considered that her faults sprang from an over-exuberance of imagination that caused Mrs. Browning to appear careless, diffusive, and sometimes discordant. In the opinion of the majority the genius revealed in Aurora Leigh swept away all objections. The Spectator, 22 November 1856, declared that 'there was always something of the Titaness about Mrs. Browning', wrote of the 'conception vast and vague and only half realised', of 'rich elements of force and beauty in chaos and confusion' and decided, finally, that Mrs. Browning had

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1 Edinburgh Review (Oct. 1861), pp. 513-35, reviewing the fourth edition of Poems (1856), Aurora Leigh and Poems Before Congress (1860), named Aurora Leigh 'a rank, unweeded garden of the most intolerable conceits'.
2 Saturday Review (27 Dec. 1856), pp.776-8.
3 G.H.Lewes in the Leader (6 Dec. 1856), pp.1169-70.
4 Spectator (25 Jan.1851), pp.85-6, reviewing Poems (1850).

> touched social problems with the light of her penetrating intellect and the warmth of her passionate heart; has painted scenery with a free outline and a glowing colour; has sketched characters as a sensitive and observant woman can sketch them; above all she has dramatized passion with a force and energy that recall the greatest masters of tragedy. 1

It is not difficult to see why Aurora Leigh aroused such mixed feelings among the reviewers, for, as George Eliot wrote,

> The story of "Aurora Leigh" has no other merit than that of offering certain elements of life, and certain situations which are peculiarly fitted to call forth the writer's rich thought and experience.

She preferred not to waste her

> small space in pointing out faults which will be very slightly felt by any one who has heart and mind enough to respond to all the beautiful feeling, the large thought, and the rich melodious song of this rare poem.

She declared that the most striking characteristic of Aurora Leigh was

> that its melody, fancy, and imagination - what we may call its poetical body - is everywhere informed by a soul, namely, by genuine thought and feeling.

She pointed out that Mrs. Browning did not strive after special effects, nor did she heap up images for their own sake, allowing her fancy to stray from the control of deeper sensibility. She wrote,

> there is simply a full mind pouring itself out in song as its natural and easiest medium. This mind has its far-stretching thoughts, its abundant treasure of well-digested learning, its acute observation of life, its yearning sympathy with multiform human sorrow, its store of personal domestic love and joy; and these are given out in a delightful alternation of pathos, reflection, satire playful or pungent, and picturesque description, which carries us with swifter pulses than usual

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1 pp. 1239-40.

through four hundred pages...

George Eliot's four long extracts from the poem were clearly chosen to substantiate her opinion and to show the variety of interest in the poem. It is interesting to note that she quoted from the one of Aurora's many dissertations on the nature of the poet's task which emphasised the '"Seriousness of Art"', as George Eliot entitled the extract. This passage ends with the following lines, to which George Eliot gave the further emphasis of italics:

> Better far,
> Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means,
> Than a sublime art frivolously.

Urging her readers that Aurora Leigh is a poem which even large extracts cannot fairly represent, George Eliot ended her review with this description:

> It has the calm, even flow of a broad river, not the spray and rainbows of a mountain torrent.

George Eliot's opinion of Mrs. Browning remained constant. While engaged in writing Romola, she wrote in her Journal, 17 February 1862,

> I have lately read again with great delight Mrs. Browning's Casa Guidi Windows. It contains amongst other admirable things a very noble expression of what I believe to be the true relation of the religious mind to the Past. 1

In 1866 she gave her public sanction to a poem of Mrs. Browning's, when she used the sixth of the Sonnets from the Portugese (1850), 'Go from me', as a motto for the chapter in Felix Holt which describes Felix's visit to Esther on the day of the election, and of his sorrow at this wilful

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1 Haight, IV. 15. Casa Guidi Windows was published in 1851.

parting from the woman he loves.[1]

Perhaps the most discerning of George Eliot's critical judgments on the works of contemporary major poets was her review of Robert Browning's Men and Women (1855) in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856.[2]

Browning was by no means established as a major poet at this time. The Leader[3] and the Examiner[4] claimed him as a genuine and original poet, as did the Dublin University Magazine,[5] William Morris in a detailed and discriminating review of Men and Women in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, March 1856,[6] and the critic in the Christian Remembrancer, October 1857.[7] But the Christian Remembrancer, in an article 'Poetry of the Past Year', April 1856, had complained of having to notice 'Mr. Browning's spasmodic whirls and eddies' and named Men and Women,

> by many degrees more eccentric, affected, and resolutely strange, and in parts deliberately unintelligible than its predecessors.

This critic considered that Browning had 'unscrupulously outraged decorum', and he doubted whether any writer of verse had

> ever represented "Men and Women" under a more uniformly offensive aspect, or more utterly without moral elevation.

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1 Chapter xxxii.
2 pp. 290-6.
3 G.H.Lewes in two consecutive articles (1 Dec. 1855), p. 1157, (8 Dec. 1855), p. 1182.
4 1 Dec. 1855, pp. 756-7.
5 June 1856, p. 673-5 in 'An Octave of Poets'.
6 pp. 162-72.
7 pp. 361-90.

This strongly abusive review continued with an analysis of the 'moral abjectness' the 'unwholesome unpleasant ideas, ... curious, creeping, morbid fancies', and grotesque treatment of all the poems.[1] It is typical of the majority opinion of Browning's poems. Those who approved of the energy and individuality of the poems, who realised the depth of thought and feeling contained in them, yet condemned the intentional obscurity of expression, the grotesque and often coarse language, and the harshness and ruggedness of line and verse. George Brimley, reviewing Men and Women in Fraser's Magazine, January 1856, pointed to Browning as an example of 'genius unfaithful to its trust'. He lamented that Browning might have become an interpreter of modern life, for, he wrote,

> He possesses exactly that combination of curious and extended observation of mankind, with a subtile power of analysing motives and a vivid imagination, which is necessary for the great dramatist.

Brimley noted that Browning did not shrink from facts. He

> enters into the human and passionate element in all the varied world of suffering and enjoyment, of virtue and of crime, of good and evil.

But, he pronounced, all was a spectacle to Browning; he would not trouble to solve moral problems, and worse would not even point them out. Describing in detail some of the poems in these two volumes, Brimley pointed to the obscurity, grotesqueness and the 'no-meaning' of many of them. But his review ended with praise for Browning, who, he declared

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1 pp. 267-308.

ranked next to Tennyson in genius despite his lack of Tennyson's purpose and art.[1]

George Eliot began her review of Men and Women with a declaration, clearly aimed at the less discerning of Browning's critics, that his poems undeniably had 'a majestic obscurity which repels the ignorant'. She commented,

> To read poems is often a substitute for thought: fine-sounding conventional phrases and the sing-song of verse demand no co-operation in the reader; they glide over his mind with the agreeable unmeaningness of "the compliments of the season".

But, she declared, let the reader expect no such 'drowsy passivity' when reading Browning's verse.

> Here he will find no conventionality, no melodious commonplace, but freshness, originality, sometimes eccentricity of expression; no didactic laying-out of a subject, but dramatic indication, which requires the reader to trace by his own mental activity the underground stream of thought that jets out in elliptical and pithy verse. To read Browning he must exert himself, but he will exert himself to some purpose. If he finds the meaning difficult of access, it is always worth his effort - if he has to dive deep, "he rises with his pearl". Indeed, in Browning's best poems he makes us feel that what we took for obscurity in him was superficiality in ourselves.

George Eliot admitted that much of Browning's obscurity was not dependent on 'the feebleness of men's vision', that there was much 'whimsical mannerism' which 'straitened' his genius, mannerism which she found irritating. She advised Browning to keep it under restraint in poems intended for printing. But she continued this review with a comparison of Browning's position in relation to the ordinary literature of the day to the relation between the 'distinct individuality of

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1 pp. 105-16.

Chopin's Studies or Schubert's Songs' and the 'well-pieced shreds and patches' which made up Flotow's music. Browning had something of his own to say, and he said it impressively, if not with faultless art. She wrote,

> There is nothing sickly or dreamy in him: he has a clear eye, a vigorous grasp, and courage to utter what he sees and handles. His robust energy is informed by a subtle, penetrating spirit, and this blending of opposite qualities gives his mind a rough picquancy that reminds one of a russet apple. His keen glance pierces into all the secrets of human character, but, being as thoroughly alive to the outward as to the inward, he reveals those secrets, not by a process of dissection, but by dramatic painting.

George Eliot quoted from his own description of the poet observing the people at their work and play around him in 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' and applied these lines to Browning himself.

George Eliot recognised that Browning's appeal was to the intellect rather than to the emotions, that he had no 'soothing strains, no chants, no lullaby' and that he rarely expressed our melancholy or our gaiety. She wrote,

> But though eminently a thinker, he is as far as possible from prosaic; his mode of presentation is always concrete, artistic, and, where it is most felicitous, dramatic.

To support her remarks George Eliot proceeded to a description of 'Fra Lippo Lippi', which she named 'a poem at once original and perfect in its kind', and quoting from it at great length, she declared that extracts could not do justice to the way in which the artist-monk throws out his instinctive Art criticism. Her extracts included the following lines:

> we're made so that we love
> First when we see them painted, things we have passed
> Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
> And so they are better, painted - better to us,
> Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
> God uses us to help each other so,
> Lending our minds out. 1

George Eliot also considered that extracts could not do justice to 'Bishop Blougram's Apology', which she described as 'an equally remarkable poem of ... the dramatic-psychological kind'. Her analysis of this poem is sensitive:

> The way in which Blougram's motives are dug up from below the roots, and laid bare to the very last fibre, not by a process of hostile exposure, not by invective or sarcasm, but by making himself exhibit them with a self-complacent sense of supreme acuteness, and even with a crushing force of worldly common sense, has the effect of masterly satire.

Other poems of the 'same order of subtle yet vigorous writing' were, she considered, the 'Epistle of Karshish, the Arab Physician', 'Cleon' and 'How it Strikes a Contemporary'. She pronounced 'In a Balcony' so fine that it was to be regretted that it was not a complete drama. She extracted some lines from it that were 'less rugged' than his usual blank verse.

Browning's greatest deficiency, George Eliot pronounced, was the 'want of music' in his verse. She considered that this fault showed most clearly in his lyrics as did his occasional obscurity. For in these poems he did not demand so exclusively our intellectual concentration. She wrote,

> His lyrics, instead of tripping along with easy grace, or rolling with a torrent-like grandeur, seem to be

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1 The underlining in this quotation is George Eliot's.

> struggling painfully under a burthen too heavy for them; and many of them have the disagreeable puzzling effect of a charade, rather than the touching or animating influence of song.

But, she decided, his blank verse, though often colloquial, never lapsed into prose, as did Wordsworth's, who, on the whole, was a far more musical poet. Yet if Browning's verse never floundered helplessly on a plain, it never soared above it to the heights of poetry. She added,

> He does not take possession of our souls and set them aglow, as the greatest poets - the greatest artists do. We admire his power, we are not subdued by it. Language with him does not seem spontaneously to link itself into song, as sounds link themselves into melody in the mind of the creative musician; he rather seems by his commanding powers to compel language into verse. He has chosen verse as his medium; but of our greatest poets we feel that they had no choice. Verse chose them.

But, she concluded, we would rather have 'Fra Lippo Lippi' than an essay on realism in Art, 'The Statue and the Bust' than a three-volumed novel with the same moral, and 'Holy-Cross Day' than '"Strictures on the Society for the Emancipation of the Jews"', and, to couterbalance her judgment, she gave a 'parting quotation from one of the most musical of the rhymed poems', 'By the Fireside'. [1]

George Eliot's review of Browning is very different from that of the majority of her contemporaries, mainly because she realised that the 'charm in his quaint embroideries' was sufficient compensation for his faults. This opinion was stressed when George Eliot proceeded to give

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1 The critic of the Saturday Review (24 Nov. 1855), pp. 69-70, also quoted from this poem and complained that it was incomprehensible.

a scornful notice to the poetry of Augustine Duganne.[1] She invited comparison between the two by commending Duganne to readers who disliked Browning. In her review of Hiawatha,[2] which followed after that on Duganne, she compared Longfellow's poem with Men and Women, and declared that while Hiawatha 'brings us a breeze from the forest and the prairie', Browning's poems

> seem to smell of the warm south; they tell of pictures and statues, of the complex questions and the complex forms of life which belong to an old civilization.

George Eliot's opinion of Browning was never revised. She used some lines from Paracelsus (1835) and from The Ring and the Book (November 1868 - February 1869) as mottoes to two chapters in Daniel Deronda.[3] Writing to John Blackwood, on the first parts of the book, 31 December 1868, George Eliot condemned the subject of The Ring and the Book as 'too void of fine elements to bear the elaborate treatment he has given to it'. She added,

> It is not really anything more than a criminal trial, and without any of the pathetic or awful psychological interest which is sometimes (though very rarely) to be found in such stories of crime. 4

This letter is in answer to one from Blackwood, 29 December 1868, in which he confessed himself a heretic in relation to the apparent praise of Browning in the newspapers and periodicals, and demanded to know her and Lewes's opinion.[5] George Eliot continued that she deeply regretted that Browning had chosen a subject so unworthy of him. In a letter to Frederic

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1 pp. 296-7.
2 pp. 297-8.
3 Chapters 1 and lxvi.
4 Haight, IV. 501.
5 Haight, IV. 497.

Harrison, 7 November 1867, George Eliot wrote that she wished to correct the impression she had conveyed in a conversation with Harrison on the previous Sunday on the subject of Browning. She declared,

> I ought to have spoken with more of the veneration I feel for him, and to have said that in his best poems - and by these I mean a large number - I do not find him unintelligible, but only peculiar and original. 1

Many of Browning's critics were motivated in their dislike by his supposed resemblance to a school of poets who had been named by William Edmunstone Aytoun the 'spasmodics'. The school was headed by Alexander Smith and Sydney Dobell, whose volume of poems, England in Time of War was reviewed by George Eliot in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856.[2]

Both Smith and Dobell possessed undoubted lyrical qualities together with vigorous and individual power of thought and expression. But all their poetry reveals the faults of this school which the North British Review, in an article entitled 'Poetry - the Spasmodics', February 1858, described as 'wilful delight in remote and involved thinking ... "pernickitieness" of expression'.[3] The critic of the National Review in his notice of England in Time of War, October 1856, wisely concluded that Dobell would not endure as a poet because he lacked the power to realise what was bad in his own work. He declared that the reader of these

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1 Haight, IV. 395-6.
2 pp. 566-70.
3 pp. 231-50. This remark is directed specifically at Browning.

poems becomes convinced of a 'shallow and easily self-satisfied artistic nature', that, although Dobell showed himself to be 'an imaginative genius of more than ordinary richness', he also revealed ruggedness, want of finish and exaggeration. [1] Other reviewers were less discerning and refused to acknowledge any good in the poetry of this school. Reading through the periodical criticism of the poetry of this time, it is possible to imagine that many of the critics were on a continuous witch-hunt for 'spasm'. They traced it in the poetry of Browning, who was named by the North British Review as in some ways the greatest spasmodic, [2] and in Tennyson's Maud. [3] They poured extravagant praise on the poetry however mundane, that was written in a simpler manner. [4]

George Eliot in her review of Dobell's poems admitted that she was not an enthusiastic admirer of his school of poetry and that much of the poetry in this volume had made her impatient. She wrote of his

> perversities or idiosyncracies which have condemned the productions of many a man of genius to be the predilection of the few, instead of being the delight of the many.

But, she decided, reviewers who considered England in Time War a worthless or contemptible book were wrong in their supercilious picking out of a few extravagances as were the

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1 pp. 442-8.
2 In 'Poetry - the Spasmodics'.
3 E.S.Dallas in the Times review of Maud, and Other Poems, (25 Aug. 1855), p.8.
4 See the opinions of Aytoun's Bothwell, discussed below, pp. 153-4.

readers who laid down the book in 'baffled uneasiness'. Dobell was, she declared,

> a man of deep thought and sensibility, essentially a poet, and earnest though aberrant in the pursuit of his art.

While this volume contained poetry that was eccentric and puerile, and sometimes enigmatic - 'capricious ingenuity which puzzles our intellect, not poetry which coerces our souls' - yet, George Eliot wrote,

> we have never turned over two or three pages in irritation without being arrested by some passage of simple pathos, or of exquisite rhythmic melody laden with fresh and felicitous thought.

This long review begins with a discussion of the 'masterly distinction' between the methods of presentation in the plastic arts and in poetry given by Lessing in his Laokoon. [1] This discussion was prompted, George Eliot declared, by an analogous mistake in Dobell's extravagant use of iteration. His use of this device was not under proper restraint. It was an elaborate appliance by which he endeavoured to make words perform the functions of musical notes, and it did not appear as 'the delicately shaded boundary where lyric poetry melts into music proper', as in Tennyson's songs.[2] She quoted a stanza which had been cited by many of Dobell's supercilious critics:

> Oh the wold, the wold,
> Oh the wold, the wold!
> Oh the winter stark,
> Oh the level dark
> Oh the wold, the wold, the wold!

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1 See above, p.105.
2 See above, p.136.

George Eliot compared this in its monotony to the burden of the early English and Scottish ballads. She declared that, while iteration was a necessity to the primitive mind in its lack of an art complex enough to clothe the same feelings in varied form, 'under a condition of high culture, this primitive monotony becomes intolerable'. To the modern reader it was evidence of the writer's inadequacy to convey his idea 'through his proper medium of thought-suggesting speech'. It would seem that, unable to achieve his effects by genuine art, he had had ~~to~~ resort to a mere trick, like angry, inarticulate people who fall to making faces. But, George Eliot considered, Dobell gave too many proofs of his powers to allow the reader to attribute his extravagant iteration to anything but a wilful idiosyncracy. She pointed to a kindred perversity in his

> frequent preference of the obscure and far-fetched to that large simplicity of expression and imagery which he occasionally shows us that he can command.

George Eliot continued her review with a description of <u>England in Time of War</u> which, she noted, represented,

> the emotions of those who are left at home to bear the passive sorrows of war, and of those who go out to brave its active perils. It is the story of the war told, not in its outward events, but in the mental experience of the men and women who are actors and sufferers in it.

She indicated the variety of English life shown in the subject of these lyrics and the tone that ranged from loftiness to simple pathos. Her extracts are chosen to show the emotional range of the poems; the father mourning over his

son in 'A Hero's Grave', the wife hurrying with joy to meet her husband returning from the war in 'Afloat and Ashore', and the maimed soldier in 'Home Wounded' who finds comfort in the thought that his work is done and in the memory of his past happiness.

