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**Preaching Silence: The Disciplined Self in the Victorian Diary**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the representations of the self as a cultural agent, both reacting to and actively shaping codes of social and artistic respectability, as displayed in the diaries of the canonical Victorian writers Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, Henry Crabb Robinson, George Eliot, George Gissing, John Ruskin and Gerard Manley Hopkins. It analyses the impact of wider ideological and social imperatives on the diarists' subjective experience and reads their tendency to silence the self as a symptom of the cultural pressure to merge their private and public persona. These diaries represented a forum in which the diarists perpetually negotiated their own value within the Victorian ideology of productivity and thus not only reflect their inner world but also the cultural climate of the nineteenth century.

Chapter One traces the selected diarists' reluctance to reveal private information, as well as their tendency to foreground professional productivity, to the social pressure to efface emotions relating to the self and to only cultivate those that nurtured the community. It identifies the similarities between the compulsive self-discipline advocated in the psychological discourse of the period, particularly Alexander Bain's *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), and the willingness to both live up to and actively shape the cultural codes of respectability that Elizabeth Eastlake and Henry Crabb Robinson display in their diaries. Chapter Two compares and contrasts the desire for maximal professional productivity as exhibited in George Eliot's and George Gissing's diaries. Both worked obstinately in order to increase their own value: whereas Eliot sought to redeem her 'guilt of the privileged,' Gissing desperately needed to increase his financial solvency through literary output. Chapter Three discusses the ways in which John Ruskin's diary helped him block out unrespectable and painful private experiences through transforming his obsessive

desire to appropriate and “feel” visual experience into a professional task. Chapter Four shows that Gerard Manley Hopkins—because he was acutely concerned by his cultural otherness caused by his homosexuality—not only sought refuge and validation by joining the Jesuits, but by narrowing his realm of experience to nature, merged the private and the public self into the figure of the professional, asexual, dutiful and disinterested observer.

## Introduction

This thesis reads the diaries of the Victorian cultural commentators Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake (1809-1893), Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867), the novelists George Eliot (1819-1890) and George Gissing (1857-1903), the critic, philosopher and artist John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) as the products of, responses to and shapers of their cultural reality.<sup>1</sup> These writers all came from very similar middle-class backgrounds and all had parents who, from an early age, instilled the habit of diligent work in them. Nonetheless, these commonalities did not produce uniformity of behaviour and ideology; on the contrary, the diaries under consideration reflect the personal reality of literary production and reveal how each of these writers positioned him- or herself within his or her cultural context, giving access to the subjective consciousness that informed his or her artistic output. In tune with the Victorian culture of self-improvement, these “professional” diaries are extroverted, rather than introverted, and reflect the diarists’ efforts to both conform to and reform their culture’s enthusiasm for self-improvement and self-discipline.

The diaries show strong similarities between the self-reported behaviour of the Victorian sages, such as Eliot and Ruskin, and the dissenters, such as Gissing and Hopkins, who, although they purposefully dissociated themselves ideologically from the pressures of Victorian communitarianism and the Protestant work ethic,

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<sup>1</sup> These literary diaries, perhaps more so than domestic or professional diaries, translate the Victorian “spirit of the age” through the increased receptivity of the artist to his or her culture. Albert Gräser has argued that “[t]he artist perceives the tension between the ‘I’ and the ‘you,’ between the individual and the community, as well as between the person and the environment, much more acutely than the ordinary human being.” Although literary diaries do not reflect a more comprehensive picture of an era, they exemplify the effects of contemporary philosophy, as well as science, economy and politics, on the mind of an individual who deliberately exposes him- or herself to the intellectual and artistic productions of his or her culture and reproduces them for an audience. Albert Gräser, *Das Literarische Tagebuch: Studien über Elemente des Tagebuchs als Kunstform* (Saarbrücken: West-Ost-Verlag GmbH., 1955), p. 99 (My translation).

nonetheless advocated a regime of strict self-discipline by which they sought to compensate for their unrespectable otherness. The texts that this thesis examines cannot be seen to represent examples of “archetypal” Victorian diary writing, as no such thing exists. Although the diary is a cultural product that always reflects the material circumstances of its creation, the variety of uses that it was put to by individuals is so wide-ranging that no specific Victorian type can be identified. This study concentrates on the ways in which the selected Victorian writers used the diary’s self-regulatory mechanisms in order to achieve maximal productivity and shows that the diary formed an integral component of the reality of authorship. These writers equated their value as individuals with the value of their literary production and their private records reveal an almost total identification with their professional occupation—to the point that these documents can be categorised as “professional” diaries. This new historicist investigation seeks to demonstrate that, beyond its function as a tool for time management and the observation of the external world, the diary can also further “self-education” and constitute a forum for self-cultivation that allows the diarist to craft and reinforce a persona specifically adapted to his or her professional needs, while simultaneously catering to the cultural codes of respectability which are perpetuated through his or her work.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis represents a unique contribution to both Victorian studies and life writing criticism as none of the existing collections and bibliographies dealing with the diary genre focus on the Victorian age at large.<sup>3</sup> Typically, scholarly articles on

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<sup>2</sup> Term coined by Joseph Marie de Gerardo, *Self-Education, or the Means and Art of Moral Progress*, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, trans. (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830)

<sup>3</sup> A remarkable collection is Trev Lynn Broughton, ed., *Autobiography: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. IV (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). Anthologies, beside Christopher Sampson Handley’s, include Arthur Ponsonby, *English Diaries: A Review of English Diaries from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London: Methuen & Co., 1923) and *More English Diaries: Further Reviews of Diaries from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen & Co., 1927); Philipp Dunaway and Melvin Evans, *A Treasury of the World’s Greatest Diaries* (Doubleday, 1957).



selected diarists can be found in volumes on autobiographical practices in general, but Robert A. Fothergill's *Private Chronicles* (1974) still seems to remain the only monograph that addresses the diary genre specifically.<sup>4</sup> Doll and Munns, in their collection of essays on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century diaries, deplore the scattered state of diary criticism, when they rightly remark: "Most discussion must be sought in introductions to and reviews of published diaries [with] the overwhelming subjects in such works [being] biographical or historical."<sup>5</sup> In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century studies, "the practice of publishing diaries and journals, excluding travel journals [...] has always lagged far behind other canonical and noncanonical texts," as Doll and Munns claim.

Whereas the relative sparsity of published journals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be the reason for the meagre body of diary criticism in this field, the same is not true for nineteenth-century studies. Diaries were published and read widely during, as well as beyond, the Victorian era. Politicians, public figures and writers habitually kept a diary and many of them were published, either posthumously, or even during the diarist's life time. Given that the publication of diaristic records was an ongoing practice, diarists knew, or at least suspected or hoped, that their diaries might be printed after their death. In addition, the style and content of already issued diaries surely affected the narrative choices of a diarist, a fact which challenges the idea of the diary as unplanned writing. Spontaneity and emotional candour are often seen as the fundamental characteristics of the genre, emphasising its contrast to formal autobiography. However, the brief list of diaries that were read and/or published in the nineteenth century I shall offer will demonstrate the enormous

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<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Dan Doll and Jessica Munns, *Recording and Reordering: Essays on the Seventeenth-century and Eighteenth-Century Diary and Journal* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), p. 9.

variety among diaristic texts and the multiplicity of interpretations of the generic characteristics. Despite a general tendency to monitor the intensity of emotions displayed in the diary, the extent of self-disclosure and self-scrutiny that diarists exhibit varies according to their perceptions of what constitutes privacy. Efforts to safeguard privacy took different shapes: whereas some diarists left out the self in order to protect it from public judgment, others used their diaristic records to construct and promote a public persona that acted as a flashy shield for privacy. Frequently, but not always, professional diaries tend to be reticent in revealing personal information and are rather defensive, while the more socially oriented diaries have a propensity to be forthcoming about their author's experiences in the public domain. We can also detect differences in emotional attachment to the diary as an object: where some diarists cherished their diaries' material presence, others felt compelled to destroy their private accounts.

For diarists such as Samuel Pepys (1658-1703), Frances Burney (1776-1828) and Frances Kemble, the diary was a carefully crafted text, which was designed to frame a deliberately constructed persona. Many Victorian writers would have been familiar with the diary that Pepys kept from 1660-1669. Although it displays a consistent preoccupation with dailiness and chronology, many of its entries were in fact pre-conceived, re-written and based on notes. As such, the diary came close to an autobiography representing Pepys's social and professional life. It was first published (and heavily edited) by Lord Braybrooke in 1825, who then issued an extended version of five volumes in 1848-1849 (reprinted in 1851).<sup>6</sup> Rev. Mynors Bright published Pepys's diary in six volumes in 1875-79, but his edition comprised but few

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Lord Braybrooke, ed., *Memoirs of Samuel Pepys, Esq., Comprising His Diary from 1659 to 1669*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1825).

copies and was not re-issued.<sup>7</sup> Henry B. Wheatley extended the published diary to ten volumes in 1893-99.<sup>8</sup> The most complete version (eleven volumes) was provided by Robert Latham and William Matthews in 1970-1983.<sup>9</sup> The fact that several editions were printed in the nineteenth century points to a growing interest in the veracious representation of historical characters.

Much like Pepys's famous and influential diary, Frances Burney's private writings (diaries and letters) frequently took the shape of commendatory advertisements for their author. With the exception of her early diaries, which are written for the eye of "Nobody," the style in which Burney's diaries and letters are composed is strikingly similar—both clearly address a wide audience and seem to have been written with the objective to portray the writer as a socialising marvel to her audience. Burney's great niece Charlotte Barrett first published her subject's diary in conjunction with her letters and extracts from the journals of her sisters Susan and Charlotte Burney.<sup>10</sup> Barrett's biographical project, which started in 1840, took her many years to complete but she ultimately succeeded in covering the duration of Burney's life. Annie Raine Ellis republished Burney's diaries in a similar format in 1889 and 1907.<sup>11</sup> This collage technique was also adopted by Thomas Sadler, the editor of Henry Crabb Robinson's diary and Charles Eastlake Smith, Elizabeth

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<sup>7</sup> Mynors Bright, ed., *Diary and Correspondence of Samuel Pepys, Esq., F. R. S.: From His Ms. Cypher in the Pepysian Library, with a Life and Notes by Richard Lord Braybrooke ; Deciphered, with Additional Notes, by Rev. Mynors Bright* (London: Bickers & Son, 1879).

<sup>8</sup> Henry B. Wheatley, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys, M.A., F.R.S., Clerk of the Acts and Secretary to the Admiralty*, 10 vols. (London: Bell, 1893-99).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 11 vols. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1970-83).

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Barrett, ed., *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay: 1797 to 1840*, 4 vols. (London: Bickers and Son, 1840).

<sup>11</sup> Annie Raine Ellis, ed., *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768-1778: With a Selection From Her Correspondence and From the Journals of her Sisters Susan and Charlotte Burney* (G. Bell, 1907).

Eastlake's nephew and editor of her life writings.<sup>12</sup> The objective of this editorial practice seems to have been to represent the essence of the subject's life in a way that would captivate the audience's attention. In fact, however, although this method allows for a vivid account of the subject's social life, it skews the reader's appreciation of the diarist/letter writer's unique expression of his or her subjectivity. However, Burney seems to have been so conscious of the audience she sought to manipulate that she assumed the role of the editor herself.

The diaries of the famous actress and writer Fanny Kemble not only consistently challenged the defining characteristics of the diary genre, but effectively overcame the boundaries between the public and the private when they were published. The style and content of the diaries mark them as texts were designed to impress and educate actual readers, as can be seen in the 1832-33 diary, which recounts Kemble's travels to America and describes her emotional reactions to unfamiliar circumstances in a very unapologetic fashion.<sup>13</sup> Among the many autobiographical writings that she published is her *Journal* in two volumes, which she released herself in 1835 in what seems to be an attempt to sensitise her reader's visual perceptiveness.<sup>14</sup> It was republished in 1999 by Monica Gough.<sup>15</sup> Kemble's *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation 1838-39*, which she originally kept for Elizabeth Dwight Sedgwick, was published in 1863 to support the cause of abolitionism. For several months in 1838-39, Kemble lived on a plantation in Georgia, which her husband had inherited, and she was revolted by the treatment of the hundreds of slaves that the family exploited for their own gain. This journal was re-

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas, Sadler, ed., *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869); Charles Eastlake Smith, ed., *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, (London: John Murray, 1895).

<sup>13</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation 1838-1839* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1863).

<sup>14</sup> Frances Anne Butler, *Journal*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1835).

<sup>15</sup> Monica Gough, ed., *Journal of a Young Actress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

published by J.A. Scott in 1961 and has attracted an enormous amount of attention in recent years from different academic disciplines, such as the social sciences, history and literary studies, which has led to and was triggered by new editions in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.<sup>16</sup> Kemble's famous autobiography *Records of a Girlhood*, which she issued in 1878 and which was republished in 2007 and 2009, can be seen as another conscious effort to manipulate public judgment: "I have thought that my gossip about myself may be as acceptable [as] gossip about me written by another."<sup>17</sup> Kemble is one of few Victorian authors who self-confidently published several diaries and an autobiography, hence elevating her own life to a matter of importance and using her public position to further the cause of underprivileged human beings.

Although the diary of the famous Romantic Lord Byron (1788-1824), can, compared to Kemble's, be distinguished by a similarly unapologetic attitude to his own emotions, less importance is attributed to a potential or actual reader. In his diary, Byron reviews his past and present emotions with impressive frankness and clearly takes pleasure in engaging with himself, his contemporaries and his physical environment through writing. It was first published in two volumes by Thomas Moore in 1830 and substantially extended by Rowland E. Prothero to six volumes in 1898-1901.<sup>18</sup> As with Pepys's diary, it was not until 1973-1994 that Leslie A. Marchand published a complete edition in thirteen volumes.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas some diarists prioritise their social and emotional lives, others give special attention to their professional selves. The diary of the famous Romantic writer Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), for instance, displays much less emotional exaltation

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<sup>16</sup> John Anthony Scott, ed., *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation 1838-1839* (New York: Knopf, 1961).

<sup>17</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2009), p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Moore, ed., *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of His Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1830); Rowland E. Prothero, ed., *The Works of Lord Byron, A New Revised and Enlarged Edition: Letters and Journals*, 6 vols. (London, 1898-1901).

<sup>19</sup> Leslie A. Marchand, ed., *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 13 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973-1994).

than Byron's and, much like George Gissing's, can be characterised by its accounts of relentless work. Leaving out the emotional self, Scott's diary foregrounds his professional self and is, as Christopher Sampson Hadley claims, "entirely without self-pity."<sup>20</sup> The first printed version in two volumes was edited and published by David Douglas in 1890 and it was followed by J.G. Tait's three volumes in 1939, 1941 and 1946 and W.E.K. Anderson's 1972 edition.<sup>21</sup> This publication history demonstrates a continuous desire on the side of critics to get the story right and an increasing willingness to let the diarist speak for him- or herself.

Dorothy Wordsworth (1771-1855) almost categorically left out the self from her diary and principally used it as a poetic record of the tours she undertook with her brother William. The diary, which Dorothy kept with many long interruptions from 1789-1828, contains very few instances in which she asserts herself as an individual. It differs from other "professional" diaries in that its lengthy entries are composed with utmost care and lovingly depict natural scenes. Although Ruskin (Chapter Three) similarly used his diary as a recipient for visual experience, his emotional reactions form an integral part of his records and in this way greatly differs from Dorothy Wordsworth's. Because of its brilliance, Dorothy's diaristic writing consistently served as a source of inspiration to William and has been much praised for its poetic genius by literary critics. It was first published by William Knight in 1897 in two volumes but extracts had already appeared in Edmund Lee's 1886 *Story of A Sister's Love*.<sup>22</sup> E. de Selincourt republished the diary in 1941 and 1952.<sup>23</sup> A lot of attention

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Sampson Hadley, *An Annotated Bibliography of Diaries Published in English* (Christopher Handley, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> David Douglas, ed., *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott: from the Original at Abbotsford* (Edinburgh, 1890); J.G. Gait, ed., *The Journal of Walter Scott* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1939); W.E.K. Anderson, ed., *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> William Knight, ed., *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2 vols. (London, 1897); Edmund Lee, *Story of a Sister's Love* (J. Clarke & co., 1886).

<sup>23</sup> E. de Selincourt, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1941), reprinted 1952.

has been paid to the Grasmere journals, which Helen Darbishire first published in 1958 and Mary Moorman edited in 1971.<sup>24</sup> Mary Ellen Bellanca has recently (2007) read Dorothy's diaristic achievement as the work of a natural historian.<sup>25</sup> It is thus thanks to the diary that Dorothy Wordsworth is remembered as a talented poet and writer in her own right.

Some diaries, such as William Allingham's (1820-1889), avoid the self as a topic to write about and instead constitute a "tribute" to other writers.<sup>26</sup> Allingham was a close friend of Alfred Lord Tennyson's (1809-1892), who described his interactions with the poet and his entourage in elaborate detail. He generally foregrounded his social persona, offering little information regarding his inner life. His diary, which he kept from 1847-1889, was first published by H. Allingham and D. Radford in 1907 and since 1967 has been published in regular intervals: 1985, 1990 and 2000.

Although the diary of Edith Simcox (1844-1901) has been read as a "tribute"-diary to George Eliot, such an attitude disregards her extensive engagement with her own emotional and professional aspirations and doubts. Significantly, Simcox had named her diary *Autobiography of a Shirtmaker* in order to stress her professional vocation, but her editors, Constance M. Fulmer and Margaret E. Barfield, when publishing the diary in 1998, changed the title to *A Monument of the Memory of George Eliot*. This editorial move dissociates Simcox from her own work and renders her position as George Eliot's biggest admirer permanent. Simcox did indeed call her

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<sup>24</sup> Helen Darbishire, ed., *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth: The Alfoxden Journal, 1789: The Grasmere Journals: 1800-1803* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); Mary Moorman, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>25</sup> Bellanca, Mary Ellen, *Daybooks of Discovery: Nature Diaries in Britain, 1770-1870* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Allingham, H. and Radford, D., *William Allingham's Diary: 1847-1889* (London: Centaur Press, 2000); Constance Marie Fulmer and Margaret E. Barfield, eds., *A Monument to the Memory of George Eliot: Edith J. Simcox's Autobiography of a Shirtmaker* (Taylor & Francis,

diary “acta diurnal amoris,” and mentioned George Eliot in almost every entry until many years after her hero’s death, but, nonetheless, the diary also constituted an important forum in which she reviewed and stored her daily experiences and encounters with politicians and public figures of the day. Moreover, her diary bears witness to her reflections about the morals, philosophy, love, religion and her own emotions, which she reveals with astounding candour.

The desire to guarantee the privacy of the diarist culminates in the destruction of the diary. Many Victorian writers, such as Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who made extensive use of diaries, commonplace books, notebooks and related memoranda, destroyed the majority of their private records and refused to be remembered as diarists. Charles Dickens’s (1812-1870) only extant diary, which stretches from 1838 to 1841, was only preserved coincidentally, as he burnt all his other diaristic writings. This tendency to cancel out personal existence reveals these writers’ awareness that diaries could be published posthumously and had the power to incriminate their defenceless author beyond redemption. For those who destroyed their diaries, the desire to preserve their privacy and integrity overpowered the wish to impress future generations of potential, sometimes imagined, readers.

Although this list is but a fragmentary sketch, it accentuates the countless shapes diaristic writing took in the nineteenth century (and before). Some diarists, as Patricia Meyer Spacks has argued, “itemize nothing but the inconsequential,” whereas others “breach [their] privacy in rather dramatic fashion.”<sup>27</sup> There is indeed a vast difference between a confessional diary, such as Arthur Munby’s and a hermetically sealed account of professional activity, such as George Gissing’s.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>27</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 168, 169.

<sup>28</sup> Derek Hudson, *Munby: Man of Two Worlds: The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby 1828-1910* (Boston: Gambit, 1972).



degree of emotional revelation displayed in a diary does not define its status as a private, or intimate, document. Spacks makes a crucial point when asserting that “people zealously protect also the privacy of their lives’ monotony and the privacy of their obsessive concern with the events or nonevents defining that monotony.”<sup>29</sup> Every diary, whether its tendency is confessional or professional, must thus be seen as the materialisation of the diarist’s private concerns; whether these are sexual relationships or the number of pages read or written each day is irrelevant. What is essential is that the diary embodies its author’s decision to elevate the “trivial into the significant” and thus affirms the importance of his or her existence.<sup>30</sup>

The diaries under consideration tend to rigorously disregard the authors’ ‘private’ lives and habitually omit painful experiences and exclude intimate emotions. However, as Wendy J. Wiener and George C. Rosenwald maintain, diary scholars should not ask “what life experiences have survived repression,” but “study what the subject has selected for preservation. For the act of remembrance is a choosing, a highlighting, a shaping, an enshrinement.”<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, in order to let the diarist speak for him- or herself, and to respectfully “decode the meaning of those texts within their context,” as Philippe Lejeune proposes, I have identified the most pressing concerns, such as the management of the emotions, work, time and observation, and have read them in light of the writers’ biographies, correspondence and literary work, considering the demands of a culture in which conservative and progressive beliefs coexisted.<sup>32</sup> Again, the personal or historical value of the diary

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<sup>29</sup> Spacks, *Privacy*, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Wiener and Rosenwald, “A Moment’s Monument,” p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Philippe Lejeune, “The ‘Journal de jeune fille in Nineteenth-Century France,” Martine Breillac, trans., Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 112; John Gardiner, *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), p. 17.

does not depend on the degree of self-disclosure, as each one is an expression of an individual consciousness moulded by culture. The analysis of the diarist's responses to culture can shed light on both his or her self-perception and self-positioning within the social, political, economic ontological parameters in which he or she functions and can give us an idea of the contemporary cultural hierarchy of values.

### **Diary and Genre**

The reader, editor, biographer and critic of diaries face similar difficulties in interpreting the narrative choices that determined the composition of a diary. Although all four can be perfectly aware of the fact that generically the diary can be considered "a confession to the self with only the self as an auditor and without the public authority," as Felicity Nussbaum has noted, they will inevitably discover that it provides but a "superficial illusion of transparency," to use Spacks's words.<sup>33</sup> As the brief list of published diaries has shown, editors have struggled to do justice to the respective diarist. With manuscripts frequently comprising thousands of heavily repetitive pages, selection seems imperative but assuredly compromises the authenticity of the diaristic record. Editorial framing, in its endeavour to accentuate the diary's literary or historical merit, is liable to misrepresent the subject, as we shall see in the cases of Crabb Robinson and Eastlake (Chapter One). Although both the diary critic and the biographer take an interest in the truthful representation of the diarist, the fundamental difference in their approach consists of the former's focus on the text and the investigation of the ways in which the diarist uses its material and conceptual form to ground him- or herself in the world. The latter would tend to use the information shared in the diary to construct the author's life narrative,

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<sup>33</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Towards Conceptualising Diary" in Trev Lynn Broughton, ed., *Autobiograph*, vol. IV (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 9; Spacks, *Privacy*, p. 177.

disregarding the importance of the contextual forum in which it was uttered. The boundaries between the work of the diary critic and that of the biographer can blur, particularly in the case of diarists such as Gissing, whose accounts are primarily concerned with establishing inventories of work done or money made.

As much critical work has shown, the diary genre is characterised by its hybrid nature. The diaristic gesture is clearly a self-objectifying autobiographical attempt to give value to subjective experience by creating an anthologised record of daily life. Langford and West have eloquently summed up the particularities of this “uncertain genre” which belongs to several genres and is therefore excluded from all, as it is “uneasily balanced between literary and historical writing, between the spontaneity of reportage and the reflectiveness of the crafted text, between selfhood and events, between subjectivity and objectivity [and] between the private and the public.”<sup>34</sup> The diary’s generic features can indeed be manipulated to reflect and contain the delights and pressures of individual lives, as well as cultural norms and literary styles and tastes. The extremely individualised form and content of a diary entry, which may take the shape of a single word, an extensive list, an elaborate travel account, or an analysis of the diarist’s psychological state, complicate the categorisation and definition of the diaristic record. Individual entries (or sequences), if dated, tend to be characterised by temporal immediacy, but frequently document experience retrospectively and must thus be situated at the generic threshold between formal autobiography and diaristic writing.

Questions regarding authorship and audience cause further difficulties. Due to its intrinsic desire to share experience, be it with the self, or an actual/imagined reader, the diary, through “auto-destination,” mimics the conventions of letter writing: the

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<sup>34</sup> Rachel Langford and Russell West, *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 8.

person who writes the entry also receives it, as it were, frequently establishing links between entries, “catching up,” apologising, confessing, justifying, and, particularly in the case of Eliot, hoping for an absolving response.<sup>35</sup> Intratextual and intertextual references are, according to Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, integral to the practices of letter writing, establishing a “dialogue of correspondence.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, self-referencing and direct allusions to previous entries are a common characteristic of diary writing, through which diarists tend to establish a continuity of text and persona. Chapter Two will highlight such ‘interactions between selves,’ focusing on the diary of George Eliot. As the writer and reader are identical, the diary functions as a formalised discourse between the two.

Arguably, the fundamental motivation behind all autobiographical writing is the desire to remember and be remembered, which coexists with the need for confession and absolution. Rather than silently contemplating his or her thoughts, the diarist chooses to give them a material shape, thus inviting communication between writing and reading selves, as well as between him- or herself and a confidante, stranger, or wider audience. This reaching out for a response from the self and/or the other can be seen as the unifying quality of autobiographical writing, as Carolyn Barros has convincingly argued: “a diary, a set of letters, an oral account, a collection of photographs, or a hymn [:] someone is telling someone else that something is happening to *me*.”<sup>37</sup> Life-writing genres, such as spiritual autobiography, formal autobiography, memoirs, letter writing and diary writing, systematically overlap as they are products of individual consciousnesses perceiving themselves from a similar

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Rousset, « Le journal intime, texte sans destinataire? » *Poétique*, vol. 16 (1983), pp. 435-443, p. 438.

