

how such genius could doubt itself so greatly—"shall I ever be good for anything again?—ever do anything again?" (120)—they constantly show her facing down her doubts and depressions and getting on with the job. I find the day-to-day unfolding of George Eliot's life particularly poignant as entry follows entry until there are no more.

Having known these journals for many years in a less accessible state and used them principally as a scholarly tool, I rejoice now in having them as a book to read as well as a source to consult. For giving the journals to us in an edition that simplifies our work as well as increases our pleasure—perhaps, even edifies us with its remarkable moments of humanity—we owe Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston our thanks and admiration.

Response

Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston

In embarking on this project our prime concern was to make George Eliot's voice heard, as far as possible unmediated by our editorial intervention. "As far as possible" is an important qualification, given that in part we were working against the now notorious editing of the journals by J.W. Cross and the more scholarly but still (for good reason) selective editing of them by Gordon S. Haight. The received version of the journals, Cross's, had a century's accumulation of interpretation attached to it. The new, more complete text we have established at the least adjusts these accumulated interpretations and at times oversets them completely.

We were then faced by the need to make a set of editorial decisions about how best to present the journals to today's readers. We assumed that some of them would be George Eliot experts, others would be people working in the nineteenth century, and some perhaps of that mythical genus, the "ordinary" reader. We were fortunate in various ways that Andrew Brown took up the project for Cambridge University Press, providing us both with the informed advice of the editor of the Clarendon *Romola* as well as with publishing expertise. It was he who alerted us to the category of reader of the edition who would, as he put it, "read the book from the back," and that observation was a significant element in the decision to annotate largely by means of the explanatory index in which footnotes and index could be economically combined. The headnotes provide other and necessary and complementary information. A significant motivation here was to make George Eliot's text readable, as little encumbered as possible by obvious apparatus. Our decisions did not follow any editorial orthodoxy but were based on our interpretation of the text of the journals. That text is in itself incomplete because of missing items (specifically, the journal covering 1849-54; the 1878 diary; and the journal of the Spanish journey of 1867). We wanted to be true to our recognition that the journals themselves are a partial account (in a different sense) of George Eliot's life.

It is gratifying in the three commentaries to which we are responding to learn how George Eliot's voice is now heard by readers of the journals. We were motivated throughout by the desire to facilitate the work of others: even pre-publication Rosemary Ashton used the edition for her authoritative *Life*, as did John Rignall who is editing the *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, and Helen Small for her *Oxford World's*

Classics edition of *The Lifted Veil*; and various postgraduates contacted us from time to time eagerly anticipating the publication which proved not, after all, to be a “Key to all Mythologies.” A particular feature of the commentaries is that they respond not only to George Eliot, but to the edition—both to our work and to aspects of its production as a material object. On this point we feel Cambridge University Press did us proud in the design of the volume, with some intelligent decisions, like the one to print the “essay” journals with a justified right-hand margin, but the “diary” journals unjustified, reinforcing their informality. Similarly there is a typographic signal about the printed diaries of 1879 and 1880. The brilliant placement of the page of the 1854-61 diary that is used also for the cover, facing the transcribed text (85), was a bonus. Less satisfactory, as Joanne Shattock notes, is the nuisance value of the running heads not being uniform (a matter raised at copy-editing stage and about which we now feel we should have taken a stronger stand). Her image of a scholar keeping track of George Eliot’s journals in parallel forms (as in the parallel accounts of her time in Weimar), and also moving within a particular journal and across to the letters, is vivid. At one point we envisaged having more comprehensive cross-referencing to Haight’s edition of the letters than in the end happened; we cite only letters that have a particular bearing on the elucidation of the text of the journals.