In 'Belles Lettres', January 1857, George Eliot reviewed William Edmunstone Aytoun's Bothwell (1856).[1]

Aytoun, Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at Edinburgh University and a frequent contributor to Blackwood's Magazine, was the leader of the attack against the Spasmodic School and had written a satirical tragedy, Firmilian, or the Student of Badajoz (1854) aimed at these poets. His new poem was acclaimed by the opposers of the Spasmodics far beyond its merits. Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, September 1856, welcomed Bothwell as the best poem for many months and declared that it would be more popular than Maud or Hiawatha.[2] Bentley's Miscellany, September 1856, pronounced that it was a lively, fluent poem, devoid of mannerism or affectation and a relief by contrast from the 'mysticism, spasmodics and namby-pamyism which have lately been rife amongst us'.[3] The Times added its voice, 27 December 1856, to praise from these popular periodicals, and claimed Bothwell as a poem worthy of praise in an age of essentially bad taste. This critic considered that the age was not unpoetic, and, indeed, offered endless scope for the poet. But the poets had turned their backs on the

1 p. 315. 2. pp. 569-71. 3 pp. 276-81.

age and chosen as their subject

> disease - hectic beauty, morbid crimes, monstrous characters, crazy passions, idiot-fancies, crotchetty actions, all expressed in the most curiously wrought language, abounding in simile in which the idea is contained fantastically as a reel in a bottle - you can't tell how it got in, and you don't see what its doing there.

The critic admitted that the poetry of Smith and Dobell revealed on every page evidence of great poetic genius, but there had followed a host of imitators, whose poems had none of this genius and, finally the disease had spread to the poetry of Tennyson. No poet of today, he maintained, addressed himself to the Derby Day crowds, who represented all aspects of humanity. Bothwell, then, was a significant poem, and, like Aytoun's stirring Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers (1849), it spoke of man and human action. It was a fine poem. [1]

George Eliot's review of Bothwell was an object lesson to the Times reviewer as well as to those less biased critics who had realised that Aytoun was not a great or an important poet, yet had given the poem undue space.[2] She wrote,

> Professor Aytoun's "Bothwell" has reached a second edition; a proof, taken together with the popularity of the "spasmodic poets", against whom he conducts a crusade, that the present widely-diffused taste for poetry embraces the most opposite schools. "Bothwell" is modelled on the poetical-historical tales of Scott, with the disadvantageous difference of being a story told in a monologue supposed to be uttered by Bothwell when a prisoner in the fortress of Malmoe. The "bold bad man",

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1 p.4.
2 Gentleman's Magazine (Oct. 1856), pp. 402-8; Christian Remembrancer (Jan. 1857), pp. 1-18; Fraser's Magazine (Sept. 1856), pp. 347-58.

> in his solitude, lives over again his past life, and tells the story of his deeds and misdeeds in the fatal episode of his relations with Mary Queen of Scots. Professor Aytoun informs us in his preface, that he has not deviated from what he considers to be historical truth - his view of historical truth being the one most favourable to Mary. The obscurer points in the history are discussed in notes affixed to the poem. The easy spirited rhymes carry the reader along like a cantering steed, and with one who applies neither a high nor an irrelevant standard, and moreover, is not an avvocato del diavolo, opposing the canonization of Mary, we can understand that "Bothwell" may be a favourite poem.

During the nineteenth century many volumes of verse were published that were written by uneducated men. Edward Capern, rural postman of Bideford, Charles Swain, engraver, both published slim volumes of poetry that received favourable notice in the weeklies and other periodicals.[1] The most successful of all was Gerald Massey, whose Craigbrook Castle (1856) was reviewed by George Eliot in 'Belles Lettres' January 1857.[2]

Massey was the son of an illiterate bargeman. He had left school at the age of eight, had had many occupations, had become involved in the Chartist movement, ~~and~~ had published a newspaper, The Spirit of Freedom (1849), and had himself published his first volume of poetry, Poems and Chansons (1848). Other volumes followed and his poetry began to attract the notice of the periodicals. Indeed his triumph over adversity makes Massey a fascinating figure. His verse has a certain charm also; there is the eager fire

1 Edward Capern, Poems (1856); Charles Swain published many volumes from 1837 to 1867. See George Eliot's comments on David Wingate's Poems and Songs, above, p. 126.
2 pp. 310-12.

of youth in the political poems, some genuine feeling in the love lyrics, and a quixotic, wholly untutored use of words and images in all the early poems that held a promise of poetry. But the periodicals acclaimed him far above his deserts. Even the Times reviewer was beguiled, and, reviewing the third edition of The Ballad of Babe Christabel: with other Lyrical Poems (1854), 24 August 1854, gave an account of Massey's life, welcomed this volume of poetry - 'We like its look, we like its promise.' - wrote of the tenderness and grace in the main poem and decided that 'the merit of the writing is unquestionable'.[1] The Dublin University Magazine, June 1854, had admitted that they had been spell-bound by the power of this volume, and had closed it saying to themselves, '"What a holy, and sublime, and wondrous spirit is the spirit of Poetry"'. This critic concluded that Massey would one day occupy the highest place among English bards.[2] The Church of England Quarterly Review, also reviewing this volume, October 1855, described the poems as remarkable under any circumstances of composition and more than remarkable under the existing circumstances of their author's birth and upbringing.[3] But reviewing Craigbrook Castle, this same quarterly declared, January 1857, that Massey was getting careless, called some of the

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1 p.5. See also the Examiner (18 Oct. 1856), pp. 660-1, reviewing Craigbrook Castle.

2 In an article 'Midsummer with the Muses' by Anthony Poplar, pp. 749-52. See also North American Review (July 1857), pp. 281-2.

3 In 'Poetry of the Present Era', pp. 363-7.

poems in this volume trash, and demanded to know if they were worthy the author of 'Babe Christabel'.[1] For some of the critics were attempting to stem the flood of rapturous applause, realising that if Massey had any real genius, such praise could only do harm by making him cease to exert himself. The more discerning of the reviewers, who had either ignored the previous volumes or had noticed them with discrimination,[2] pointed out that Massey's faults were becoming more deeply-rooted and ineradicable with each new poem and far outweighed his merits. George Eliot, like G.H.Lewes in the Leader, 1 November 1856, was among these unbiased critics.[3]

Her review of Craigbrook Castle followed her notice of Aurora Leigh, a juxtaposition which allowed her to point at once to the root causes of Massey's faults. She wrote,

> That fulness of thought and feeling to which we have pointed as the surpassing attraction of Mrs. Browning's poem, is precisely what we miss in Mr. Gerald Massey's new volume, "Craigbrook Castle".

She praised his 'exuberant fancy' but added 'he rarely shows any higher power than fancy'. She compared his poems to

> children's May-garlands, bright with flowers which have no root and are only artificially woven into close contact.

She had read all the poems more than once and, with certain exceptions,

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1 pp. 250-2.
2 Edinburgh Review (Oct. 1856), pp. 361-2, reviewing the fifth edition of The Ballad of Babe Christabel: with Other Lyrical Poems.
3 pp. 1048-50. See also Christian Remembrancer (Jan. 1857), pp. 253-5; Spectator (1 Nov.1856),pp.1157-8; Saturday Review (6 Dec. 1856), pp. 705-7.

> always with growing dissatisfaction, from a growing perception that the writer's profuse imagery is an end instead of a means. It does not serve to bring more vividly before us an object, an idea, or an emotion, but rather thrusts itself forward as a substitute or a screen. We are perpetually wearied with a series of lines, each of which is a fresh tax on our ingenuity in detecting fantastic analogy.

His imagery, she decided, was derived from 'fleeting impressions' and the 'capricious combinations of an active fancy'. She admitted that she was not insensible to the charm of this imagery, but believed that it must be 'made subordinate to riper intellectual and moral activity'. She also condemned Massey's 'easily satisfied facility' which made his versification 'utterly bad through an indifference' caused perhaps by self-conceit or by a 'want of artistic scrupulousness', and to be regretted because his verse was often 'highly musical through a felicity of genius'. She pointed to Massey's 'slovenly recurrence to habitual images', his newly-coined words, which she considered were another result of laziness on the part of the author.

But although the general tone of this review was condemnatory, George Eliot softened her criticism by declaring that her harshness was occasioned solely by her desire to warn Massey against faults which 'may arrest rather than further his efforts after excellence'. She continued her review with praise for the one section of the poem which had pleased her, 'because it is founded on personal, deeplying experience', in which feeling was not 'thrust aside by fancy'. The lines quoted by George Eliot from 'The

Mother's Idol Broken' are indeed Massey's 'best self' and, in contrast to the rest of the volume, reveal 'truth and simplicity', although hardly deserving of the term 'exquisite' applied to them by George Eliot. This review ended with further reference to Massey's 'starry similes', and his predilection for 'dews, roses, and fragrance - fragrance, roses, and dews', and George Eliot regretted that she had not space to quote from Massey's 'habitual, fantastic mood'.

In a letter to John Blackwood, 24 July 1868, George Eliot asked her publisher to send a copy of the Spanish Gypsy to Gerald Massey.[1] She included his address in this instruction, so it is possible that Massey had written to her to request a copy of the poem. There is no evidence of a personal acquaintance between them.

In the Leader, 1 March 1856, George Eliot reviewed Rufus Wilmot Griswold's The Poets and Poetry of America.[2] This was a comprehensive survey, historical rather than selective, of American poetry from its beginnings to the date of writing, with a biographical and critical sketch of each poet, which, as George Eliot wrote, was 'more rhetorical than judicious'.

George Eliot's review began with a comparison of the work with a hypothetical collection of '"Poems by Authors in their Teens"'. She doubted whether such a volume would contain much original writing or even provide very delightful

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1 Haight, IV. 460.
2 p. 210.

reading. She maintained that such a volume would have a 'psychological and biographical interest, but considered as poetry it would be dreary.' She implied that the same was true of Griswold's book. It was acceptable as a historical survey, an acceptability heightened by the decided impression it gave that, with two or three brilliant exceptions, 'it gives us quite as much as we want to know of the American poets.' But, she continued, the 'mere specimens' of Bryant and Longfellow 'will content no lover of poetry', and commented that, fortunately, complete editions of the works of these two poets were easily available. Praising the inclusion of 'some well-executed portraits' in the book, she pointed to the fine daguerrotype of Bryant and pronounced 'the refined moral expression of the head perfectly corresponds with the spirit of his poems'. She condemned Griswold's selection of the poetry of James Russell Lowell as not representative of his high order of talent. In her Journal, 6 February 1869,[1] George Eliot had noted a 'deservedly high appreciation' of Lowell's poems in the Spectator.[2] Finally, in this review of Griswold's book, George Eliot quoted from some of the bad poets, and from Whittier's 'spirited ballads', and from Bayard Taylor's 'The Phantom', which she described as 'a charming bit of simple pathos'.

George Eliot reviewed two major American poets, Longfellow and Walt Whitman.

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1 Haight, V. 12.
2 6 Feb.1869, pp.168-9. This critic named Lowell 'the only really original poet America has yet produced'.

Longfellow's Hiawatha (1855) was very well received by nearly all the critics and George Eliot, reviewing it in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856,[1] was no exception. Most of the reviewers praised the freshness, vigour and manliness of the narrative,[2] the simplicity and charm of the metre and diction [3] and pronounced the poem as adding to Longfellow's reputation.[4] A few found fault with the metre and named it monotonous although they admitted that it was entirely suitable to the subject of the poem.[5] Others objected to Longfellow's use of 'jaw-breaking' Indian names.[6] Only the Eclectic Review, December 1855,[7] and the Irish Quarterly Review, March 1856,[8] judged the poem as unworthy of Longfellow's genius and found the whole childish and wearisome.

George Eliot ranked Hiawatha with Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter as 'one of the two most indigenous and masterly productions in American literature.' Welcoming the 'coincidences of publication' that had presented Hiawatha for review in the same quarter with Men and Women, she declared that Browning's poem belonged to an old civilization

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1 pp. 297-8.
2 Literary Gazette (10 Nov. 1855), pp. 709-10; Saturday Review (10 Nov. 1855), pp. 34-5.
3 Leader (24 Nov. 1855), pp.1133-5; Spectator (17 Nov. 1855), pp. 1200-1.
4 Athenaeum (10 Nov. 1855), p. 1295-6.
5 Examiner (17 Nov. 1855), p. 724; Christian Remembrancer (April 1856), pp. 270-81.
6 Dublin University Magazine (Jan. 1856), pp. 90-1.
7 pp. 760-1.
8 In 'Poetry under a Cloud', pp. 1-30.

while Hiawatha

> brings us a breeze from the forest and the prairie; it has the simplicity, the purely narrative spirit, the child-like love of every outward detail, which belong to the primitive epic; it embalms the most human elements in the life and ideas of a race of hunters and warriors.

By quoting briefly from Longfellow's preface, she allowed the poet to describe the aim and subject of his poem, and devoted the remainder of her short review to unqualified praise of the poem. She declared that one of its greatest charms was the 'large, simple melody', which Longfellow 'manages with exquisite art'. She wrote,

> Indeed, every time we look into the volume, this metre seems to have a stronger fascination for us.

She considered that Longfellow had woven the Indian names for animals and natural objects into the metre with great effect. She noted that he had almost always indicated the meaning of the Indian words, and pointed to the 'charming contrast' afforded by them to the melody of the whole, 'like the little bells of the tambourine in the accompaniment to a song'. She judged that Hiawatha would be found to be

> equally delightful to childhood and maturity, as all poetry is that expresses primitive feelings and primitive forms of imagination. It is like the flowers, and birds, and the colours of sunset, which may be looked at with equal pleasure by the child and the man; for though the man sees more in them, the child sees them with a fresher sense.

She recommended any mother who loved poetry to read Hiawatha aloud to her children. George Eliot ended this enthusiastic review with a brief quotation from the very beginning of the poem, rightly concluding that the 'best persuasion we can

think of is the poet's own invitation'.

Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass received very little notice in England, perhaps because, as the North American Review, January 1856, pointed out, the book was printed by the author and bore no publisher's name.[1] George Eliot noticed it at the end of her long section on the quarter's minor poets in 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856,[2] and, clearly, was ignorant of the identity of the author. It is a brief and rather ambiguous review, consisting of extract rather than criticism. She introduced it as an American production 'which, according to some Transatlantic critics, is to initiate a new school of poetry'. Her extract is taken from the beginning of the poem and she described it as

> typical in every respect, except that it contains none of the very bold expressions by which the author indicates his contempt for the "prejudices" of decency.

Other English reviewers expressed their dislike of Leaves of Grass in less uncertain terms. The Saturday Review 15 March 1856, advised anyone who found the book in his hands to throw it 'instantly behind the fire'.[3] Fraser's Magazine in an essay on 'Literary Style', April 1857, referred to it as the 'spasmodic style in all its glory and perfection'.[4] The Examiner, 22 March 1856, named Whitman the 'wild Tupper of the West', poured scorn on his American admirers, reviled

1 pp. 275-7.
2 p. 650.
3 pp. 393-4.
4 pp. 425-6.

Whitman for intentional obscenity of language and compared his device of listing of objects and names to the catalogue of an auctioneer.[1] G.H.Lewes in the Leader, 7 June 1856, was more discerning, and while deploring Whitman's needless plain-speaking, pointed to 'so many evidences of a noble soul'.[2]

George Eliot's opinion of Whitman was to become closer to that of Lewes, for she used the following lines of Whitman:

> Surely whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her I shall follow,
> As the water follows the moon, silently with fluid steps around the globe.

as motto to the chapter in Daniel Deronda in which Gwendoline Harleth again meets Deronda and feels again his strength of character and innate wisdom and sympathy.[3] But she was still chary of recommending Whitman to her readers in this way and attempted, too late, to expunge the motto. She explained to John Blackwood, 18 April 1876, that it was

> not because the motto itself is objectionable to me - it was one of the finer things which had clung to me from among his writings - but because, since I quote so few poets, my selection of a motto from Walt Whitman might be taken as a sign of a special admiration which I am very far from feeling. 4.

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1 p. 180.
2 p. 547. Lewes was the only English reviewer to realise Whitman's purpose. He pointed to the 'all-attracting egotism - an eternal presence of the individual soul of Walt Whitman in all things', which he declared would be to the English reader almost as 'staggering' as the 'wild, irregular, unrhymed, almost unmetrical' versification. But he also stressed Whitman's essential humanity and his love of the city and the country.
3 Chapter xxix.
4 Haight, VI. 241.

George Eliot reviewed only two foreign poets, Victor Hugo and Heinrich Heine. Hugo's Les Contemplations were described briefly in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856[1] and George Eliot advised any reader who distrusted his 'own power of persevering through two rather stout volumes of French poetry' to turn to the second volume to the series of poems written in memory of his daughter, who had died in 1843. She wrote,

> There are touches in these poems such as real affection and real sorrow only can inspire ... The cold winds of calamity and death sweep over us all; but it is only the poets amongst us from whom they call forth delicious tones like these, and such tones ought not to die out unheard.

The 'simple, tender verses which recall the daughter's image as she was in her childhood' were particularly pleasing to George Eliot, and she quoted from several of them, concluding that they were more to her taste than the 'loftier strains' of many of Hugo's poems addressed to 'Dieu', 'l'Univers', 'Les Anges' and 'le Tombeau'.[2]

Heinrich Heine was the subject of four articles by George Eliot. The earliest appeared in the Leader, 1 September 1855,[3] and was a review of Charles Leland's translation of Heine's Pictures of Travel. A review of John Wallis's Heinrich Heine's Book of Songs - A Translation appeared in the Saturday Review, 26 April 1856;[4] a review of

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1 pp. 262-4.
2 Saturday Review (28 June 1856), pp. 204-6, wrote of these volumes as proof of Hugo's genius, and described them as a 'rich banquet of poetry'.
3 pp. 843-4.
4 pp. 523-4.

Heinrich Heine. Erinnerungen by Alfred Meissner in the Leader, 23 August 1856;[1] and a review article 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine' in the Westminster Review, January 1856.[2]

There can be little doubt that Heine was of particular interest to George Eliot both for his writing and his life. She considered that the variety and the brilliance of his wit, - a rare quality in a German, according to George Eliot, - his prose works that showed better than Goethe's the possibilities of German prose, and his lyrical genius made him one of the most remarkable men of this age, and as such, worthy of special study. His life of self-imposed exile from Germany, his work for the political freedom of all peoples, his long illness and his mental triumph over his sufferings all aroused her sympathy and admiration.