<sup>36</sup> Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, “Intertextual Networks in the Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston,” in *Letter Writing*, Terttu Nevalainen and Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, eds. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> Barros, Carolyn A., *Autobiography—Narrative of Transformation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 8.

“operational vantage point,” to use the words of Sidonie Smith, aiming to ensure the veracious and respectful treatment and remembrance of their lives.<sup>38</sup>

Despite their similar generic objectives, the conception of reality communicated by retrospective autobiographical accounts differs fundamentally from the perspective that diaristic writing must necessarily adopt. Whereas the autobiographer “considers his or her destiny as a whole” and endeavours to create a unified version of the past, as Alain Girard has observed, the diarist does not have the advantage of retrospectively re-imagining his or her self, but “seeks to give to his or her present life a reality which ceaselessly escapes from his or her grasp.”<sup>39</sup> The diary thus captures the process of self-signification in which the diarist negotiates his own value within his or her cultural context. Autobiography can be seen as an effort to manipulate the judgment of the past by future generations. The diary, in contrast, seeks to fashion a self that is considered respectable in the present and the future. The fact that this self-construct is usually invisible at first glance does not mean the diarist’s motivations are any less predetermined than the autobiographer’s.

Diarists tend to use several life-writing genres for different purposes, as can be seen in the case of John Ruskin (Chapter Three). Ruskin did not use the diary as a forum for internal self-contemplation and only communicated truly personal issues via written correspondence that was explicitly addressed to a recipient. Considering the consistent silencing of the self that he practices in the diary, it is ironic that in *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1878 and 1880-1884), a collection of letters that takes the stylistic form of a diary and the material form of a pamphlet/magazine, Ruskin demonstrates

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<sup>38</sup> Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Alain Girard, *Le journal intime* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), pp. 16, 19.

“reckless and absolute candour,” as John D. Rosenberg has observed.<sup>40</sup> In “The Convents of St. Quentin,” written in Brantwood on February 8<sup>th</sup> 1880, he admits that:

*Fors* contains much trivial and desultory talk [...] Scattered up and down in it [...] there is much casual expression of my own personal feelings and faith, together with bits of autobiography, which were allowed place, not without some notion of their being useful, but yet imprudently, and even incontinently, because I could not at the moment hold my tongue about what vexed or interested me, or returned soothingly to my memory.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas in the diaries, Ruskin prudently limits the content of his entries to professionally useful observations, in *Fors*, this rather dignified reticence breaks down and gives way to “incontinent,” ebullient and self-revealing writing. The diary portrays Ruskin as the photographic intermediary between the world and the reader, but *Fors* shows a Ruskin longing for an “us of the old race” (“The Advent Collect”), solidarity and human understanding.<sup>42</sup> He now seems unresponsive to nature, which constitutes a fundamental change from the attitude manifested in the diaries: “For me, the birds do not sing, nor ever will,” but he still aspires to make others see: “but they would, for you, if you cared to have it so.”<sup>43</sup>

The maxim “Verba Volant—scripta manent” (“Words fly away, what is written stays put”), can be seen as the primary motive of the diary genre.<sup>44</sup> This applies to all forms of writing, but in the case of the diary, the writer’s desire to fix his or her personal (temporal, spatial and emotional) reality transcends writing as a technology that aids intellectual reasoning.<sup>45</sup> The diary embodies an attempt to grasp

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<sup>40</sup> John D. Rosenberg, *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from His Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), p. 319.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

<sup>44</sup> Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 2000), p. 93. This thesis, although the term “diary” predominates, does not distinguish between “diary” and “journal,” which, according to Christopher Sampson Handley is common practice in life writing criticism. Christopher Sampson Handley, *An Annotated Bibliography of Diaries Printed in English* (Christopher Handley, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> On the importance of written representation in the intellectual processing of information, see Walter J. Ong, “Writing is a Technology that Structures Thought,” in Gerd Baumann, ed. *The Written Word:*

and collect different facets of an ever-changing self through, to use the words of Robyn Sarah, its “contemplative nature, [its] engaged literacy, [its] respect for the past, and an examined life.”<sup>46</sup> The diaristic gesture is possessive, analytic and introspective, but always concerned with cultural rules for behaviour and conduct. The diary self-consciously articulates the diarist’s subjective experience of the world within the parameters of the culturally acceptable and hence its act of self-assertion is always already coupled with self-effacement. Regenia Gagnier has defined autobiographical records as “rhetorical projects embedded in concrete material situations,” and similarly, this thesis insists on their direct reflection of and indirect contribution to cultural circumstances.<sup>47</sup>

### **Critical approaches and methodology**

Despite the abundance of published diaries, Victorian and other, Felicity A. Nussbaum’s 1988 assessment that “a theory of diary has not yet evolved,” is still true in the realm of English-speaking diary scholarship.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this is for good reason, as the definition of generic boundaries implies the constant danger of over-theorising the particular and brushing over instances of dissidence, thus misrepresenting the individual diarist. Despite the strongly subjective meaning that each diary has for its author, we can detect commonalities between diaries. Rather than to obtrude a generic frame onto the diaries I have considered, I have identified each text’s most urgent concerns and, taking a new historicist approach, read them in light of the author’s

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*Literature in Transition. Wolfson College Lectures 1985* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986); and Alfred Burns, *The Power of the Written Word: The Role of Literacy in the History of Western Civilization* (P. Lang, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> Robyn Sarah, “Saving Time,” *New Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1997), pp. 11-23 (p. 12).

<sup>47</sup> Gagnier, Regenia, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, “Towards Conceptualizing Diary,” in *Studies on Autobiography*, James Olney, ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 129.

work, letters and memoranda, as well as journalism, philosophy and psychology of the day. After individual study and contextualisation of the diaries in question, the themes of professional zeal and emotional regulation transpired and surpassed topics prevalent in other Victorian diaries, such as social life, politics and sexuality. Although I distinguish selective repression as an integral factor in the professionalisation of the self, I by no means intend to take up and perpetuate the idea that the Victorians were fundamentally repressed, which was spread by critical work of the 1960s and 1970s. I use the Foucauldian model not to stress the dissemination of repression throughout the Victorian culture in general, but rather to indicate specific ways in which the diarist functions as the product and shaper of his or her culture by showing a variety of responses to the cult of self-improvement as well as individual interpretations of the diary's generic characteristics.

My endeavour to explore Victorian perceptions of the desirability and respectability of feeling bears resemblance to Gesa Stedman's impetus for her study on the Victorian discourses on the emotions.<sup>49</sup> Although Stedman is similarly interested in the influence of "the individual body and the feelings" on the "body politic of the nineteenth century," our studies diverge on a methodological level.<sup>50</sup> Whereas Stedman's focus on nineteenth-century novels and both Victorian and contemporary criticism provides an important survey of the language of the emotions in their cultural context, my thesis exhibits the "dialectic of the expression of the emotions and the necessity to control them" in the Victorian diary and shows that the compulsion to exert self-censorship that can be detected in public utterances also

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<sup>49</sup> Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



intruded into the supposedly free and private realm of the diaristic record.<sup>51</sup> The study of these well-known writers' diaries can thus shed a new light on their perception of their function in the world. Whereas the examination of their published work reveals their impact on Victorian culture, the diaries uncover the extent to which they themselves were concretely influenced by the ideologies of the day, such as the necessity to control the emotions (Chapter One).

In order to form a critical understanding of the diary genre, as well as to develop methods of interpreting non-confessional diaries, I have frequently turned to French diary criticism, which has produced several large-scale monographs that successfully explore the effects of socio-political, historical and philosophical developments on the interiority of the diarist from multiple perspectives, such as psychoanalysis and sociology. The seminal French diary studies written by Philippe Lejeune, Beatrice Didier and Alain Girard include both genders and discuss the importance of class and historical moment, as well as generic affinities.<sup>52</sup> Their comprehensive and in-depth surveys, more so than the disunited and rather fragmented body of English diary criticism, lucidly present the diary as a tool for

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 1. The fear of transgression, which was motivated by the disastrous consequences that the Victorians imagined to follow the loss of self-control, has recently been investigated in several new publications, such as David G. Riede's study of melancholy, Valerie Pedlar's book on male madness, Andrew Mangham's research on female violence and Carolyn Daniel's work which argues that Victorian children's literature taught its young readers to practice self-regulation by offering and withdrawing food: David G. Riede, *Allegories of One's Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 2005); Valerie Pedlar, "'The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction' (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Carolyn Daniel, *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Victorian Children's Literature* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Les brouillons de soi* (Paris : le Seuil, 1998) ; Béatrice Didier, *Le journal intime* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976); Alain Girard, *Le journal intime* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

gaining self-possession, obliterating the need for a possibly disappointing human other and maximally taking advantage of the time available to the individual.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast, English analyses tend to focus on the particular and refrain from establishing all-encompassing generalisations. Nonetheless, they frequently portray the diary as a specifically feminine form and aim to give a voice to the silenced.<sup>54</sup> In order to situate a diary among other autobiographical texts, while still respecting its unique articulation of authorial subjectivity, it was imperative to consult theoretical attempts at defining the genre, as well as case-specific information, such as biographical references and other forms of life writing, and historical evidence of Victorian discourse.

The approach of cultural historians to the diary was of little help when it came to the analysis of individual texts.<sup>55</sup> Research carried out by nineteenth-century critic Jakob Burkhardt and twentieth-century scholars Karl Joachim Weintraub and Georges Gusdorf, among others, has read the desire to communicate noteworthy information relating to the self as the product of “certain metaphysical preconditions,” to use

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<sup>53</sup> The existence of a study guide for university students, familiarising them with the genre is evidence for the integration of the diary into the curriculum of French literature studies: Françoise Simonet-Tenant, *Le Journal Intime: genre littéraire et écriture ordinaire* (Paris: Nathan Université, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Such collections include Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990) and Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> Cultural historians dealing with autobiography have been preoccupied with historicising the emergence of life writing and tracing the development of an autobiographical consciousness. Among them there seems to be a consensus that since classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, the appearance of autobiographical writing has been linked to major structural changes in the respective society. They have argued that individuals have mimicked socio-political crises, and, in increasing number, have sought to contain and normalise personal and cultural upheaval through writing the self. As Weintraub has explained in relation to Augustine's *Confessions*,

the ages of crisis, in which the firm assumption about man and his world are being called into question, force upon the individual the task of doubting and reinvestigating the very foundations on which self-conception traditionally rested. (Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 18).

This argument infers that the need to create autobiographical records, and this includes diaries as well as the retrospective account of an individual's life designed for publication, appears when the “old” world is shaken by new technological inventions and political developments which lead to a major generalised transition toward radically changed conditions. This process of modernisation is seen to deeply affect the living circumstances of the individual, altering his or her relationship with the self.

Gusdorf's words.<sup>56</sup> For instance, according to Weintraub, in ancient Greece, self-searching was extremely limited because the conditions of the day did not encourage self-centred activity, as "individuals were embedded in the social mass of given blood relations. These earlier lines are enmeshed in and derive their meaning from basic social and kinship relations."<sup>57</sup> The Middle Ages, Weintraub argues, present a similarly low number of autobiographical writings because the medieval societal structure differed from the social order of ancient Greece to a minimal degree: the Church took the place of the "polis." While this thesis takes into account the "macro-phenomena" of the historical context in which the Victorian diaries under consideration were conceived, such as social and industrial change, it devotes substantial attention to the individual writer's private utterances. Rather than to impose a determinative framework, Chapter One's discussion of selective repression acts as an explanatory, contextualising basis for my examination of the chosen diarists' tendency to prioritise discussions of their work over expressions of personal emotion in their diaries.

Returning to my previous point, there is obviously reason to doubt the possibility of a total immersion of the individual in his or her culture, as Marcel Mauss's sociological investigations have revealed: "there has never been a human being without the sense not only of his body but, but also of his simultaneously mental and physical individuality."<sup>58</sup> It does indeed seem obvious that intelligent beings, aware of their inner and outer particularities, would form a concept of self,

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<sup>56</sup> Jacob C. Burckhardt, *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, Irene Gordon, trans. (New York: Mentor Books, 1960); Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in James Olney, ed., Olney, James, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>57</sup> Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual*, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Marcel Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology*, Ben Brewster, trans. (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 61.

even if the term “self” is not in common usage. However, for autobiographical writing to occur, “belief in the inward self as a responsible agent” needs to be encouraged, as, according to Roger Smith, “the Protestant sensibility” did.<sup>59</sup> Factors such as political restructuring, technological advancement, religious reformation and scientific progress all have an impact on the individual and his or her material environment.

Peter Burke has warned that a lack of autobiographical records must not be equated with a lack of self-consciousness:

It is obviously dangerous to argue from the rarity of ego-documents before 1500 that self-consciousness was undeveloped, since modern Western links between writing and self-examination are not universal. The kinds of texts produced in a given culture are related not only to its central values, but also to local assumptions about the uses of literacy (and we must not forget that only a minority of the population of Renaissance Europe was able to write).<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, when considering the material reality in which autobiographical records are produced, we must take into account the practical aspects of culture. Victorian culture, with its immense output of literary, journalistic, scientific, educational, recreational and promotional publications, insisted on the supremacy of the written word.<sup>61</sup> Literacy equated the ability to disseminate one’s knowledge and celebrities, such as Ruskin, published almost everything they wrote. Literacy also meant that writing could become a professional, bread-winning activity, which kept Gissing from the much-dreaded workhouse. The economic importance of writing and the general eagerness to publish written work can arguably be seen as a crucial factor that determined the shape (content and form) of Victorian life writing. As we have seen, even though diaries were not always designed for publication, it is very likely that many of them were written with publication in mind, or defensively anticipated

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<sup>59</sup> Roger Smith, “Self-Reflection and the Self,” in Porter, *Rewriting the Self*, p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Burke, “Representations of the Self from Petrarch to Descartes,” in Porter, *Rewriting the Self*, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> See Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: the Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market* (Basingstoke: Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

external judgment. The cultural association of writing and economic value could be seen to have stimulated diarists' desire to use their temporal and emotional resources wisely and to appropriate their own lives, as Chapter Two discusses at length.

From a political point of view, the liberalism that was in place in Victorian Britain was “a new type of social order related to a novel mode of production that was marked in contrast to either feudalism or the ancient republics,” as Richard Paul Bellamy has noted.<sup>62</sup> In light of Weintraub's metaphysical theories of autobiography, we might remark that liberal individuals did not adhere to a “unitary body of principles dubbed the capitalist ideology” but that still their society was not atomized, as they strove to maintain the communitarian spirit of past civilizations.<sup>63</sup> As evidenced by the diaries this thesis examines, the Victorians strove to establish a “meritocratic society of self-reliant and responsible citizens” who were united “in pursuit of individual, social, material and moral improvement,” which was not opposed to the community-based system that dominated the Greek “polis.”<sup>64</sup> However, since Victorian individuals had both the right and the duty to maximise their own profit, they also assumed an undeniable, but not clearly defined, responsibility towards the community, which meant that their role in society was ambiguous. As a result, the diarists in this thesis constantly evaluated their behaviour in search for the appropriate conduct. Their diaries helped them ‘find a place for the self.’

### **Themes: Time, Work and Extraverted Narrative**

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Paul Bellamy, ed., *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Roy Porter, *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 6. See also Jacob C. Burckhardt, *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, Irene Gordon, trans. (New York: Mentor Books, 1960).

Rather than ruminate in isolation, the diarists under consideration used their diaries as a means to process the external world and to position themselves in relation to their cultural reality. The diaristic gesture's primarily appropriative function consists of arresting and organising the temporal, which catered to the diarists' need to use their limited time on earth as productively as possible. They were eager to ensure the self-disciplined employment of time for the purposes of work, which ideally benefited the community. As the appropriation and possession of emotional experience was complicated due to Victorian culture's condemnation of passion, sullenness and self-complacency (Chapter One), a preoccupation with visual observations (Chapters Three and Four) and work schedules (Chapter Two) constituted a legitimised substitute for engaging with the self directly.

Gradual secularisation, which denied the comforting belief in an afterlife, can be seen to have reinforced the pressures exerted by the Protestant work ethic and made productivity the standard for measuring human value. Martin Hewitt has thus viewed the extensive use and availability of (often preformatted) diaries after 1830 as the product of this capitalist lifestyle:

The industrialization of time created wide demand for desk and pocket diaries to record meetings arranged and transactions conducted. The rise of bureaucracy brought the spread of the diary as a tool for management.<sup>65</sup>

In this "meritocratic" culture, the treatment of time as a precious resource that was not to be wasted converged with the pressure to work tirelessly and encouraged the diarists this thesis discusses to take maximal advantage of their available time. By verbally rendering and inscribing the lived moment, they claimed ownership over their experience and sought to prove to themselves and to potential readers that they were/had been hard-working, useful members of society. Wastefulness of life and

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<sup>65</sup> Martin Hewitt, "Diary, Autobiography and the Practice of Life History," in David Amigoni, ed., *Life writing and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 26.

misdirected energies were considered major sins and this awareness was progressively forged and reinforced by the diary, which, as Robert A. Fothergill has observed, shaped “a mental attitude [cultivating] systematic and discriminating observation. The journal is an instrument for seeing more clearly and remembering more profitably.”<sup>66</sup> Through re-reading, the diarists were able to (re-)establish connections to their past selves, which allowed them to take an educational short-cut: instead of having to re-gain knowledge, they could learn from the inscribed events and relativise new experiences. Thus, in their attempt to use time and experience “profitably,” their whole lives became work.

Besides consistently documenting their professional progress, the diarists under examination demonstrate a keen interest in observing their natural and urban environment, rather than reflecting on interhuman relationships. Eliot’s and Gissing’s fiction demonstrates very developed observational skills when it comes to human character, but their diaries, although less consistently than Ruskin’s and Hopkins’s, tend to privilege descriptions of the natural world (and artefacts) over human interactions. This tendency to foreground descriptions of natural scenery accentuates these diaries’ ‘professional’ nature and their role as equipment to the observer. The function of these texts, as Mary Ellen Bellanca has explained, was often more than that of “[repositories] of raw information,” as they provided diarists with

a versatile instrument for investigating not only nature but also themselves as perceiving subjects—for responding to experience and reconstructing discovery as well as fashioning modes of expression that would later inform other writings, including published works in other forms.<sup>67</sup>

The diary’s capacity to establish a self-objectifying distance between selves, allows the observer to watch him- or herself in the process of visually studying the world. In

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<sup>66</sup> Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries*, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Ellen Bellanca, *Daybooks of Discovery: Nature Diaries in Britain, 1770-1870* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 13.

this sense, for Ruskin and Hopkins in particular, the diary was a tool that allowed them to store and process visual experience and ‘train the eye,’ as well as to construct themselves purely as observers. We might argue that their diary’s strict focus on visual reality implies a conscious choice to block out undesirable emotions, such as sexual confusion.

## **Chapters**

As I have announced, the selected ‘professional’ diaries can be characterised by their determination to improve the diarists’ productivity through an unwavering focus on work. The daily inventory of tasks accomplished, progress made and set-backs suffered establishes a competition between the writing selves (past, present and future) and encourages the identification of the diarist with his or her work. For the diarists in question, the diary was an essential instrument in the implementation of the self-discipline necessary to maximise productivity and respectability. Although all the authors this thesis discusses are seminal Victorian writers whose work has received extensive critical attention, their diaries have largely been ignored. Even if these authors’ lives and publication histories are quite dissimilar, all of them display an eagerness to excel at their work and to avoid hostile social judgment by consistently monitoring the propriety of their utterances and actions. Their diaries can be seen as attempts to find the fragile balance between self-assertion and self-effacement.

Chapter One aims to situate Eastlake’s, Crabb Robinson’s, Eliot’s, Gissing’s, Ruskin’s and Hopkins’s obsession with self-discipline within their culture’s passion for self-improvement. As professional motivation and the selective repression of emotion tend to be deeply intertwined in the texts under scrutiny, I shall analyse the instructions for emotional control as evidenced in the psychological discourse of the



nineteenth century and take Alexander Bain's (1818-1809) psychology manual *The Emotions and the Will* of 1859 as a conceptual basis. Bain's title has eponymous significance in that it accentuates the fundamentally bipolar organisation that he and many of his contemporaries and colleagues perceived to be the essence of a person. Before the strength of the will achieved dominance over the emotions, the human being was not considered a person, but rather an infant, madman/woman or criminal. Emotional control came to be seen as the mark of civilisation and respectability.

The first diarist discussed is art critic, artist and journalist, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1809-1893). She figures in this thesis because she was a woman in a male-dominated world and wrote articles that defined the traits of character and behaviour that were desirable in a respectable female, as her famously scathing review of *Jane Eyre* shows.<sup>68</sup> Although Eastlake never advocated total immunity from emotion, she insisted that work should always counteract emotional weakness and thus helped to reinforce her culture's association of professional diligence with emotional control. Her diaries have mostly been ransacked for their biographical content and have not been read in their own right. Although they have been edited and reassembled with little sensitivity, they reveal a woman who not only cultivated a façade of moral and intellectual perfection, but who fervently strove to substantialise this persona by embodying and being an honourable and principled person.

Eastlake's heavily didactic cultural commentary supported Bain's idea that the emotions needed to be managed and used for artistic creation, rather than self-indulgent self-contemplation. Both Bain and Eastlake display a strong belief in the individual's responsibility to control "passionate [emotional] outbursts" for the

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Eastlake, "Review of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*," *Quarterly Review*, vol. 84 (Dec.1848), pp. 162-75.

benefit of the community.<sup>69</sup> Alongside this encouraged selective repression, both deemed enthusiastic emotion to be a crucial component of creativity. As Henry Crabb Robinson's (1775-1867) diary shows, the Victorian artist was under considerable pressure to find this ideal emotional equilibrium. Crabb Robinson was a well-known Victorian lawyer, who was closely acquainted with the intellectual elite of the nineteenth century, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, as well as Goethe and Schiller. He used his diary primarily to document his interactions (verbal and written) with his famous friends, as well as to vent his opinions on contemporary philosophy. As with Eastlake, his diary has not been the object of scholarly investigation and is often used as a reference text to deliver 'authentic' Victorian 'first-hand' 'facts,' as well as background information on the members of the diarist's social circle. His estimations of his personal value correlate with his regrets over his failed artistic career and accentuate the desire, or duty, to achieve professional success that we see in the other diaries of this thesis. His (heavily edited) records show that he was severely intimidated by the general cultural call for just enough emotion, which stifled his own creative energy. The disappointment, humiliation and shame that came from this 'poetic dryness' (which is also evident in Hopkins's career) demonstrate that, for Crabb Robinson, artistic prowess was the highest distinction of the human being, which he felt that, for him, was always out of reach.

This chapter contrasts two types of cultural commentators: on the one hand, Lady Eastlake, who was confident in her professional authority and sought to influence others; on the other, Crabb Robinson, who, although he had a successful legal career, was not able to fulfil his professional vision and spent his life coming to terms with the compromises he had to make. I consider some of the cultural roots of

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), p. 366.

the habitual self-effacement, which all the diarists that this thesis examines seem to have exerted for the sake of foregrounding their work. It also presents the diary's role as a self-monitoring tool that could help the diarist adhere to the culturally determined duty to tailor a self that protects, rather than challenges, the community.

Chapter Two focuses on the diaries of the renowned Victorian realists George Eliot (1819-1890) and George Gissing (1857-1903). Eliot was a female sage who hoped to transform society through her fiction and, as her diaries show, attempted to craft a genuinely noble and selfless person. Although Gissing's novels are often mentioned alongside Eliot's, he was not motivated by the same determination to achieve social change through his fictional creations, but struggled for financial, rather than moral, survival. Reading the diaries of these realist novelists, whose works appear at different extremes of the spectrum of realism, reveals the ways in which material reality can inform and reinforce a writer's moral philosophy (Comte's positivism for Eliot and Schopenhauerian pessimism in Gissing's case). Despite the drastic difference in material wealth that separated these two authors, their diaries show that both treated work as a new form of religiosity that determined their value as individuals. Both constantly deplored their inability to produce fictional and essayistic writing.

Eliot's diary shows that her ideal of an uninterrupted, rigorous work-discipline exerted a significant strain on her and caused a constant personal struggle between self-abnegation and self-assertion. For Eliot, lack of work signified the neglect of her readers who depended on her for moral guidance. Failure to produce literature thus established her as a weak and selfish human being who had disappointed the community by not paying back the debt that came with her financial and romantic privileges and who had deserted her positivist ideals. Eliot's diary reveals that her

didactic fiction, through which she sought to redeem her guilt towards her readers, was the product of endless crises of confidence, caused by her own, exceedingly high, literary standards. The diary offers a space for weakness and complaint, but, in tune with the cultural pressure to silence such emotions, Eliot refuses to wholly indulge in her lamentations and always reassures herself and her invisible reader that despite momentary discomfort she is extremely grateful for her blessings. Through frequently re-reading her diaries and consequently interacting with past selves, Eliot sought to cultivate a self-contained, balanced and productive persona who could “touch the hearts of [her] fellowmen” and accomplish social change.<sup>70</sup> Significantly, Eliot did not employ her diary as a confessional vent, but instead used her letters and fictional works to utter and transcend emotional turmoil.