It was this principle also which drove the innumerable decisions involved in compiling the explanatory index. It is not, as is explained in the preface (ix-x), equivalent to an encyclopaedia, because it does not provide extraneous material but only, for the most part, information pertinent to the actual journal entries. Thus the entries on Bessie Rayner Parkes (later Madame Belloc) and Barbara Bodichon read very oddly indeed if they are taken as a digest of their careers and significance. The entries on them are in fact glossing only the references to them or their appearances in the journals. For instance the following item from Eliot’s 1879 Diary for Tuesday 22 April reads:

Letter from Vivian, returning cheque, and confessing his error.
 Letter from Mde. Belloc asking me to lend her £500. Told Charles about V.
 John came to advise me in the evening.
 Wrote to Mde. Belloc, declining.
 Homer IV. Foster, Physiology.
 Mrs. Congreve at 2. Drove her home, with parcel of my grey dresses for the girls. (171)

This entry is the reason for the comment in the index on Bessie Parkes and her imprudent investment. Incidentally we conjecture now that the reference to Mrs. Congreve and the girls (children adopted by the Congreves) may well explain the hitherto puzzling entry for 2 March 1880 “Beatrice and Sophie came to lunch and I took them to the Exhibition of Old Masters” (199).

Each of the commentators has demonstrated the significance and value of the index, but we have to live in the uneasy confidence that there are lacunae and inconsistencies in it: if anyone can explain “the Soul of Mitre Court” (182) more satisfactorily Judith Johnston will be ecstatic, while Margaret Harris’s particular

personal regret is a sense of failure about sourcing the Carlyle anecdotes in both the Berlin diary entries and “Recollections.” At the same time there are triumphs, as in the discovery of the meaning of the laconic words “Mr. Burne Jones—about St. Mark’s Venice” (185). Difficult decisions included how to structure the entry on George Eliot herself and how to manage cross-referencing. Once the (surprisingly not-so-obvious) decision was made not to explicate the self-explanatory our procedure became much clearer and simpler.

The omission of voluminous accounts from the 1879 and 1880 diaries (and only from those: the material was entered into appropriate sections of the Beechings’ Diaries) came relatively late and was in part due to commercial considerations (they run to thirty or so pages). But these accounts, while not without interest, as indicated in the headnote to 1879, are not like the earlier accounts of individual earnings and relate rather to George Lewes’s journals in which he kept their joint comprehensive accounts up to his death and which George Eliot then took over.

As in any undertaking of this size and complexity we are conscious now of things we might wish undone (like the spelling “Illfracombe” in the contents). Ruby Redinger’s biography (1975) deserved a mention it doesn’t get for its illuminating argument about George Eliot as woman and author. How unfortunate to use “Allbut” as an example in the preface (ix-x), referring to him as Thomas when he was known by his second name Clifford—and should we have squeezed into the index that he invented the clinical thermometer and is a prototype for Lydgate, thus breaking our own rules about relevance to the journal entry? But in our defence of this seeming inconsistency, occasionally we deemed it useful to elaborate on lesser known figures either in the headnotes or in the index to explain their place and relevance in Eliot and Lewes’s circle, while for others, George Smith for instance, the curt “British publisher” seemed sufficient given his further mention in the headnote to “II. Diary 1861-1877.”

All three reviewers have a strong personal inflection and affective response to the volume. Joe Wiesenfarth’s opening image is apt, and moving: it is especially pleasing to have recognition from someone whose knowledge of Eliot’s scholarship must be unequalled. Whatever the editorial difficulties of the journals, the erudition and persistence required for the *Commonplace Book* is of another order altogether. He brings out compellingly the kinds of interaction among her various texts, including the many notebooks, towards which we only gesture. Other of our reviewers have found the anguish recorded during the writing of *Romola* as gripping as any fictional narrative, and have commented on the rawness of the sorrow exposed so keenly in the 1879 diary. If not a confessional document there remains, as Hilary Fraser says, Eliot’s personal sense of agency and self-scrutiny. In what she does not record it is as if, for Eliot, writing things down “made reality so strong that she was wary of disclosure, even to herself” (as Gillian Beer comments in “You have to read between the lines,” *Sunday Times* 25 April 1999). Eliot’s wariness is only one among the facets of her life and work illuminated by the edition. *The Journals of George Eliot*, in bringing together for the first time all of her extant diaries, offers the discerning reader access to a writing life in which the writer herself modestly hopes to do “some good, lasting work” (134) and assures the reader on the success of *Middlemarch* that the “merely egoistic satisfactions of fame are easily nullified by toothache” (143).