Her review article 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine' is a survey of his life and writings beginning with a discussion of the distinction between humour and wit which relates to all of Heine's writings. For, George Eliot considered, Heine was unique in possessing 'Teutonic imagination, sensibility, and humour' together with a wit 'that would make him brilliant among the most brilliant of Frenchmen'.

In her attempts to define humour and wit George Eliot named humour as of earlier origin than wit, which, in its highest form, demanded a riper and stronger mental

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1 pp. 811-2. See below, pp. 201-2.
2 pp. 1-33. This is a review of Heine's Sämmtliche Werke (1855) and Vermischte Schriften (1854).

development both in the individual man and in nations. Humour drew its materials from situations and characteristics, was unconstrained by laws, was allied to the emotions. Wit seized upon the unexpected, was brief, sudden and sharply defined, and was connected with men's intellect. In earlier times, George Eliot continued, humour was not sympathetic. It was egoistic, cruel and intolerant, at best a love of the ludicrous. But modern humour was a 'wonderful and delicious mixture of fun, fancy, philosophy, and feeling'. High culture was more in harmony with humour than with wit, for humour was more gentle, deliberate and left us masters of ourselves, whereas wit electrified us and took us by violence ' quite independently of our predominating mental disposition'. George Eliot maintained that coarse cruel humour had departed from literature, while coarse and cruel wit was still present. She pointed to Heine's attacks on some of his compatriots in his prose writings.

Admitting that wit and humour often overlapped and cancelled out all attempts at definition, George Eliot proceeded to apply her definition to the distinction between French and German writers. She noted that Germans had produced no great comedy, and declared that they lacked the delicate perceptions and sensibilities essential to the tact and good taste of true wit. So she considered Heine, in his possession of French wit, the promise of better things to come from Germany.

Pointing to the variety of Heine's genius, George Eliot

also indicated his main defect; the expression of debased feeling and the occasional coarseness that ran through all his work. She declared that some form of censureship was necessary before Heine's writings could be placed within reach of immature minds. But George Eliot realised that it was more edifying to appreciate the good in a writer's work than to dwell on his faults and she continued her essay with a study of Heine's life as it was revealed in his writings.

In the Leader review George Eliot had also pointed to Heine's lack of moral conviction and declared that his work was wanting in this respect. But she wrote that his was

> a passionate heart blending its emotions with the most delicate and imaginative sensibility to the beauties of earth and sky, and a supreme lyrical genius, which could weave the wit, and the passion, and the imagination into songs as light and lovely as the rainbows on the spray of the summer torrent.

She maintained that his verse was as musical as Goethe's, but lacked the profound love and reverence that lay beneath Goethe's sparkling song. To better appreciate Goethe's qualities it was only necessary to read Heine. George Eliot disagreed with Leland, the translator of the work under review, in his view that Heine's grand characteristic was his sense of humour. She defined humour as 'an exuberant sympathy acting in company with a sense of the ludicrous', while wit 'is the critical intellect acting in company with that same sense'. - Clearly this brief definition was the germ of the account of wit and humour in the article in the Westminster Review. She declared that wit was present in

all of Heine's legends and passionate love songs, dissolving the reader's shudders and tears in laughter.[1] George Eliot continued with a discussion of Leland's attempts at translation, praised his rigorous faithfulness to his original and his poetic sensibility, but declared that the gossamer webs of Heine's poetry were untranslatable.

Her review of Wallis's translation of Heine's Buch der Lieder, in the Saturday Review, reveals more clearly George Eliot's opinion of Heine's poetical genius. She compared this work to Tennyson's In Memoriam, noting that both poets drew their inspiration from a single theme. But Tennyson, while adhering to the same poetic form, had taken a wider sweep of thought; and Heine, on the contrary, had kept to a narrow circle of feeling and ideas and perpetually varied his poetic form. Thus the recurring theme of unhappy love never became wearisome, because Heine's melody was ever changing, ever charming. It appeared as ballad, idyll, sonnet and, best of all, in the delicious lyrics which he seemed to find 'as easy as sighing'. George Eliot pointed to the wonderful grace and completeness of expression in these lyrics. She declared that there was no awkwardness of inversion, no farfetched combination of ideas or epithets; all was completely effortless. She wrote,

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1 The critic of the Athenaeum (31 March 1855), pp. 369-70, reviewing an edition of Heine's Vermische Schriften, could find nothing in his work to compensate for his coarseness and ridicule and condemned his trick of spoiling a lovely poem with a sudden twist of ridicule, a 'horse-laugh', in the last line.

> Song seems as natural to Heine as to the thrush and the nightingale, and, while you are reading him, it is prose that appears artificial.

Again George Eliot maintained that Heine was utterly untranslatable by anyone who was not also a poet, for, with Heine, 'to be simple, idiomatic, and poetic' is the same thing.

George Eliot's opinion of Heine is similar to that of Matthew Arnold, who in his essay on Heine (1863),[1] pointed to the strange mixture of 'French modernism and clearness' and 'German sentiment and fulness', commended the 'exquisite lightness and ease' of Heine's lyrics, and indicated his 'want of moral balance and of nobleness of soul and character'. But, like George Eliot, Arnold realised these were the negatives of the criticism of a man of genius and he preferred to dwell on Heine's merits rather than his faults.

George Eliot devoted very little of the limited space in 'Belles Lettres' to the many volumes of minor verse published each quarter, verse that received much indiscriminate laudatory notice from the weeklies and, in the main, was ignored by the monthlies and quarterlies, or made the subject of derisive articles like 'Little Lessons for Little Poets' in Fraser's Magazine, February 1857.[2] Her attitude towards such poetry is made clear in a prefatory statement to the notice of the quarter's selection in 'Art and Belles

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1 Essays in Criticism (1865).
2 pp. 218-235.

Lettres', April 1856.[1] She quoted and endorsed Ruskin's opinion that

> "With poetry second-rate in quality no one ought to be allowed to trouble mankind ... All inferior poetry is an injury to the good, inasmuch as it takes away the freshness of rhymes, blunders upon and gives a wretched commonalty to good thoughts; and, in general, adds to the weight of human weariness in a most awful and culpable manner". [2]

George Eliot argued that as the supply of bad poetry was constantly increasing it was clear that there was a demand for it,

> that beneath the active imbecility of those who write feeble poetry there is a lower deep - namely, the passive imbecility of those who read it.

She considered that bad poets and their readers were a serious threat to good sense and good taste, for they 'set up balderdash as the ideal of literature'. She continued with a brief exposition of the reasons which, in her opinion, motivated the writing of poetry good and bad. She declared that almost all men with any literary ambition wrote poetry before they were twenty, and, mostly, they aimed at the highest achievements of epic or drama. After twenty, 'literary aspirants' became divided into three categories; the 'true poets, who witch the world with noble song', those men of 'real ability' who quickly discover that their talents lie elsewhere than in poetry, and those of 'too little intellect and too much vanity to know that their poems are

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1 pp. 646-50.
2 Modern Painters, Part IV, Chapter xii. George Eliot had reviewed this third volume of Modern Painters in this article.

bad'. Some of this latter class, to judge by their Prefaces, were aware that their poems were inferior, but yet considered them 'acceptable and edifying to mankind', and George Eliot pointed to Thomas Leigh's Garlands of Verse as an example of this kind of poet. She quoted from his preface the following self-deprecatory lines:

> " Yet ah! my touch is rude;
> I mar the buds I gather; they lose youth:
> A sickliness doth on their grace intrude,
> And dim the freshness of their living truth.
>
> Still such an impulse bids
> That I must try, nor may my labour leave;
> Though, trust me, with flushed cheek and down-drawn lids,
> I offer even friends the flowers I weave." [1]

and demanded what was the "impulse" which forced him to go to the lengths of publishing and advertising such verse. She wrote,

> Verse is not like bread - so indispensable that it must be made of sawdust and chopped thistles if no better material is to be had.

Again she quoted from Ruskin to the effect that there was already more than enough good literature, that to '"to encumber us with inferior work"' was a sin and to maintain that such inferior work was acceptable while there was some good in it was equally wrong - '"Some good! If there is not all good there is no good."' But, although George Eliot upheld, in principle, Ruskin's stern demands, her reviews of minor poets show more tolerance than Ruskin would seem

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1 Athenaeum (14 June 1856), p.744, found this volume 'pleasing'; Eclectic Review (May 1856), pp.535-6, pointed to Leigh's 'liveliness of fancy'; Examiner (3 May 1856) p. 277, discovered 'excellent feeling' in the poetry.

to permit. Nevertheless it is a tolerance that is extended only where there is some merit. Her scorn and denunciation of bad poetry is never mitigated by conciliatory attempts to find beauty or merit where it clearly does not exist. Her tolerance is never a lowering of standards, as her review of Aytoun's Bothwell proved.[1]

The qualities most praised by George Eliot in her notices of these minor poets were those of sincerity and simplicity of diction, thought and feeling.

In 'Belles Lettres', July 1855,[2] she described Henry Sewell Stokes Echoes of the War, and Other Poems as

> unpretending rhymes, which seem to be the sincere response of a warm British heart to the tales of noble deeds, and nobly endured suffering, which have come to us from the Crimea.

She singled out the poem on Inkermann as 'an easy, spirited ballad' preferable to the 'high flown metaphysical strain' of other contemporary war poets. But George Eliot suitably, though gently, relegates Stokes to the ranks of minor poets in the final sentence of this brief notice:

> The war has called forth little poetry such as our sons may learn along with "Hohenlinden" and the "Burial of Sir John Moore".

Of the poets reviewed by George Eliot in 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, there were two for whom she prophesied better days of literary endeavour.[3] One of these was Walter R. Cassels whose slim volume of Poems she

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1 See above, pp. 154-5.
2 p. 301.
3 p. 648.

described as 'remarkably free from affectation', containing 'occasionally a bit of quiet grace'. She pointed to 'The Raven' as a poem with 'a pregnant idea not sufficiently worked up' and suggested the necessity for a little more patience on the part of the author. Several of those more discerning critics who praised Cassel's poems had specified and quoted from 'The Raven', for it was a poem of some power in the vein of Edgar Allen Poe, as some critics had realised.[1]

The other young poet singled out by George Eliot as one of whom one day she hoped to hear 'as something far higher than a writer of verse', was Philip Gilbert Hamerton, whose volume of 'descriptive poetry', The Isles of Loch Awe, and other poems of my Youth (1855), also contained some equally pleasing drawings by the author. George Eliot admired the 'manly, healthy simplicity' of the poems and commended Hamerton for describing only those scenes he knew and not those 'scenes remote from his experience'. She judged that his model was Wordsworth, but added that, 'unlike young imitators generally', he had the 'most affinity for his model's best characteristics'. George Eliot also admired the 'considerable skill with his pencil' shown in this book, and her expectations of his future success were the result of her perception of the 'vigour of thought as well as of culture indicated in this early production'. Hamerton was to succeed Palgrave as art critic of the Saturday Review

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1 Athenaeum (2 Feb. 1856), p.130; Tait's Edinburgh Review (Feb.1856), p.125; Fraser's Magazine (Feb.1857), p.218, in 'Little Lessons for Little Poets'.

in 1863, and to write for the Cornhill, the Fortnightly Review and for Macmillans.

George Eliot also found worthy of praise Lionel Holdreth's Shadows of the Past, which she reviewed in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856, immediately following her notice of Hugo's Les Contemplations. She wrote,

> Some sad and sweet remembrance, akin to that which has inspired the verses we have cited from Victor Hugo, runs through ... "Shadows of the Past", which, without showing any remarkable power or originality, are pleasing because they have an air of genuineness as well as refinement; they seem to have been suggested by experience, and not to spring from the vague determination to write poetry. 1

Thomas Lynch's volume of poems, The Rivulet, a Contribution to Sacred Song (1855) raised a long and heated controversy in the religious periodicals,[2] but George Eliot's review, 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856,[3] ignored the matter of these poems, many of which have passed into the Non-Conformist hymnals. She wisely judged that, although they revealed no 'great poetic power', they yet were

> admirably distinguished from many similar productions by ... purity from egoistic feelings, by the lovingness and sincerity of ... spirit.

Another volume of poems by a cleric was the Reverend Archer Gurney's Songs of Early Summer, which George Eliot aptly dismissed in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856, as 'robustly commonplace, like a bed of marigolds'.[4]

George Eliot gave a comparatively large part of the

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1 p.264.

2 Eclectic's very laudatory review (Jan.1856), pp.86-7, aroused the Morning Advertiser to accuse Lynch of unorthodoxy in his poems. Other religious periodicals joined issue.

3 p. 649.

4 p. 570.

space she usually assigned to minor poets to a poem by her friend Bessie Rayner Parkes. Gabriel purported to be a biography of Shelley written by his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, in a series of short poems, and, because of its subject, it aroused the scorn of some reviewers [1] and the rather exaggerated praise of those few critics who were not misled by 'the blind, sottish prejudice which reviled and persecuted Shelley'.[2] George Eliot's criticism, in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856, is quite impartial.[3] She did not hesitate to point to the main deficiency of the poem, the failure in 'psychological verisimilitude' and dramatic presentation of character and incident demanded by the subject. For the authoress's purpose was not made clear from the commencement of the poem and she too frequently indulged in philosophical speculations, which clearly owed their obscurity to the vagueness ~~of~~ in her mind. But George Eliot's strictures on the 'mistake in structure, and the occasional obscurity and want of finish in the more emotional and reflective parts', were softened by her praise of the descriptive passages. She pronounced that 'Miss Parkes shows a certain vein of poetic power, as well as poetic susceptibility' and she extracted for quotation six stanzas from the description of the house in the beginning of the poem, stanzas whose qualities hardly merited their inclusion.

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1 Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (June 1856), pp. 381-2.
2 Leader (28 June 1856), pp.618-9. See also the Eclectic (Aug.1857), pp.196-7, and Gentleman's Magazine (June 1856), p.620.
3 pp. 264-6.

It is to be regretted that George Eliot had not sufficient space in 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856,[1] and in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856,[2] to notice more fully two narrative poems of at least equal merit with Gabriel. The American poet, Thomas Buchanan Read whose A House ~~by~~ of the Sea was described by the Leader, 7 June 1856, as unhealthy and as unpleasant as a 'charnel-house',[3] while George Eliot dismissed it briefly but with more discrimination, as a 'gracefully rhymed, imaginative story'. St. Bartholomew's Day, and Other Poems by Stewart Lockyer, was justly, but inadequately, described as 'unaffected and not ungraceful'.

Other less deserving poems received similar scant notice. Mrs. Machell's Poems and Translations are described in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856, as 'passable vers de société, such as, doubtless, "friend will flatter, prudent foes forbear."'[4] Mrs. Ogilvy's Poems of Ten Years and an American publication N.L.Frothingham's Metrical Pieces, Translated and Original (1855), were suitably designated, in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856, as belonging to 'that dilettante class of productions which are not likely to have any greater result than that of giving refined occupation to the writer's leisure.'[5]

George Eliot was less kind in 'Belles Lettres and

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1 pp. 649-50.
2 p. 570.
3 In 'Translantic Poems', p.542. This review is almost certainly by G.H.Lewes.
4 pp. 570-1.
5 pp. 298-9.

Art', July 1856, to G. Gerard's Grace and Remembrance, a volume of sentimental poems addressed to Shakespeare. She noted the echoes of Tennysonian verse in these as in many current publications of verse,[1] and declared that she felt 'none the richer for reading them'. She quoted a couplet attributed to Goethe:

> "Weil dir ein Vers gelingt in einer gebildeten Sprache,
> Die für dich dichtet und denkt, glaubst du schon Dichter zu sein?"

and translating it, '"Do you think yourself a poet because you can produce passable verses in a cultivated language which sings and thinks for you?"', declared that the admonition might be of service in England today.[2]

Among other poets who came under George Eliot's disapproving notice were those who did not so much echo their betters as endeavour to write on the same themes. So, in 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, three poets are rebuked. Thomas Leigh is held up to ridicule for choosing such subjects as the Alps, Lake Leman, moonlight and the nightingale for his Garlands of Verse.[3] Thomas Aird is condemned for pilfering from Coleridge, Shelley and Byron and producing in his Poetical Works 'irritating travesties of a thought or image already presented in perfection by a

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1 p. 264. George Eliot may have been the author of the review of Frederick Tennyson's Days and Hours in the Leader (22 April 1854), pp. 378-9, which described this poet as of the 'school' of Tennyson in his thought and feeling but not in that imitation of mannerism and peculiarities of language and construction which was to be found in inferior poets.

2 The underlining is George Eliot's.

3 p. 647. See above, p. 172.

great poet'.[1] Edmund Reade[2] is mocked in lighter vein for his Tennysonian titles 'Ulysses', 'Mariana', and for his imitations of Milton's blank verse and subject matter in the long poem Man in Paradise.[3] George Eliot wisely warned her readers that Reade's 'capricious memory for poetical phrases and images', arranged haphazardly into various metres, might be mistaken, by the 'unwarned ear' if read 'sonorously and with significant emphasis', as the 'promise of poetry'. She quoted an example of Reade's 'magniloquent no-meaning':

> " Then palpably growing on the crisped air,
> Thrilled the vibration of a coming power,
>
> .....
>
> Unheard, save on the hollow ear of space,
> And the fine sense of feeling consciousness." [4]

After her review of Matthew Arnold's Poems in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, George Eliot wrote,

> The same skies that make our garden flourish encourage the growth of weeds, and so a time that produces real poets has generally a large crop of versifiers, whom the Reviewer must resignedly expect as so much inevitable chickweed or dandelion which will spring up around the heliotropes and anemones. 5

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1 pp. 648-9. Aird had been writing poetry since 1830, and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (July 1856), pp.428-9; Eclectic Review (June 1856), pp.607-612; and the Critic (15 April 1856), pp.194-5, welcomed this new edition as the standard edition of an established poet.

2 p. 649.

3 Man in Paradise: A poem in six books, with lyrical poems.

4 The underlining is George Eliot's.

5 p. 300.

Two such poets were Arthur M. Morgan, Poems,[1] and William Ball, The Transcript, and Other Poems,[2] and George Eliot briefly dismissed them by quoting extracts from each which are typical of the dull, insipid versification. Morgan is particularly rebuked for his audacity in inscribing '"From the German of Goethe"' over a travesty of one of Goethe's lyrics.