George Gissing’s (1857-1903) diary displays an even more obstinate compulsion to produce work and a more consistent equation of professional productivity with personal value. Gissing needed to produce literature at an astonishing speed in order to overcome the misery of poverty which he experienced as shameful and unrespectable. He used his diary as a tool to monitor his rate of literary output and to exert additional pressure on himself, and, usually only when he could report genuine happiness, did he inscribe experiences that were personal rather than professional. Gissing’s practice of diary keeping reflects the divided nature of his life: because material want and anxiety dominated his professional existence, he rarely shared anything beyond his progress with his diary. During his travels, however, when Gissing was in the pleasurable proximity of great art, his diary entries swelled in size and became more descriptive. It seems that in the idealised world of Italy and Greece, Gissing felt he was truly alive, which shows that work was the only

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<sup>70</sup> David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 64.

component of his comparatively dreary London life that deserved recording. He tended to reveal more personal information in his letters—for instance, among many other instances, the diary fails to disclose the romantic developments with Gabrielle Fleury, but his letters to her expose his obsessive love.

Chapter Three examines the published diaries of art critic and philosopher John Ruskin (1819-1900), whose extraordinary body of publications is evidence for a life spent in the service of work. His diaristic writing was similarly extensive, as for Ruskin, undocumented experience was wasted. I shall treat Ruskin's deliberate disregard of his personal life in his diaries and his autobiography as a prime example of the selective consciousness at work in many Victorian diaries. As Andrew Leng has pointed out, Ruskin, in his extensive "self-mythologization," simply omitted his "disastrous marriage and the humiliating scandal surrounding its annulment on the grounds of non-consummation."<sup>71</sup> Through foregrounding his professional self, Ruskin's diary displays an unwavering focus on visual reality, which reveals a refusal to engage with the unrespectable aspects of his past and present life and is self-assertive in its self-effacing censorship. The diary precedes Ruskin's determination to "[pass] in total silence things which I have no pleasure in reviewing," which he made explicit in *Praeterita* (1885-1889).<sup>72</sup>

Whereas for Eliot and Gissing pleasure stood in direct opposition to work, for Ruskin, gratifying emotion was an integral part of the labour-intensive process of observation, as his diary shows. The other diarists only sporadically included extensive travel reports into their diaries, but Ruskin's overflows with lengthy and very detailed visual descriptions of his external environment. Although Ruskin, like

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<sup>71</sup> Andrew Leng, "The Unwritten and the Underwriting of Ruskin's Art Criticism," in *The Silent Word: Textual Meaning and the Unwritten*, Robert C. J. Young, Ban Kah Choon, Robbie B. H. Goh, eds. (Singapore: World Scientific Press, 1998), p. 145.

<sup>72</sup> John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Orpington: George Allen, 1899), p. v.

Crabb Robinson, viewed emotion as the necessary spark that invested art with life and meaning, he employed it for the purposes of work and did not respect its natural dynamic of excitability and satiability, which was the cause of much frustration. Instead, he constantly forced himself to feel touched by landscapes and architecture when he was emotionally drained and incapable of connecting to the observed objects/events. Like Gissing's, Ruskin's diary strikes through its remarkably consistent silencing of private emotions, which stands in stark contrast to the desire for the total possession of visual scenes, which Ruskin expressed frequently.

Chapter Four scrutinises the diary of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), the now famous Jesuit poet who existed at the periphery of the Victorian art world. None of Hopkins's poems were published in his lifetime, for his religious and his poetic self were in a constant state of conflict. His diary primarily translates his poetic consciousness, rendering Hopkins's wilful focus on the descriptions of visual objects. In some ways, the diary can be seen to embody Hopkins's effort to distance himself from his subversive and unrespectable homosexual emotions, which was finalised by his decision to join the Jesuit order and devote his body and mind to God. His diary shows that, in order to divert from "dangerous" emotions, Hopkins developed his observational skills and, through inscribing his impressions into this record, strengthened his imagined connection to the natural world. Initially Hopkins used the diary form to monitor and quench his inappropriate homosexual interests and it later served as a forum in which to construct himself as a necessary observer of nature—a task that took the shape of a profession: in order to include and ground himself in God's creation, Hopkins consistently animated non-human natural objects, imagining them to invite and return his gaze. Hopkins then received validation for his efforts to fulfil nature's need to be perceived by a human consciousness, which, in the

terminology he developed in his diary, was called “inscape.” Presumably, Hopkins eventually gave up on his diary because his work as a priest was too demanding and completely swallowed his time, to the point that he could no longer cultivate his observational skills, which led to the despair of the “terrible” sonnets.

The Victorian diaries under examination can be seen as the diarists’ attempts to monitor the intensity and propriety of their emotions and employ them to increase their professional output. Eastlake, Crabb Robinson, Eliot, Gissing, Ruskin and Hopkins perceived self-scrutiny as a useful activity only when it could serve the perfection and maximisation of their intellectual endeavour, not when it encouraged self-indulgent rumination. Constantly aiming to inspire themselves, these diarists preached the codes of silent discipline to themselves and, through their published work, to a wider audience.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> While this thesis analyses how the cultural context in which each of the diarists wrote affected his or her diaristic habits, it is unable to show how and when the resultant persona appears in his or her literary production.

## Chapter One

### **Silencing the Self: Victorian Psychology and Social Life: Alexander Bain, Elizabeth Eastlake and Henry Crabb Robinson.**

The diaries that this thesis examines are characterised by their reluctance to reveal intimate detail about their authors. These private records are distinguished by the diarists' determination to maintain a disciplined work routine and to exert control over their emotions of anger, pride and passion. Invariably, the diarists portray self-control as a quality that is essential for maintaining a rigorous work ethic and thus an inestimably desirable trait of character. Emotionally indulgent behaviour, such as vanity, self-pity or lethargy, on the other hand, is regarded as a sign of personal weakness which has to be extirpated. This chapter will read the deliberate silencing of the self displayed in the diaries under investigation as a symptom of a more general societal pressure to hush the emotions, minimise references to the self and cultivate other-oriented behaviour, as evidenced in the psychological discourse of the period. It will consider the impact of Evangelical self-abnegation and political uncertainty on these diarists' desire for a disciplined management of their emotions and show that repression did by no means target all emotions, but was employed in specific situations to achieve specific results.

Alexander Bain's (1818-1903) psychology textbook *The Emotions and the Will* (1859) investigates and disseminates the mechanisms inherent in emotional control and thus assumes a function similar to Victorian advice literature.<sup>1</sup> Bain believed that through will-power, the individual could control and train his or her emotions like limbs. I shall investigate the reoccurrence of similar instructions for repressing the emotions in favour of professional diligence in the diaries and critical

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875).



work of two extremely influential Victorian public figures: Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake (1809-1893), the art critic and writer who was a “central figure in the Victorian art scene” and the lawyer and linguist Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) who was “a significant cultural mediator and channel of communication between English and German letters.”<sup>2</sup> Due to their high-ranking social circles—Eastlake’s was composed of celebrities such as Ruskin, Turner and Carlyle and Crabb Robinson was friends with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Goethe—their views would have influenced a large number of their contemporaries. At the same time, like Bain, they adopted behavioural guidelines that were pervading the culture, which were reflected in both their diaries and their work.

The Victorian diarists that this thesis examines evidently come from a privileged background and the moral concerns they uttered in their private records reflect upper-middle-class ideas of respectability, rather than rendering a comprehensive picture of the Victorian cultural climate. All of them, George Eliot and George Gissing (Chapter Two) in particular, were “writers [who] spread the cult of self-awareness to the reading middle classes” and “professed a heartfelt interest in the secret needs and conflicting emotions concealed beneath civilized surfaces,” thus “[mapping] inner space,” to use the words of Peter Gay.<sup>3</sup> Their diaries are dominated by a persistent struggle to tend to the various duties their cultural context demanded them to accomplish. Eliot and Gissing used the diary’s organisational structure to monitor daily accomplishments and failures. For Ruskin (Chapter Three), the diary represented a repository for his visual experience, which he felt compelled to preserve from oblivion. Gerard Manley Hopkins (Chapter Four) felt a similar duty to

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<sup>2</sup> Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell, *Prose by Victorian Women: An Anthology* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), p.77; Eugene Stelzig, “Henry Crabb Robinson as Staël’s Philosophical Informant,” *Essays in Romanticism*, vol. 15 (2007), pp.113-128, p.114.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), p. 4.

appropriate his visual environment, insisting on his own presence as an observer in the tableaux he depicted.

Eastlake, Crabb Robinson, Eliot, Gissing, Ruskin and Hopkins used their diaries as tools to enforce self-imposed as well as culturally determined duties and cannot be seen to fully conform to the functions—“expression” and “reflection”—that diary critic Philippe Lejeune views as the fundamental characteristics of the twentieth-century diary.<sup>4</sup> I shall argue that, due to the cultural codes of propriety, the “[releasing and unloading of] the weight of emotions” inherent in diaristic expression often inspired the diarists with shame, which led them to give in to “the impulse to *destroy*.”<sup>5</sup> Lejeune convincingly argues that through this final separation of the self and the emotion, diarists are able to “liberate” themselves from “the weight of the past.”<sup>6</sup> Lady Eastlake destroyed some of the diaries she thought too revealing and Ruskin determined from the start to keep one diary for feelings and one for thoughts, thus weeding out the undesirable emotional overgrowth. The present diaries fit into Lejeune’s framework in that they can primarily be considered as instruments for “analysis” and “deliberation,” creating “archives from lived experience” in order to “freeze time” and “examine choices.”<sup>7</sup> Significantly, Bain encouraged the use of a diary to separate thoughts from emotions in order to make rational decisions. The diarists I focus on similarly used their records to draw lessons from the past and strengthen their willpower rather than for venting emotional turmoil.

An examination of the similarities between the portrayal of emotion in Bain’s psychological discourse and Eastlake and Crabb Robinson’s texts can give us an understanding of how cultural ideas of the emotional and physical constitution of the

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<sup>4</sup> Philippe Lejeune, “How Do Diaries End?” Victoria Lodewick, trans., *Biography*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2001), pp. 99-112.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

human being conditioned individual behaviour. In its effort to objectivise and catalogue the motions of the mental apparatus through scientific inquiry, psychology assumed an almost factual knowledge of the mind. Psychological textbooks thus propagated an image of the human being that claimed the unquestionable accuracy of anatomical analysis. Psychology manuals, such as the work of Alexander Bain, W.B. Carpenter (1813-1885) and T.S. Clouston (1840-1915), which possessed (some) scientific authority, tended to promulgate moral ideas under the cover of disinterested veracity.<sup>8</sup> They can therefore be viewed as prescriptive texts, in some ways comparable to the popular advice literature, such as Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859), which I shall further discuss in Chapter Two.<sup>9</sup>

The diary is an important tool in the analysis of Victorian thought because the diarist's choice of material and language can shed light on the cultural consciousness of the nineteenth century. However, due to the methodological difficulties that the editors of Eastlake's and Crabb Robinson's diaries have caused, this chapter will not be able to investigate the diaries' role in the latter's emotional self-monitoring, but will limit itself to an analysis of the attitudes they expressed in regard to emotional control. Despite the textual tailoring of the editors, we can discern Eastlake's and Crabb Robinson's efforts to fulfil socio-cultural requirements and assess the impact of culture on self-fashioning. Eastlake lived to witness the impact of Bain's work and, as

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<sup>8</sup> W.B. Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology with their Applications to the Training of the Mind and the Study of its Morbid Conditions* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004); T.S. Clouston, "The Developmental Aspects of Criminal Anthropology," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 23 (1894), pp.215-225.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986). As Rick Rylance has pointed out in *Victorian Psychology and British Culture: 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 133, Bain disagreed with Smiles's "emphasis on will power:" "to bid a man be habitually cheerful [...] is like bidding him to triple his fortune, or add a cubit to his stature." Original source: Alexander Bain, "Common Errors on the Mind," *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 4 (1848), p. 161. Although Bain believed that certain emotions, such as those that give rise to blushing, cannot be restrained through will power, he generally stressed that volitional strength was a sign of sophistication and intelligence. However, his conviction that an open, disciplined mind could advance the individual's knowledge as well as fortune, which is expressed in "quasi-Smilesian images of success" (p. 200), to use Rylance's phrase, is evident in *The Emotions and the Will*.

I shall show, her 1868 study of grief entitled *Fellowship: Letters to My Sister Mourners* recalls Bain's views that the suffering related to loss must initially be tolerated, if not embraced, before the individual must resume rigorous emotional self-discipline.<sup>10</sup> Because both Eastlake and Crabb Robinson, as much as the other diarists this thesis examines, discussed the necessity to repress emotion in their diaries, we can infer that they responded to the codes of conduct that their culture was suffused with. We may assume that Bain was himself influenced by cultural mores advocating repression which marked the moral didacticism of his studies. Neither of these authors can be considered a representative of the whole of Victorian society, but some of the conscious mechanisms at work in the regulation of their conduct can be seen to be characteristic of their historical and cultural context.

Bain's psychological studies, as much as the diaries and critical articles under consideration, depict emotional self-indulgence as a behaviour needing control, temperance and self-restraint. Section I argues that secularisation, religious self-abnegation and political uncertainty intensified the culture's focus on the self and heightened the individual's responsibility towards the community. I will trace the motivation for emotional restraint to the self-negation advocated by Evangelical doctrines on the one hand, and the fear of revolution and social upheaval that pervaded Victorian culture on the other. I will show that psychologists and medical doctors of the nineteenth century, in accordance with the institutionalised enforcement of altruism, proposed techniques for a successful repressive adjustment of unrespectable emotions—particularly those relating to the self—to the social requirements. I will situate Alexander Bain's work within the discourse of Victorian

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<sup>10</sup> As opposed to the more passive self-fashioning of the Renaissance, which for Stephen Greenblatt, designates the cultural forces that introduced the idea of individual autonomy. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Elizabeth Eastlake, *Fellowship: Letters to My Sister Mourners* (London: Macmillan, 1868).

psychology and discuss its relevance in light of the sociological scholarship of Norbert Elias and selected scholars of respectability, such as F.M.L. Thompson, and analyse the self-protective mechanisms at work within the individual that give rise to culturally conditioned behaviour.<sup>11</sup> Attempting to shed light on the practice of silencing the self that can be observed in the diaries under examination, I will investigate the conscious and unconscious processes inherent in the private ‘managing of feeling’ in the public persona’s moral appearance.<sup>12</sup>

Section II will present my methodological choice to compensate the severe editorial distortion of the diarists’ original records by reading Eastlake’s diary in light of her published texts and Crabb Robinson’s in view of biographical factors. I will then discuss the feminisation of emotion in Victorian culture; presenting Eastlake’s and Crabb Robinson’s praise of both the nurturing, motherly qualities of feminine emotion and the connection that they draw between self-effacement and respectability as an example of more general cultural tendencies. Despite their encouragement of repression, they considered specific emotions as wholesome and necessary, such as the comforting and caring emotions that parents felt towards their children and artists’ emotional enthusiasm towards their creations. The juxtaposition of Eastlake’s attitude to the grieving process and the advice Crabb Robinson was given after the death of his mother demonstrates the delicate balance between indulgence and self-control that he felt he was expected to find. Whereas the emotions were seen as the mortar that solidified the family and infused art with its greatness, they had to be severely monitored in social interactions. In what ultimately can be seen as an effort to protect

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<sup>11</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Malden Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

the other and the community, the individual had to abstain from emotional impetuosity and selfishness, which explains the instances of apologetic self-minimisation that are typical of the diaries under investigation.

## **I Psychology and the Repression of Emotion**

In the past twenty years a considerable body of criticism has questioned the extent of Victorian repression and analysed its portrayal in nineteenth-century texts. Recent scholarship has interrogated and challenged the validity of accepted post-Victorian assessments of the period's attitudes to ideas of propriety. Matthew Sweet, for instance, has observed that traditional views of Victorian sexuality have tended to focus on the "practices drawn from the cranky margins of Victorian medical culture," tailoring a picture of the Victorians that is based on extremely shocking exceptions.<sup>13</sup> In reality, the Victorians were probably more lenient than Peter Cominos' article on respectability and sexual behaviour can lead us to think. Cominos focused primarily on extreme anti-sexual attitudes, such as Dr. William Acton's belief in "absolute continence" in the respectable gentleman, or Archbishop Ireland's equation of "sexual passion" with "animalism."<sup>14</sup> Clitoridectomy, chastity belts, penis cages and veiled piano legs may have existed, but they certainly were not part of the standard household. However, selective repression of emotion, even in its most basic forms, was, and still is, an undeniable cultural necessity. Like critic Gowan Dawson, who has drawn attention to the censorship that Victorian naturalistic texts faced, I would like to expose some of the cultural imperatives that encouraged the chosen diarists to

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p.210.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Cominos, "Late-Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System," *International Review of Social History*, vol.8 (1963), pp.18-48, p.21, p.23.

customise his or her self into a well-behaved, self-contained, modest and tirelessly industrious human being.<sup>15</sup>

The idealisation of self-possession, thrift and other-directed behaviour can partly be seen as an outcome of the Evangelical principles that were introduced in eighteenth-century Britain. Historian Lawrence Stone has noted that within the realm of Evangelical control, sexual repression was administered concurrently with a general discouragement of openly displayed emotion.<sup>16</sup> Max Weber (1864-1920), on whose study of the Protestant work ethic (1904-05) I shall elaborate in Chapter Two, attributes the Victorian obsession with proper conduct to the Puritan belief that “even though a man himself could not, others could know his state of grace by his conduct.”<sup>17</sup> The Puritan not only anticipated and monitored his or her perception by others, but in order to do so, he or she had to believe whole-heartedly in the possibility of being one of the elect for whom salvation was assured. Not all Victorians were extreme Puritans, of course, but Evangelicalism had an impact on the culture’s perception of ardent emotion as undesirable.

The fear of excessive emotion can also be traced to the political reality of nineteenth-century Europe. Britain witnessed the political turmoil of the French Revolution, and, eager to avoid such uproar within its own confines, created countless institutions that attempted to regularise conduct by establishing norms for individual behaviour. These organisations, such as the Society for the Suppression of Vice of 1803, the Association Securing a Better Observance of Sunday, the Society for the Prevention of Female Prostitution, the Religious Tract Society and the 1824 Vagrancy

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<sup>15</sup> Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 645.

<sup>17</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, trans. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), p.135.

Act, aimed to combat the forces that constituted a menace to the existing political and ideological system, such as revolutionary tendencies, decreasing religious zeal and the intrusion of science into the traditional value system.<sup>18</sup> This progressive institutionalisation of the Victorian state demonstrates that Henry Crabb Robinson, although born in the eighteenth century, was influenced by the increasingly restrictive culture of the nineteenth.

Public and private fears of the disorderly fed into each other to form a culture of state control, which encouraged personal vigilance. Walter J. Houghton, in his influential work *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957) has noted that the Victorians' "excessive censorship [was] intended to protect and support the code of chastity, or to prevent the embarrassment of looking at what was felt to be shameful."<sup>19</sup> This censorship manifested itself both on a private and on a state level. The necessity of controlling feeling sprang from a general fear of revolutionary chaos and cannot be reduced to mere prudish tastes. Gesa Stegman has emphasised the political aspect of uncontrolled emotion, which, for the Victorians, echoed the breakdown of the social system of 1789 France:

The spectre of the body politic as a mass of powerful, passionate bodies overthrowing traditional values and institutions—Spencer's 'sanguinary chaos of the [French] Revolution' still very much preyed on people's minds—was another obsessive fear expressed by leading intellectuals, particularly during the first part of the century.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (London, Penguin Books, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Walter J. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 356.

<sup>20</sup> Gesa Stegman, "Mind, Matter and Morals: The Emotions and Nineteenth-Century Discourse," in Juergen Schlaeger and Gesa Stegman, eds., *Representations of Emotions* (Tuebingen: Guenter Narr Verlag, 1999), p. 129. This fear of the "mob" was originally (1790) introduced by Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition (London: J. Dodsley, Pall Mall, 1791). Burke presents the "inability to wrestle with difficulty" of the riotous "arbitrary assembly in France" as an example of destructive behaviour which is antithetical to the ideal intellectual pacifism displayed by the English: "rage and phrenzy will pull down more in half an hour, than prudence, deliberation and foresight can build up in a hundred years" (p. 248).



This implied belief that human beings, when unleashed, could muster extraordinary force, capable of “overthrowing” the structures imposed by social control, demonstrates an acute fear of animalistic violence that defied all attempts of restraining discipline. In reaction, as social historian F.M.L. Thompson has explained, strict regulations became “[devised] mechanisms of social control which conditioned and manipulated the propertyless masses into accepting and operating the forms and functions of behaviour necessary to sustain the social order of an industrial society.”<sup>21</sup> Financially challenged groups such as the working-classes, prostitutes and Irish migrants, among others, were stigmatised as likely to “behave badly,” and thus represented a particular menace to an orderly society.<sup>22</sup>

Since the introduction of a regularised police force in London in 1829, discussions about the nature of the criminal and of unlawful behaviour increased significantly and over the course of the nineteenth century led to the formation of “the policeman-state.”<sup>23</sup> Such a state, according to Foucauldian critics Patrick Brantlinger and Donald Ulin, provoked “guilty consciences” in individuals, pushing them to behave in non-deviant, respectable ways. “The soul [being] the prison of the body,” as Foucault wrote in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), the self-monitoring individual became his or her own panopticon, as this “discipline [came to be] internalised in every well-behaved, ‘normal’ good citizen.”<sup>24</sup> This approach implied that the human

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<sup>21</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, “Social Control in Victorian Britain,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 34, no. 2, (May 1981), pp. 189-208, p. 189.

<sup>22</sup> This is clearly exemplified by the contributors of Judith Rowbothan’s and Kim Stevenson’s collection, such as in Robert Swift’s chapter “Behaving Badly? Irish Migrants and Crime in the Victorian City” in *Criminal Conversations, Social Panic and Moral Outrage* (Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 119-120.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Brantlinger and Donald Ulin, “Discourse and Social Control in Early Victorian England,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 25, (Autumn, 1993), pp. 33-63, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 30; Brantlinger and Ulin, “Discourse and Social Control,” p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Schlaefer and Stedman, *Representations of Emotions*, p. 129.

being was seen as an unruly, wild and possibly riotous creature, who needed control and correction by a powerful, omnipresent authority.<sup>25</sup>

Nineteenth-century psychological studies on the emotions can reveal cultural signifiers that reflect some of the concerns that preoccupied society and therefore represent valuable historical sources. In her analysis of the emotions in nineteenth-century psychological discourse, critic Gesa Stegman has attributed the increased focus on the emotions to a general decrease in religious devotion, which constituted “a threat to social cohesion and morality which had to be counteracted by desperate measures, all of which can be found in the discourse on the emotions.”<sup>26</sup> However, it seems that religious zeal, as much as secularisation and the fears that accompanied this phenomenon, affected Victorian attitudes to the emotions with similar results. Gertrude Himmelfarb’s assertion that the “Victorian ethic” of moral reform was inspired by the Methodism which John Wesley had promoted, echoes Max Weber’s allegation that capitalism rose out of the disembodied behavioural framework of Protestantism:

Even as religion became progressively more attenuated, as the public became more relaxed in its faith and the intellectuals more openly sceptical, the social ethic did not become correspondingly attenuated or relaxed. Indeed the ethic acquired some of the stigmata of old religion—the gloom and fierceness that Newman yearned for.<sup>27</sup>

George Eliot’s diary, in particular, confirms Himmelfarb’s observation that the diminution of religious commitment was replaced by “an intensification of moral zeal,” and did not bring about a collapse of the value system.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, as Himmelfarb has argued, the focus shifted from religious concerns to social compassion, with the Victorians now “giving to mankind what they could no longer

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<sup>27</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 289.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

give to God.”<sup>29</sup> This turn towards altruism, I propose, can be associated with the general mockery and dismissal of vanity and of the preoccupation with the self which can be witnessed in the work of Bain, Eastlake and Crabb Robinson, as well as George Eliot, Ruskin and Hopkins (Gissing to a lesser extent).

I shall now investigate the ways in which Alexander Bain’s psychology was other-directed and indicate its parallels to state control. For Bain, the function of education consisted in shaping the individual’s “half-organic and half-mental” will, to use Rick Rylance’s words, and in directing it towards respectable behaviour; namely selfless altruism: “the good of the community becomes the end and aim of our moral nature.”<sup>30</sup> A very influential psychologist and academic, Bain epitomises the dualism “emotion” and “will,” which can be seen as the fundamental dynamic that characterises the diaries under examination as well as the diary as a genre. The self-objectifying function of the diary facilitates the monitoring and the improvement of the written (past) self’s emotions through the writing (present) self’s will. The diary genre thus reflects the Victorian preoccupation with knowing and moulding the self.

### **Alexander Bain (1818-1903)**

Alexander Bain was a psychologist and professor of Logic and English at the University of Aberdeen. His work, which elevated self-control to a moral level, brings to light the ways in which Victorian culture influenced the science of psychology and vice-versa. Rylance has argued that: “Bain was a man reacting to close historical events and tendencies [and] his conception of the will is not immune from some of the prevailing beliefs.”<sup>31</sup> Bain was not affiliated with any religious group and demonstrated a classical humanist belief in the malleability of human character and

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<sup>29</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture: 1850-1888*, p. 198. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Bain, “Darwinism and Religion,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, vol. 24 (1871), p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture: 1850-1888*, p. 200.

the agency of the human being, as he was convinced that “men and women could become virtuous by their own effort of will.”<sup>32</sup> *The Emotions and the Will* presents actual techniques by which the individual could condition the emotions by the power of the will and thus achieve professional productivity and respectability. Like Gesa Stedman, I believe that the “strict moral framework,” which Bain constructed to explain the emotions, was designed to “safeguard the individual as well as society from immoral behaviour and therefore from ill-health.”<sup>33</sup> The will was seen to control the body’s “subversive potential,” and to prevent the individual from regressing, as my section on Bain’s stance on education will show.<sup>34</sup> I would, however, like to go beyond Stedman’s argument, showing that Bain specifically encouraged the repression of emotions associated with the self, such as vanity and self-indulgence and encouraged the use of a diary to invalidate the misleading influence of the emotions.