The Poetical Works of Augustine Duganne, an American poet, were given longer notice in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856,[3] than that usually given to minor poets, not because of his poetry, which George Eliot dismissed as 'smooth versifying on unexceptionable sentiments', but because of a 'new form of affectation' in his preface, from which she quoted at length. It was a pretended apology for the publication of the volume, written in a style as grandiloquent as the poems themselves, and George Eliot declared that she noticed this affectation because 'we value simplicity as the small change of integrity'.

But perhaps George Eliot's most cruel attack on a minor poet was directed against Caroline Gifford Phillipson's Lonely Hours, which she reviewed in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856.[4] This second and enlarged edition of

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1 Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (June 1855), p. 378, introduced Morgan: 'Enter Arthur M. Morgan, in sable garb and turn-down collar, with sallow cheeks and melancholy eye fixed on vacancy.'
2 The Literary Gazette (21 April 1855), p. 245, compared this poem to Cowper's Task.
3 pp. 296-7.
4 p. 264.

sentimental verse, whose tone is of perpetual complaint, was described as having neither 'song nor sense', being merely 'jingle and nonsense' and George Eliot pointed to the portrait of the authoress in the front of the book, which, she wrote, conveyed

> a very high idea of her personal charms - charms which we can only regard as a kind of compensation of Nature for the imbecility exhibited in her verses. 1

Mrs. Phillipson was sufficiently wounded by this notice to reply in A Song in Prose to the Westminster Owl, and George Eliot retaliated, in 'Belles Lettres', January 1857,[2] with the 'severity of quotation' from Mrs. Phillipson's equally bad prose.

It is clear, then, that for George Eliot the greatest faults in poetry as in prose were affectation, insincerity and a failure on the part of the author to realise the want of ability or power. It was solely in order to point to examples of such faults and such unnecessary verse and to give praise where there was some merit that she gave a little of her valuable space in 'Belles Lettres' to some of the many volumes of inferior poetry published each quarter. It It is significant that apart from Gabriel, only the volumes

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1 Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (July 1856), pp. 419-21; Fraser's Magazine (Feb. 1857), in 'Little Lessons for Little Poets', pp. 229-31, and the Gentleman's Magazine (Sept. 1856), p. 345, all mentioned this very striking portrait.

2 pp. 312-5.

of minor verse that contained no merit were given the 'severity of quotation', quotations that threw into greater relief the beauties quoted from the major poets.

CHAPTER III

Of Prose Works Other Than Fiction

The greater proportion of George Eliot's reviews were of books other than fiction or poetry. But although many of these works cannot be classed as literature, the majority were intended for the general reader.[1] A few, although non-literary in subject, have proved through the genius of their author to be of great literary value.

It would be impossible and, I believe, unnecessary, to examine all of George Eliot's reviews in the scope of this thesis and therefore in this chapter I shall first consider briefly George Eliot's attitude to non-literary works, then discuss more fully certain kinds of literature reviewed by her - works of literary scholarship, criticism, translation and biography, and finally, after a glance at her opinion of the special place of women in literature, examine her views of some of the great prose writers of the past and present whose works she read and enjoyed.

To read through George Eliot's reviews of any kind of book is to realise that the high standard of writing obtaining in these reviews [2] is the standard which she herself

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1 In the review article 'Art and Artists of Greece', Saturday Review (31 May 1856), p. 109, George Eliot defined the 'general reader' as 'a reader of no particular knowledge.'

2 See above, pp. 12-13.

demanded of all writers. Whether the work was of theology, philosophy, art, natural history or of travel she required from the author a conscientious, impartial statement of all the carefully digested and sifted knowledge he possessed relevant to the subject discussed, cogently expressed in a manner to stimulate the reader to find out more for himself on the subject. Always from the first reviews in the Coventry Herald in 1846 to the review of Owen Jones's The Grammar of Ornament in the Fortnightly Review, 15 May 1865,[1] she condemned writing that was careless or facile, and, in works intended for the general reader, scholarship that was 'too vague and allusive'[2] to be of use to the layman in the subject, too digressive and irrelevant to the matter in hand or so biased as to create a wrong impression in the reader's mind. In a notice of a new edition of Reformation in Italy, Reformation in Spain, 'History, Biography, Voyages and Travels', Westminster Review, January 1857,[3] George Eliot wrote of the author, Thomas M'Crie, as belonging

> to that higher class of writer to whose earnestness, thoroughness, and genuine research we turn for relief from the superficial, second-hand showiness of books written from a transient impulse, in order to supply only a transient need.

A review of C.W.Fullom's The History of Woman, and Her Connexion with Religion, Civilization, and Domestic Manners, from the Earliest Periods, 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, [4]

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1 pp. 124-5.
2 See her review of the three works of Quinet and Michelet in the Coventry Herald (30 Oct. 1846).
3 pp. 294-5.
4 pp. 301-2.

reveals something of the 'second-hand showiness' she disliked. Fullom had angered George Eliot by his treatment of that particular subject and she declared that he

> has the audacity to call a book stuffed with vulgar anecdotes and vulgar errors, the mere froth and scum of historical reading, a "History of Woman".

His pretentious introduction, in which he declared that he would not perplex his readers with citations from authorities, his mass of irrelevant detail and the 'immeasurable morass of his ignorance' earned him more scorn than George Eliot usually expended on such books. She excused herself:

> It is not worth while to detain our readers longer over such a book; it has been our duty to examine it precisely for the sake of saving them from wasting their time upon it.

For George Eliot the most important factor in any work addressed to the general reader was the manner in which it was written. A work that was the product of 'immense learning', Dr. Von Bohlen's Introduction to the Book of Genesis, with a Commentary on the Opening Portion, was commended by George Eliot in the Leader, 12 January 1856,[1] because of its author's thoroughly earnest and reverent mind, and she declared that the book never shocks by its manner even if it pains by its matter.

Writing in praise of Mrs. Spier's Life in Ancient India, in 'History, Biography, Voyages and Travel',[2] George Eliot declared that although the book would not satisfy curiosity, it performed the 'yet greater service of stimulating it'.

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1 pp. 41-2.
2 pp. 288-92.

In a glowing account in the Leader, 16 August 1856, of Ferny Combes: a Ramble after Ferns in the Glens and Valleys of ~~Devonshire~~ Dartmoor by Charlotte Chanter, George Eliot named it a very agreeable companion because of the

> ardour in her enjoyment of nature, and a happy way of describing and narrating, which is the less surprising when one knows that she is a sister of Charles Kingsley.[1]

Sir John Forbes Sightseeing in Germany and the Tyrol was less kindly reviewed by George Eliot in the Leader, 2 August 1856.[2] She pronounced it as little more than a guide book, unlike his The Physician's Holiday (1848), which she had found full of holiday zest and charming descriptions.

The manner in which a book was written, George Eliot realised, was governed by the ability of its author, by the wealth of his knowledge and experience and by the moral refinement of his mind. So she was able to find delight in The Lover's Seat. Kathemérina or Common Things in Relation to Beauty, Virtue, and Truth by Kenelm Henry Digby, two volumes of extracts from prose and poetry on the subject of love, mingled with comment from the author. George Eliot reviewed it, in the Leader, 2 August 1856,[3] in a tone of amused respect, for, although she found it unsystematic, vague and vacillating, she considered it

> everywhere inspired by rare refinement and moral elevation, ... obviously the production of a man who is both morally and intellectually more entitled to ask an audience for his opinions than ninety-nine writers out of a hundred.

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1 p. 787.
2 p. 737-8.
3 p. 735-6.

In 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, George Eliot briefly noted a work on gardening in India, Flowers and Flower-gardens (1855),[1] by David Lester Richardson, which included topics as varied as Indian legend, facts of natural history, literary reference and poetical quotation. Reviewing in the Leader, 28 July 1855,[2] a more specialist work than was usual with her, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Philosophie in Deutschland, she described at length the varied accomplishments of the author, Professor Gruppe, and expressed her appreciation of the service rendered by versatile writers in lending the suggestiveness of their fresh, unrestrained minds to specialist studies.

Adolph Stahr's 'Torso'. Kunst, Künstler, und Kunstwerke der Alten was the only work reviewed by George Eliot more than twice. She reviewed the first part in the Leader, 17 March 1855,[3] and the second part in the Leader, 22 March 1856,[4] in 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856,[5] and in the Saturday Review, 31 May 1856.[6] These four reviews sum up George Eliot's attitude to non-literary work. In the Leader review of the first part she wrote with enthusiasm of Stahr's

> thorough scholarship ... refined taste ... rare mastery of the unwieldy German language which makes his works charm by their form as well as their matter.

She pointed to his power of describing natural scenery and

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1 p. 645.
2 pp. 723-4.
3 pp. 257-8.
4 pp. 279-80.
5 p. 633.
6 pp. 109-110.

works of art and declared,

> he is in possession of the magic word that will convey his impression to the mind of the reader ... may be read with lively interest in a country town far away from all casts and museums.

In 'Art and Belles Lettres', reviewing the second part of the work, George Eliot declared that Stahr was a writer who knew how to make his work interesting to the uninitiated, and, although some readers might prefer more definite citation to his easy flow of narrative, the work created a thirst for knowledge. In the Leader review of this second part she declared that the work was valuable as a whole and not for any special information contained in it. She commended Stahr for not writing from a preconceived notion. He did not indulge in vague philosophising, and was not cloudily rhapsodic like some of his fellow Germans. Stahr was a philosophic critic in the best sense. He judged art in its relation to the phases of human development and traced it to its originating principles, noting the causes and reactive influence of its development and decline. George Eliot's article in the Saturday Review was equally laudatory. She declared of Stahr that he possessed the

> agreeable combination of philosophical insight, picturesque narration, and poetic enthusiasm, to be found only in minds that have prepared themselves for a special study by thorough general culture.

George Eliot's reviews of works of literary scholarship reveal the same demands for careful and conscientious work, together with a charm of manner, refinement of taste and considerable culture on the part of the author.

Three pages of 'Belles Lettres', January 1856, were given to the second volume (1855) of an edition, with a commentary by George Long, of M.Tullii Ciceronis Orationes.[1] The third volume (1856) was reviewed at some length in 'Belles Lettres', January 1857,[2] and was commended because of its author's 'pains, perspicuity, and conciseness'.

The third volume of a work of French scholarship, Cours de Littérature Dramatique ou de l'usage des Passions dans le Drame, by Saint-Marc Girardin was welcomed by George Eliot in 'Belles Lettres', October 1855,[3] as criticism 'entirely philosophical and aesthetic' which is 'conveyed with such exquisite ease and grace' that the reader is instructed without knowing it. Like all good writers, she declared, M. Girardin suggests more than he tells and readers who want an agreeable stimulus to their thoughts should go to this book.

George Eliot also found a 'charming quality' in Richard Whately's Bacon's Essays; with Annotations which she reviewed with obvious delight in 'Belles Lettres', October 1856.[4] She remarked on Archbishop Whatley's 'cool, hard, practical sense, with the smallest alloy of sentiment' and wrote,

> a grave or difficult subject is lighted up by some ingenious analogy from common experience ... and most ordinary observations or anecdotes are made fresh by novelty of application.

In general George Eliot's reviews of literary scholarship were little more than a survey, often detailed and with

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1 pp. 310-2. 2 pp. 324-6.
3 pp. 604-7. 4 pp. 579-81.

long quotations from the work, of the contents of the books, with particular attention paid to that part of the work which most interested her, and with only a brief, but adequate, evaluation. Guillaume Guizot's Ménandre: Étude Historique et Littéraire sur la Comédie et la Société Grecques was reviewed in this manner in the Leader, 16 June 1855, [1] and in 'Belles Lettres', July 1855.[2] In the Leader review of this work she expressed her opinion of the kind of pleasure to be obtained from such scholarly studies of the life and works of a great writer of the past. She declared that it was an epoch in life when a mere name becomes for us 'the centre for a group of pleasant and fertile ideas'. She recommended Guizot's exhaustive study to those readers for whom Menander's name had previously belonged to 'that inventory of unknown things which so much of our youth is taken up in learning'.

The reading of Trench's Life's a Dream: The Great Theatre of the World. From the Spanish of Calderon. With an Essay on his Life and Genius was not an epoch in George Eliot's life, for, in her review in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856,[3] she judged the book a failure in its attempt to make Calderon more than a mere name. She considered that the translation did not in the least help to convince her, one of the 'uninitiated', that Calderon merited the high position Mr. Trench assigns to him as a poet. She also found

1 pp. 578-9.
2 pp. 302-6.
3 pp. 266-7.

that Trench's high opinion of the poet was not borne out in his Introductory Essay by a forcible statement of reasons, or by adequate illustrations. Her conclusion, that the previously uninformed reader would lay down the volume with only a vague impression, is wholly justified.

Reviewing Thomas Keightley's An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton: with an Introduction to Paradise Lost (1855), in the Leader, 4 August 1855, [1] George Eliot judged it the 'best introduction we have seen to the study of Milton' and she recommended it 'as a fund of knowledge at once instructive and delightful'. She guessed that the work had been a labour of love to Keightley and, as there was also ability, the result was valuable. The main part of this review, as in her review of the same book in 'Belles Lettres', October 1855,[2] was concerned with a description of the contents and particularly of Keightley's 'well-chosen extracts' of Milton's prose works. George Eliot's notice of this book in 'Belles Lettres' was more critical. She disagreed with Keightley in his praise of Milton's prose style, which she considered was often obscure and monotonous despite the occasional beauties. She expressed amusement at Keightley's view that lucidity in prose could be carried to extremes and she wrote,

> All effort to understand mere expression is an expenditure of strength, which must enfeeble instead of aiding our apprehension of ideas.

Discussing Keightley's detailed criticism of Milton's poems

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1 p. 750.
2 pp. 602-4.

George Eliot declared that he was an exact and diligent rather than a fascinating critic.

Perhaps the most interesting book of literary criticism reviewed by George Eliot was Collier's edition of Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton by Coleridge, (1856). [1] Collier prefaced to this work a defence of the charges of forgery made against him in respect to his Notes and Emendations to Shakespeare (1852), and his alleged possession of these Coleridge lecture notes. George Eliot considered that this defence was wholly successful, and wrote,

> No one who knows Mr. Collier, and his long and honorable career, will doubt the perfect veracity of his statements on this matter.

She considered that Collier's account, in his preface, of conversations held with Coleridge and with Wordsworth, Lamb and Hazlitt were of great interest. But, while admitting that prefaces were privileged places where the author might discuss personal matters relevant to the work in hand, she deplored Collier's inclusion in this preface of a fifty page criticism of Singer's Notes and Emendations to Shakespeare.[2] She did not deny the value of the list of emendations from Mr. Collier's copy of the 1632 Folio, but considered that they were out of place in a work purporting to be an edition of Coleridge's lectures, and ought to have been published separately. George Eliot also objected to the policy which had dictated the re-publication of the

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1 In 'Belles Lettres', Jan. 1857, pp. 319-20.

2 The Text of Shakespeare Vindicated from the Interpolations and Corruptions advocated by J.P.Collier was published in 1853.

notes from Coleridge's lectures, for she considered that there was very little new material in them and decided

> Coleridge was not so great a man that every scrap of his must needs be interesting.

George Eliot's letters written while she was translating Strauss's Das Leben Jesu reveal those qualities in her work which she was to demand from each of the many translations that came under her notice during her period as a critic. In her conclusion to an article on 'Translations and Translators' in the Leader, 20 October 1855,[1] she described briefly the moral qualities essential in a translator:

> the patience, the rigid fidelity, and the sense of responsibility in interpreting another man's mind.

In her review of Cock's translation of the three books of Michelet and Quinet, in the Coventry Herald, 30 October 1846, she had admitted that a translation could never be more than a second-hand vehicle for an author's thoughts, but concluded that it was necessary to know the thoughts and ideas of the great writers of other nations. Now, in the Leader article, she discussed the kind of abilities required in a translator. She declared that the power demanded must vary according to the nature of the book to be translated, that, clearly, a novel or a book of travels required less power and knowledge than a philosophical treatise or scientific work. In this article George Eliot compared two very different kinds of translation; J.M.D.

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1 pp. 1014-5.

Meiklejohn's translation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and the second edition of Specimens of the Choicest Lyrical Productions of the most Celebrated German Poets by Mary Anne Burt. She judged that Kant's work must be among the most difficult of all books to translate, but that this 'terrible ninety-gun ship' was not more difficult to overcome than the 'little painted pleasure-boat' of Miss Burt's work. For, she declared, the translation of poetry presented problems that could not be solved by the most careful, conscientious and knowledgable translator. The inadequacy of the majority of poetic translations could not be sufficiently stressed. In her review of Wallis's translation of Heine's Buch der Lieder, Saturday Review, 26 April 1856, George Eliot wrote that the majority of translators of poetry had not the poetical sensibility necessary to their task; they toiled heavily on the ground when they should float through the ether. Moreover few translators had the patience to give their attention to the quality of the work, preferring to translate all of a writer's work than to produce good renderings of a few poems. Wallis, on the whole, had reproduced faithfully the meaning of Heine's poems, but had failed to convey their charm. In the Leader article, she commended Schlegel's close and admirable translations of Shakespeare, but declared that, although they were frequently eloquent, they were sometimes merely feeble echoes of their original. She discussed instances of Schlegel's errors and lamented that if such a man could fail it was certain that

a man of lesser ability would hardly succeed. However, George Eliot concluded, men of ability were needed to attempt the translation of great foreign works, for, she declared, if a good translator is of less account than the man who produces original works of merit, he was infinitely superior to the creator of inferior work.

In her review of Henry Morley's Life of Cornelius Agrippa [1] George Eliot commented that, owing to prevalent literary taste,[2] history was becoming more closely allied to biography. The biographer seemed to find it essential to give an account of the period in which his hero lived and often bestowed greater pains on this than on the life. Commending Morley's book, she wrote that it was good to have a true picture of other times and that the biography of a man once very celebrated was 'both instructive and amusing'.

George Eliot's private reading had always included a great deal of biography. In a letter to Maria Lewis, 16 March 1839, she wrote that she was reading Lockhart's Life of Scott (1837) and commented, 'all biography is interesting and instructive'.[3] This opinion was later modified by sterner critical demands as to the merits of individual

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1 'History, Biography, Voyages and Travels', Jan. 1857, pp. 295-7.