Bain, like Herbert Spencer, was a friend of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes and shared their admiration for the work of Auguste Comte. Because of their belief in the interdependence of mind and body, John Stuart Mill explicitly termed Bain and Spencer the “successors” of Comte, “who duly placed themselves at the twofold point between psychology and physiology.”<sup>35</sup> Gustav Jahoda, in his book on social psychology, has acknowledged that although Bain was “not a central figure” in positivism, he, like Mill and Lewes, played an important role in introducing Comte’s ideas to Britain.<sup>36</sup> Although, as Thomas Dixon has explained, Comte had not included psychology in his classification of the sciences, Bain approached the subject from a

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<sup>32</sup> Jose Harris, *Private Lives*, p. 248.

<sup>33</sup> Schlaeger and Stedman, *Representations of Emotions*, p. 132.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1907), p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Gustav Jahoda, *A History of Social Psychology: From the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment to the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 84.

scientific angle: “As Brown and other Scottish mental scientists had done before him, Bain turned to the physical sciences in his search for a preferable alternative to theological methodology.”<sup>37</sup> Using the “Natural History Method,” he viewed the emotions as bodily products which could be controlled by the rational command of volition.<sup>38</sup> As Andrea A. Lunsford has explicated, “to Bain the emotive, cognitive, and volitional aspects are not ‘compartments’ of the mind; on the contrary, the mind is unified.”<sup>39</sup> For him, mental states affected bodily functions and vice-versa—the body and the mind were inseparably intertwined as constituents of a unified human being and acted upon each other.

Bain’s *The Emotions and the Will* starts out with an outline of the elements comprising the human mind: “Feeling, Volition and Intellect.”<sup>40</sup> Although, as Rylance has noted, Bain “rejected the notion that personality and human agency [were] only reward stimulated,” he viewed “Pleasures” and “Pains” as essential tools for conditioning the emotions, which were termed “Feelings.”<sup>41</sup> Feelings were distinguished from Emotions, because they were “characterised simply as excitement.”<sup>42</sup> An “Emotion” was a complex phenomenon, which was activated through the energies generated by a combination of mental and physical factors:<sup>43</sup>

Under the MUSCULAR FEELINGS and the SENSATIONS of the SENSES, [are] detailed all the susceptibilities of a primary character, due, on the one hand, to the putting forth of the muscular energy, and, on the other, to the operation of the outer world on the organs of sense. There remains a large department of secondary, derived, or complicated feelings, termed the EMOTIONS.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. v.

<sup>39</sup> Andrea L. Lunsford, “Alexander Bain’s Contributions to Discourse Theory,” *College English*, vol. 44, no. 3, (March, 1982), pp. 290-300 (p. 292).

<sup>40</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture: 1850-1888*, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> I shall use them interchangeably throughout my thesis.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The emotions were thus seen as complex derivatives of the body.<sup>45</sup> The movements of the body could be refined and trained to perform high-precision skills through specific conditioning of the emotions. Similarly, in Bain's view, intense emotions could be tamed, as it were, by the physical and mental control of the will. Through consistent efforts at habituation, the individual could achieve command over the shapeless mess that were the feelings and gear them towards the sophistication of the intellect.

Like the diarists this thesis studies, Bain deemed an appropriate dosage of repression to be necessary for the individual to become a valuable contributor to society. In the fashion of classical humanism, Bain "reject[ed] the ethic of egoism in favour of altruism," insisting that the individual was answerable to society and had to direct his or her actions towards the good of the social community.<sup>46</sup> His scientific work thus reflects his personal moral ideals as well as a strong awareness of the expectations that society imposed on the individual.

I will not discuss the Victorian controversy relating to free will in this chapter, but I will attempt to highlight how, in Bain's work, the will can be seen as socially constructed. Bain viewed the will as an emotion, which, once duly trained, could take the shape of what Freud later called the "superego"—a control mechanism maintaining the respectable conduct of the individual.<sup>47</sup> William George Ward (1812-1882), the Roman Catholic theologian, contested that Bain and his fellow "Determinists" believed in the existence of an "anti-impulsive effort," by which to manage the emotions: "the whole Deterministic controversy [...] turns on this one question: Do I, or do I not, at various times exercise self-restraint? Do I, or do I not, at

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<sup>45</sup> Spencer similarly sees the emotions as the product of the body: "Every feeling, peripheral or central—sensational or emotional—is the concomitant of a nervous disturbance and resulting nervous discharge, that has on the body both a special effect and a general effect." Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1870-72), p. 540.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, *Private Lives*, p. 248.

<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Walter John Herbert Sprott, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1933).

various times act in resistance to my strongest present desire?”<sup>48</sup> Ward insisted that Bain had “omit[ted] all reference to that most important factor in the formation of a moral habit, the will’s repeated anti-impulsive efforts.”<sup>49</sup> Bain’s own partial confirmation of this accusation in his reply in the third edition of *The Emotions and the Will* is completely misleading, as his Chapter IX on “The Moral Habits,” for instance, comprises subchapters such as “Control of Sense and Appetite,” “Suppression of Instinctive Movements,” and “Repression of Desire.”<sup>50</sup> Despite this incomprehensible denial of his belief in the power of will to control both the body and the mind, *The Emotions and the Will* portrays the will as the force that commands and corrects the individual’s thoughts and actions.

Bain’s anti-theistic approach to the emotions represented a novel current among nineteenth-century psychologists. Evidently, secularisation was a phenomenon that advanced gradually, and within the discipline of psychology, like everywhere else, the secular coexisted with the traditionally religious. Thomas Dixon, in his study of religious, non-religious and anti-religious approaches to the emotions in the nineteenth century, has explained that the psychological term and category of “emotions” was introduced in Thomas Brown’s *Lectures* of 1820. Because the term “emotion” belonged to a scientific terminology, as did words like “psychology, law, observation, evolution, organism, brain, nerves, expression, behaviour and viscera,” it represented a break with traditional religious typology from the start.<sup>51</sup> The words formerly used were “passion” and “affection,” which were associated with a less rational approach to the mind: “soul, conscience, Fall, sin, grace, Spirit, Satan, will,

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<sup>48</sup> William George Ward, “Free Will,” *Dublin Review*, vol. 32 (1879), pp. 281-322 (p. 288).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>50</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. xxvii.

<sup>51</sup> Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions*, p. 290; Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1845).

lower appetite and self love,” which are obviously suffused with religious morality.<sup>52</sup> Alexander Bain had looked at Brown’s *Lectures* in 1837, but “did not fully peruse” them.<sup>53</sup> However, according to Dixon, Bain later acquainted himself with Brown’s work. Evidently, Bain adopted the secular term “emotion” which distinguished him from the group of conservative psychological writers who continued to use the religious designations “passions” and “affections.” Among them were the evangelical Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) and the Anglican William Whewell (1794-1866).<sup>54</sup>

According to the adepts of a “physiological psychology,” such as Bain, Spencer and the influential German Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), who insisted on a reciprocal correlation between mental and physical factors, the individual was to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Bain, *Autobiography* (London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co, 1904), p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Chalmers’ *Sketches* (1840) present some similarities to Bain’s *Emotions and the Will*, such as the belief in “the Command which the Will had over the Emotions,” and consistent references to Thomas Brown, whom Chalmers viewed as the “most successful of [the] disciples [of Mental Science].” However, two crucial differences separate Bain and Chalmers: Bain’s physiological approach to the mind and Chalmers reliance on a “Deity” setting the moral standards.<sup>54</sup> Chalmers described the emotions as “mental phenomena,” “which occupy a kind of middle department in our nature, between the merely sensitive and the purely intellectual.” Thus, the emotions were seen to be in between the body and the mind, not fixedly attached to either. Chalmers maintained that the physical “appetites,” such as hunger and thirst could not be termed emotions because “they take their rise from the body” (p.88). They were also detached from the intellectual faculties, because phenomena such as joy, grief, desire, astonishment, respect, contempt and moral sensibility could not be seen as abstract constructions of the mind. Volitional control was essential in the “enjoyment” that emotions afforded, lest the individual took pleasure too far and became greedy: “One man more alive than his fellow to the pleasures of the appetite, will not only give himself over to their indulgence, but will prosecute a busy train of devices and doings on purpose to obtain them” (p.144). The appetites being the most unsophisticated category of the physical phenomena, shared by humans and animals, they were contrasted with “the very love the Deity has to moral excellence in his creatures” (p.98). Thus, Chalmers discouraged his reader from pursuing trivial worldliness such as wealth and actively promoted the adhesion to religious codes of conduct. Thomas Chalmers, *Sketches in Moral and Mental Philosophy: Their Connections With Each Other and Their Bearings on Doctrinal and Practical Christianity* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840).

Whewell identified the emotions as the “Springs of Human Action,” classifying them into the “Appetites,” “Affections,” “Mental Desires,” “Desire of Civil Society,” “Moral Sentiments,” and the “Reflex Sentiments.” His thoughts on the will differed fundamentally from Bain’s, Spencer’s and Brown’s as he held that “it is through his Will that the Desires act” (p.98) “Reason” took the place of the “Will” as defined by the physiological psychologists. Besides relatively rational appreciations of Victorian society, Whewell maintained “Moral Law” to be “the Will of God,” and established “God [as] the Author of Nature” (p. xxvii). Bain dealt with Whewell in his chapter on “Moral Sense” (Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 3). William Whewell *Elements of Morality, Including Polity*, vol. 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: John Parker and Son, West Strand, 1854).



attain respectability in the social sphere, rather than religious salvation, through the regulative function of the will.<sup>55</sup>

### **Respectability and Self-Monitoring**

Although the codes of respectability varied greatly depending on the class context, this chapter will take the concept to designate the degree to which the individual was able to meet the social requirements of proper behaviour. The respectable individual closely monitored his or her emotions, always anticipating the judgment of an imagined other. Avoiding others' contempt was difficult as respectability could take infinite shapes: for Henry Crabb Robinson and many of his contemporaries, for instance, respectability meant being well-to-do. Twentieth-century critical views extend from Walter Houghton's association of the concept with Church attendance, to Peter Cominos, who has related it to the postponement of marriage and its gratifications for the gentleman, to Richard Dellamora, who stressed the Victorian distinction between the respectable gentleman and the homosexual male.<sup>56</sup>

Significantly, *Cornhill Magazine* of 1863 defined respectability in the following terms:

The approval of mankind, its causes and its effects, are all summed up in the one word 'Respectable.' To be respectable, whether the object of the feeling is man or woman, is to fall under the protection of public opinion—to come up to that most real, though very indefinite standard of goodness, the attainment of which is exacted of every one as a condition of being allowed to associate upon terms of ostensible equality with the rest of the human race.<sup>57</sup>

The unifying factor among the many faces of respectability seems to be the desire to be accepted by one's peers; cradled in security through a comfortable integration in society. The absence of objectionable behaviour allowed the individual to reach "the

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Jacyna "The Physiology of Mind, the Unity of Nature, and the Moral Order in Victorian Thought," *British Journal of the History of Science*, vol. 14 (1981), pp. 109-32 (p. 109).

<sup>56</sup> Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 202.

<sup>57</sup> *The Cornhill Magazine*, "Anti-Respectability" (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1863), pp. 282-294 (p. 282).

standard of goodness,” which included value, respect and authority.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the esteem of society not only “protected” the individual from social ostracism, but also gave weight to his or her existence, making him or her an important element of society.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, respectability came at a price, for it demanded the compliance to specific, sometimes unspoken, rules of conduct. F.M.L. Thompson explains in his study of nineteenth-century views on the subject: “Respectability [was] a creed and a code for the conduct of personal and family life.”<sup>60</sup> This control was largely the product of “religious teaching and the conventions of acceptable behaviour of different social groups, not of the law itself.”<sup>61</sup> We can, however, object that legislations such as the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1867 and 1869) reinforced the societal consensus that the respectable individual was not to veer from the norm. Progress was encouraged, but only in as far as it remained “helpful to mankind,” in Thomas Brown’s terms.<sup>62</sup> The consistent efforts of this thesis’s diarists—Gissing functioning as an example of dissidence—to distance themselves from egotistical behaviour show that their authors perceived selfishness as a threat to the wholesomeness of society and therefore shunned it.

This active avoidance of possibly objectionable behaviour is, according to the twentieth-century sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990), the product of “The Civilizing Process.”<sup>63</sup> In this context, Bain’s writings on the emotions can partly be seen as active efforts to modify or facilitate the “psychological changes [inherent] in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 251.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Lectures*, p. 413.

<sup>63</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

the course of civilization.”<sup>64</sup> Bain encouraged adherence to the dominant cultural codes by contributing to what Elias describes as a partially conscious indoctrination:

The more complex and stable control of conduct is increasingly instilled in the individual from his or her earliest years as an automatism, a self-compulsion that he or she cannot resist even if he or she consciously wishes to. The web of actions grows so complex and extensive, the effort required to behave “correctly” within it becomes so great, that beside the individual’s conscious self-control an automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self-control is firmly established.<sup>65</sup>

Because the individual is subjected to the cultural indoctrination of social values from the minute he or she is born, conforming to the cultural imperatives becomes an irresistible, an often unquestioned, compulsion. Like Michel Foucault, Elias attributes the necessity to regulate the emotions to the hegemonic apparatus, which both dictates and reflects the subjective experience of the individual. Critic Martin A. Danahay, who has investigated the relationship of the Victorian individual to state power, has argued that: “it is through subjected autonomy that Victorian texts embody a model of the State’s role in the regulation of subjectivity.”<sup>66</sup> Danahay contends that Victorian texts were dominated by the State’s “superego” which led them to encourage “[repression of] violent and anti-social tendencies.”<sup>67</sup> Bain’s work, in its attempt to standardise respectable behaviour, can be seen to confirm this theory.

For Bain, the function of education was to teach the individual how to exert self-control and to motivate him or her to adhere to the societal rules of behaviour. He developed techniques by which to civilise the newly born human being, which he saw as a bundle of inchoate feelings. In order to become a successful participant in cultural reality, “the infant has yet to be indoctrinated betimes into the suppression of at least violent emotion, and is fit to be disciplined to this when very few volitional

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>66</sup> Martin A. Danahay, “State Power and the Victorian Subject,” *Prose Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1992), pp. 61-83 (p. 73).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

links are as yet established.”<sup>68</sup> Bain’s tone was detached and scientific when he described the educational process necessary to create a ‘proper’ human being; the infant seems to have been undeserving of respect due to the raw immediacy of his or her emotional responses. Bain repeatedly equated the human infant to an animal: “The treatment adapted for the young restive horse would apply to the beginnings of self-control in the infant.”<sup>69</sup> The impatient and instinct-driven infant was portrayed as a nuisance, necessitating harsh correction: “Pain is a surprising quickener of the intellectual process.”<sup>70</sup> This approach clearly emphasises the similarities between the taming of animals, the “domestications of the animal tribe,” and the introduction of an infant to self-control.<sup>71</sup> Pain was an appropriate motivational measure: “The first lessons in the control of passionate outbursts are unavoidably severe.”<sup>72</sup> In order to produce a respectable human being, the individual’s emotional foundation needed to be established through uncompromising adjustment.

Bain viewed obedience as unnatural, yet necessary; in the same way that strong emotion was natural but undesirable: “the habits of Obedience are created in opposition to self-will.”<sup>73</sup> These habits were needed to protect the community from the fervour of uncontrolled emotions: “an artificial system of controlling the actions is contrived—the system of using pain to deter from particular sorts of conduct.”<sup>74</sup> Punishment was initially experienced directly and was then replaced by its threat. The fear of pain, penalty and ridicule motivated the individual to abide by the rules and respect the norms of the community, as Elias has argued. My aim is not to point out

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<sup>68</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 363.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

the strictness of the pedagogical method, but to draw attention to Bain's portrayal of intense, uncultivated and unrestrained emotion as impermissibly childish.

Self-control, in Bain's eyes, was the mechanism by which the force of habit achieved "control [over] the volitions and the appetites."<sup>75</sup> The unruly emotional features of the human being were cultivated through manners, for instance, which drilled the individual to behave "correctly," to use Elias's phrasing, as they were "directed against the primitive or instinctive movements of the body."<sup>76</sup> Thus, the actions of the body needed to be in line with socially accepted behaviour, already in the infant. Starting with bodily reactions, the human being had to learn to overcome emotional "difficulties," such as "the power of the appetite itself, the inadequacy of the initiative" and "the want of any strong inclination in the mind towards the points to be gained by a complete control."<sup>77</sup> The failure to wield complete self-control was thus perceived as moral weakness. The individual was only in complete possession of his or her powers after having gained "superiority" over "flurry, excitement, needless fears, and extravagant ebullitions," which constituted obstacles to the respectable person.<sup>78</sup>

Bain's work is enlightening in that it exposes some of the silently accepted and implicitly transferred conduct rules and portrays them as necessary implementations that help the community function. In his detailed analysis of the emotions, he, much like Elias, identified the process of civilisation as the obligatory "suppression of the more prominent manifestations of feeling," and gave advice as to the successful management of emotional reactions according to social standards:<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 444.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

The major part of every community adopt certain rules of conduct necessary for the common preservation, or ministering to the common well-being. They find it not merely their interest, but the very condition of their existence, to observe a number of maxims of individual restraint, and of respect to one another's feelings in regard to person, property, and good name.<sup>80</sup>

Bain clearly portrayed respectability as a motivation for engaging in this socialising process. As opposed to Elias, he believed this process of civilisation to be conscious, with the individual voluntarily renouncing some of his or her freedoms for the greater good. For Elias, this process of adaptation could not be equalled to a contract, because the “inculcation” necessary to instil social codes in the individual was only partly based on intention.

Self-monitoring could be seen as a response to social scrutiny. As I have mentioned, the Victorian police-state can be seen as a giant metaphorical panopticon in which the individual both adopted the position of the guard monitoring and judging others' behaviour from the control tower. The prisoner in the cell, always conscious of being surveilled, imagined and thus anticipated societal judgment and altered his or her behaviour in relation to this assumed criticism, as sociologist Charles Cooley (1864-1929) has held: “We always imagine and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind.”<sup>81</sup> The other's expected judgment became real because of the persistence of this anticipatory attitude. Reprimands for self-important behaviour were

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 467. Bain's colleague, the major Victorian philosopher and psychologist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) made a similar point, explicitly urging the importance of repression for the “preservation of each society” in his *Principles of Psychology* of 1855. He identified “two sets of conditions” in the “predatory” human being, which were “antagonistic” (p. 570). “Destructive activities” included both offensive and defensive behaviour, demanding a suppression of sympathy for the opponent, in order to protect the respective society. The community, however, thrived on “co-operation between [its] members,” constructively advancing domestic relations and nurturing the group through “fellow-feeling” (p. 570). Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1870-72). Spencer's recent biographer Mark Francis holds that Spencer wished to be perceived as “neutral, passionless and objective;” a demeanour he achieved to adopt in his writing. Francis claims that, in part, Spencer longed for an exciting emotional life, but that he “was afraid of the consequences of [passion and affection] or of any other emotions.” Although Spencer did advocate repression on the one hand, he was shocked what the modern work ethic did to “harden” individuals “against pain, grief or desire.” All quotations from Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner's, 1922), pp. 184-185.

likely to remain unspoken, but provoked the shrinking of the self that abided by the rules at the expense, perhaps, of personal development. As we shall see, Crabb Robinson renounced his literary career partly because the idea of social ridicule terrified him.

For Bain, the adult human being had to derive intimate self-knowledge from “self-examination,” which was a crucial premise of the acquisition and maintenance of complete self-control.<sup>82</sup> Bain viewed the individual’s questioning of his or her “motives, merits, guilt, or innocence” as a fundamental constituent of personal rigour. Self-reflection, which Bain called “the most special occupation of the mind,” added a more complex dimension to merely impulsive behaviour and allowed the individual to double his or her consciousness and thus monitor his or her own conduct.<sup>83</sup> By establishing a “study of his [or her] actions and motives,” the individual could “[compare] them with such and such examples, standards or rules.”<sup>84</sup> To Bain, self-monitoring contributed to emotional sophistication, because it raised the individual’s awareness of his or her position in the world and thus heightened the desire for respectability.

Significantly, Bain recommended the use of a diary as a vital tool in rational decision-making. Due to its objectifying capacity, which separates the writing self from the reading self, the diary constituted a well-suited medium for “self-examination.”<sup>85</sup> Bain essentially viewed the diaristic process as conducive to rational, self-protective behaviour. The lessons drawn from the experiences recorded in the diary could help the individual avoid painful mistakes:

we need to recall past delights, according to their measure, with a view of securing them in full actuality, and to as great an extent as possible. We need

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<sup>82</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 543.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*; W.B. Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, p. 251.

<sup>85</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 543.

to recall previous suffering, in order that the reality, so much worse than the idea, may not be again reproduced.<sup>86</sup>

Although the individual could glean valuable insight from his or her experience, these lessons were not necessarily remembered, because, as the memory of the event and its circumstances vanished, the conclusions drawn from them weakened as well. The diary's immediacy could physically compensate for memory's ineptitude:

the mind may be untrustworthy in recording the successive impressions, and may thus leave us at the mercy of those occurring last; it is to counteract such a danger that the method of recording and summing up the separate decisions is here recommended.<sup>87</sup>

The latest impression was likely to be disproportionately strong and could mislead the individual into thinking that its impact was the greatest. Keeping a diary to document the decision-making process could give the individual a clearer grasp of the components that influenced the decision.

Bain mostly recommended a diary to make educated decisions in times of crisis, in order to "record [every evening] the impression of the day, or put down the side which preponderates according to the balance of motives passing through the mind in the course of that day."<sup>88</sup> He approached the solving of the crisis like a scientific problem and was eager to avoid partiality caused by emotional investment. It seems that his technique was aimed at the separation of rational thought and emotional impulses. The "lapse of time" between entries, Bain hoped, "should reduce the casual or accidental biases to a general average."<sup>89</sup> At the end of the "period that the deliberation lasts," the individual should "sum up the records of the days and see which side has the majority."<sup>90</sup> The purpose of weighing "all the states of mind that we pass through" against "the opposing questions" was to produce a logical

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



synthesis.<sup>91</sup> Over the delineated duration of time, the diarist was to monitor his or her motives with attempted disinterestedness, trying to remove emotional inclinations that might spoil the superior decision reached by rational consideration.

We see that Bain viewed the diary as a logical consequence of the cultural imperative to monitor and improve the self. By adopting the gaze of the other, the diarist attempted to forestall external judgment and resolve the conflicts inherent in the civilising process without exposing him- or herself to potential ridicule or scorn. In this sense, keeping a diary can be seen as a self-protective activity of private socialisation which could help the diarist fashion a respectable persona for the public sphere. The following section illustrates both the pressure to observe and regulate possibly disruptive emotions, as exerted by cultural critic Lady Eastlake, and the demotivation and self-doubt that such demands inflicted on Crabb Robinson.

## **II Self-control in the Edited Diary: Elizabeth Eastlake (1809-1893) and Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867)**

This section reads the diaries and work of Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake, as well as Henry Crabb Robinson's diary in light of Alexander Bain's *The Emotions and the Will*. Despite the differences in generic medium and historical moment, these texts reflect common attitudes towards the respectability of the emotions. Both diarists exerted a great influence on Victorian society through their publications, acquaintances and financial affluence. Eastlake's response to society's codes of respectability differed drastically from Crabb Robinson's: whereas she was empowered by elitist politics, he failed to realise his full intellectual potential for fear of social ridicule. Although Eastlake's work exemplified the cultural need for the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

repression of passionate emotion in social interactions, art, in her opinion, necessitated the enthusiasm and emotional receptiveness of both the artist and the critic. Crabb Robinson was less intent on maintaining or reinforcing codes of conduct but obsessively monitored his emotions. Generally, both Eastlake and Crabb Robinson believed that moral, family-oriented emotions were essential to a healthy society and that emotional enthusiasm was a necessary premise of the successful work of art. Whereas Eastlake and Bain tended to condemn pride, vanity and emotional excess as unrespectable behaviour, Crabb Robinson remained relatively silent on these subjects.

The pressure to live up to social expectations and the societal judgment he imagined inhibited Crabb Robinson's creative and critical output to the point that he renounced his literary ambitions. Although he enjoyed the respect of his famous friends and clients, Crabb Robinson suffered from low self-esteem which was caused by excessive self-monitoring. This necessity to anticipate judgment was integrated in Crabb Robinson's consciousness through the definitions of respectability given by the media, literature and psychology, some of which I have illustrated in my previous section. Crabb Robinson's self was constructed by the other; a notion which recalls Bentham's *Panopticon* and the theories of M.M. Bakhtin, whose "attitudinizing" individual has incorporated the public gaze: "I am not alone when I look at myself in the mirror: I am possessed with someone else's soul."<sup>92</sup> Crabb Robinson had internalised social reprobation and adapted his behaviour to circumvent silent or explicit criticism from his peers.