2 The Leader (22 April 1854), p. 377, quoted from the report of the Liverpool Library on its issues to readers. The figures show that the issue of Histories and Biographies amounted to double that of fiction, which is the next highest figure.

3 Haight, 1. 24.

biographies and by unhappy personal experience as to the unscrupulousness of certain literary biographers.[1]

Writing to John Blackwood, 20 February 1874, George Eliot declared,

> something should be done by dispassionate criticism towards the reform of our national habits in the matter of literary biography. Is it not odious that as soon as a man is dead his desk is raked, and every insignificant memorandum which he never meant for the public, is printed for the gossiping amusement of people too idle to re-read his books? ... I think this fashion is a disgrace to us all. It is something like the uncovering of the dead Byron's club foot. 2

She would not permit a biography of Lewes to be written. In a letter to Mrs. T.A.Trollope, 19 December 1879, she wrote,

> The best history of a writer is contained in his writings - these are his chief actions. If he happens to have left an autobiography telling (what nobody else can tell) how his mind grew, how it was determined by the joys, sorrows and other influences of childhood and youth - that is a precious contribution to knowledge. But Biographies generally are a disease of English literature. 3

Certain trends in autobiography also roused George Eliot's anger. Writing to Sara Hennell, 15 May 1877, on Harriet Martineau's Autobiography (1877), she complained that it had created in her a 'new repugnance' to autobiography because it perpetuated personal animosities and misrepresented certain facts by giving a 'ridiculously inaccurate account of the tenor or bearing of correspondence

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1 See a letter from G.H.Lewes to Edward Walford, editor of Men of the Time, dated 22 June 1861, on George Eliot's refusal to give information about herself to the press; (Haight, 111. 429).

2 Haight, VI. 23.

3 Haight, VII. 230.

held with her.'[1] Writing in praise of J.S.Mill's Autobiography (1873) to Barbara Bodichon, December 1873, she admitted that she had had fears that

> the exaggerated expressions in which he conveys his feeling about his wife would neutralize all the good that might have come from the beautiful fact of his devotion to her. [2]

George Eliot had admired the accounts in both Mill's [3] and Harriet Martineau's [4] Autobiographies of the writers' childhood and early days. She found the same interest in the part of Forster's Life of Charles Dickens (1872-4) that dealt with his 'boyish experience' although she disliked the book as a whole and considered it 'ill-organised, and stuffed with criticism and other matter which would be better in limbo'.[5] A review of Thorwaldsen's Leben by Thiele, in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856, reveals the same preference for the account of the childhood and youth of the subject, and she wrote that the early life of a genius is the most interesting.[6]

Despite her grave considerations as to the harm caused by certain trends in biography both to the subject and to the reader, George Eliot's opinion of biography as a possible power for good remained unchanged. G.H.Lewes's Diary records

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1 Haight, VI. 371.
2 Haight, V. 467. See J.S.Mill's Autobiography, Chapter vi.
3 In a letter to Barbara Bodichon, 11 Nov. 1873; (Haight, V. 458).
4 In a letter to J. Blackwood, 20 March 1877; (Haight, VI.351).
5 See letter to Sara Hennell, 15 December 1871; (Haight, V. 226).
6 pp. 271-2.

that George Eliot read the first three books (1878) of the English Men of Letters series, R.H.Hutton's Sir Walter Scott, Stephen's Samuel Johnson, and J. Cotter Morison's Gibbon. Writing to Macmillan to express George Eliot's pleasure in these books, Lewes declared that Hutton's book had especially delighted her with its 'largeness of feeling and sympathetic insight'.[1] A clearer exposition of her view of the importance of biography is contained in her review of David Masson's Essays, Biographical and Critical, in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856.[2] The major part of this notice is taken up with Masson's biography of Chatterton. She wrote,

> Here is a biography told without exaggeration, without any unwarranted use of hypothetic incidents, yet surpassing the most highly-wrought fiction in its power over our emotions; for, if we have healthy sympathies, imaginary beings can never so stir our pity or our piety as the real beings of the past, as the sufferers and heroes of whom we can say - "Such as these have lived and died".

George Eliot had expressed a similar opinion in her review of Carlyle's Life of Sterling.[3] She wrote,

> We have often wished that genius would incline itself more frequently to the task of the biographer, - that when some great or good personage dies, instead of the dreary three or five volumed compilations of letter, and diary, and detail, little to the purpose, ... we could have a real "Life", setting forth briefly and vividly the man's inward and outward struggles, aims, and achievements, so as to make clear the meaning which his experience has for his fellows. A few such lives (chiefly, indeed, autobiographies) the world possesses, and they have, perhaps, been more influential on the formation of character than any other kind of reading.

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1 26 Aug. 1878; (Haight, VII. 65-6 and n.).
2 pp. 267-9.
3 In 'Contemporary Literature of England', Westminster Review (Jan. 1852), pp. 247-51.

Writing to Alexander Main, 22 April 1873, on his proposed edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson, George Eliot expressed her strong interest in the

> delightful task of helping to impress on men's minds the life of dear, ever-memorable Johnson. 1

Further idea of the kind of subject George Eliot considered as most suitable for a biography is to be seen in her review of J.W.Kaye's Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm.[2] She pronounced that this diplomat, who was the first British ambassador to Persia, was one of those men whose lives ought unquestionably to be written. He was a man of action and his character 'was of a kind to render his life a suggestive study'.

In her review of Carlyle's Life of Sterling George Eliot admitted that the value of the book lay in its parentage rather than in its subject. She did not consider that the life of Sterling was remarkable enough to warrant even one biography. She considered that his writings lacked

> that vigour of conception and felicity of expression, by which we distinguish the undefinable something called genius,

and his moral nature, though 'refined and elevated', seemed wholly subordinated to his intellectual tendencies. But, she continued, Carlyle, in his Preface, had explained that this biography was written to counteract the false ideas of Sterling's character and religious beliefs given by his first

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1 Haight, V. 404. This book was published in 1874.
2 'History, Biography, Voyages and Travels', Jan. 1857, pp. 298-300.

biographer, Archbishop Hare.[1] George Eliot agreed that this first life was a justification of the second. Moreover, she decided, there was an intrinsic interest in Sterling's life, even if

> it be viewed simply as the struggle of a restless aspiring soul, yearning to leave a distinct impress of itself on the spiritual development of humanity.

Carlyle was for George Eliot the perfect biographer, partly because this work was for him 'a labour of love' and not just the conscientious discharge of a duty, but mainly because of his genius.[2] She judged that in this book were met all

> the conditions required for the perfection of life writing, - personal intimacy, a loving and poetic nature which sees the beauty and the depth of familiar things, and the artistic power which seizes characteristic points and renders them with life-like effect.

She pronounced that the 'comparative tameness' of Sterling's life gathered 'picturesqueness and interest under the rich lights of Carlyle's mind'. He had written neither too much nor too little, had selected incidents, facts and letters with such care as to 'give the liveliest conception of what Sterling was and what he did'. Other persons were brought in as a kind of scene-painting to the general picture, an accessory to the main purpose. She particularly pointed to Carlyle's description of Coleridge and declared it was 'precisely adapted to bring before us the intellectual

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1 J.C.Hare's memoir of John Sterling was prefixed to his edition of Sterling's Essays and Tales, 2 vols. (1848).

2 For a fuller account of George Eliot's opinion of Carlyle, see below pp. 213-5.

region in which Sterling lived'. She quoted from this description and noted that it had been deservedly extracted by many of the reviewers. She commented that in this admirable description 'veneration and compassion struggle with irresistible satire'. George Eliot admitted to finding the life of double interest from the period when Carlyle's own acquaintance with Sterling began, because of 'the glimpses it gives us of the writer, as well as of his hero.' Carlyle's personal intimacy with his subject enabled him to convey 'a clear insight into Sterling's character and mental progress', not in heavy disquisition or narrative but through the lively description of their walks and conversations together. George Eliot concluded,

> This "Life of Sterling" is a touching monument of the capability human nature possesses of the highest love, the love of the good and beautiful in character, which is, after all, the essence of piety. The style of the work, too, is for the most part at once pure and rich; there are passages of deep pathos which come upon the reader like a strain of solemn music, and others which show that aptness of epithet, that masterly power of close delineation, in which, perhaps, no writer has excelled Carlyle.

Another biography which was written by a close friend of its subject was reviewed by George Eliot in the Leader, 23 August 1856.[1] It was Alfred Meissner's Heinrich Heine, Erinnerungen, and George Eliot clearly found it of interest because it filled in the gaps in her knowledge of the remarkable Heine.[2] She admitted that the book was carefully

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1 pp. 811-2.
2 See above, p.166,for George Eliot's opinion of Heine.

and agreeably written, in a manner that was at once sympathetic and impartial. The writer had a sober estimate of his friend and had not discredited 'his own testimony with indiscriminating laudation.'

Three biographical studies of writers of the past afford further evidence of George Eliot's criteria of good biography. A scathing review of Lord Brougham's Lives of Men of Letters of the Time of George III in the Leader, 7 July 1855,[1] reveals her hatred of careless and slovenly work. She is especially impatient with Lord Brougham because as a gentleman of ample leisure he had less excuse for 'writing third-rate biographies in the style of a literary hack'. She pronounced that these lives might have been adequate in a biographical dictionary. But they offered no new material and were written in a pretentious and clumsy style, which was 'thrown almost ludicrously into relief' by the fact that much of the work was taken up with criticism of other men's styles. Defending this review in a letter to Charles Bray, 16 July 1855, George Eliot declared that her examples of Brougham's bad style were not mere word quibbling. She wrote,

> I consider it criminal in a man to prostitute Literature for the purposes of his own vanity and this is what Lord Brougham has done. [2]

George Eliot had nothing but praise for Masson's 'Life of Chatterton'. She declared that it revealed some of the most important characteristics necessary in a good biography;

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1 pp. 652-3. 2 Haight, 11. 210.

'the vivid reproduction of details, the psychological insight, and the wise charity'. She noted Masson's acuteness in realising that Chatterton's 'veneration for the antique' was the 'predominating mental feature which was certainly the strongest determining cause of his peculiar career', and she quoted a long description of Chatterton's love for the church of St. Mary's Redcliffe.

In her review of Keightley's Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton in the Leader, George Eliot described the biographical section as

> full without being prolix; all the accessible materials are well digested, and the evidence for questionable details carefully sifted: there are no bookmaking digressions from the history of Milton's life to the history of his period, but the reader finds as much illustrative information as is necessary.

George Eliot reviewed many books written by women. She believed that it was important to realise the special contribution women had to offer to literature.[1] In her review article, 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé' Westminster Review, October 1854,[2] she declared that it was a mistake to think that there was no sex distinction in literature. She wrote,

> in art and literature, which imply the action of the entire being, in which every fibre of the nature is engaged, in which every peculiar modification of the individual makes itself felt, woman has something specific to contribute. Under every imaginable social

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1 See above, George Eliot's review of Mrs. Browning's Aurora Leigh, p. 137.

2 pp. 448-73. This was a review of three books: Victor Cousin Madame de Sablé. Etudes sur les Femmes Illustrés et la Société du XVIIe Siècle; Saint-Beuve, Portraits des Femmes, J.Michelet, Les Femmes de la Revolution.

> condition, she will necessarily have a class of sensations and emotions - the maternal ones - which must remain unknown to man; and the fact of her comparative physical weakness, which, however it may have been exaggerated by a vicious civilization, can never be cancelled, introduces a distinctly feminine condition into the wondrous chemistry of the affections and sentiments, which inevitably gives rise to distinctive forms and combinations.

She judged that the writing of the women of the seventeenth century in France had had a vital influence on French literature. These writings consisted mainly of letters to friends and lovers and memoirs of their everyday lives and romances. Consequently these women were not cramped by any timidity or any desire to create an effect by their writing. They were always refined and graceful, often witty and sometimes judicious. They wrote what they saw, thought and felt in their habitual language, proposing no models for themselves, without any desire to prove that women could write as cleverly as men and without affecting any manly views or suppressing any feminine ones. Their writing was 'a charming accident of their more charming lives', but it passed like an electric current through the French language, making it crisp and definite. George Eliot declared that it was only in France that women had made a mark on the national literature. She pointed to the great names of feminine literature in France; to Madame de Sévigné, who remained the single example of a woman supreme in a class of literature which engaged the ambition of men, to Madame Dacier, to Madame de Stael, who leaps to the mind as an

example of a woman of intellectual power, and to George Sand.[1]

George Eliot continued with an attempt to discover the causes of this development in France. She pointed to the Gallic temperament and decided that English women writers had often possessed this 'intense and rapid rather than comprehensive' faculty. George Eliot was on firmer ground when she indicated that the women in seventeenth century France became prominent in literature because they were admitted to a common fund of ideas and interests with men. She wrote,

> this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and true social well-being. 2

Perhaps the most interesting of George Eliot's reviews of the work of feminine authors is the article 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' which she contributed to the Leader, 13 October 1855.[3] It was a comparison of Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845) and Mary Wollstonecraft's The Rights of Women (1792). She considered that there were many ideas in common between these two feminist writers. Both saw woman as she really was and also understood what she might be if given just opportunities, but they did not exaggerate or write romantically on the superiority of women. They realised and deplored men's subjection to idle and ignorant women and

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1 See above, pp.31-2.
2 See above, p.70.
3 pp. 988-9.

their horror of a cultured woman.[1] Comparing their methods and manner of writing George Eliot expressed her preference for Margaret Fuller whose vigorous, cultivated understanding often expressed itself in vague dreaminess but always with a great breadth of illustration. Mary Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, never allowed anything to disturb her grave pages. She was always serious and severely moral, and, George Eliot considered, there was a certain heaviness in her pages which probably accounted for the fact that there had been no edition of her book since 1796.[2] But, she declared, both Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft revealed themselves in their writings as brave, strong, truthful and yet womanly.[3]

Evidence of George Eliot's wide and catholic reading among English and foreign prose writers is to be found in all of her writings. But there is little specific comment to make possible a survey of her opinions on such writers as Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Thomas Fuller, Burton, Hooker, Hobbes, Dryden, Addison, Swift, Johnson, Gibbon, Burke and Southey.

A remark on Sir Thomas Browne in her article 'The Influence of Rationalism' in the Fortnightly Review, adds to the glimpse of George Eliot's fondness for his writings

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1 See above, George Eliot's opinion of men's attitude to women, in 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', p.70.

2 A third edition of The Rights of Women was published in 1844.

3 For George Eliot's review of Margaret Fuller's At Home and Abroad, see above, p.p. 101-2.

obtainable from her novels. She wrote of his 'magnificent incongruity of opinion', and declared that his works

> are the most remarkable combination existing, of witty sarcasm against ancient nonsense and modern obsequiousness, with indications of a capacious credulity. 1

Clearly George Eliot delighted in Browne's 'passionate prodigality' of statement, a description which she applied to Ladislaw.[2] Hans Meyrick, that other irresponsible artist, coined a phrase which he declared might have been written by Browne; he described his unspoken love for Mirah as a 'cheerful caliginosity'.[3] George Eliot made use of the writings of Browne in three of the mottoes to her chapter headings.[4]

Other comments on individual writers reveal a similar response to the general effect of a writer's work. In her review article 'Memoirs of the Court of Austria', Westminster Review, April 1855,[5] she declared that the work under review, Dr. Vehse's Geschicte des östreichischen Hofs und Adels, was hardly remarkable for its style. She judged that her readers would find none of the picquancy of St Simon or De Grammont, the quaintness of Pepys, the gossiping charm of Walpole, or the panoramic picturesqueness of Macauley.

In a brief notice of Bohn's Illustrated edition of

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1 15 May 1865, p. 52.
2 Middlemarch, Chapter xxxvii.
3 Daniel Deronda, Chapter xxxvii.
4 Felix Holt, Chapter xxix, Middlemarch, Chapter xlv, Daniel Deronda, Chapter xv.
5 pp. 303-35.

Isaac Walton's Compleat Angler, 'Belles Lettres', October 1856, George Eliot named the book 'quaintly delightful'.[1]

Charles Lamb was among the writers read by George Eliot as a child and he remained a firm favourite. In her discussion of the distinction between humour and wit, in 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine', she had described Lamb's bon mots as instances of the blending of both wit and humour.[2]

There is more detailed comment on some French prose writers. In the article 'The Influence of Rationalism' she wrote of the 'charming, chatty Montaigne', a man of sceptical acuteness, possessing a keen narrowness of nature but not a large soul.[3] Of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims she wrote, in 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé',

> as to form, they are perfect, ... as to matter, they are at once undeniably true and miserably false; true as applied to that condition of human nature in which the selfish instincts are still dominant, false if taken as a representation of all the elements and possibilities of human nature. 4

In a letter to John Blackwood, 26 January 1878, George Eliot declared that she had been given Pascal's Pensées as a school prize at the age of fourteen and had been turning to them again to revive her sense of 'their deep though broken wisdom'.[5] Dorothea Brooke knew passages of Pascal by heart.[6]

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1 p. 582.
2 Westminster Review (Jan. 1856), p.3.
3 p. 50.
4 p. 468. Two mottoes in Daniel Deronda, chapters xxviii. and lii, are from La Rochefoucauld.
5 Haight, VII. 11.
6 Middlemarch, Chapter i.

In 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine' George Eliot described Voltaire as 'the intensest example of pure wit', but she judged that his fictions fail because of their lack of humour. She pronounced Micromégas

> a perfect tale, because, as it deals chiefly with philosophic ideas and does not touch the marrow of human feeling and life, the writer's wit and wisdom were all-sufficient for his purpose.

In Candide, on the other hand, Voltaire had attempted to give pictures of life and had failed because of his lack of humour.

> The sense of the ludicrous is continually defeated by disgust, and the scenes, instead of presenting us with an amusing or agreeable picture, are only the frame for a witticism. 1

George Eliot's opinion of Rousseau is in complete contrast. In a letter to Sara Hennell, 9 February 1849, in which she expressed her gratitude for the writings of George Sand, she wrote of Rousseau in similar terms.

> it would signify nothing to me if a very wise person were to stun me with proofs that Rousseau's views of life, religion, and government are miserably erroneous - that he was guilty of some of the worst bass~~-~~esses that have degraded civilized man. I might admit all this - and it would be not the less true that Rousseau's genius has sent that electric thrill through my intellectual and moral frame which has awakened me to new perceptions, which has made man and nature a fresh world of thought and feeling to me - and this ~~is~~ not by teaching me any new belief. It is simply that the rushing mighty wind of his inspiration has so quickened my faculties that I have been able to shape more definitely for myself ideas which have previously dwelt as dim 'ahnungen' in my soul - the fire of his genius has so fused together old thoughts and prejudices that I have been ready to make new combinations. 2

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1 p. 4.
2 Haight, 1. 277.