Both Eastlake's and Crabb Robinson's diaries were severely mutilated by their Victorian editors' interference. By ripping selected extracts out of their context,

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<sup>92</sup> Michael, Holquist, ed., with Vadin Liapunov, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 32-3; Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon or the Inspection House* (London: T. Payne, 1791).

Charles Eastlake Smith and Dr. Thomas Sadler manipulated the text of their respective subject to a degree that prevents the reader from engaging with these diaries in a truly meaningful fashion.<sup>93</sup> Crabb Robinson's biographer Edith J. Morley was right when she wrote that Sadler had accomplished the immense task of "[sifting] and [condensing]" the thirty-five volumes of his subject's diary, but she erred when stating that: "Sadler allowed Crabb Robinson to speak for himself."<sup>94</sup> That an editor would "select, re-word, and arrange" his or her material seems understandable, but Sadler's practice to skip and re-phrase passages without indication "no scholarly editor or publisher today would countenance," as Eugene Stelzig has rightly observed.<sup>95</sup> Sadler reduced Crabb Robinson to his friendships with Coleridge, Wordsworth and Carlyle, which may allow an interesting glimpse into the interactions between the thinkers of the nineteenth century, but the subject's voice is ultimately portrayed inadequately. This editorial practice removes the immediacy and emotional spontaneity that is typical of the diary genre almost entirely. Instead, it creates the impression that Crabb Robinson is taking his reader through the text, stressing only the most memorable moments and name-dropping. Despite Sadler's unfortunate editorial choices, we can still discern Crabb Robinson's construction of self against the backdrop of societal judgment and emotional control. In order to fill in some of the gaps left by Sadler, I shall consult Crabb Robinson's biographers Edith J. Morley and John Milton Baker, as well as more recent critics, such as Eugene Stelzig and Diana I. Behler.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Charles Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake* (London: John Murray, 1895); Thomas Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869).

<sup>94</sup> Edith J. Morley, *The Life and Times of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Limited, 1935), n.p. [Introduction, 1].

<sup>95</sup> Eugene Stelzig, "A Cultural Tourist in Romantic Germany: Henry Crabb Robinson as Nineteenth-Century Life Writer," *Biography*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Fall 2005), pp. 515-533 (p. 516).

<sup>96</sup> John Milton Baker, *Henry Crabb Robinson, of Bury, Jena, The Times, and Russell Square* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1937); Diana I. Behler, "Henry Crabb Robinson as a Mediator of Early

Eastlake's diaries were heavily edited by her nephew Charles Eastlake Smith, who composed a text based on a patchwork of personal recollections, letters and diaries, rarely giving the full context of the entries. In fact, he tended to present Elizabeth's manuscripts as a series of aphorisms, often accentuating her self-control. This fashioning of the text reflects Charles's own appraisal of propriety, which led him to extend and perpetuate Elizabeth's opinions, parading her as a model critic. Despite the maiming by her nephew's editing, Elizabeth's conflict between the desirability of emotion and its resolute repression can be retrieved in the diary. I shall attempt to complete and correct the distorted picture of Eastlake that her nephew created by reading the fragments of her diary entries in light of her critical work, such as her 1845 review article on travel literature written by women, her 1849 review of *Jane Eyre*, her 1856 review of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and her 1868 *Fellowship: Letters to My Sister Mourners*.

### **A Woman's Role: Self-Effacement and Respectability**

Both Eastlake and Crabb Robinson strove to maintain a respectable image. Eastlake did so by upholding strict distinctions of gender and class which elevated her own status and shamed those who did not interpret and respond to the cultural rules of propriety in the same way that she did. Crabb Robinson sought to protect himself from the shame of unsuccessful attempts at literary creation by becoming a lawyer although he "hated the law," because it was the only way of "[attaining] any social station."<sup>97</sup> Thus, his need to be respectable determined his entire life.

Crabb Robinson struggled to overcome the painful "feeling of loss of not having attended [an English] university" all his life, as his biographer John Milton

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German Romanticism to England," *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 12 (1977), pp. 117-155.

<sup>97</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, p. 37.

Baker has explained.<sup>98</sup> Instead of savouring his feelings of inferiority, Crabb Robinson went to Germany for five years, during which he made the acquaintance of many of the prominent Romantic figures, such as Goethe, Schiller, Kotzebue, Herder and the Schlegel brothers, among many others. According to Diana I. Behler, Crabb Robinson was the “first foreigner to make a thorough investigation” of early German Romantic ideas, which he translated for and explained to his countrymen.<sup>99</sup> Behler has observed that Crabb Robinson adjusted many of his translations to the English tradition of “common sense,” and “[toned] down” the revolutionary aspect of early-nineteenth-century German thought.<sup>100</sup> Significantly, Crabb Robinson discerned his culture’s fear of revolution and modified his work to fit the taste and needs of his fellow Englishmen.

Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake hardly represented the typical Victorian female. She was educated, well-travelled and had many literary contacts who published and celebrated her work. According to her biographer Marion Lochhead, Elizabeth’s marriage to the prominent art gallery director Charles Eastlake “meant the best of both worlds” as she could maintain her life as an “independent woman of letters, secure in her reputation [and as] a specialist and authority.”<sup>101</sup> Through her influential husband she permanently gained “the entrée to the inmost sanctuary of society.”<sup>102</sup> Although Eastlake herself did not adopt the traditional role of housewife and mother, she insisted on a strict separation of the male and female spheres and, through her work, reinforced cultural norms of propriety.

Eastlake and Crabb Robinson tended to define respectable emotion as that which was altruistic, caring and beneficial for the community. Both gendered this

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<sup>98</sup> Baker, *Henry Crabb Robinson*, p. 99.

<sup>99</sup> Behler, “Henry Crabb Robinson as a Mediator of Early German Romanticism to England,” p. 123.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>101</sup> Marion Lochhead, *Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake* (London: John Murray, 1961), p. 113.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

constructive, nourishing emotion as female. While Eastlake consistently stressed the virtues of domesticity, she also regarded excessive emotion as integral to the nature of femininity. As I shall show in my section on gendered grief, Eastlake's contradictory attitudes to feminine behaviour reflect more general Victorian views on the subversive potential of women's emotion and confirm what critic Ann Cvetkovich has identified as the simultaneous exemplification of "the domestic ideal [and] the threat of transgression."<sup>103</sup> Eastlake reproduced the cultural perception of female emotion as absolutely necessary for mothering future generations of intact family units. She viewed this emotional side—"affect"—as innate to the female sex, which, according to Cvetkovich, "meant that it might be uncontrollable."<sup>104</sup> This possibly uncontainable emotional energy, which could take the face of promiscuity, positioned the female, like the child and the criminal, outside of respectability and reason. Eastlake can be seen to establish her own superiority by setting the standards for her female contemporaries, whom she considered in need of her guidance to keep unrespectable emotions in check and develop their domestic skills. Crabb Robinson's idealisation of his mother's moral education corresponded to Eastlake's glorification of the ideal Englishwoman.

Like many of her contemporaries, Eastlake despised women who gave in to their emotions, as can be seen in her commentary on German society of the 1830s; *Some Biographies of German Ladies*: "the German woman is feminine but nothing else; and herein lies the nullity of her influence."<sup>105</sup> German women, according to Eastlake, were indirectly responsible for the "[disgusting] social structure of morals and religion" she witnessed in Germany. Their "excess of devotion and self-

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<sup>103</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings, Feminism, Mass Culture and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Lochhead, *Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake*, p. 7.

abandonment,” for Eastlake, was natural and therefore somewhat acceptable, but she firmly condemned these women’s “unrestrained indulgence in these impulses.”<sup>106</sup> According to Eastlake, German women failed to counter their country’s moral laxity through their own intellectual and behavioural rigour and thus neglected their educational function in society.

The Englishwoman, as portrayed in Eastlake’s 1845 article “Lady Travellers,” which appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, represented the opposite of the dramatic and ineffectual German woman.<sup>107</sup> Eastlake praised the Middle-class Englishwoman’s “four cardinal virtues,” namely “activity, punctuality, courage, and independence,” which made her a far superior traveller to the woman of any other country. Her principal quality consisted in the strict discipline with which she trained both body and mind. Unlike women of other nationalities, the Englishwoman was seen as a “well-read, solid thinking, –early rising—sketch-loving—light-footed—trim-waisted—strawhatted specimen,” who combined the “refinement of the highest classes” with the “usefulness of the lowest.”<sup>108</sup> Significantly, the Englishwoman excelled at travelling because her domesticity had equipped her with the “habits of order and regularity” which furthered both her mental and physical agility.<sup>109</sup> Her mind, hand and appearance were cultivated and geared towards useful actions rather than sensual excesses.

This unreachable standard of respectability surely created a lot of pressure for Eastlake’s female readers. Her ideal woman was open to the world and diligently recorded the exotic sights she encountered on her journeys. Her role as wife and mother had taught her the “reserved” attitude which made her respectable, but her

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Elizabeth Eastlake, “Lady Travellers,” *Quarterly Review*, vol. 76 (June 1845), pp. 98-137 (p. 102).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

horizon was not limited to domestic affairs.<sup>110</sup> Her personal reticence allowed the necessary space for an intense interest in the external world and the simultaneous inquisitiveness and receptiveness of her mind. Eastlake contrasted this virtuous expert at self-effacement with a different type of woman, who, despite the proximity of fascinating new sights, was unable to fix her mind on anything but her personal domestic circumstances and therefore was a tedious travel companion:

[She] pauses every moment to tell you not only her own particular thoughts and feelings, but also those habits, particularities, preferences and antipathies, which one would have thought even she herself on such an occasion would have forgotten, we feel tied to one who at home would be rather tiresome, but abroad becomes insufferable—to *one who never leaves self behind*.<sup>111</sup>

The self-obsessed woman was not responsive to external beauty because her need to share her private thoughts deprived her of the delights of both travelling and companionship. This woman's constant preoccupation with the self and her narrow-minded naivety were shameful because she disregarded the customs of both observant travelling and polite conversation. Her lack of self-monitoring made her unrespectable because she failed to redress her self-indulgent behaviour and neglected to actively please her companion. We see that Eastlake's objective was to keep the behaviour of her fellow females under observation and, by elevating the ideal Englishwoman, to prescribe codes of propriety to which her readers could adhere. The "affect" that was natural in women had to be counteracted by a focus on the virtues of diligent order. Emotional control was thus an intrinsic characteristic of the respectable female.

In his diary, Crabb Robinson praised the formative influence of his mother who, as his primary caregiver, had a major impact on his moral development. As we shall see, Crabb Robinson accused his father of neglecting his son's moral, creative and spiritual life, which shows that he insisted on the parents' responsibility to mould

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 131. My italics.



their child's character, maintaining the eighteenth-century view that it was the "primary duty" of "every educator [...] to gain mastery over a child's emotions and shape them in a positive way," as critics Anke te Heesen and Ann M. Hentschel have observed.<sup>112</sup> Like Alexander Bain, who viewed the young child as an uncultivated animal, in need of emotional guidance, Crabb Robinson attributed his character to the formative influence of his parents. Bain believed that the child mirrored and internalised parental behaviour: "the child falls into the tones, movements, and peculiarities of action of the parent, through the circumstance of their being constantly presented to its imitation."<sup>113</sup> Deriving gratification from mimicking his or her parents, the child directed his or her will towards replicating their behaviour, which attributed an immense responsibility to the mother in particular.

Crabb Robinson idealised his mother's moral excellence which she successfully infused in her son: "in my childhood my mother was to me everything, and I have no hesitation in ascribing to her every good moral or religious feeling I had in my childhood or youth."<sup>114</sup> His mother was the key figure introducing him to proper, morally sound conduct; not through harsh discipline but through acting as an example of diligence: "I was an unruly boy and my mother had no strength to keep me in order."<sup>115</sup> Young and unsocialised, Crabb Robinson could not yet recognise the significance of "order" and only gradually learned to regulate his behaviour. His mother, through her moral guidelines, attempted to eradicate her son's selfish behaviour by raising his concern for others. Robinson seems immensely grateful for her efforts, which can be seen in this remembrance:

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<sup>112</sup> Anke te Heesen and Ann M. Hentschel, *A World in a Box: The Story of an Eighteenth-Century Picture Encyclopedia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 108.

<sup>113</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1865), p. 185.

<sup>114</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

I recollect a practice of hers, which had the best effect on my mind. She never would permit me (like all children, a glutton) to empty the dish at table if there was anything particularly nice, such as pudding or pie. “Henry, don’t take any more; do you not suppose the maids like to have some?”<sup>116</sup>

Gluttony was natural, yet unacceptable behaviour for the young human being. Instead of letting her son selfishly indulge in the pleasures of the palate, Mrs Robinson shifted Henry’s perspective from the self to the other and heightened his awareness of egotistical transgression.

Crabb Robinson, like Eastlake, cherished the moral rigour of the mother figure, who, through her own “reserve,” love of order and sense of propriety, taught her child the rules of respectability.<sup>117</sup> This ideal Englishwoman provided wholesome nourishment to her family because she was able to repress the passionate, selfish aspect of her emotions—“leave self behind”—and devote her emotional energies to care for the well-being of others.<sup>118</sup> In the case of emotional shock, such as the death of a loved one, Eastlake and Bain allowed the individual to yield to the weakening blow temporarily but then encouraged him or her to regain strength and “reserve” through work and distraction. Because in this case, emotion was “natural,” it was acceptable, but interestingly, behavioural guidelines seemed necessary even for such legitimated emotion. Crabb Robinson does not explicitly discuss grieving behaviour, but the advice he received when his mother died reveals the pressure that his peers exerted on him; inviting him to extract lessons from the life-shattering event rather than to indulge in suffering.

## **Gendered Grief**

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Eastlake, “Lady Travellers,” p. 102.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

The discussions of proper grieving behaviour that this section considers tend to portray the female as particularly prone to emotional disintegration. As Laura Brown has argued, eighteenth-century consciousness was pervaded by theories such as philosopher Bernard Mandeville's *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions* (1711) which viewed the female body as having a "peculiar relation to fluctuation, irregularity, excess, passion and imagination."<sup>119</sup> The female's supposed inability to control the potentially overpowering impulses of the body and the mind set her on the same level as the child, who was unable to adopt a stance of posed serenity. These attitudes can still be observed in Catherine Buck's legitimisation of Crabb Robinson's grief as *not* that of "a silly girl," as well as in Eastlake's comments on strong emotion disabling the female mind.

Eastlake insisted on the fundamental difference in rationality between the sexes. She felt that due to their unpredictable emotional nature, women had to cling to the structured sphere of the household, as this entry from her 1840-42 diary shows:

Why do men invariably judge better than women? Simply because their feelings have less interference. With us, our feelings often make the worse appear the better cause. It is well our duties are more confined and prescribed than theirs, or, with such rash monitors within us, what should we do? Our feelings are like the element fire—most excellent servants but wretched mistresses.<sup>120</sup>

Women were thus seen as always on the verge of being victimised by their emotional nature and therefore fundamentally incapable of making decisions based on a rational process of deliberation. Because women's will power was not considered sufficiently strong to keep the foolish impulses of the female mind in check, their duty to create order in the domestic and social sphere had to serve as a clearly defined structure to contain the subversive potential of passionate emotion.

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<sup>119</sup> Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 110.

<sup>120</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, p. 20.

On a personal level, Eastlake admitted that even minor indulgences made her feel weak-willed and guilty of feminine, pleasure-seeking behaviour, as this entry of July 5<sup>th</sup> 1845 shows: “My pen has been too silent in every respect. The Siren Music has been the tempter [...] with my strong love for music I have indulged myself far too much.” The language of seduction at work in this extract demonstrates that Eastlake felt that she had allowed her personal “indulgent” preferences to take over the time reserved for professional occupation. Her shame was caused by her neglect of the model behaviour of the restrained Englishwoman for the decadent German woman’s.

This association of femininity with excessive emotion can, as I have announced, be seen as an inheritance of the eighteenth century, which, according to Baker “believed in restraint and self-discipline, rather than in the free expression of [...] personality.”<sup>121</sup> A letter by Crabb Robinson’s friend Catherine Buck of January 8<sup>th</sup> 1793, written upon the news of his mother’s death, demonstrates her contempt for the overemotional female:

I am not writing to a silly girl whose reason is under control of passion & whose passion having nothing of intellect in it is the object of pity without tenderness & of commiseration the result of our compassion for degraded humanity—you have indeed lost your best friend.<sup>122</sup>

Buck legitimised Crabb Robinson’s grief by contrasting it with the improper emotional excess of the “silly girl,” unable to rationally tame her emotions and therefore less deserving of sympathy. In Buck’s eyes, Crabb Robinson was entitled to feel horrendous pain of loss and relinquish emotional control because he did not exaggerate and flaunt his grief over losing the most important person in his life.

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<sup>121</sup> Baker, *Henry Crabb Robinson*, p. 87.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Baker, p. 57

Unlike Eastlake, who believed that the widow was under the oppressive siege of grief and was, at least temporarily, powerless to alleviate her suffering, Buck advised Crabb Robinson to use his grief for self-improvement: “the hour of affliction is the hour of reflection—let us then not neglect to improve it.”<sup>123</sup> Because the emotional shock caused by the death of a loved one could alter the individual’s outlook on life, Buck believed that he or she should take advantage of this temporary mental clarity. She viewed grief as a “test” of the individual’s resilience and discouraged Crabb Robinson from clouding the sharpness of his heightened intellectual vision by indulging in his agony: “shall we sacrifice to passion the precious moments which dedicated to reason produce the most salutary effects?”<sup>124</sup> Thus, even in this moment of utter despair, Crabb Robinson’s friend, instead of offering consolation, forced him to rationalise his grief and draw beneficial lessons from it. This would have put Crabb Robinson under considerable pressure to resist emotional expression and internalise his grief, lest he jeopardise his masculinity and give in to emotion like a “silly girl.”

However, emotional reactions to joyous and painful experiences marked the individual as human. Eastlake wrote *Fellowship: Letters to My Sister Mourners* to deal with the devastation she experienced after the death of her husband in 1865, when “the life of [her] life” left her, and her “own very identity [...] departed with him [she] love[d].”<sup>125</sup> In this address to her fellow widows, Eastlake portrayed grief as an illness and invited her readers to accept their own powerlessness and give in to their affliction: “the only reasonable view you can take of your own state is as of one smitten with a sore sickness,—the sorest the heart can suffer.”<sup>126</sup> This surprisingly

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Eastlake, *Fellowship*, p. 12.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

mellow statement shows that Eastlake, in her unspeakable grief, had hit the limits of self-control. The will no longer had power over the diseased mind and any attempts to “repress the anguish—divert the spirits—change the scene,” which society recommended, were doomed.<sup>127</sup> Interestingly, Eastlake used a vocabulary of criminality and insanity to illustrate the complete incapacitation of the will, which recalls Victorian culture’s pathologisation of strong emotion, as exemplified in Section I: “the question [...] is not how to arrest or cure the evil, for that is impossible.”<sup>128</sup> She absolved the widow from the societal pressure to control her emotions: “let not the cant reproach of ‘indulging your grief’ disturb you—the very words are an imbecile contradiction in terms; can we turn our sorrow off and on as we please?”<sup>129</sup> Despite her apparent acceptance of emotional turmoil as inevitable, Eastlake still incriminated the emotion itself: “sorrow” was an “illness,” which, like a sentence, had to be served: “[prayer] is not meant to remove our pain—we *are* to suffer it.”<sup>130</sup> The widow was seen as unable to thwart the emotional siege she was under and had to accept the acute pain of loss.

The *Letters* explicitly evidence Eastlake’s perception of and reaction to the societal pressure to control the emotions. Although she appealed to her audience to “live *in* your sorrow; let the heart ache itself out,” she did not completely abandon her socially conditioned belief in the virtues of industrious behaviour, which I shall discuss in detail in Chapter Two. Eastlake ensured that her readers did not take her *Letters* as an invitation to become lazy: “it is mockery to accuse us of indulging in our agony, yet, on the other hand, we must meet it with remedies as strong as itself. Of

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27-28.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

these, work is as indispensable as prayer.”<sup>131</sup> In a typically Protestant fashion, Eastlake identified the “remedies” as useless, yet, the very composition of the *Letters* can be seen as an effort to counteract her debilitating grief through intellectual activity: “work we must in some shape in self-defence; if we are idle, our sorrow is doubly busy.”<sup>132</sup> Although work could not undo the pain of loss, activity could keep the individual from feeling at the mercy of strong emotion.

Bain’s techniques for dealing with intense grief resembled Eastlake’s in that they stressed the importance of initially accepting the emotion and then consciously counteracting it by wilful industry. Eastlake’s suggestion to “let the heart ache itself out” was paralleled by Bain’s assertion that “under a shock of joy or grief, a burst of anger or fear, we are recommended to give way for a little to the torrent, as the safest way of making it subside.”<sup>133</sup> Convinced of the necessity to restrain emotion, Bain admitted that “an emotion may be too strong to be resisted” and gave advice for its successful repression.<sup>134</sup> After allowing a “free vent” to the emotions, the will could operate on the “voluntary muscles” and “[reach] the deep recesses of emotion.”<sup>135</sup> Physical control was thus echoed by the emotions, which could be manipulated by a “resolute determination.”<sup>136</sup>

The diaries this thesis examines tend to omit the process of grieving. For instance, the announcements of death in George Eliot’s diary (Chapter Two) are usually reduced to one sentence, such as her entry of March 15<sup>th</sup> 1859 shows: “*Chrissey died this morning at quarter to 5.*”<sup>137</sup> Although Eliot was extremely fond of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 29, p. 30.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>133</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 361.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Harris and Johnston, *The Journals of George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 77.

her elder sister, whose children she had cared for and whose consumptive illness had worried her immensely, her diary does not provide evidence of the severe pain she must have felt.<sup>138</sup> This silence in the face of emotional may be a consequence of the society's pressure to accept what could not be changed instead of lamenting an irreplaceable loss. Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone has argued that Eliot mourned her losses by fictionalising these traumatising events: "through a work of fiction, Eliot could, like the patient in a therapeutic transference, enter into a fantasy in which she could reenact repressed feelings towards prior attachments."<sup>139</sup> Thus, Eliot, rather than directly and gratuitously expressing grief in the diary, used this emotional energy to benefit the community through the education she propagated in her novels. For her, emotional despair was thus to be borne internally; it was too private even for the diary and could only be verbalised through artistic sublimation.

### **Emotion and Social Life**

For Eastlake, Crabb Robinson and Bain, intense emotions constituted a constant threat to the integrity and moral rigour of the individual, "affecting the judgement of true and false," as Bain wrote.<sup>140</sup> Recalling the medical associations between "excitement of the brain" and insanity, they insisted on respectable conduct, which was defined by temperate and rational other-oriented behaviour, disinterestedness and intellectual rigour.<sup>141</sup> The self-controlled individual aimed to prevent a rekindling of suppressed appetites through the efforts of the will in order to dominate the natural impulses of the body and mind. "Like destroying Vandals," Bain wrote, feelings "pervert our

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<sup>138</sup> For an extensive description of the relationship between Eliot and Chrissey, see Barbara Nathan Hardy, *George Eliot: A Critic's Biography* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), p. 12-13.

<sup>139</sup> Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone, *Transformation of Rage: Mourning and Creativity in George Eliot's Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 85.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>141</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1868), p. 274.



convictions by smiting us with intellectual blindness, which we need not be under when committing great imprudence in action.”<sup>142</sup> The irrational, uncontrollable nature of the feelings was seen to make the individual vulnerable to thoughtless conduct and moral lassitude, by not only exposing him or her to public ridicule, but also leading him or her to regress morally and give in to substance abuse and promiscuity.

Although Crabb Robinson wished for a less apathetic temperament to fuel his creative output, in social interactions, he still felt uneasy and distressed when he experienced others’ boundless emotional outbursts. In 1805, Crabb Robinson harshly criticised the display of powerful emotion and although he admired it to a degree, was grateful that he was less prone to such unrespectable disintegration. His friend Major von Knebel was extremely upset when he heard the news of Schiller’s death, but, in Crabb Robinson’s eyes, went too far in the demonstration of his emotions: “it was ridiculous and pathetic. Dear Knebel’s passions were always an odd combination of fury and tenderness. He loved Schiller and gave his feelings immediate and unconsidered expression.”<sup>143</sup> For Crabb Robinson, the emotions were not to be exhibited carelessly and had to remain within the spectrum of acceptable gestures.

Deeply uncomfortable with displays of emotion, Crabb Robinson resented the overly sentimental individual. In 1810, he explained his discomfort, asserting that he felt awkward when confronted with arduous emotion. Excitability became his criteria for the categorisation of human character; he associated himself with more rational, sensible human beings, as opposed to those individuals capable of open fervour: “we of colder temperament and sober minds feel ourselves oppressed by the stronger feelings of more passionate characters.”<sup>144</sup> Others’ powerful emotion was unpleasant and unnerving to Crabb Robinson even if he did “fully recognize the dignity of

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<sup>142</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>143</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, p. 214.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

passion” and claimed to “admire what I have not and am not.”<sup>145</sup> While strong emotion could be desirable for the creation of art, Crabb Robinson validated his own personality by comparing himself to fanatical or overly fragile fellow humans, as can be seen in this entry of July 6<sup>th</sup> 1816:

Sometimes I regret a want of sensibility in my nature, but when such cases of perverted intensity of feeling are brought to my observation, I rejoice in my neutral apathetic character, as better than the more sanguine and choleric temperament, which is so dangerous at the same time that it is so popular and respectable.<sup>146</sup>

Crabb Robinson’s disappointment over his inability to experience an increased depth of emotion was outbalanced by his disgust with “dangerous,” inferior emotion. The fact that he attached the term “respectable” to such a temperament is very surprising, but could be explained by the imaginativeness and inspiration that passion brings to the creative process—a dimension that Crabb Robinson felt utterly incapable of entering. He viewed his exclusion from the realm of emotionality as definite but gradually came to terms with it as this same entry shows:

The older I grow, the more I am satisfied, on prudential grounds, with the constitution of my sensitive nature. I am persuaded that there are very few persons who suffer so little pain of all kinds as I do; and if the absence of vice be the beginning of virtue, so the absence of suffering is the beginning of enjoyment.<sup>147</sup>

Crabb Robinson rejoiced over his relative insensitivity, which kept him from experiencing the peaks of excitement, but also spared him the experience and ridicule connected to intense mental pain. He convinced himself that his lack of excitability annulled the threat of dangerous emotion and established him as a harmless and therefore virtuous human being.