George Eliot's letters from France in the summer of 1876 describe a 'pilgrimage' made by her and Lewes to Rousseau's house, and her diaries show that they had read Rousseau throughout their stay in France.[1] Another visit to Les Charmettes was made with J.W.Cross in May 1880.[2]

Emerson was one of the writers who greatly influenced the young George Eliot's thought and ideas. In July 1848, she met him at the Brays and wrote to Sara Hennell, 14 July, 'I have seen Emerson - the first man I have ever seen'.[3] Her opinion did not change. Writing to Sara, 27-8 August 1860, she explained that she had been re-reading his lecture, Man the Reformer (1841) for her 'spiritual good' and added that it came to her

> with fresh beauty and meaning. My heart goes out with venerating gratitude to that mild face which I daresay is smiling on some one as beneficently as it one day did on me years and years ago. 4

She thought very highly of his collection of essays, Society and Solitude (1870, and wrote to Oscar Browning, 8 May 1870,

> There is enough gospel to serve one for a year in one or two of the Essays - those on Domestic life, Eloquence, Farming etc. 5

Another American essayist whom George Eliot read and enjoyed was James Russell Lowell. She recommended the essays 'My Garden Acquaintance' and 'Winter' from My Study Windows (1871) to Barbara Bodichon, 17 June 1871.[6] In a letter to C.L.Lewes, 20 June, she commented that his critical articles

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1 Haight, VI. 265 and n.
2 Haight, VII. 285.
3 Haight, I. 270.
4 Haight, III. 337.
5 Haight, V. 93.
6 Haight, V. 153.

were worthless when compared to these two essays which she described as 'like a pure brook'. [1] They are pleasant reading, skilfully combining natural history and description with anecdote and literary reference.

George Eliot appears to have been almost the only English reviewer to notice Henry David Thoreau's Walden, or, Life in the Woods (1854).[2] She gave it a brief but commendatory notice in 'Belles Lettres', January 1856.[3] She named it a work quite interesting enough to break her rule by a retrospective review, and described it as

> a bit of pure American life ... animated by that energetic, yet calm spirit of innovation, that practical as well as theoretic independence of formulae, which is peculiar to some of the finer American minds.

Describing Thoreau's experiment, his solitary way of life in the woods, his reflections and his observations of natural phenomena, she declared,

> These last are not only made by a keen eye, but have their interest enhanced by passing through the medium of a deep poetic sensibility; and, indeed, we feel throughout the book in the presence of a refined as well as a hardy mind.

She added that Thoreau might be considered as unpractical and dreamy in this episode of his life, but she declared 'there is plenty of sturdy sense mingled with his unworldliness', and she quoted to support her view, two long extracts from Thoreau's explanation and description of his conduct.[4]

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1 Haight, V. 155. For George Eliot's opinion of Lowell's poetry, see above, p.160.
2 There is a very brief, favourable notice in the Leader (9 August 1856), p. 762.
3 pp. 302-3.
4 Chapter iv.

Two contemporary English prose writers, Carlyle and Ruskin, possessed for George Eliot that same quality which she had found in the work of Rousseau and George Sand. Both she considered, were able to rouse men from apathy and indifference to consider anew old beliefs and ideas and 'to form new combinations'.

Perhaps also, Frances and J.H.Newman can be added to these writers. Certainly the young George Eliot was strongly affected by F.W.Newman's The Soul; Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations (1849.) In a letter to Sara Hennell, May 1849, she named him 'our blessed Saint Francis', declared, 'His soul is a blessed yea', and discoursed rather grandiloquently on the new possibilities for mankind since

> those eruptions of the intellect and the passions which have scattered the lava of doubt and negation over our early faith. 1

It is to be regretted that George Eliot was unable to write the article on F.W.Newman which she had intended for the Westminster Review in 1857.[2] A letter to Sara Hennell, 27 March 1874, recalled her early interest in the Soul and Phases of Faith (1850) with 'affectionate sadness'. She commented

> How much work he has done in the world, which has left no deep, conspicuous mark, but has probably entered beneficiently into many lives! 3

In a letter to Sara Hennell, 2 November 1851, George

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1 Haight, I. 282.
2 See letter to John Chapman, 12 Jan. 1858; (Haight, II. 420).
3 Haight, VI. 34.

Eliot wrote that she was reading J.H.Newman's Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England (1851) 'with great amusement'. She commented, 'They are full of clever satire and description'.[1] Another letter to Sara, 13 July 1864, describes her impressions on reading Apologia pro Vita Sua (1864). She admitted that she had found it so absorbing that she could not lay the book down until she had finished it. She expressed her indignation at Kingsley's attack on Newman with its mixture of 'arrogance, coarse impertinence and unscrupulousness', and declared that she had taken up Newman's book, in the first instance, in order to see such 'thoroughly vicious writing thoroughly castigated'. She continued,

> But the Apology now mainly effects me as the revelation of a life - how different in form from one's own, yet with how close a fellowship in its needs and burthens - I mean spiritual needs and burthens. 2

Again, 28 August 1864, she wrote to Sara, that the Apologia 'breathed much life into me when I read it'.[3]

As early as 1840 George Eliot had quoted from Carlyle, in a letter to Maria Lewis, 27 October.[4] Writing to Martha Jackson, 16 December 1841, she named him 'a grand favourite' and recommended Sartor Resartus (1833-4). She wrote,

> His soul is a shrine of the brightest and purest philanthropy, kindled by the live coal of gratitude and devotion to the Author of all things. I should observe that he is not "orthodox". 5

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1 Haight, I. 372.
2 Haight, IV. 158-9.
3 Haight, IV. 160.
4 Haight, 1. 71. The quotation is from Chartism (1840).
5 Haight, 1. 122-3.

In a review of Thomas Ballantyne's Passages Selected from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle, in the Leader, 27 October 1855,[1] she named Carlyle a 'dynamic' writer. She declared that he was not a teacher but an inspirer of men. He did not write to convince but to undeceive men's minds and to nerve their energies to seek for truth. She considered that Carlyle's books had had such influence on contemporary thought that there was hardly a book written in the previous ten years which would not have been different had Carlyle not lived. Sartor Resartus was a great epoch in such writer's lives, for, although its ideas were now commonplace, at the time of its publication they were startling. George Eliot realised that there were many people who disliked the exaggeration of the Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850), or who questioned Carlyle's judgments on the men of the past, but, she declared, these things were of no account beside the great and beautiful nature revealed in Carlyle's writings. If his views differ from our own he writes so finely and with such conviction that we can only applaud. It was fashionable to name Carlyle a philosopher, George Eliot continued, but she preferred to call him an artist. She wrote,

> He glances deep down into human nature, and shows the causes of human actions; he seizes grand generalisations, and traces them in the particular with wonderful acumen; and in all this he is a philosopher. But, perhaps, his greatest power lies in concrete presentation. No novelist has made his creations live for us more thoroughly than Carlyle haw made Mirabeau and the men of the French Revolution, Cromwell and the Puritans. What humour in his pictures! Yet what depths of

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1 pp. 1034-5.

> appreciation, what reverence for the great and godlike under every sort of earthly mummery! 1

In her review of Westward Ho! in the Westminster Review,[2] George Eliot had described Carlyle's faults; his partial judgments of character and his attacks on men of the present in biased comparison with men of the past. She expressed her amusement at his love of the concrete that made him prefer any proper name to an abstraction and named this habit 'mere Carlylian rhetoric'. She also pointed to his genius:

> that piercing insight, which every now and then flashes to the depths of things, and alternating as it does with the most obstinate one-sidedness, makes Carlyle a wonderful paradox of wisdom and wilfulness; ... that awful sense of the mystery of existence which continually checks and chastens the denunciations of the Teufelsdrockh ... the rich humour, the keen satire, and the tremendous word-missiles which Carlyle hurls about as Milton's angels hurl the rocks.

George Eliot's opinion of Carlyle's later writing was less enthusiastic. Writing to Frederic Harrison, 20 June 1873, she spoke of the 'disease of Carlyle's later writing', a '"rimbobo" of rhetoric (like the singing into big jars to make demon-music in an opera)'.[3]

In her review of the third volume of Modern Painters, 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856,[4] George Eliot discussed Ruskin's claim that his constant study of Carlyle had impressed itself on his language as on his thought. She wrote,

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1 Carlyle's French Revolution was published in 1837, Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches in 1845.
2 'Belles Lettres', July 1855, pp. 289-90.
3 Haight, V. 422.
4 pp. 625-33.

> In the point of view from which he looks at a subject, in the correctness of his descriptions, and in a certain rough flavour of humour, he constantly reminds us of Carlyle, but in the mere tissue of his style, scarcely ever.

She considered that Ruskin's style was due far more to innate faculty than to any modifying influences and she judged him as of the highest rank of English stylists. She declared,

> the vigour and splendour of his eloquence are not more remarkable than its precision, and the delicate truthfulness of his epithets.

She added that the 'fine largo' of his sentences reminded her of De Quincey, but she considered that he also resembled De Quincey in his less admirable trait of digressiveness.

But George Eliot's long notice of Modern Painters in this article and her review of the fourth volume in 'Belles Lettres and Art', July 1856,[1] is more concerned with pointing to the merits of Ruskin's work than with his faults, and quotations occupy the major part of the space allotted to him in each of these articles. She admitted that both volumes offered a fresh text to antagonistic critics, that his fourth volume showed, together with a deep love for the noble and beautiful, a 'somewhat excessive contempt or hatred for what the writer holds to be the reverse of the noble and beautiful'. In her introduction to the third volume George Eliot agreed that Ruskin was often arrogant and absurd, that he frequently over-valued one painter and under-valued another, that he sometimes glided from a just argument to a fallacious one. But, she maintained, these

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1 pp. 274-8.

faults were of small account when considered in the light of his great gifts of truth and eloquence. Discussing the contents of this book, she noted the appropriateness of the subordinate title, 'Of Many Things', and declared that no special artistic knowledge was necessary in order to enjoy its many excellences or to profit by its suggestions. She wrote,

> Everyone who cares about nature, or poetry, or the story of human development - every one who has a tinge of literature, or philosophy, will find something that is for him and that will "gravitate to him" in this volume.

She explained that since the second volume of Modern Painters appeared Ruskin had devoted ten years of loving study to 'his great subject - the principles of art; which like all other great subjects, carries the student into many fields'. She continued,

> And when a writer like Mr. Ruskin brings these varied studies to bear on one great purpose, when he has to trace their common relation to a grand phase of human activity, it is obvious that he will have a great deal to say which is of interest and importance to others besides painters.

Ruskin taught a truth of 'infinite value', the truth of 'realism', which George Eliot defined as:

> the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality.

She maintained 'the thorough acceptance of this doctrine would remould our lives', and a writer who preached its application to any one department of human activity and

taught it with the power and eloquence of Ruskin was a prophet for his time. She continued,

> It is not enough simply to teach truth; that may be done, as we all know, to empty walls and within the covers of unsaleable books; we want it to be so taught as to compel men's sympathy. Very correct singing of very fine music will avail little without a voice that can thrill the audience and take possession of their souls. Now, Mr. Ruskin has a voice, and one of such power, that whatever error he may mix with his truth, he will make more converts to the truth than less erring advocates who are hoarse and feeble.

George Eliot's long quotations from this book form a brief summary of Ruskin's views of the four chief characteristics of great artists: the choice of noble subject that will embrace the widest interests and the most profound passions; the love of beauty and the tendency to introduce into the subject as much beauty as is consistent with truth; sincerity, that is the introduction of the largest quantity of truth in the most perfect possible harmony, and, finally, the fullest use of invention or imaginative power. George Eliot then explained Ruskin's view of the False ideal in art, the obscuring of Truth by false show of beauty or decoration. She quoted at length from the section on 'Classical Landscape' which she named the 'most delightful and suggestive chapters in the volume', and discussing the writer's feeling for landscape, she applauded Ruskin's selection of Scott as the typical poet and greatest man of his age. She agreed that creative writing such as that of Scott was of greater value than the sentimental

literature to be found in Byron or Tennyson.

George Eliot's review ended with an expression of regret at having to leave this 'seductive book', and she added that if the matter had interested her less she would have laid more stress on the beautiful illustrations contained in it. [1]

George Eliot's letters give further evidence of her high regard for Ruskin's writings. In a letter to Sara Hennell, 17 January 1858, she wrote,

> I don't know whether you look out for Ruskin's books whenever they appear. His little book on the Political Economy of Art contains some magnificent passages, mixed up with stupendous specimens of arrogant absurdity on some economical points. But I venerate him as one of the great Teachers of the day - his absurdities on practical points do no harm, but the grand doctrines of truth and sincerity in art, and the nobleness and

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1 Throughout George Eliot's reviews and review articles there is frequent appraisal of the appearance of a book. In a letter to John Blackwood, 16 June 1874, she discussed the format of The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems, expressed her pleasure in the new luxury edition to be published and wrote, 'I confess to the weakness of being affected by paper and type in something of the same subtle way as I am affected by the odour of a room'. (Haight, VI. 57). So in her reviews she praised the neat, well-bound book or the handy pocket-edition of a poet or classic writer and indicated the badly finished books from Germany. At first she disliked the proposed illustrated edition of her novels, but wrote to Blackwood, 21 March 1867, 'When I remember my own childish happiness in a frightfully illustrated copy of The Vicar of Wakefield, I can believe that illustrations may be a great good relatively, and that my own present liking has no weight in the question.' (Haight, IV. 354).

> solemnity of our human life, which he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet, must be stirring up young minds in a promising way. ... The two last volumes of Modern Painters contain, I think, some of the finest writing of this age. He is strongly akin to the sublimest part of Wordsworth. 1

While in Venice with J.W.Cross in 1880, George Eliot was reading St. Mark's Rest (1877-9) and she wrote to C.L.Lewes, 9 June, that they were using his knowledge of Venice

> gratefully and shutting our ears to his wrathful innuendoes against the whole modern world. 2

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1 Haight, 11. 422-3. The Political Economy of Art was published in 1858.
2 Haight, VII. 294-5.

CONCLUSION.

George Eliot wrote to Charles Bray, 5 July 1859,

> I can't tell you how much melancholy it causes me that people are, for the most part, so incapable of comprehending the state of mind which cares for that which is essentially human in all forms of belief, and desires to exhibit it under all forms with loving truthfulness. Freethinkers are scarcely wider than the orthodox in this matter - they all want to see themselves and their own opinions held up as the true and the lovely. On the same ground that an idle woman with flirtations and flounces likes to read a French novel because she can imagine herself the heroine, grave people, with opinions, like the most admirable character in a novel to be their mouth-piece. If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally.
>
> I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures. 1

This opinion that the function of the artist was to enlarge men's sympathies is to be found in all George Eliot's critical writings. It is made explicit in the discussion of the necessity for realism in Art in the review article 'The Natural History of German Life.',[2] and in the digression in Adam Bede.[3] In the review of the third volume of Ruskin's Modern Painters, George Eliot wrote,

> The fundamental principles of all just thought and beautiful action or creation are the same, and in making clear to ourselves what is best and noblest in art, we are making clear to ourselves what is best and noblest in morals; in learning how to estimate the artistic products of a particular age according to

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1 Haight, III. 111.
2 Westminster Review (July 1856), pp. 51-79. See above, pp. 22-6.
3 Adam Bede, Chapter xvii.

> the mental attitude and external life of that age, we are widening our sympathy and deepening the basis of our tolerance and charity. [1]

It was because George Eliot found this moral attitude to art in Ruskin's writings that she so admired his work. Walter Pater's Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873), on the other hand, aroused her anger, with its demand for the principle of 'Art for Art's sake'. She wrote to John Blackwood, 5 November 1873, describing the book as 'quite poisonous in its false principles of criticism and false conceptions of life.' [2] W. H. Mallock's The New Republic (1877) received similar condemnation from George Eliot because Mallock had no solid contribution of his own to make but ridiculed 'the men who are most prominent in serious effort to make such contribution'.[3] This concern for the moral purpose of literature is also to be seen in her judgment on such writers as the poets Young and Byron and on such works as Tennyson's Maud and Conybeare's Perversion. Trollope and Matthew Arnold, on the other hand, are commended for their wholesome-mindedness and refined moral sense.

But if for George Eliot art is fundamentally moral in its purpose, she did not consider it the prime duty of the writer to teach. His task was rather to stimulate men's minds into fresh activity; not to preach doctrines but to

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1 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, p. 626.
2 Haight, V. 455.
3 See a letter to Mrs. F. Ponsonby, 17 Oct. 1877; (Haight, VI. 406).

arouse men from apathy to seek for themselves the ultimate truths of life. The poet, the novelist, the great prose writer who had the power to direct men's lives by awakening their sympathies, by broadening their minds and enlarging their knowledge, achieved this end not so much by the matter as by the manner of his writing. So George Eliot valued those writers on specialist studies who, by their eloquence, could interest the general reader in new fields of thought and who did not satiate that interest but rather encouraged the reader to further study. The supreme gift of the writer, then, was his power to make himself heard, his ability to stir his readers by his eloquence. This power she acknowledged wherever she found it, in the writings of Rousseau, of George Sand, of J. H. and F. W. Newman, of Carlyle, of Ruskin and in J. A. Froude's Nemesis of Faith. Its influence was such that it cancelled out all the faults of a writer. His dogmatism, his false judgments and errors, his arrogance and his exaggerations were as nothing beside the great fact of the spirit which pervaded his writings and transfused itself into men's souls, vitalising them with its energy.[1] So also the crowning gift of the poet was his power 'to witch the world with noble song'.[2] Wordsworth, Tennyson, Mrs. Browning, Goethe and Heine had this magic in their poetry; in Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning it was less

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1 See her review of J. A. Froude's Nemesis of Faith, above, p. 50.
2 See the introduction to the quarter's selection of minor poets, 'Art and Belles Lettres', April 1856, p. 647.

distinctly felt and George Eliot's praise was consequently modified.