When Eastlake insisted on personal reticence in social interactions, she aimed to establish a climate of mutual respect in which the individual was to refrain both

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 2, p. 11.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

from exhibiting his or her emotions and from probing into other people's private emotions. The politeness of "easy society," which Eastlake mentioned in her 1848 "Review of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*," was characterised by "awkwardness," because it depended on the restraint of any emotion that could cause offence, embarrassment or boredom in the interlocutor.<sup>148</sup> The social interactions Eastlake described were highly stylised and she advised her readers to observe the "tacit understanding" to "go so far and no further; to be as polite as we ought to be, and as intellectual as we can; but mutually and honourably to forbear lifting those veils which each spreads over his inner sentiments and sympathies."<sup>149</sup> Ultimately, such conventionalised behaviour was intended to protect all members of society from being overwhelmed by the other's emotional burdens.

In her personal life, Eastlake was very careful to maintain the façade of respectability by appearing humble and disciplined in her letters and even her diaries. Through this performance of the respectable correspondent, Eastlake consciously evaded the general association of vanity with low intellect, lack of refinement and taste. Eastlake's conviction that emotional restraint was partly a response to societal expectations and partly a genuine concern for others can account for her apologetic attitude to her reader, which forced her to dutifully express regret whenever she provided information relating to the self, as this letter to Miss L. Browne shows:

I find I have been writing in an egotistical strain, and am shocked to have to speak so much of myself; but while this insignificant person is made so much of, and while you are so kindly interested in hearing of what she does and sees, you must just take this as it comes.<sup>150</sup>

Calling herself "insignificant" undid the act of self-importance she felt she was liable to. Eastlake was "shocked" by the necessity to communicate facts relating to her life;

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<sup>148</sup> Elizabeth Eastlake, "Review of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*," *Quarterly Review*, vol. 84 (Dec., 1848), pp. 162-75 (p. 153).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, pp. 44-45.

implying that if it were possible, she would omit self-referencing altogether. She appealed to her reader's kindness and understanding; making clear that she was aware that such behaviour was reproachable.

On March 20<sup>th</sup> 1846, Eastlake encounters the embodiment of perfect conduct:

Professor Wilson is the only person I ever heard who can speak of himself without being an egotist; but he talks of himself as the species man, not as the solitary individual; he talks of feelings and passions common to the race, and dissects himself to lay them bare to you. Whenever he talks as an individual, it is only drollery.<sup>151</sup>

Through portraying himself as the object of study rather than a person to be admired or pitied, Wilson effaced himself while speaking of himself. His deliberations remained impersonal as he presented himself as an example of “the species man,” giving the impression of “disinterestedness.”<sup>152</sup> Relying on conversational self-irony to talk about himself allowed him to evade accusations of self-indulgence and boastfulness.

Eager to imitate such selfless conversation, Eastlake, like Crabb Robinson and the other diarists this thesis examines, conscientiously apologised for references to personal feelings in her letters and can be seen to consistently monitor the intensity of her emotional reactions generally. For instance, in a letter to Miss L. Browne of January 1843, Eastlake reported a scandalous emotional outburst: “He [Dean of Faculty, Mr Peter Robertson] made me laugh, till I was almost shocked to hear myself.”<sup>153</sup> The intensity of her laughter embarrassed Eastlake, because she had evidently lost control over her emotions. The language of his extract suggests a self-objectifying, self-monitoring attitude in Eastlake—she listens to herself from the position of an external observer and judges herself accordingly.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth Eastlake, *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic* (London: John Murray, 1844), p. 59.

<sup>153</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, p. 43.

Crabb Robinson similarly minimised himself in his correspondence, as his letter to Wordsworth of March 19<sup>th</sup> 1840 shows: “You ask me why I write so seldom. The answer is an obvious one, and you will give me credit for being quite sincere when I make it. It is but seldom that I dare to think that I have anything to say that is worth your reading.”<sup>154</sup> Crabb Robinson hoped to gain Wordsworth’s respect by stressing his inferiority, which reflects his preference of self-effacement over self-aggrandisement. It seems that the willingness to denigrate the self which was frequent in the nineteenth century can be traced to “the moral consecration of sentiment,” which, as Charles Taylor has explained “[became] strong and unmistakable in England and then France in the latter half of the eighteenth century.”<sup>155</sup> In order to protect the family and friendships that now were cherished, but not felt, with increased fervour, the individual needed to fight the omnipresent currents of utilitarian thought that threatened the common good, the self necessarily needed to abstain from wanting, needing or being anything. This could explain why “self-explorations,” in which Romantic poets conducted “dialogues [not] with readers, but solipsistically with [their] own psyche,” became more self-conscious and restricted in the Victorian era and why Crabb Robinson felt increased pressure to assure that his utterances were worthy of drawing others’ attention to.<sup>156</sup>

For Eastlake, Crabb Robinson and Bain, vanity in social interactions, as well as art, was intolerable. They supported the idea that the creator of an object or the initiator of an action or event was not to be congratulated unless he or she was free of selfish motivations. Bain wrote that: “merit attaches itself only to something that is not our duty, that something being a valuable service rendered to other human beings.

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<sup>154</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 3, p. 184.

<sup>155</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>156</sup> Angela Esterhammer, *Romantic Poetry* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2002), p. 20.

Positive beneficence is a merit.”<sup>157</sup> Human actions could only be virtuous if devoid of self-serving purposes. For Bain, the accomplishment of duty was a behaviour that society expected and failure to do so resulted in social despise. Thus, doing his or her duty benefited the individual; it was a “self-regarding action and therefore [...] not an adequate foundation of morals.”<sup>158</sup> Bain fervently advocated behaviour that was geared towards the benefit of society: “the inculcation of unbounded Self-denial is to be regarded as an extreme statement of the happiness value of reciprocal good offices. It is found that, to reap the precious fruit, disinterestedness must sow the seed.”<sup>159</sup> The individual was to renounce the self and work for the good of others, but, paradoxically, he or she should never claim any profit from his or her actions. “Inculcation” suggests the indoctrination of the individual by society, constantly rehearsing the rules of propriety, which seems to contradict the possibility of a truly “disinterested” attitude— notably because further on Bain spoke of a “disinterested impulse,” which connotes spontaneous emotion.<sup>160</sup>

When Eastlake was confronted with others’ self-indulgence and boasting, she attempted to withhold judgment; stressing her moral superiority. In an entry of 1840, she wrote: “It is no hypocrisy to be courteous and kind even where we despise. Esteem or contempt is involuntary: judgment is controllable—and that is why the Scriptures, which prescribe nothing against the system of Nature, say ‘Judge not.’”<sup>161</sup> Eastlake thus attempted to be completely selfless—not only did she abstain from the temptations of despicable behaviour, but she did not even let herself indulge in the condemnation of such disgrace. In reality, however, Eastlake was an impetuous critic

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<sup>157</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 292.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>161</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, p. 18; Matthew, 7. 1-5

and did not live up to her resolution to quietly tolerate others' behaviour, assuming a position of superior, almost godlike, virtue.

In an attempt to examine the shame associated with referring to the self in conversation, Bain called attention to the thin line between description of the self and boasting, which violated the "virtue of Self-Sufficingness."<sup>162</sup> Ideal conduct should mirror that of Socrates, who represented the truly self-sufficient person "rendering a full share of help to others, and asking little in return."<sup>163</sup> Bain and Eastlake, in tune with their culture's glorification of altruism, applauded those who stood "alone and unsupported," always giving, never taking.<sup>164</sup> Bain's definition of virtuous behaviour emphasised the contemporary view of self-restraint as sophisticated mannerly conduct:

Modern society has thrown a certain discredit on the enjoyment of self-gratulatory pleasures, and hence a feeling of shame is apt to be engendered when a person is marked out as the subject of formal applause. For all these reasons, the transformation of the open into the more covert modes of paying honour has been thought a refinement. Vanity and Vain-glory signify that the individual is active in the cultivation of self-importance, canvassing as it were, for distinction. The open boaster, not satisfied with his own feelings of esteem, insists on the concurrence of others, and, if people do not choose their own accord to pay him regard, he detains them on every opportunity with the circumstantial of his own glorification.<sup>165</sup>

"Self-importance" was obviously unacceptable behaviour. Any kind of "open" excess violated the codes of "refinement," and was identified as moral weakness. The boaster was unable to abstain from insisting on his or her own value or to give value to himself in a Socratic fashion, and thus heavily relied on the other to bequeath meaning upon him or her. This dependency was the opposite of the virtue of "self-sufficingness," and thus constituted a behaviour that discredited the boaster. He or she was the object of ridicule and never of respect, as he or she blatantly performed respectability instead of embodying it.

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<sup>162</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 207.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

Eastlake considered “selfishness” as the characteristic vice of the Victorian individual. She deemed modernisation, industrialisation and consumerism to be the dominant cultural forces feeding into the greedy and hectic lifestyle of modernity, as this diary entry of December 16<sup>th</sup> 1842 shows: “What will future ages be? For we are really living awfully fast. [...] selfishness is like the daughters of the horse-leech, that cry ‘Give, give!’”<sup>166</sup> Eastlake feared that individualism was taking over the culture’s sense of communality and that mass reproduction was spoiling art. The capitalist mode of production increased the number of commodities available for purchase, which arguably stimulated the individual’s desire to possess, “shifting,” as social historian Thomas Richards has noted, “the axis of perception toward an objective phenomenology of property.”<sup>167</sup> The early-Victorian religious moral codes that defined the “value of the individual,” were giving way, at least partly, to the fast-paced culture of consumerism that Richards describes.<sup>168</sup> In Eastlake’s eyes, the measureless amassing of commodities and the loosening of moral values were paralleled by the individual who constantly drew attention to himself or herself, showing off personal merits, without any guise of humility. To both Eastlake and Bain, such individuals were disgusting.

Eastlake, Crabb Robinson and Bain believed that the artist especially was to control his or her vain cravings for recognition and produce art that benefited the viewer rather than the artist. According to the double standard by which the artist was judged, emotional energy constituted a vital part of the process of artistic creation, but vanity was an impermissible motivation. The ambiguous status that emotion occupied was the source of immense complication for many artists, as excess of emotion was

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<sup>166</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, p. 38. Proverb 30:15

<sup>167</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 64.

<sup>168</sup> Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1978).



unrespectable, whereas lack of emotional enthusiasm made for a weak and boring work of art.

### **Art and the Necessity of Emotion**

Eastlake and Crabb Robinson viewed artistic respectability from very different perspectives. Whereas Eastlake critically monitored others' creative output, Crabb Robinson struggled to attain the status of respectability as an artist and critic. Both, however, believed that, in order to result in an artefact of lasting value, the creative process had to be fuelled by the artist's emotional energies. This belief is reflected in Crabb Robinson's frustration over his own lack of "sensibility" and in the disparaging comments on Ruskin's "unfeeling heart" that Eastlake makes in her 1856 review of *Modern Painters*.<sup>169</sup> While embracing emotional energy, Eastlake, Bain and Crabb Robinson were in tune with their culture's condemnation of self-indulgence in the artist. Victorian critics, such as John Keble, gave advice in regard to the productive channelling of the emotions in order to avoid unrespectable effeminate sentimentality.

Elizabeth Helsinger has argued that the major Victorian writers, such as Tennyson, Browning, Arnold and Ruskin, regarded the artist's preoccupation with the self as immoral and hence deliberately omitted traces of personal involvement from their writings. By doing so, they hoped to evade accusations of excessive self-contemplation that resounded Wordsworth's "sublime egotism," which was considered fruitless, and even "unhealthy."<sup>170</sup>

The strongest reason for the Victorian objection to self-revealing literature seems to be not that it fails to lead to identity and action, but that it is 'the mere delirium of vanity,' an act of selfish pride. Their objection is profoundly moral. It is an attitude which can be found throughout the literature of the period.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, p. 479; Broomfield and Mitchell, *Prose by Victorian Women*, p. 85.

<sup>170</sup> Elizabeth Helsinger, "Ruskin and the Poets: Alterations in Autobiography," *Modern Philology*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Nov., 1976), pp. 142-170 (p. 143).

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Self-indulgence was thus considered a faux pas in both a literary and a social context. Pride was never to be shown publicly, and praise ideally should only be given to others—never the self. In response to this necessary self-effacement, many writers performed a “deliberate shift in focus from the self to mutuality;” an increased concern with community, friendship and marriage.<sup>172</sup>

The influential Victorian literary critic John Keble (1792-1866) advocated a similar attitude of restraint in poets—the “law of modest reticence.”<sup>173</sup> Poetry, in order to be considered of “primary quality,” had to “hint at very many things, rather than [be] at pains to describe and define them,” thus leaving the reader with “an appetite whetted but not satisfied.”<sup>174</sup> This required reserve demanded that the poet’s self be left out; any deliberate, flashy, over-sentimentalised behaviour in poetry was considered a sign of low quality: “In short, they [primary poets] more willingly understate than exaggerate, while the common run of poets pride themselves most of all in outdoing their rivals in the production of what is novel, passionate and startling.”<sup>175</sup> Although Keble applauded enthusiasm, such as Homer’s, he sternly advised young poets to have “insight” and to realise that “a poet’s fine frenzy is subject to law or control.”<sup>176</sup> Unconcealed, unsublimated emotion indicated the poet’s poor taste and connoted an immature lack of self-control, mistaking art for a means of self-glorification and confession. Significantly, “master-passion,” as in Virgil, could only be expressed through “significant ellipses.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> John Keble, *Keble’s Lectures on Poetry 1832-1841*, Edward Kershaw Francis, trans., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1854), p. 82.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 417; David Shaw, “Victorian Poetry and Repression: The Use and Abuse of Masks,” *ELH*, vol. 46, no. 3 (Autumn, 1979), pp. 468-494 (p. 468).

Women's poetry in particular tended to be associated with the "uncontrollable" side of emotion and was often accused of effusive "affect," as Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blains have shown.<sup>178</sup> Victorian culture presupposed women to produce literature that was gushing with sentimentality and thus intellectually inferior to men's. In critical reviews, both women's work and taste were portrayed as deficient in moral and artistic rigour, which is why, according to Kristen Drotner, melodrama's "excess of emotions and intensity of events" was seen as an "aesthetically and morally inferior 'women's genre.'"<sup>179</sup>

The reactions of Victorian critics to poet Felicia Hemans's work (1793-1835) exemplify the connection between femininity and over-sentimentalised art. Kevin Eubanks has observed that, even in her lifetime, Hemans was considered to be "the quintessential feminine poet" whose "themes of heart and home" dominated her domestic poetry.<sup>180</sup> Eubanks convincingly argues that Hemans chose her subject matter to cater to the cultural demands for women's poetry: "Hemans[']s persona arose, in part, out of the interaction of her texts and the contemporary critical texts."<sup>181</sup> She depended on critical approval for her income and thus was forced to work within the sphere of gender stereotypes. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who actively attempted to overcome the "dissociation of [female] sensibility from the affairs of the world," which Angela Leighton has identified as the "disabling inheritance" that women poets faced, set Hemans up as her "'feminine' female" counterpart in an effort to distance herself from "the superficial, emotional lyrics that

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<sup>178</sup> Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings*, p. 6; Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), p. 3.

<sup>179</sup> Kristen Drotner, "Intensities of Feeling: Emotion, Reception and Gender in Popular Culture," *Publication of the English Department University of Aarhus*, vol. 17 (1989), pp. 76-100 (pp. 81- 82).

<sup>180</sup> Kevin Eubanks, "Minerva's Veil: Hemans, Critics and the Construction of Gender," *European Romantic Review*, vol. 8 (Fall 1997), pp. 341-59 (p. 341).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

were considered women's poetical sphere," as Kay Moser has convincingly argued.<sup>182</sup> Eager to establish herself as a "'masculine' female" poet, Barrett Browning chose to write about philosophical, social and political issues. Hemans's work, according to Barrett Browning, was characterised by its "conventional excess of delicacy [which] was the flaw in her fine genius."<sup>183</sup> Reacting against this sentimental tradition, Barrett Browning did not write "from, but against the heart," because she wanted to be perceived as an "intelligent, human thinker."<sup>184</sup> She criticised the emotional overflow of female poets in order to impose her superiority on the producer of "second-rate" literature and to avoid the equation of her work with the popular genres such as the sensation novel and melodrama.<sup>185</sup> This suggests that the connection between emotion and femininity that Victorian culture tended to draw had to be counteracted by the explicit dismissal of sensualism.

When critiquing art, Eastlake was as adamant as Keble and Barrett Browning in her insistence on self-control as an indicator of quality. Flaunted, exaggerated emotion seemed vulgar to her, as her diary of 1840-42 shows: "There is no simplicity so simple as that which is refined, no sorrow so touching as that which is subdued, no art so beautiful as that which is concealed."<sup>186</sup> Art, in order to be praiseworthy, had to capture subtle nuances and was never to parade the overtly sentimental. Eastlake seemed to suggest that the more understated and hidden the artist's intention, the more valuable and effective the work of art. Further on in her 1840-42 diary, she wrote: "there is more moral courage in refusing than in accepting, and more merit in

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<sup>182</sup> Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 3; Kay Moser, "The Victorian Critic's Dilemma: What To Do With a Talented Poetess?," *Victorian Institute Journal*, vol. 13 (1985), pp. 59-66 (p. 65).

<sup>183</sup> Betty Miller, ed., *Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Miss Mitford: The Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford* (London: John Murray, 1954), p. 213.

<sup>184</sup> Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, p. 3; Moser, "The Victorian Critic's Dilemma," p. 65.

<sup>185</sup> Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings*, p. 15.

<sup>186</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, p. 22.

restricting genius than in indulging it.”<sup>187</sup> Here, she denounced a blatantly visible desire to please on the side of the artist. How exactly genius can be restricted is not clear, due to Charles Eastlake Smith’s editing techniques, which omitted the context of many entries. We may speculate that the constraints set by altruism limited the artist’s freedom of expression and heightened the quality of his or her work.

Generally, Eastlake criticised art in which the self of the maker was not left out. When she met Turner at a dinner on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1844, she was greatly displeased with his self-indulgent behaviour, as can be seen in this diary entry: “Turner, the artist, a queer little being, very knowing about all the castles he has drawn—a cynical kind of body, who seems to love his art for no other reason than because it is his *own*.”<sup>188</sup> Clearly, in Eastlake’s eyes, a great artist had to abstain from displaying pride or affection in relation to his own work. This self-aggrandising performance of self catered to a taste for spectacle, and did not spring from a sincere concern for others. The other was forced to participate in this grandiose, absurd acclamation of the self.

Bain attempted to explain self-centred behaviour from a psychological point of view, which reveals the strong cultural concern with the propriety of such conduct:

There is a great pleasure in observing and contemplating our own excellence, power, grandeur, or other imposing characteristics. This is a very special mode of self-regarding emotion; the names used for it are Self-complacency, Self-gratulation, Self-esteem, Self-conceit, Pride.<sup>189</sup>

“Self-regarding emotion” was acceptable when it meant “self-monitoring,” but became objectionable when the contemplation of the self was a source of pleasure. Bain seemed sympathetic towards the “Desire of Fame or Glory” and “Love of Approbation” and identified them as common pleasures, shared by all humans.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>189</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 201.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

However, because these emotions led to egotistical and exploitative behaviour, he sided with Eastlake's opinion that they had to be held in check.

To Eastlake, the artist's pride was immoral because she viewed art as the universal possession of all humankind; beyond any rewards to be hoped for him or her as a person. The self of the artist was never to be the object of the creative endeavour: "It is the business of the painter not to represent the individual, but the individuality—not to copy a specimen, but to show forth a species."<sup>191</sup> Providing accurate depictions of selected subjects did not make a great artist. He or she was meant to render an atmosphere; a sensitivity, rather than to present a perfect demonstration of stylistic skills. A work of art should never consciously promote the artist but instead benefit the community. Eastlake's general advocacy of self-effacement took on moral urgency when the artist was concerned, as her diary shows: "Self-forgetfulness and self-possession are the extremes which meet—they are essential to all excellence."<sup>192</sup> Excellence was annulled by the desire to be excellent—true greatness was the product of rigour and self-control. Self-realisation, according to Eastlake, had no place in art.

It is crucial to note that emotional restraint was, however, not a guarantee for artistic success. Eastlake, like Keble and Crabb Robinson, deemed controlled enthusiasm a primary factor in the creation of good art. As her review of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* shows, Eastlake believed that "where a painter's language has really given no delight to himself, it will as surely give no delight to the spectator."<sup>193</sup> Emotional enthusiasm and personal involvement were thus necessary for the artist to be "borne up on the wings of willing power," rather than to have his art "held down [...] to the grindstone of slavery."<sup>194</sup> Hence, Eastlake found the laws that Ruskin

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<sup>191</sup> Eastlake Smith, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, p. 27.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Broomfield and Mitchell, *Prose by Victorian Women*, p. 129.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

considered essential to the proper appreciation of art to achieve the contrary—they limited artistic expression for the worse and stood in the way of a greater truth.

In Eastlake's eyes, Ruskin did not possess the enthusiasm that the successful artist needed, which is why she thought him a dreadful art critic. She disapproved of Ruskin's work as having the "qualities of premature old age" from the first volume, lacking the passionate zest and vigour an art critic required.<sup>195</sup> His "overbearing spirit," had "nothing of the self-excusing insolence of youth" and she despised the "coldness, callousness and contraction" of his critical stance.<sup>196</sup> His opinions did not spring from a youthful emotional whim, but were completely rational.<sup>197</sup> The paradoxes in his way of thinking could therefore not be excused by the "perverse, but often charming, conflict between the arrogance and the timidity of a juvenile reasoner," but established Ruskin's judgments as unqualified. Ruskin's lack of emotion made him incapable of appreciating art, because "art is a thing which [...] appeals more to the heart, the seat of emotion, than to the head, the seat of thought, and is, therefore, more dreamt and raved about than reasoned about."<sup>198</sup> Art needed to be felt rather than thought and Eastlake condemned admiration or disapproval that was based on the rational critique of an "unfeeling heart" such as Ruskin's.<sup>199</sup> The restraint that the strict etiquette of polite society demanded was less desirable in the art critic. Eastlake loathed Ruskin's "cold and hardened habit, in which no enthusiasm involuntarily leads astray" and thus established the emotions as a vital part of the appreciation of art.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 85, p. 84.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

Ruskin's choice to "live only in [art], and (how generously!) only for it," seemed selfish to Eastlake and led her to question his humanity.<sup>200</sup> She condemned Ruskin's unwavering focus on art and considered his complete disregard for human beings to be immoral:

Mr. Ruskin may talk of love for trees, stones, and clouds, and profess an impious horror for those who do not represent them according to his ideas of truth, but where, throughout his writings, do we find one spark of that love for *man, woman, or child* which is foremost among all the precepts and the fruits of religion and morality?<sup>201</sup>

In most of Eastlake's writings, such as *Fellowship: Letters to my Sister Mourners* of 1868, affection was seen as a woman's "dearest duty."<sup>202</sup> In this case, she blamed Ruskin for neglecting the care for his fellow humans that she deemed fundamental to moral behaviour. She was convinced that morals could not be aestheticised but were grounded in virtuous human interactions, which necessarily had to be fed by affectionate emotions.

Bain would have disapproved of Ruskin's obsessive preoccupation with art because it negated the "vicarious and self-sacrificing impulse of our nature, in opposition to the self-seeking or self-regarding impulse."<sup>203</sup> Ruskin's focus on art was reprehensible because it revealed a conscious decision to distance himself from his fellow humans, which made him guilty of the selfish behaviour he sought to avoid, as Chapter Three will show. Eastlake deemed Ruskin incapable of "admiration, love, and sympathy" which, for Bain, were the "powers that take us out of ourselves, and enable us to find pleasure in seeing, if not in adding to, the good that others possess."<sup>204</sup> We see that Ruskin's refusal to engage with humanity and limit his scope to his own passions violated Victorian morality in two ways. Firstly, his lack, not excess, of

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p.100.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>202</sup> Eastlake, *Fellowship*, p. 11.

<sup>203</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, p. 111.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.



amorous and paternal emotions identified him as a heartless monster and positioned him outside Eastlake's and Bain's codes of acceptable behaviour. Secondly, his choice to focus his energies on the subject he felt most passionately about was seen as immoral because it represented an act of self-assertion that disregarded the well-being of the community. Notwithstanding Ruskin's socially conscious writing, such as "The Nature of Gothic" in *The Stones of Venice II* (1853), *Fors Clavigera* (1871-1878 and 1880-1884) and his unwavering desire to share his observations with his readers (Chapter Three), his association of morality with aesthetics instead of the family, as well as his "aged" narrative style, earned him Eastlake's lifelong contempt.

Hence, Henry Crabb Robinson's lack of literary confidence could have stemmed from his fear of judgmental critics, who, like Eastlake, created and reinforced artistic and social standards of behaviour. He did not worry about over-sentimentalising his creations, but feared that he did not possess the emotional energy to produce literature or criticism of lasting impact. His tendency to anticipate critical reprimands impeded him from pursuing his interest in literature and philosophy on a professional level and he never completely outgrew the dread of being annihilated by harsh criticism.

In trying to isolate the factors responsible for his unemotional temperament, Crabb Robinson suspected that his father's indifference might have played a role in the "want of sensibility in myself which I consider as a radical defect in my nature," as his diary entry of April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1815 shows.<sup>205</sup> By considering this neglect as his father's "misfortune rather than his fault," he pretended to absolve the latter for never

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<sup>205</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, p. 479.

“excit[ing] in his children the best and most delightful emotions.”<sup>206</sup> Nevertheless, he questioned the formative impact of parental emotional instruction:

Oh, how difficult, not to say impossible, to assign the boundaries between natural and moral evil, between the defects of character which proceed from natural imbecility, which no man considers a reproach and those errors of the will, about which metaphysicians may dispute forever!<sup>207</sup>

Crabb Robinson regretted his lack of “sensibility” immensely, which led him to investigate who was to blame for the gross moral negligence that deprived him from the necessary emotional resources. He tried to absolve both himself and his father through considering the attenuating circumstance of their respective incapacity to feel and to nurture being innate. Crabb Robinson was unsure whether he could hold his father responsible for not instilling a poetic temperament in his son because he could not assess the deliberateness of the latter’s indifference.

Evidently, Crabb Robinson investigated the limits of his will power when he questioned his personal guilt in neglecting his literary talent: “on what does sensibility depend? On constitution, or habits, or what? I cannot tell. I only know I was not my own maker. I know also that I respect others more than I do myself.”<sup>208</sup> Crabb Robinson attempted to weigh the predominance of external circumstances against internal factors in the formation of human character, but was unable to resolve this philosophical problem. Its solution would have determined whether Crabb Robinson was emotionally under-stimulated as a child, fundamentally lacking creative genius or whether he was too weak-willed to achieve literary greatness. The latter explanation presented him as responsible for the inferiority he felt in comparison to “those [individuals] I see around me [...] whom I believe of nobler and better nature than

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

myself.”<sup>209</sup> However, Crabb Robinson felt powerless to actively change his character: “I sincerely wish I was other than I am.”<sup>210</sup> This suggests a belief in his father’s failure to mould his son’s moral and mental qualities when this was still possible.

Throughout his life, Crabb Robinson’s conviction that he lacked emotional resourcefulness made him feel insecure about the quality of his literary and critical work; to the point that he composed less and less. Despite his studies at the University of Jena and the empowering encounters with prominent thinkers that he made during his stay in Germany (1800-5) and afterwards in England, Crabb Robinson maintained a sceptical attitude towards his talent as a critic and writer. Upon his arrival in Germany, he deplored his lack of both the emotional enthusiasm and technical skill that successful literary and pictorial composition required:

I can neither reason nor paint... Could I only with elegance & effect describe what I feel and see (Which I call painting) I sho<sup>d</sup> be contented but I am persuaded every day more confidently, that I want that sensibility of the beautiful in Language which is called Taste and in Compos<sup>n</sup>. Style which alone without higher qualities enables a Man to become a respectable Author.<sup>211</sup>

Crabb Robinson felt that both his perceptive and descriptive powers were incapable of producing sophisticated, “respectable” work. Because of these fundamental deficiencies, he was forced to clumsily represent his own experience, which made him vulnerable to attacks on the grounds of both self-indulgence and lack of talent. Crabb Robinson did not allow himself to fully develop his critical potential because he was intensely scared of public ridicule: “I believe I shall never expose myself by writing a very contemptible book, because if I did, I sho<sup>d</sup> perhaps hang myself through shame at

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Quoted in Baker, *Henry Crabb Robinson*, p. 108.

being criticised.”<sup>212</sup> Crabb Robinson stifled his own desire for literary and critical output by imagining destructive criticism for his potentially unworthy work.

Constantly questioning his talent, Crabb Robinson gradually decided that it was more respectable to excel in his legal profession than to be an inadequate writer. Until 1803, Crabb Robinson published several articles on German philosophy in the *Monthly Register* and the *Monthly Magazine*, but when he saw that his work “attracted no notice,” he stopped submitting it, as Behler has shown.<sup>213</sup> Morley has convincingly argued that Crabb Robinson preferred the safety of obscurity to the threat of being ridiculed for his dishonouring mediocrity: “he gave up attempting to write because he was convinced that his powers were at best only second-rate.”<sup>214</sup> By March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1811, Crabb Robinson had resolved to “not waste my faculties in attempting to acquire what is not within my reach, viz. pre-eminence as a metaphysical philosopher or critic.”<sup>215</sup> Instead of consistently trying and failing to reach literary fame, Crabb Robinson determined to achieve respectability where it was possible. He recognised that his “moderately logical understanding” and his ability to “speak, when I know my subject, with some effect,” were “precisely the business talents of a lawyer and advocate.”<sup>216</sup> Because the law could be mastered, Crabb Robinson was able to present a confident and competent persona to society, leaving little room for attack.

Despite his function as a foreign editor, or war-correspondent, from August 1808 until January 1809 during the Peninsular Wars (1807-1814), Crabb Robinson never acquired the confidence to confront a critical audience. Even thirty years later, when his editorial additions to Thomas Clarkson’s *Strictures on a Life of William*

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Behler, “Henry Crabb Robinson as a Mediator of Early German Romanticism to England,” p. 124.

<sup>214</sup> Morley, *The Life and Times of Henry Crabb Robinson*, p. 31.

<sup>215</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 1, p. 305.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

*Wilberforce* were about to appear, Crabb Robinson expressed deep anxiety over the prospect of publishing his work in his letter to Wordsworth of August 10<sup>th</sup> 1838. He alluded to the legend of a woman who stood on the street with the purpose of selling muffins but would only utter the faint cry: “muffins to sell, muffins to sell! Oh! I hope nobody hears me.”<sup>217</sup> According to Sadler, Crabb Robinson was the epitome of the “shy author” who simultaneously desired and feared public recognition. Hence he identified with the saleswoman:

This is just my feeling whenever I write anything. I think it a piece of capital luck when those whose opinion I most value never chance to hear of my writing. [...] I shall be out of the way when the book comes out. It is remarkable how differently I feel as to talk and writing. No one talks with more ease and confidence than I do; no one writes with more difficulty and distrust. I am aware, that whatever nonsense is *spoken*, it never can be brought against me; but *writing*, however concealed, like other sins, may any day rise up against one.<sup>218</sup>

From a young age, Crabb Robinson had been a confident orator and in 1803, in the presence of Bonaparte, outdid his company with his eloquent forthcomingness: “I alone talked freely, and I could see that people envied me my power of saying what I liked.”<sup>219</sup> The rules of polite society did not frighten Crabb Robinson, as he felt that the spoken word vanished after being pronounced, whereas publishing his work made him feel exposed and vulnerable because he could not control the reactions of his readers. His “distrust” stemmed from his anticipation of his audience’s destructive judgment. The cultural demand for self-effacement in the author may have affected his entry, as the pride that came with potential applause would have embarrassed a humble Crabb Robinson as much as the derision by his critics and friends. He was torn between the desire to be read and the need to be ignored.

In order to be respectable, the artist had to find the delicate balance between emotional self-investment and the insistence on his talents. Although Eastlake

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<sup>217</sup> Sadler, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, vol. 3, p. 152.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 204.

asserted that Ruskin's aesthetic laws detracted from the correct understanding of artistic creations, she implied that creative joy had to be limited to the process of creation and that once the work of art was finished; the artist had to distance himself from his work and assume a position of neutral modesty. Her rigid opinions of appropriate artistic behaviour were just as limiting to the creative spirit as the ideas she condemned in Ruskin. The Victorian art scene allowed little room for artistic experimentation as artists were either accused of too much or too little passion and Crabb Robinson consequently never had the courage to expose himself to this hostile audience.

This chapter has drawn attention to the strict parameters of acceptable behaviour within which the Victorian individual functioned. Respectability was as much determined by other-directedness as by the cultivation of personal talent and the diaries examined in the following chapters reflect this consistent tension between the individual and the community. As Chapter Two will show, George Eliot's diary is characterised by her determination to improve the community through her literary production. The apologetic attitude that Eastlake and Crabb Robinson displayed towards their correspondents is manifested in Eliot's diary and takes the shape of frequent expressions of gratitude and self-minimising guilt for being privileged. George Gissing's diary is almost completely devoid of an authorial presence, but his letters and non-fiction reveal that his struggle for financial survival inspired him with a pessimistic egotistical outlook which thwarted other-directed behaviour and led him to despise the Religion of Humanity that George Eliot believed in. In accordance with the cultural pressure for self-improvement, Gissing monitored his professional output in his diary, which defined his sense of self-worth. His conviction that altruism was opposed to all forms of progress is unique among the diarists in this thesis, as George

Eliot, John Ruskin and Gerard Manley Hopkins displayed a strong concern for the educational and spiritual well-being of others. This chapter has aimed to clarify the specific societal circumstances that induced the pressure to channel the emotions away from contemptible indulgence, towards the disciplined accomplishment of duty which dominates the following chapters.

## Chapter Two

### The Duty to Work: George Eliot and George Gissing

This chapter investigates George Eliot's and George Gissing's responses to ontological void created by their secularising culture's disbelief in an afterlife. In consequence, both viewed time as a substance that was to be turned into personal value by meeting the standards of respectability that Chapter One has described. For both Eliot and Gissing, the proper employment of time was their primary duty which defined their sense of self-worth. For both, material wealth was the welcome reward for assiduous work, but for Eliot money represented the source of the "guilt of the privileged" whereas for Gissing it was a means to purchase leisure time. This chapter will show that the prominence of the subjects of time and money in both novelists' "professional" diaries is indicative of their wider philosophical outlook in that they encouraged Eliot's pressure to be optimistic and animated Gissing's pessimistic reluctance to value life, which marks him as morally dissident compared to the other examined diarists.

Because Eliot filled the ontological void of agnosticism with her beliefs in the social responsibility of the individual, she felt immensely guilty for being well-off, as her diary shows. This fuelled the "economic of compensation" which dominated her work ethic and commanded her to pay off her debt to the community.<sup>1</sup> In order to explain the consistent self-minimisation and the quasi-religious desire for self-improvement that characterise Eliot's diary, I shall draw on Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905).<sup>2</sup> Although Eliot's work ethic was heavily influenced by her Evangelical roots, she fought the Puritan orientation towards the self that inspired the capitalist system. Eliot, who was an enthusiastic

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Hertz, "George Eliot's Debt-in-Life," *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no. 4 (Winter 1995), pp. 59-70 (p. 60).

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, trans. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003).



student of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857), held the positivistic belief that concern with the self was sinful—the individual had to invest in others as the self on its own was meaningless. Thus, in the absence of God, the signifying power could not rest entirely in the individual, because personal meaning had to be evaluated in relation to an “other.” The analysis of Eliot’s diary reveals that she used her diary to create a self-conscious inventory of productivity by which to perfect herself as a reformer of social circumstances.

In his 1980 review of Pierre Coustillas’s 1978 edition of Gissing’s diary, critic Robin Barrow disapproved of the “tedious” nature of the diary, which failed to “endear the author to us.”<sup>3</sup> Barrow is right when he notes that the “diary gives a very restricted and limited view” of Gissing’s inner life.<sup>4</sup> I shall, however, argue that this professional diary, which is indeed rarely confessional and “remarkably reticent,” speaks through its absences and does shed light on Gissing’s philosophical outlook.<sup>5</sup> Because Gissing’s diary is decidedly reluctant to reveal personal detail, I am reading it in conjunction with the letters and the *Commonplace Book*.

Gissing’s life was dominated by the compulsion to make money in order to overcome poverty and re-acquire social respectability after the Manchester episode, which designates his imprisonment after stealing money to keep the prostitute Nell Harrison, whom he later married. Biographer Paul Delany has argued that Gissing’s personality and the “lower-middle-class instincts of frugality, order, self-discipline and constant work,” are at the root of the “exile” he “brought on himself.”<sup>6</sup> Gissing’s diary is indeed distinguished by an unwavering focus on professional progress and

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<sup>3</sup> Robin Barrow, “Review of Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978),” *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 31, no. 121 (Feb., 1980), pp. 102-103.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Paul Delany, *George Gissing: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008), pp. xi, 49.

self-discipline, but there is also a clear sense that Gissing had to produce literature in order to buy time for himself. Only during his travels to Italy and Greece, did the proximity to great art inspire Gissing to develop as a diarist, but, unlike Eliot, “Gissing was not privileged enough” to adopt this ideal lifestyle permanently.<sup>7</sup> Gissing’s pessimistic outlook can thus be traced to the limited space for personal development and enjoyment that his life afforded and explains his lack of other-directed behaviour. Although Gissing’s work is primarily concerned with the social discontents of the nineteenth century, Delany has rightly noted that “his writing was a labour imposed from without rather than the expression of a creative self.”<sup>8</sup> Gissing did not seek to improve society but treated his work as an indicator of his own value.

Both Eliot and Gissing were acutely aware of the fragility of their lives. With no afterlife to hope for and no religious authority to pray to, life could change drastically any minute and the individual was powerless to prevent or explain disaster. Eliot confronted the assurance of eternal death by optimistically cherishing life as much as she could. Gissing’s life on the other hand, had no such idealistic framework; he defined himself entirely by his work, as Paul Delany has said: “there was always a sense in which his true partner was not another person, but his writing-desk.”<sup>9</sup> Gissing found “immense satisfaction in a task accomplished,” as he wrote in a letter on 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1885, and enormous despair if this was impossible.<sup>10</sup>

George Eliot and George Gissing are prominent figures of nineteenth-century literary realism. Eliot’s realism communicated her personal desire to educate her readers and was strongly other-directed, because art, for her, was “the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow

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<sup>7</sup> Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. xii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Coustillas, Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. II (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990), pp. 336-7

men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.”<sup>11</sup> For Gissing, on the other hand, writing was not a vehicle for social change, but a means to survive poverty and rise in respectability. Nor was writing a calling—Gissing had to resort to this type of work because his academic career had been terminated by the scandal of his imprisonment, and W. Van Maanen is right when he writes: “Gissing was not a ‘born’ writer: circumstances made him one. If they had been different, he might have been a professor of Greek in one of the major universities.”<sup>12</sup> Professionally, Gissing’s destitution set the theme for his novels, as, through his misery, he had “acquired [his] intense perception of the characteristics of poor life in London.”<sup>13</sup> Somewhat ironically, Gissing needed to be in proximity to London and the miseries he witnessed in order to find material for his short fiction and novels. As Delany has noted, Gissing “condemned the heartlessness of London,” which was seen as a “giant battlefield where, every day, thousands died in silence.”<sup>14</sup> Although Gissing’s work described these dreadful social conditions accurately, it was not intended to reform society, but rather for personal survival. In works such as *The Unclassed* (1884), *Demos* (1886) and *Thyrza* (1887), Gissing doubted the legitimacy of any reformer’s motives, because, as Daniel Born has suggested: “reform [could] be cast as activity carried out more for the psychological benefit of the reformers than for any positive outcome accruing to the supposed beneficiaries of such activism.”<sup>15</sup> In “The Hope of Pessimism” (1882) Gissing criticised the selfishness inherent in religious and

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<sup>11</sup> George Eliot, “The Natural History of German Life,” *The Westminster Review*, vol. 66 (July 1856), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> W. Van Maanen, “George Gissing: Escapist,” *Neophilologus*, vol. 59, no. 3 (1975), pp. 301-305 (p. 304).

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Korg, ed., *George Gissing’s Commonplace Book: a Manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962), p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Born, *The Birth of Liberal Guilt in the English Novel: Charles Dickens to H.G. Wells* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 78.

positivist doctrines and proposed, along with Schopenhauer, that only the pessimistic rejection of the will to live could bring about sincere sympathy.

In the absence of a religious system of signification, Eliot and Gissing had to signify themselves in relation to their social context. Their diaries clearly foreground their professional lives, displaying the struggle to possess and validate their own lives in the battle against time/death. After investigating the creation of personal value through work in both Eliot and Gissing, I will examine the meaning their diaries held in this process of signification. I will then present the impact of these biographical factors on their wider philosophies.

### **Guilt and Gratitude in George Eliot**

Eliot's "strenuous efforts to integrate individualistic and communal values and to transform religious ties into social ones," were, according to Suzanne Graver, characteristic of many enforcers of communitarianism in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

Eliot exhausted herself trying to fulfil her self-imposed duties which re-enacted the religious conventions of self-effacement, other-directedness and extreme diligence.

Like Carolyn W. de la Oulton, I shall argue that Eliot's "insistence on duty and responsibility is the one point of reference taken from her youthful Evangelicalism."<sup>17</sup>

Although Eliot had abandoned her Protestant roots, they had permanently shaped her mindset; a phenomenon which, according to Max Weber, had been carried over from pre-industrial time to capitalist culture: "the magical and religious forces, and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them, have in the past always been among the most

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<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Carolyn de la Oulton, *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 8.

important formative influences on conduct.”<sup>18</sup> Eliot retained the insistence on dutiful self-restraint inherent in religious practices, but it was now mere gesture, devoid of religious significance. This emptiness was repulsive to Eliot and she was eager to re-invest the concept with meaning through an increased focus on duty (towards others), which, in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), she defined as “that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self.”<sup>19</sup> Without religious guidance, the individual was a “mere bundle of impressions, desires and impulses,” and duty, a concept that stemmed from religion, had to save the individual from nihilism.<sup>20</sup> The individual could not subsist in isolation and had to live in relation to an authority, which forced him or her to “[rise] to a higher order of experience,” subjecting himself or herself to a “principle of subordination.” For Eliot, divine veneration had been replaced by a work ethic to which she was extremely dedicated.

Eliot’s work for, and behaviour towards, others justified her existence. She substituted divine criteria for virtuous behaviour by self-set standards, which were no less strict. Like the Puritan, whose fate was predetermined, but nonetheless had to be as virtuous as possible in order to count as one of the elect, Eliot felt that all her actions had to satisfy her duties towards others. In neither the Protestant, nor the capitalist work ethic did intentions suffice, as opposed to Catholicism where “the absolution of [the] Church was a compensation for [the subject’s] own imperfection. The priest was a magician who performed the miracle of transubstantiation, and who held the key to eternal life in his hand.”<sup>21</sup> Eternal life was questionable for the Puritan and unthinkable for Eliot. The absence of an absolving power handed over all responsibility to the individual, who was defined by his or her past behaviour and had

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<sup>18</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858), p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 117.

to bear the consequences of not meeting his or her standards in the form of shame and guilt.

We must be careful, however, not to explain the necessity of self-control in the Victorian codes of respectability solely as a consequence of Protestantism. Trygve R. Tholfson, as well as Niles M. Hansen among others, has pointed out that Weber merely identified the “‘elective affinities’ between evangelicalism and the liberal-rationalist-utilitarian tradition.”<sup>22</sup> Tholfson has insisted that secular forces, such as industrial progress, shaped mid-Victorian urban culture more than evangelicalism did. He does, however, like Gertrude Himmelfarb (see Chapter One), acknowledge the influence of the Protestant ethic as “the chief source of the moral intensity that pervaded the culture” which “[strengthened] the ethic of improvement,” by focussing on the actions of the individual.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, evangelicalism “[softened] the astringent side of Enlightenment rationalism and radicalism” and “[elevated] the masses.”<sup>24</sup> Tholfson also explains that the ethic of improvement can be seen as the universal embracement of progress, settling, to some degree, the complicated class conflict between trade unions and middle-class employers. Workingmen “deradicalized” and joined the middle-classes to form a “cohesive culture given to a quasi-religious celebration of the activity of the community.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, work became the ideological means to define and elevate the self through ambitious efforts at ever-greater productivity in all social strata.

George Eliot’s diary and fiction are characterised by an intense feeling of responsibility—the self had to cultivate its strengths for the benefit of others.

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<sup>22</sup> Trygve R. Tholfson, “The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 86, no. 1 (Mar., 1971), pp. 57-91 (p. 80). See also Niles M. Hansen, “The Protestant Ethic as a General Precondition for Economic Development,” *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Nov., 1963), pp. 462-474.

<sup>23</sup> Tholfson, “Mid-Victorian Stability,” p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Seemingly embarrassed to reap the worldly fruits of her labour, Eliot consistently pushed herself to “make greater efforts against indolency and the despondency that comes from too egoistic a dread of failure,” and thus attempted to eliminate any vanity from her drive towards success and fame.<sup>26</sup> She did long for the validation of her efforts by others but desired to make a difference to humanity rather than to enrich herself: “life would ever be made precious to me by the consciousness that I lived to some good purpose!”<sup>27</sup> Only when helping others did she consider her life worthwhile and only then could she fully enjoy her success. Despite Eliot’s evident agnosticism, these statements resemble religious pledges in their intensity and devotion.

To Eliot, according to her friend F.W.H. Myers, literature represented “the means of self-expression by which she was best able to move mankind,” and changing her audience “for good” was her primary aim.<sup>28</sup> He further asserted that her fame “ever presented itself [...] unmixedly as responsibility,” which was confirmed by the moral urgency with which she reached out to her readership.<sup>29</sup> When in the process of writing *Daniel Deronda* (1876), on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1875, Eliot felt pressured by time and she voiced her “fear lest I may not be able to complete it so as to make it a contribution to literature and not a mere addition to the heap of books.”<sup>30</sup> Eliot strove to create a text of lasting value, employing her novels not only as “experiments in life” but as models *for* life.<sup>31</sup> As Graver has observed, Eliot’s work enabled her to mould her readers’ minds by encouraging them to mimic:

characters who experienced such changes as those as she would ideally have her readers undergo, or such failings as might bring her readers to a fuller

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 90; June 19<sup>th</sup> 1861.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> F.W.H. Myers, “George Eliot,” *Essays: Modern*, no. 1 (1883), pp. 268-269 (p. 255).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>30</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon Sherman Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954-56), p. 216.

understanding of the human limitations and social conditions that inhibit the fellowship she wanted her readers to experience as a felt need.<sup>32</sup>

Eliot measured her success in terms of the emotional and intellectual nourishment her work provided for its readers, which is why the public acclaim of *Middlemarch* (1871-72) was very satisfying to her, as her diary entry of January 1<sup>st</sup> 1873 demonstrates: “No former book of mine has been received with more enthusiasm—not even Adam Bede, and I have received many deeply affecting assurances of its influence for good on individual minds.”<sup>33</sup> The book was seen to cater to the audience’s need for the formative effects of wholesome fiction and Eliot hoped that her audience would internalise the virtuous behaviour she had depicted or learn to avoid the fictional errors of judgment in their lives.

Reflecting the culture of zealous progressivity that Chapter One has described, George Eliot displayed an almost total identification with her work. She felt morally obligated to work and aimed to improve the whole of society through influencing the individual reader’s ethical choices. As Neil Hertz has observed, and this is obvious in her diary, Eliot portrayed her work as the “acquittal of a debt” she had to pay in order for her life to have “value” and meaning.<sup>34</sup> This idea of work as a sacrifice that should be offered joyfully without the affirmation of the self by pecuniary reward implies the annihilation of the author and the foregrounding of the literary text.

Eliot’s desire to provide moral sustenance to others can be seen to rise out of an “economics of compensation,” to use Hertz’s term, which implied that she thought she deserved personal validation only if she had invested in others. Moreover, her compulsion to dutifully acknowledge her “blessings” and to never indulge in complaint was an attempt to absolve the guilt related to her enjoyment of worldly

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<sup>32</sup> Graver, *George Eliot and Community*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> Hertz, “George Eliot’s Debt-in-Life,” p. 59.



possessions in the face of the deprivation of others. Christopher Herbert, in his study of money in the Victorian age, has emphasised the religious aspects of this guilt of the privileged: “Christianity idealizes poverty and anathematizes money; it teaches Christians to recoil from the contaminating uncleanness of worldly riches.”<sup>35</sup> In a similar fashion, Eliot strove to redeem her personal and material happiness through her literary output, along with her guilty expressions of gratitude, following the logic that Weber identified as specifically Wesleyan: “those who gain all they can and save all they can should also give all they can, so that they will grow in grace.”<sup>36</sup> This imperative to aggrandise the other and minimise the self very clearly dominated Eliot’s mindset.

Despite her agnosticism, Eliot had retained the orientation towards a higher being and seemed to look to an invisible authority to sanction her actions. In her diary entry of December 30<sup>th</sup> 1868, Eliot relativised her favourable review of that year by alluding to her disadvantaged contemporaries and appealing to a superior power to grant her the tools to equalise this unfair distribution of resources:

We have had no real trouble. I wish we were not in a minority of our fellowmen! I desire no added blessing for the coming year but these: that I may do some good, lasting work, and make both outward and inward habits less imperfect, that is, more directly tending to the best uses of life.<sup>37</sup>

The certainty that the Leweses were uniquely privileged spoiled Eliot’s enjoyment of her peaceful existence and hence she wished for the “added blessing” of remarkable work by which to benefit others. Eliot obviously retained the religious gesture of prayer, when she looked to a superior power to concede the “blessing,” in other words the ability to more productively use the time available to her, instead of employing increased will-power to effect change.

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher Herbert, “Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Winter, 2002), pp. 185-213 (p. 190).

<sup>36</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p.176.

<sup>37</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 133.