It would at first appear that George Eliot's demand for eloquence as the supreme gift of the writer was at odds with her attitude to the high moral purpose of art. But it becomes apparent that for George Eliot the writer's eloquence and power to sing must be allied with his moral purpose. She pointed to the lack of moral balance apparent in all the writings of Heine that made his most exquisite and spontaneous lyrics inferior to those of Goethe. The basic fault of Gerald Massey's poetry was the absence of that 'fulness of thought and feeling' to be found in Mrs. Browning's Aurora Leigh. The highest order of poet was he who received the veil of poetry from the hand of Truth.[1] In all great writing as in great art the writer's power to persuade men's minds is inseparable from his nobleness of soul and purpose. This power cannot be achieved by industry or mere ability; it is the innate quality of genius.

But George Eliot also realised that talent and industry were among the essentials necessary to the production of good writing. She demanded always in every kind of work, whether of scholarship, translation or creative writing, care, conscientiousness, thoroughness and the full use of all the writer's faculties, knowledge and experience. These qualities were also part of the writer's moral attitude to

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1 See her review of Maud, and Other Poems, above, p.104.

his work; they were the result of his integrity of purpose, his sincerity. In a letter to Robert Lytton, 8 May 1869, she declared, 'in authorship I hold carelessness to be a mortal sin.' [1] Discussing the question of the translation of her own novels in a letter to Barbara Bodichon, 17 June 1867, she expressed a repugnance to being 'ill-translated' for the sake of financial reward and wrote,

> on quite impersonal grounds I object to the encouragement of poor literary work. Poor writing is one of the things that ought never to be done and that every body is morally the worse for. [2]

For this reason George Eliot had castigated [3] Lord Brougham's Lives of Men of Letters of the Time of George III, and C. W. Fullom's History of Woman.

She was particularly angered by pretentiousness on the part of an author. She ridiculed the presumptuous claims made in their prefaces by such writers as Fullom and the poets Duganne and Thomas Leigh, and poured scorn on the false erudition and grandiloquence of the 'silly novels by lady novelists'. Facile writers were similarly condemned as evidenced in her reviews of Gerald Massey's Craigbrook Castle and Holme Lee's Kathie Brande. On the other hand, writers like Henry Sewell Stokes, in his Echoes of the War, and Other Poems, and Berthold Auerbach were commended by George Eliot because their work gave evidence of honest feeling and the full use of abilities however small. For,

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1 Haight, V. 33.
2 Haight, IV. 367.
3 See a letter to Sara Hennell, 23 June 1855; (Haight, II. 205).

although George Eliot frequently pointed to a writer whose virtues lay in the negation of such faults as affectation and pretentiousness, it is clear that a creative artist was to be valued for his positive excellencies rather than for his freedom from faults. Thus, although George Eliot deplored the quantity of inferior writing which was published every year, realising that it must inevitably lower the standards of good work, she considered it her duty as a critic to accept and acknowledge the good in minor writings. This is implicit in her praise of the small excellencies of originality of plot, situation or scene, of sympathetic and observant characterisation and of vivid and realistic representation in her reviews of minor novelists. She indicated the 'remarkable promise' of Erlesmere, the originality of the plot of Young Singleton and found pleasure in the 'manly humour' of Double and Quits. She admitted the 'remarkable endowment of fancy' shown in Gerald Massey's poems.

This continued search for the good in art resulted in a generosity that, linked as it is with a strict impartiality and sensitivity to the writer's purpose, is the distinctive quality in all George Eliot's criticism. Because of it she was unable to condemn Maud without first pointing to Tennyson's great poetic achievements. She was not blinded by the obvious faults of the 'spasmodics' to the considerable genius exhibited in Dobell's England in Time

of War. She refused to examine Dred in the light of Uncle Tom's Cabin. She would not dwell on the faults of Westward Ho!, It is Never Too Late to Mend and Aurora Leigh but preferred to lay stress on the genius of their authors. She could find pleasure in Meredith's Arabian fantasy The Shaving of Shagpat, in Wilkie Collin's mystery stories and in Charlotte Chanter's descriptions of the Ferny Combes of Devonshire.

There is a striking similarity between the critical opinions of George Eliot and G.H.Lewes. In 'A Word to Young Authors on Their True Position', Hood's Magazine and Comic Miscellany, April 1845,[1] Lewes expressed his belief in the high moral function of the writer, the view that it was the purpose of a writer to stimulate his readers to think for themselves, and he stressed the necessity for sincerity and conscientiousness in all writings. George Eliot's views of the special contribution to be made by women in literature found in her articles 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé', in 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' and in her review of Aurora Leigh are similar to those expressed by Lewes in 'The Lady Novelists', Westminster Review, July 1852.[2] George Eliot's acute criticism of Dickens's novels is echoed and enlarged by Lewes in his article, 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism', Fortnightly Review, February 1872.[3] Again in

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1 pp. 366 - 376.
2 pp. 129 - 141.
3 pp. 141 - 154.

the Principles of Success in Literature [1] Lewes quoted from George Eliot's essay 'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young'. This similarity of opinion is sufficiently accounted for by the fact that for several years George Eliot and G.H.Lewes read and reviewed the same books. From the beginning of their life together they read aloud together and they had always a mutual interest in scientific knowledge and philosophy. There is no ground of evidence for the belief that George Eliot was indebted to Lewes for her critical opinions.[2] Her views are apparent in the mature judgments of literature in her earliest letters. Her reviews in the Coventry Herald and her early work in the Westminster Review and the Leader reveal critical method and criteria which remained constant throughout her period as a literary critic. George Eliot belonged to no school of criticism. Her critical criteria: her belief that the function of the artist was to enlarge man's knowledge and his sympathy for his fellows, her preference for subjects that dealt with the lives of ordinary men and women, her insistence on the necessity for realism in the treatment of such subjects, her demand for sincerity and integrity of purpose and for careful, conscientious execution in all writings, her view that the greatest gift of a writer was

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1 This series of articles from the Fortnightly Review (1865) was reprinted in 1898.

2 See Alice R. Kaminsky 'George Eliot, G.H. Lewes and the Novel', P.L.M.A. (Dec. 1855), pp. 997-1013.

his power of eloquence, all these judgments are in tune with the opinions on art and morality current in her age. They are the result of a wide, sensitive and acute study of European literature and thought, past and contemporary. They embrace the views of Goethe, of Lessing, of Coleridge, of Ruskin, but they remain completely individual for they are linked with the personal qualities of impartiality, sincerity, generosity and sensitivity to the writer's purpose which are the distinctive mark of all George Eliot's literary criticism.

APPENDIX

A List of Articles Contributed by George Eliot to Periodicals.

(Many of the books reviewed by George Eliot were of editions and translations subsequent to the first edition. Date and place of original publication of such books are included, in brackets. Unless otherwise stated all books were published in London.)

1 Blackwood's Magazine

January 1868
pp. 1-11 — 'An Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt.'

2 Coventry Herald and Observer

30 October 1846 — C. Cock's translation, 1846, of:

Quinet, Edgar
Christianity in its various Aspects from the Birth of Christ to the French Revolution. (Paris, 1845).

Michelet, Jules
Priests, Women, and Families. (Paris, 1845).

Quinet, E. & Michelet, J.
The Jesuits (Paris, 1843).

13 November 1846 [1] — à Becket, G.A.
The Comic History of England. Vols. I, II, III, and IV. 1846.

4 December 1846 — 'Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric'. - 'Introductory.'

15 January 1847 — 'How to Avoid Disappointment.'

5 February 1847 — 'The Wisdom of the Child.'

12 February 1847 — 'A Little Fable with a Great Moral.'

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1 G.S.Haight gives the date of this review as 4 Nov. 1846; (Haight, 1. 221).

19 February 1847 'Hints on Snubbing.'

26 February 1847 'Vice and Sausages.' [1]

16 March 1849 Froude, J.A.
Nemesis of Faith. 1849.

3 Fortnightly Review

15 May 1865
pp. 43-55 'The Influence of Rationalism.'
Lecky, W.E.H. [2]
History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe. 2 vols. 1865.

pp. 124-5 in 'Notices of New Books.'
Jones, Owen [2]
The Grammar of Ornament. new edition. 1865. (1856).

4 Fraser's Magazine

June 1855
pp. 699-706 'Three Months in Weimar.'

July 1855
pp. 48-68 'Liszt, Wagner and Weimar.'

5 The Leader [3]

20 September 1851
pp. 897-9 'The Creed of Christendom.'
Greg, W. Rathbone
The Creed of Christendom: its Foundation and Superstructure. 1851.

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1 This article appears as a comment on local events and not in the literary column. It is not included in the Early Essays of George Eliot (1919).
2 Both these reviews were signed George Eliot.
3 George Eliot also contributed reviews to the Leader during the weeks from 15 April to 20 May 1854 while G.H.Lewes was ill. There is no evidence of the details of these reviews and identification is difficult because George Eliot is clearly adapting her style to suit with that of G.H.Lewes.

28 October 1854 [1]
pp. 1027-8

'The Romantic School of Music. Liszt on Meyerbeer. Wagner.'

17 March 1855
pp. 257-8

'The Art of the Ancients.'

Stahr, Adolf
Torso. Kunst, Künstler, und Kuntswerke der Alten. In 11 Parts. Part 1.
Brunswick, 1854, 1855.

19 May 1855
pp. 474-5

'Westward Ho!'

Kingsley, Charles
Westward Ho! or, the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight, of Burrough in the county of Devon, in the reign of Her Most Glorious Majesty Queen Elizabeth. 3 vols. Cambridge, 1855.

16 June 1855
pp. 578-9

'Menander and the Greek Comedy.'

Guizot, M. Guillaume
Ménandre: Etude Historique et Littéraire sur la Comédie et la Société Grecques.
Paris, 1855.

7 July 1855
pp. 652-3

'Lord Brougham's Literature.'

Brougham, Henry, Lord
Lives of Men of Letters of the Time of George III. Vol. II of Works. 1855-60.
(? Lives of Men of Letters and Science; who Flourished in the Time of George III.
2 vols. 1845).

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1 This article is dated October 1, Weimar.

28 July 1855
pp. 723-4

'The Future of German Philosophy.'

Gruppe, O.F.
Gegenwart und Zukunft der Philosophie in Deutschland.
Berlin, 1855.

4 August 1855 [1]
p. 750

'Life and Opinions of Milton.'

Keightley, Thomas
An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton: with an Introduction to Paradise Lost.
1855.

25 August 1855
pp. 820-1

'Love in the Drama.'

Saint-Marc Girardin
Cours de Littérature Dramatique ou l'Usage des Passions dans le Drame. Vol. III. Paris, 1855.

1 September 1855
pp. 843-4

'Heine's Poems.'

Leland, Charles
Pictures of Travels. Translated from the German of Henry Heine.
1855.

15 September 1855
p. 892

'Michelet on the Reformation.'

Michelet, Jules
La Réforme
(Histoire de France. Vol. V.
Paris, 1855). [2]

22 September 1855
pp. 917-8

'German Mythology and Legend.'

Menzel, Wolfgang
Odin. Stuttgart, 1855.

Panzer, F.
Bayerische Sagen und Bräuche.
(?) [3]

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1 G.S.Haight gives the date of this review as 1 Aug. 1855; (Haight, VII. 472).
2 I have been unable to trace the edition of this book reviewed by George Eliot. It was published by David Nutt.
3 I have been unable to trace this book.

13 October 1855
pp. 988-9

'Margeret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft.'

Ossoli, Margeret Fuller
Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers relating to the Sphere, Condition and Duties of Woman. 1855
(Boston, 1845).

Wollstonecraft, Mary
Rights of Women. 1792.

20 October 1855
pp. 1014-5

'Translations and Translators.'

Meiklejohn, J.M.D.
Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, translated. 1856.

Burt, Mary Anne
Specimens of the Choicest Lyrical Productions of the Most Celebrated German Poets, translated.
second edition, 1856. (1855).

27 October 1855
pp. 1034-5

'Thomas Carlyle.'

Ballantyne, Thomas
Passages selected from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle. With a Biographical Memoir. 1855.

3 November 1855
pp. 1058-61

'Life of Goethe.'

Lewes, G.H.
Life and Works of Goethe: with sketches of his age and contemporaries.
2 vols. 1855.

5 January 1856
pp. 15-17

'The Shaving of Shagpat.'

Meredith, George
The Shaving of Shagpat. An Arabian Entertainment. 1855.

5 January 1856
p. 19

'Rachel Gray.'

Kavanagh, Julia
Rachel Gray. A Tale Founded on Fact. 1856.

12 January 1856
pp. 41-2

'Introduction to Genesis.'

Von Bohlen
Introduction to the Book of Genesis, with a Commentary on the Opening Portion. From the German. Edited by J. Heywood. 2 vols. 1856.

9 February 1856
p. 140

'History of German Protestantism.'

Kahnis
Internal History of German Protestantism since the Middle of the Last Century. translated from the German by Rev. Theodore Meyer. Edinburgh, 1856.

1 March 1856
p. 210

'The Poets and Poetry of America.'

Griswold, Rufus Wilmot
The Poets and Poetry of America. 1856.

22 March 1856
pp. 279-80

'Torso.'

Stahr, Adolf
Torso. Kunst, Künstler, und Kuntswerke der Alten.
In II parts. Part II. [1]
Brunswick, 1854, 1855.

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1 G. S. Haight does not include this review in his list of Leader reviews; (Haight, VII. 472). But her journal for 1856 lists two reviews of this book; one is specified as written for the Saturday Review, the other is paid at the Leader rate of one guinea; (Haight, VII. 358). Internal evidence confirms it.

29 March 1856
p. 306

'The Antigone and its Moral.'

The Antigone of Sophocles. Text, with short English Notes for the use of schools. 1855.

5 April 1856
pp. 331-2

'Church History of the Nineteenth Century.'

Gieseler.
Kirchengeschicte der neusten Zeit, von 1814 bis auf die Gegenwart. Edited by Dr. Redepenning. 1856.

12 April 1856
pp. 352-3

'The Court of Austria.'

Vehse, Eduard
Memoirs of the Court of Austria. Aristocracy and Diplomacy of Austria.
Translated by Franz Demmler.
2 vols. 1856. (Hamburg, 1851-3).

19 April 1856
pp. 375-6

'Who Wrote the Waverley Novels.'

W.F.J. (Fitzpatrick)
Who Wrote the Waverley Novels? Being an Investigation into Certain Mysterious Circumstances attending their Production; and an Inquiry into the Literary Aid which Sir Walter Scott may have received from many Persons. 1856.

26 April 1856
pp. 401-2

'Story of a Bluebottle.'

Gozlan, Léon
La Folle du Logis. (Paris, 1855).

17 May 1856
p. 475

'Margeret Fuller's Letters From Italy.'

Ossoli, Margeret Fuller
At Home and Abroad; or, Things and Thoughts in America and Europe. 1856.

19 July 1856
p. 691

'A Tragic Story.'

Auerbach, Berthold
Schatzkästlein de Gevattersmann. 1856.
(Stuttgart and Augsberg, 1856).

2 August 1856
pp. 735-6

'The Lover's Seat.'

Digby, Henry Kenelm
The Lover's Seat. Kathemérina or Common Things in Relation to Beauty, Virtue, and Truth.
2 vols. 1856.

2 August 1856
pp. 737-8

'Sight-Seeing in Germany and the Tyrol.'

Forbes, Sir John
Sight-seeing in Germany and the Tyrol, in the autumn of 1855.
1856. 1

16 August 1856
p. 787

'Ferny Combes.'

Chanter, Charlotte
Ferny Combes: a Ramble after Ferns in the Glens and Valleys of Dartmoor. 1856.

23 August 1856
pp. 811-2

'Recollections of Heine.'

Meissner, Alfred
Heinrich Heine. Erinnerungen. 1856.
(Hamburg, 1856).

30 August 1856
p. 835

'Felice Orsini.'

White, J. Meriton
The Austrian Dungeons in Italy: a Narrative of Fifteen Months Imprisonment and Final Escape from the Fortress of S. Giorgio. By Felice Orsini. Translated from unpublished Ms. 1856.

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1. See below, p.238, G.S.Haight lists this article under Saturday Review.

6 Pall Mall Gazette.

7 March 1865 p. 9	'A Word for the Germans.'
17 March 1865 pp. 10-11	'Servants' Logic.'
3 April 1865 pp. 2-3	'Futile Falsehoods.' signed Sacharissa.
13 May 1865 p.4	'Modern Housekeeping.' signed Sacharissa.

7 Saturday Review [1]

26 April 1856 pp. 523-4	'Heine's Book of Songs.' Wallis, John E. Heinrich Heine's Book of Songs - A Translation. 1856.

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1 G.S.Haight has attributed to George Eliot the article 'Sight-seeing in Germany and the Tyrol', 6 Sept. 1856, pp. 424-5; (Haight, II. 227). George Eliot's journal records the sum of one guinea received for this article, (Haight, VII. 359). This was the customary rate of pay for the Leader articles, whereas George Eliot received two guineas for each of the other articles for the Saturday Review, which are listed under receipts for Jan. - June 1856 and specified as written for the Saturday Review. Dating would also suggest that the Forbes review, written in the second part of the year belongs to the Leader, 2 Aug. 1856, rather than to the series written for the Saturday Review in April and May.

Merle M. Bevington has attributed other reviews to George Eliot in the Saturday Review on the grounds that she was known to have contributed some reviews to this periodical and the authors of all other reviews for this period have been identified. They are: 'A Terrible Story', 8 March 1856, a review of Gerard de Nerval's La Bohême Galante; 'A True Woman.', 22 March 1856, a review of A. de Goudrecourt's Une Vrai Femme; and, 3 May 1856, Edwin Arnold's Griselda and Other Poems. - Bevington, The Saturday Review. 1855-1868 (1941).

17 May 1856
pp. 69-70

'Pictures of Life in French Novels.'

Murger, Henry
Le Dernier Rendezvous. La Résurrection de Lazare.
(Paris, 1856).

31 May 1856
pp. 109-110

'The Art and Artists of Greece.'

Stahr, Adolf
Torso. Kunst, Künstler, und Kuntswerke der Alten. In II Parts.
Part II. Brunswick, 1855.

8 Westminster Review

A Review Articles

January 1851
pp. 353-68

Mackay, R.W.

The Progress of the Intellect, as exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews. 1850.

January 1852
pp. 247-251

in 'Contemporary Literature of England.'

Carlyle, Thomas
The Life of John Sterling. 1851.[1]

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1 Other reviews attributed to George Eliot during this period are: in 'Contemporary Literature of America', April 1852, Memoirs of Margeret Fuller by R.W. Emerson, W.H.Canning and others, 3 vols. 1852. Nearly all her biographers attribute this review to George Eliot and evidence of style and references to Carlyle's Life of Sterling would support the claims.

'The Lady Novelists', July 1852, now known to be by G.H.Lewes.

In 'Contemporary Literature of America', Oct. 1852, Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance. See Rust, 'The Art of Fiction in George Eliot's Reviews', R.E.S. (April 1856), pp. 164-72. Internal evidence of style, method and opinions which contradict George Eliot's private opinion of Hawthorne would refute this claim. See above, pp. 43-44.

In an article 'The Progress of Fiction as an Art', Oct. 1853, a review of Charles Kingsley's Hypatia (1853). See Haight, II. 64.

October 1854
pp. 448-73

'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé.'

Cousin, Victor
Madame de Sablé. Études sur les Femmes illustrés et la Société du XVLLe siècle. Paris, 1854.

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Portraits des Femmes. Paris, 1852.

Michelet, Jules
Les Femmes de la Revolution. Paris, 1854.

April 1855
pp. 303-35

'Memoirs of the Court of Austria.'

Vehse, Eduard
Geschicte des östreichischen Hofs unds Adels und der östreichischen Diplomatie.
II vols. Hamburg, 1851-3.

October 1855
pp. 436-62

'Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming.'

Cumming, Rev. John D.D.

The Church Before the Flood. 1853
Occasional Discourses. 2 vols. 1850.
Signs of the Times; or Present, Past and Future. 1854.
The Finger of God. 1853.
Is Christianity from God? 1847.
Acopalyptic Sketches, or, Lectures on the Book of the Revelation.
First Series 1849.
Second Series 1849.
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January 1856
pp. 1-33

'German Wit: Heinrich Heine.'

Heinrich Heine's Sämmtliche Werke.
Philadelphia, 1855.

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Hamburg, 1854.

July 1856
pp. 51-79

'The Natural History of German Life.'

Riehl, W.H.
Die Bürgerliche Gesellschaft. 1855.
Land und Leute. vol. III. 1856.

October 1856
pp. 442-61

'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists.'

(Chatterton, Lady Henrietta)
Compensation, a Story of Real Life Thirty Years Ago. 2 vols. 1856.

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Rank and Beauty, or the Young Baroness. 1856.

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Laura Gay. 2 vols. 1856.

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The Enigma: a Leaf from the Chronicles of Wolchorley House. 1856.

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The Old Grey Church. 3 vols. 1856.

(Strickland, J.M.)
Adonijah, a Tale of the Jewish Dispersion. 1856.

January 1857
pp. 1-42

'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young.'

Young's Works. 1767.
Johnson's Lives of the Poets. Edited by Peter Cunningham. 1854.
'Life of Edward Young. L.L. D. by Dr. Doran. Prefixed to Night Thoughts. 1853.
Gentleman's Magazine, 1782. (this volume contains letters, notes and anecdotes of Young.)
Nichol's Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century. (6 vols. 1812), Vol. 1.
Spence's Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men. Arranged with Notes by the Late Edmund Malone (1820).

Westminster Review

B 'Belles Lettres', etc.

July 1855
pp. 288-307

'Belles Lettres.'
23 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

Kingsley, Charles
Westward Ho! or, the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight, of Burrough in the county of Devon, in the reign of Her Most Glorious Majesty Queen Elizabeth.
3 vols. Cambridge, 1855.

Jewsbury, Geraldine
Constance Herbert. 3 vols. 1855.

Holme Lee, (pseud. of Harriet Parr)
Thorney Hall: a Story of an Old Family. 1855.

(Adams, Francis Colburn)
Our World, or the Democrat's Rule. by Justia, a Know nothing. 2 vols. 1855.

(?)
Married Women, by the author of Broomhill. 3 vols. 1855.

Souvestre, Emile
Brittany and La Vendée, translated with a Life and Literary Character of Emile Souvestre. Edinburgh, 1855.

About, Edmond
Tolla. Paris, 1855.

Poetry

Arnold, Matthew
Poems. Second Series. 1855.

Morgan, Arthur M.
Poems. 1855.

Ball, William
The Transcript, and Other Poems. 1855.

Stokes, Henry Sewell
Echoes of the War, and Other Poems. 1855.

Chaucer
Poetical Works. Edited by Robert Bell. Vols. I-IV. 1855.

Literary Criticism

Guizet, M. Guillaume
Ménandre: Etude Historique et Littéraire sur la Comédie et la Société Grecques.
Paris, 1855.

Other Works

Fullom, C.W.
The History of Woman, and Her Connexion with Religion, Civilization, and Domestic Manners, from the Earliest Periods. 1855.

Douglas, James of Clavers
Passing Thoughts. Edinburgh, 1855.

October 1855
pp. 596-615

'Belles Lettres.'
18 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

Owen, Ashford
A Lost Love. 1855.

Shirley Brooks
Aspen Court. A Story of Our Own Time.
3 vols. 1855.
(republished from Bentley's Miscellany, 1853-4).

Conscience, Hendrick
The Lion of Flanders. A Historical Romance. 1855.
Veva; or the War of the Peasants. 1855.
The Curse of the Village, and The Happiness of Being Rich. 1855.

Poetry

Tennyson, Alfred
Maud, and Other Poems. 1855.

Literary Criticism

Keightley, John
An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton: with an Introduction to Paradise Lost. 1855.

Wilson, John
Noctes Ambrosianae. Vol. 1.
Edinburgh, 1855.

Saint-Marc Girardin
Cours de Littérature Dramatique ou de l'Usage des Passions dans le Drame.
Vol. III. Paris, 1855.

Heinrich, G.A.
Le Parcival de Wolfram d'Eschenbach et la Légende du Saint- Graal. Etude sur la Littérature du Moyen Age.
Paris, 1855.

January 1856
pp. 290-312

'Belles Lettres.'
27 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

(John Ruffini)
Doctor Antonio, a Tale. Edinburgh,1855.

Holme Lee, (pseud. of Harriet Parr)
Gilbert Massenger. 1855.

(Sheppard, E.S.)
My First Season, by Beatrice Reynolds, edited by the author of Counterparts. 1855.

About, Edmond
Tolla. translated by L.C.C.
Edinburgh, 1855.

Poetry

Browning, Robert
Men and Women. 2 vols. 1855.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth
The Song of Hiawatha. 1855.

Duganne, Augustine
Poetical Works. Philadelphia, 1856.

Ogilvy, Mrs. D.
Poems of Ten Years. 1856.

Frothingham, N.L.
Metrical Pieces, Translated and Original. Boston, 1855.

Mitchell, Nicholas
The Poetry of the Creation, in seven parts. 1855.

Blew, William
Agamemnon the King. From the Greek of Aeschylus. 1855.

Literary Criticism

Wilson, John
Noctes Ambrosianae. Vol. II.
Edinburgh, 1855.

Long, George
M. Tullii Ciceronis Orationes,
with a Commentary by George Long.
Vol. II. 1855.

Essays

Brougham, Henry, Lord
Contributions to the Edinburgh
Review. 3 Vols.

Thoreau, Henry David
Walden, or, Life in the Woods
Boston, 1854.

Art

About, Edmond
Voyages à Travers l'Exposition
des Beaux-Artes. Paris, 1855.

Rio, A.F.
Léonard de Vinci et son Ecole.
Paris, 1855.

April 1856
pp. 625-50

'Art and Belles Lettres.'
29 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

Meredith, George
The Shaving of Shagpat. An Arabian Entertainment. 1855.

Collins, Wilkie
After Dark. 2 vols. 1856.
(the stories in these volumes first appeared in Household Words, 1853-5).

Kingsley, Charles
The Heroes, or Greek Fairy Tales for my Children. Cambridge, 1856.

de Nerval, Gerard
La Bohême Gálante. Paris, 1855.

Poetry

Whitman, Walt
Leaves of Grass. 1856.
(Philadelphia, 1856).

Leigh, Thomas
Garlands of Verse. 1856.

Cassels, W.R.
Poems. 1856

Hamerton, Philip Gilbert
The Isles of Loch Awe, and Other Poems of my Youth. Edinburgh, 1855.

Ballantyne, James
Poems. Edinburgh, 1856.

Aird, Thomas
Poetical Works. a new edition.
Edinburgh, 1856.

Reade, Edmund
Man in Paradise. A Poem in six books, with lyrical poems. 1856.

Lynch, Thomas Toke
The Rivulet, a contribution to sacred song.
second edition 1856. (1855).

Jones, Ernest
The Emperor's Vigil and the Waves and the War. 1856.

Read, Thomas Buchanan
The House of the Sea. 1856.

Literary Criticism and Translation

Wilson, John
Noctes Ambrosianae. Vol. III.
Edinburgh, 1856.

Newman, F.W.
The Iliad of Homer, a translation.
1856.

Art

Ruskin, John
Modern Painters. Vol. III. 1856.

Stahr, Adolf
Torso, Kunst, Künstler, und Kuntswerke der Alten.
In II Parts. Part II. 1856.
(Brunswick, 1855).

Other Works

de Stendhal. (Henri Beyle)
de l'Amour. 1856. (Paris, 1822)

Richardson, David Lester
Flowers and Flower-gardens.
Calcutta, 1855.

July 1856
pp. 257-78

'Belles Lettres and Art.'
19 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

(W.J.Conybeare)
Perversion; or the Causes and Consequences of Infidelity. A Tale for the Times.
3 vols. 1856.

(Ellen Wallace).
Beyminstre. 3 vols. 1856.

(?)
Maurice Elvington; or, One out of Suits with Fortune. An Autobiography. Edited by Wilfred East.
3 vols. 1856.

Poetry

Hugo, Victor
Les Contemplations. Brussels, 1856.

Holdreth, Lionel
Shadows of the Past. 1856.

Gerard, G.
Grace and Remembrance. 1856.

Phillipson, Caroline Gifford
Lonely Hours. 1856.

Peel, Edmund
Poetical Works. new edition. 1856.

Parkes, Bessie Rayner
Gabriel. 1856.

Literary Criticism, biography and translation.

Trench, R.C.
Life's a Dream. The Great Theatre of the World. From the Spanish of Calderon. With an Essay on his Life and Genius. 1856.

Masson, David
Essays Biographical and Critical, chiefly on English Poets.
Cambridge, 1856.

Cousin, Victor
Madame de Hautefort et Madame de Chevreuse: Études sur les Femmes Illustrés du XVII^{e} siècle.
Paris, 1856.

Thiele, Just Mathias
Thorwaldsen's Leben. Vol. II.
Leipzig, 1856.

Art

Ruskin, John
Modern Painters. Vol. IV. 1856.

Other Works

Jones, W.B. and Freeman, E.A.
The History and Antiquities of St. David's.
1856.

Scudo, Paul
Critique et Littérature Musicales.
third edition.
Paris, 1856. (1850).

October 1856
pp. 566-82

'Belles Lettres.'
17 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

Stowe, Harriet Beecher
Dred: a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp. 2 vols. 1856.

Reade, Charles
It is Never Too Late to Mend. A Matter of Fact Romance. 3 vols. 1856.

Talbot Gwynne
Young Singleton. 2 vols. 1856.

Lavenu, L.S.
Erlesmere, or, Contrasts of Character. 2 vols. 1856.

Bremer, Frederika
Hertha. translated by Mary Howitt. 1856.

Poetry

Dobell, Sydney
England in Time of War. 1856.

Lockyer, Stewart
St. Bartholomew's Day, and Other Poems. 1856.

Gurney, Archer
Songs of Early Summer. 1856.

Machell, Mrs.
Poems and Translations. 1856

Early Ballads, Illustrative of History, Traditions, and Customs. edited by Robert Bell. 1856.

Literary Criticism

Wilson, John
Essays, Critical and Imaginative. Vol. I. Edinburgh, 1856.

Whately, Richard
Bacon's Essays; with Annotations. 1856.

January 1857
pp. 307-26

'Belles Lettres'
15 books reviewed, including:

Fiction

Holme Lee, (pseud. of Harriet Parr)
Kathie Brande. a Fireside History of a Quiet Life. 2 vols. 1856.

(Catherine Ellen Spence)
Tender and True. a Colonial Tale. 2 vols. 1856.

(?)
Deverell. a Novel. 3 vols. 1856.

Poetry

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett
Aurora Leigh. 1856.

Massey, Gerald
Craigbrook Castle. 1856.

Aytoun, William Edmunstone
Bothwell. A Poem in six Parts. Second edition. London and Edinburgh, 1856. (1856).

Rouman Anthology; or a selection of Rouman Poetry, ancient and modern., translation and notes of Roumanian Poetry. Hertford, 1856.

Literary Criticism

Wilson, John
Essays, Critical and Imaginative. Vol. II. Edinburgh, 1856.

Collier, J. Payne
Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton by Coleridge. 1856.

Long, George
M. Tullii Ciceronis Orationes. with a Commentary by George Long. Vol. III. 1856.

January 1857
pp. 288-306.

'History, Biography, Voyages and Travels.'
18 books reviewed.

Speir, Mrs. Charlotte
Life in Ancient India. 1856.

Roberts, George
The Social History of the People of the Southern Counties of England in Past Centuries. 1856.

Andrews, Alexander
The Eighteenth Century; or Illustrations of the Manners and Customs of Our Grandfathers. 1856.

Knight, Charles
The Popular History of England, an Illustrated History of Society and Government from the Earliest Period to our Own Times. Vol. 1. 1856.

Ferguson, Robert
The Northmen in Cumberland and Westmorland. 1856.

M'Crie, Thomas
Reformation in Italy. Reformation in Spain. a new edition. Edited by his son. 1856.

Morley, Henry
Life of Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Doctor and Knight, commonly known as a Magician. 1856.

Trollope, Thomas Adolphus
The Girlhood of Catherine de Medici. 1856.

Kaye, J.W.
Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm, G.C.B., late envoy to Persia and Governor of Bombay. 2 vols. 1856.

Viesse de Marmont
Memoires de maréchal Marmont, duc de Raguse, de 1792 à 1841. imprimés sur le manuscrit original de l'auteur. (9 vols. Paris, 1857). 1

Williamson, George
Memorials of the Lineage, Early Life, Education, and Development of the Genius of James Watt. Edinburgh, 1856.

Bailey, Thomas
Records of Longevity; with an Introductory Discourse on Vital Statistics. 1856.

Osborne, Commander Sherard
The Discovery of the North-West Passage by H.M.S. Investigator. Captain R. M'Clure, 1850-1854, edited from the Logs and Journals of Captain M'Clure. 2

Kane, Elisha Kent
Arctic Explorations in the Years 1853, 1854 and 1855. Philadelphia, 1856.

Saint-Hilaire, J. Barthelemy
Lettres sur l'Egypte. 1856.

(?)
The Rise and Progress of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand by an Englishman. 1856.

Stoney, Captain H. Butler
A Residence in Tasmania. 1856.

(Byrne, Mrs. W. Pitt)
Flemish Interiors. 1856.

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1 I have been unable to trace the edition of this book reviewed by George Eliot. It was published by David Nutt.

2 I have been unable to trace this book. It was published by Longmans.

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Christian Observer, Jan. 1840.

The Life of Jesus Critically Examined by David Friedrick Strauss. Translated from the fourth German edition. 3 vols. 1846.

The Essence of Christianity by Ludwig Feuerbach. Translated from the second edition of the German by Marion Evans. 1854.

Scenes of Clerical Life. 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1858.

published separately:

'The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton.'
Blackwood's Magazine, Jan. - Feb.1857.

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Blackwood's Magazine, March - June. 1857.

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Blackwood's Magazine, July 1859.

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Cornhill Magazine, July 1862 - 3.

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Cornhill Magazine, July 1864.

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The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems. Edinburgh, 1874.

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Blackwood's Magazine, May 1869.

'Agatha.'
Atlantic Monthly, Aug. 1869.

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Macmillan's, May 1870.

'Armgart.'
Macmillan's, July 1871.

Daniel Deronda.
4 vols. Edinburgh, 1876.

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Empedocles on Etna, and other Poems. 1852.

Poems. a New Edition. 1853

Poems. collected edition, 2 vols. 1869

Balzac, Honoré de

Eugénie Grandet. Paris, 1833.

* Bronte, Charlotte

Jane Eyre. 3 vols. 1847.
Villette. 3 vols. 1853.

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Poems. 1850.
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Paracelsus. 1835.
The Ring and the Book. 1868-9.

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Rab and His Friends. Edinburgh, 1859.

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Sartor Resartus. 3 vols. 1834.
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Speeches, with Elucidations.
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Clough, Arthur Hugh

Poems. Cambridge and London, 1862.

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No Name. 3 vols. 1862.
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Little Dorrit. 1857.
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parts, 1855-7.

Disraeli, Benjamin

Sybil: or the Two Nations.
3 vols. 1845.
Tancred: or the New Crusade.
3 vols. 1847.

* Emerson, Ralph Waldo

Man the Reformer.
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Society and Solitude. Boston, 1870.

Froude, James Anthony

Shadow of the Clouds. 1847.

Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn

Mary Barton, a Tale of Manchester Life. 2 vols. 1848.
Cranford. 1853.
first published in Household Words, 1851-3.
Ruth. 3 vols. 1853.
Life of Charlotte Bronte. 2 vols. 1857.
Sylvia's Lovers. 3 vols. 1863.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel

The Scarlet Letter. Boston, 1850.
The Blithedale Romance. Boston, 1852.

Kingsley, Charles

Yeast, a Problem.
revised and corrected. 1851.
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Hypatia: or, new foes with an old face. 2 vols. 1853.
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Two Years Ago. 3 vols. Cambridge, 1857.
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London Lyrics. (1857)
new edition, 1870.

Lockhart, L.W.M.

Double and Quits. 2 vols. Edinburgh and London, 1869.
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My Study Windows. Boston, 1871.

Lytton, Bulwer-

A Strange Story. 2 vols. 1862.
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All the Year Round, 1861.
Kenelm Chillingly, his Adventures and Opinions. 3 vols. 1873.

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Fables in Song. 1874.

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The New Republic, or Culture, Faith and Philosophy in an English Country House. 2 vols. 1877.

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The Soul; Her Sorrows and Her Aspirations. 1849.
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Bentley's Miscellany (1837-68)	1849-1857.
Blackwood's Magazine (Edinburgh, 1817-)	1849-1862, 1873.
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Gentleman's Magazine (1731-1907)	1782, 1849-1857.
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Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (Edinburgh, 1832-61)	1849-1857.

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