Eliot's consistent de-emphasis of the monetary reward for her work was a crucial aspect of her tendency to self-minimise. Her attitudes can be seen to reflect the Victorian work ethic that was shaped by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and Samuel Smiles (1812-1904). Carlyle exclaimed in "Labour" that: "Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has found it, and will follow it!"<sup>38</sup> *Past and Present* (1843) constitutes a eulogy of work in which Carlyle insisted that "there is a perennial nobleness, even sacredness, in Work."<sup>39</sup> Carlyle was the son of Calvinist parents and a passionate social activist who asserted, like Eliot, that the worker's intention should not be personal gain, but that work was necessary to extract the "god-given Force" and the "sacred celestial Life-essence" out of his or her existence.<sup>40</sup> Work was seen as an activity that ought to be fundamentally selfless; the "Reward" of professional effort being strictly non-monetary: "The 'wages' of every noble Work do yet lie in Heaven or else Nowhere. Not in Bank-of-England bills [or] in Owen's Labour-bank."<sup>41</sup> He associated work directly with religion and detached it from the worldly reality of financial necessity. Desirous to re-inspire England with energetic spiritualism, Carlyle uttered this deeply romantic declaration: "Thou wilt never sell thy Life, or any part of thy Life, in a satisfactory manner. Give it, like a royal heart; let the price be Nothing: thou *hast* then, in a certain sense, got All for it!"<sup>42</sup> The individual had to invest his or her physical and intellectual powers in what critic John Ulrich has identified as "a sacrificial economy of energy," in which the value of labour was equal to the value of life.<sup>43</sup> In this

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), p. 169.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.168.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> John Ulrich, *Signs of their Times: History, Labour and the Body in Cobbett, Carlyle and Disraeli* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), p. 94.

economy, God was maintained as the “guarantor of meaningful exchange,” the signifying “anchor,” attributing value to creation.<sup>44</sup>

Samuel Smiles is probably the best known author of Victorian self-improvement literature. His optimistic speeches and essays were delivered to crowds of workers to whom he sought to teach the moral value of consistent work, as this extract from *Self-Help* (1859) shows: “if a working man have high ambition and possess richness in spirit—a kind of wealth which far transcends all mere worldly possessions—he may not only help himself, but be a profitable helper of others in his path through life.”<sup>45</sup> Intelligence and selflessness were the qualities of the virtuous, respectable individual. Money was an inadequate reward to get out of work—the individual should not invest time into work in the hope of material gain, but in order to improve him or herself. He too commented on the popular maxim that:

Time is money; but it is more; the proper improvement of it is self-culture, self-improvement, and growth of character. An hour wasted on daily trifles or in indolence would, if devoted to self-improvement, make an ignorant man wise in a few years, and employed in good works would make his life fruitful, and death a harvest of worthy deeds. Fifteen minutes a day devoted to self-improvement will be felt at the end of the year.<sup>46</sup>

Time was clearly treated as a precious substance that was to be used properly. The employment of time defined the value of the individual, as “wasting” it was a sin and using it as an opportunity to enhance the self was a virtue.

Eliot greatly admired Carlyle and she both adopted and disseminated the principles he had designed to teach order and industry to the working classes.<sup>47</sup> She shared Smiles’s progressive belief that the railway, and material progress generally, could benefit the community immensely as it constituted a “binding force” and a “much-needed communication net,” which had the “endless potential to do good,” as

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1986), p. 189.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 173-174.

<sup>47</sup> Jules Paul Seigel, *Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 375.

Laura Otis has argued.<sup>48</sup> All three thus believed in the necessary conjunction of thrift, self-abnegation and other-directedness in order to achieve social improvement.

Eliot's self-abnegation was never complete, as she derived validation and satisfaction from the act of giving. The great responsibility towards the community that Eliot obtruded upon herself was, however, not a source of pleasure because she not only sought to redeem the guilt of her present self, but also to make up for the shameful neglect of her past self. In a letter of January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1858, having received much praise for her first novel, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), Eliot wrote that: "[I am] hoping that my writing may succeed and so give value to my life [to] touch the hearts of my fellow men, and so sprinkle some precious grain as the result of the long years in which I have been inert and suffering."<sup>49</sup> Eliot's episodic inability to produce work of a high standard made her feel like she had neglected her duty of providing others with moral nourishment. Because she had not worked for "long years," she had been useless ballast hindering the community from progressing. Sowing the "precious grain" of wisdom in others allowed Eliot to justify her existence and receive absolution for her guilt.

Eliot felt pressured to maximise her literary output because she was constantly aware that death would assuredly put an end to, or even annul, the lessons she was eager to teach. Having permanently distanced herself from Christianity, Eliot could not "believe in personal immortality," as Bernard J. Paris has claimed and therefore

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<sup>48</sup> George Eliot's attitude to material progress was divided as can be seen in *The Mill on the Floss* (New York: Harper Brothers and W.I. Pooley & Co., 1860), in which the narrator embraces the "striving for something better" as that which "distinguishes man from the brute," but nonetheless considers worriedly "heaven knows where this striving might lead us" (p. 136); Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth-Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> David Carroll, ed., *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.64.

feared that her time was running out.<sup>50</sup> Cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Turner have explained that “our understanding of life and death is very much bound up with our understanding of time. This is because death is inevitable.”<sup>51</sup> Within this limited time span, the individual (“User”) must employ the amount of the available “Resource” efficiently to achieve a “Purpose,” which will create “Value” to be gained by the “User.”<sup>52</sup> The “Value” of the “Resource,” because exhausted, is lost in any case. The management of time is thus directly related to human agency, as human beings must hold themselves accountable for causing waste due to their disorganisation and inefficiency.

This theory visualises that the prospect of death was terrifying to Eliot because it forever suspended her creative efforts and annulled the potential—“Resource”—from which to draw. She displayed an intense fear of mortality; a fear that Martin Heidegger attributed to death’s “character as a possibility [...] which is certain and at the same time indefinite—that is to say, possible at any moment.”<sup>53</sup> The unpredictability and inevitability of death as the force that broke the bonds of human companionship and impeded capable human beings from becoming permanent carriers of wisdom unsettled Eliot. She wrote of her “perfect love” with George Henry Lewes: “our unspeakable joy in each other has no other alloy than the sense that it must one day end in parting.”<sup>54</sup> When, on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1878, Lewes died, she bitterly regretted that his creative potential was not permitted to unfold completely; grief-stricken, she lamented “the beseechings of a mighty soul/ That left its work

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<sup>50</sup> Bernard J. Paris, “George Eliot’s Religion of Humanity,” *EHL*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Dec., 1962), pp. 418-443 (p. 418).

<sup>51</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reasons: A Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 162.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John McIntyre and Ian T. Ramsey, eds., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1962), p. 300.

<sup>54</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, pp. 147-143.

unfinished.”<sup>55</sup> During her lifetime, the thought of looming extinction was omnipresent and could not be repressed; to the point that it determined her outlook on life and her self-image. According to Heidegger, the individual commits a mistake by “*expecting*” [*Erwarten*] “possible” events. In the case of death, “Expecting is not just an occasional looking-away from the possible to its possible actualization, but is essentially *a waiting for that actualization* [*ein Warten auf diese*].”<sup>56</sup> The definite assurance that death would strike turned life into a priceless commodity that was threatened; an invaluable “Resource” that had to be utilised with utmost care, which meant that experience had to be maximised during this waiting time that was existence.<sup>57</sup> For Eliot too, the fear of death magnified the temporality of existence and created an oppressive obligation to maximise production.

These cognitive linguistic mechanisms originated in the Protestant work ethic, as the model of “time is money” relates back to “the exact moment when the industrial revolution demanded a greater synchronization of labour,” as E.P. Thompson has shown.<sup>58</sup> Thompson has observed that the integral elements of “disciplined industrial capitalism,” such as the “time-sheet, the time-keeper, the informers and the fines,” were in place as early as 1700.<sup>59</sup> He notes that the Puritan ethic did not introduce the concept of “industry” or “the moral critique of idleness,” but that it emphasised the moral character of laborious discipline.<sup>60</sup> Even before pocket watches were in common usage, Puritan clergymen were inculcating “interior moral time-pieces” into their subjects.<sup>61</sup> For instance, Richard Baxter’s 1673

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156; Shakespeare, *King John*, 3.1.37.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 306.

<sup>57</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p. 162.

<sup>58</sup> E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present*, no. 38 (Dec., 1967), pp. 56-97 (p. 69).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

*Christian Directory* advised its readers to treat time as a valuable commodity, which was not to be wasted: “use every minute of [Time] as a most precious thing, and spend it wholly in the way of duty.”<sup>62</sup> The reason the Christian individual needed to be so conscious of time lies in the Calvinist belief in predetermination, according to which “some men and angels” were given everlasting life, while others were wiped out by death.<sup>63</sup> Max Weber explained that the knowledge of being one of the elect could be sustained by “intense worldly activity” in order to feel “self-confiden[t]” enough to “counteract religious anxiety.”<sup>64</sup> Although the Calvinist did not technically have the power to “create his own salvation,” he or she could create “the conviction of it.”<sup>65</sup> Thus—and this is reflected in Eliot—the individual was responsible for constructing his or her self-image by establishing a certain set of standards to which he or she had to live up. Compared to Protestantism, Catholicism offered more guidance to the individual, who, as Henry Newman stated, had to “do God’s pleasure” in heaven and on earth, rather than to “choose and take his own pleasure.”<sup>66</sup> In the absence of an absolving God, the individual faced the grave pressure of having to *live correctly* at all times.<sup>67</sup> The diary, as Stuart Sherman has shown in his case study of Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), like the watch, provided “uses, pleasures and privileges as a medium of self-possession,” which exemplifies its early use as an aide-mémoire and tool for self-monitoring.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the decreasing importance of Judgment, Heaven and Hell in her secularising culture, Eliot was acutely alert to the irreversibility of time and constantly

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory*, vol. 1 (London, 1673), p. 285.

<sup>63</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 100.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 1, no. 7 (1868), pp. 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> As discussed extensively in Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>68</sup> Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form 1660-1785* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 77.

attempted to ensure that the products of her actions avoided “loss” and achieved a “Purpose.” In tune with her culture, Eliot viewed existence through what Lakoff and Turner call the “life-as-a-possession-metaphor” which meant that individuals were answerable to themselves as well as to the community they lived in.<sup>69</sup>

### **George Eliot’s Diary: Interactions Between Selves**

Eliot strove to “possess” life not only in terms of the proper employment of time but she also sought to materialise the lived moment in her diary. Like many diaries of the Victorian period, George Eliot’s diary was reluctant to unveil introspective detail. The scientifically inclined Eliot tended to “[make] herself the subject of study,” as diary critic Alain Girard would have it, rather than to employ her diary as an outlet for confessing her innermost thoughts.<sup>70</sup>

As we have seen, Eliot’s agnosticism and her positivist beliefs led her to consider life as a valuable resource and fuelled her desire to encapsulate the immediacy of the present moment. Her diary allowed her to appropriate the temporal in several ways: she was able to retain her momentary self in a verbal shape, to record and preserve visual and emotional reality and, through a unified consciousness, to synthesise the experience she had gained. Frequent re-readings of previous entries permitted a reconnection to former selves from whose sadness, love, failures and success Eliot drew lessons and comfort, which helped her to temporarily overcome the murderous linearity of time and to effectively use the past as a resource. Eliot’s immense respect for the limited time available to her reinforced the acute sense of responsibility with which she approached work.

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<sup>69</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reasons*, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> Alain Girard, *Le Journal Intime* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. 5 : « L’introspection évoque une technique, selon laquelle un sujet se prend lui-même comme terrain d’observation ou d’expérience, pour étudier la nature d’un phénomène, quel qu’il soit. »



The double-consciousness and temporal appropriation inherent in the diary genre were crucial factors in Eliot's process of professional self-construction, because they incited her to monitor and master her self and to diligently perform her duties. The personification of time at work in her diary suggests a strong unwillingness to lose her hold over the temporal resources available to her, which set the basis for her obstinate desire for uninterrupted diligence. Through her habit of re-reading her diary Eliot sought to improve her self by conducting what Mark Freeman has called the "hermeneutical project" of exploring and understanding the "narrative fabric of the self."<sup>71</sup> Although the diary strengthened Eliot's sense of self, the sections following this one will show that her self-assertion was subject to the self-effacement both her culture and her positivistic beliefs demanded.

Eliot's tendency to personify and objectify durations can be seen as both an extreme act of self-assertion and a gesture of appropriation, by which she elevated her own experience to the level of serious history writing. According to Heidegger, time—in order to be graspable—had to be named or physically represented by "the clock [which made] the event explicit."<sup>72</sup> Historian Arnaldo Momigliano has similarly suggested that any historical evidence, "in order to be evidence, must somehow be dated."<sup>73</sup> The practice of dating events raised them from easily forgotten trivia to permanent elements integrated into a system of signification, which rendered their mastery less problematic.

The diary, for Eliot, was thus an indispensable organisational and motivational tool that supported her mission to improve herself as well as others. It helped her to

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<sup>71</sup> Mark Freeman, "Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self," *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1998), pp. 27-50 (p. 27).

<sup>72</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, William McNeill, trans. (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 5E.

<sup>73</sup> Arnaldo Mamigliano, 'Time in Ancient Histiography', in *History and the Concept of Time: History and Theory*, *Studies in the Philosophy of History*, vol. 6 (1996), p. 15.

unify and control her self as well as her past. Whenever she neglected her diary for more than a few days, she felt guilty; as if she had deserted a person in need of care.

On June 22th 1857, she wrote apologetically:

My mind has been too intensely agitated and occupied during the last three weeks, for me to have the energy left to make entries in my journal, though I have often been regretting that the days pass without registering the beauties we see on our walks.<sup>74</sup>

We see that Eliot, like Ruskin, felt the duty to prevent the loss of time (and visual beauty) by recording her experience in her diary. When she failed to do so, she blamed herself for carelessly handing over “days” to oblivion, which, in Western thought, is considered to “devour” memory, snatching it to an “inaccessible location,” as linguists Lakoff and Turner have explained.<sup>75</sup> For Eliot, the consistency of the diary habit was a calming and reassuring practice and frequently, after a period of not writing, Eliot felt the duty, as it were, to catch up and merge with her former self, as can be seen in this entry of January 13<sup>th</sup> 1875: “Here is a great gap since I last made a record! But the time has been filled full of happiness.”<sup>76</sup> Thus dutifully informing herself in an epistolary fashion (Introduction), she clearly exhibited a desire to fashion a completely unified record of her life.

Eliot manifested a deep emotional attachment to her diary; both to the material object and to the experiences it housed. This is evident in her habit of composing an evaluation of sickness, work achievements and family news at the end of each year with festive finality. She shared this custom with Alfred Lord Tennyson, whose poem “Death of the Old Year” of 1833 honoured the year that was taking leave and with George Gissing, whose father introduced him to this ritual by reciting Tennyson’s poem each year. Eliot sought closure by appraising the experienced pains and

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<sup>74</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reasons*, p. 48.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

pleasures; invariably expressing thankfulness for being privileged. In line with her efforts at self-improvement, she tended to acknowledge progress, as can be seen in this entry of December 26<sup>th</sup> 1857: “So goodbye, dear 1857! May I be able to look back on 1858 with an equal consciousness of advancement in work and in heart.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, through the chronological naming of time periods, “1857” and “1858” stand for the successes achieved during their duration. The tenderness with which Eliot spoke of certain years was derived from a conceptualisation of experience through metonymy: “The happy old year in which we have had constant enjoyment of life notwithstanding much bodily malaise, is gone from us forever” (January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1874).<sup>78</sup> Time, in the form of a year, was leaving as it were; “we” were staying and grieving over the “happy old year’s” departure. The flow of time, in the compact shape of a “year” was taking off like a train, having the “enjoyments” on board. The joys and accomplishments—“blessings”—were attributed to the year, which therefore had to be mourned.

The diary as a physical object possessed inestimable value because it accommodated Eliot’s former selves and established a connection to past states of being through the daily practice of writing and re-reading entries: “Today I say a final farewell to this little book which is the only record I have made of my personal life for sixteen years and more.”<sup>79</sup> The regular use of this “little book” had bestowed an aura of familiarity on the diary; it physically embodied the cathartic routine of recording. When the diary’s “Resource” of space had been depleted, it had to be bid “farewell” in its function as an effective “utensil,” retaining, however, its ineffable

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<sup>77</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 72.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148; 31<sup>st</sup> December 1877.

“Value” as the lasting representation of subjectivity and a selectively constructed past.<sup>80</sup>

Eliot’s diary represented a materialised act of self-assertion, as she insisted that her experience deserved to be recorded. Arguably, her diary helped her set the guidelines for the propagation of her ideals, as “this little book” embodied “human feeling,” which she considered to be “the proper source of social goals.”<sup>81</sup> The diary established the self as its own signifier by obliterating God as the authority and catering to what Bernard J. Paris has called “man[‘s] powerful need for a response to his consciousness, for a humanized world.”<sup>82</sup> According to Paris, for Eliot, “the world of things [was] humanized by the individual’s identification of himself with objects and places, by associations and long familiarity.”<sup>83</sup> Through the long duration of its presence, the diary was among these objects that came to embody parts of the self, which could then defy death and outlive the mortal being.

By the act of re-reading and by carrying the physical inscription of past states of mind, Eliot obliterated the other and sought to provide a response to her own subjectivity. The diary enforced Eliot’s work ethic by holding her to her duty to diligently provide intellectual sustenance for her readers. The diaristic gesture allowed Eliot to save time in the present through preserving the past and establishing a historical resource of experience, which, in Heidegger’s terms, represented “a way of viewing history arise in the present.”<sup>84</sup> Heidegger further asserted that “The past—experienced as authentic historicity—is anything but what is past. It is something to

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<sup>80</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter, trans. (New York, London: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> From a letter to John Morley, quoted in Paris, “George Eliot’s Religion of Humanity,” p. 421.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, p. 19E.

which I can return again and again.”<sup>85</sup> Through materialising experience, the diary was able to counteract time’s linearity and restore the past in a circular movement of return, which Bain considered to be conducive to mental health.

Like the photograph, the diary is always in present tense, which is necessarily past at the moment of re-reading. The detachment produced by the act of writing and the subsequent passage of time have “eliminated the element of real time,” as Henri Bergson wrote, and leave historicised fact, thus creating a representation of a past moment.<sup>86</sup> Eliot’s earlier entries constituted invaluable touchstones and she was convinced that the diary was of great importance to her mental balance, as this entry of September 24<sup>th</sup> 1869 shows: “It is worthwhile to record my great depression of spirits, that I may remember one more resurrection from the pit of melancholy.”<sup>87</sup> By registering her mental states, Eliot provided guidelines that her future self could follow and either avoid mistakes or handle crises better. Indeed, her entry of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1877 shows that her diary had permitted her to control her low moods and regain optimism by directing her attention to previous instances in which she had successfully tackled difficulty:

I have often been helped by looking in [my diary] to compare former with actual states of despondency from a bad health or other apparent causes. In this way a past despondency has turned into present hopefulness. But of course as the years advance there is a new rational ground for the expectation that my life may become less fruitful.<sup>88</sup>

This entry acknowledges the therapeutic value of re-reading and its fundamental importance in self-formation. Through revisiting past states of mind, Eliot relativised the present, knowing that she had overcome hardship before, which gave her hope and confidence.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, Arthur Mitchell, trans. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1998), p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 138.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

However, Eliot did not always succeed in therapising herself, and occasionally failed to regain self-control through deliberating her problems in a scientific manner, as Bain had proposed (Chapter One). When the distance between selves became too great for identification, re-motivation could not occur:

The last day of the month! This evening I have been reading to G some entries in my note-book of past times in which I recorded my malaise and despair. But it is impossible to me to believe that I have ever been in so unpromising and despairing a state as I now feel (January 31<sup>st</sup> 1862).<sup>89</sup>

We see that despite her intense emotional turmoil, Eliot first situated herself within the year's chronological sequence, as she often did in the beginning of an entry. She then actively tried to relate to a former self but could not retrieve a self that resembled her current one in her past. The agony of the present seemed unmatched. Seeking for similar states of being in the past was an effort at normalisation—an attempt to integrate the current self and its “malaise” into the realm of the knowable and hence remain in control:

I have a distrust in myself, in my work, in others' loving acceptance of it which robs my otherwise happy life of all joy. I ask myself, without being able to answer, whether I have ever before felt so chilled and oppressed (February 26<sup>th</sup> 1862).<sup>90</sup>

Re-reading a diary from the past could, thus, also enlarge the distance between the present self and the past ones and sharpen the contrast between them. Béatrice Didier has remarked that the diary can quadruple its author's personality in the: “frequently arising situation in which the self who writes, the self-who-is-reading-the-journal-at-present, the self-who-has-written-the-journal and finally the self-who-was-the-object confront each other.”<sup>91</sup> George Eliot experienced acute despair when she could not retrieve her present self in the past, as she felt lost without the guidance of the “self-

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>91</sup> Béatrice Didier, *Le Journal Intime* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p. 118 : « Situation fréquente où s'affrontent cependant le moi qui écrit, le moi-au-présent-qui-lit, le moi-qui-a-écrit le journal et enfin le moi-qui-était-l'objet de ce journal passé. »

who-has-written-the-journal.” This entry also displays her incessant need for validation by others; usually George Henry Lewes and her audience, as I shall show.

Eliot’s effort to “understand” the self can be seen to affirm the generic premise of the diary. Mark Freeman, in his discussion of fiction’s ability to restructure linear/historical time, has argued that “the project of self-understanding is to be regarded as a hermeneutical project.”<sup>92</sup> By means of his or her personal records the diarist is able to interpret present events in light of past occurrences which can facilitate self-retrieval. Although Freeman does not specifically write on the diary, his argument on the function of narrative sheds light on the diary’s ontological mechanisms:

In coming to terms with my past, I can only do so from the present, through the act of interpretation; I seek to ‘read’ the events of my life as episodes in an evolving narrative, the parts shaping the whole and the whole shaping the parts, in an undivided movement of the creation of meaning.<sup>93</sup>

The recollection of isolated “parts,” such as the individual entries of the diary, can provide the re-reading self with the immediacy and precision necessary to bring about proximity to the past. The “whole” can be seen to represent the diary’s generic enterprise of writing the self; the effort of creating a written representation of a momentary self that arrests the passage of time. By connecting with her former selves, Eliot got the chance to imitate those selves, drawing upon them as models for desirable behaviour. In this sense, the diary supplied a shortcut that was conducive to learning—the experience undergone in the past did not have to be endured over again. As we shall see, Eliot’s attempts at self-sufficiency were only partly successful because she relied on Lewes, as well as her audience, to ultimately determine her value.

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<sup>92</sup> Mark Freeman, “Mythical Time, Historical Time, and the Narrative Fabric of the Self,” *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1998), pp. 27-50 (p. 42).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

## Self-Effacement and the Need for the Other

The content, emotionally controlled self that Eliot aimed to construct in her diary was influenced by the criteria of respectability that Chapter One has presented in that it sought to silence emotions of vanity and pride to the point that Eliot became unable to evaluate the quality of her own work. Her behaviour can be seen to mimic the ideal Puritan that Max Weber described:

[He] avoids ostentation and unnecessary expenditure, as well as conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the outward signs of the social recognition which he receives. His manner of life is [often] distinguished by a certain ascetic tendency. [...] He gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well.<sup>94</sup>

In an attempt at self-effacement, Eliot scolded herself when indulging in complaint or taking pleasure in her success. Her desire to be humble and altruistic compelled her to stress that she was profoundly grateful for her life's "blessings;" namely, the financial security and intellectual stimulation she shared with her beloved mate. As a result of the economic culpability she felt due to her privileged status, Eliot guiltily added grateful pendants to most negative remarks:

Read little this morning—my mind dwindling with much depression on the probability or improbability of my achieving the work I wish to do. [...] I am much afflicted with hopelessness and melancholy just now: and *yet I feel the value of my blessings.*<sup>95</sup>

Even when oppressed by depression, Eliot forced herself to keep a positive outlook, and tried to prevent herself from slipping into the abyss of self-deprecation and ingratitude through her will power. She clearly strove to maintain a balance between exhilarating happiness, physical frailty and an obsessive ambition that focused too much on the self. Thus, this balance was not just geared towards maintaining health but also aimed at sustaining moral faultlessness.

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<sup>94</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 71.

<sup>95</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, pp. 98-99; 30<sup>th</sup> July 1861. My italics.



Although Eliot used her diary as a platform to learn from the interactions between her selves, it did not help her develop a stronger sense of self-esteem, because she heavily depended on Lewes to break the circle of constant self-examination and dread of failure and to validate her work. Eliot needed Lewes to “assemble” herself “out of the other,” to draw on M.M. Bakhtin’s 1919 essay “Art and Answerability,” which argues that the self only exists in relation to the other.<sup>96</sup> Although Eliot strove both for control over her temporal reality and attempted to signify herself through her diary, these efforts at objectivity were doomed to fail, because she could only see herself through others’ responses to her being and her work. Bakhtin wrote that in order to gain self-knowledge,

Something like a transparent screen has to be inserted between my inner self-sensation (the function of my *empty* seeing) and my outwardly expressed image: the screen of the other’s possible emotional-volitional reaction to my outward manifestation—his possible enthusiasm, love, astonishment, or compassion for me.<sup>97</sup>

The other is thus necessary for self-realisation because although we can conceptualise the world we perceive and develop strategies to survive in it, we cannot form an idea of ourselves functioning in our material surroundings. We cannot watch ourselves live; only others can. It seems that Eliot did not manage to durably internalise the favourable appreciation of her work by those who admired her, such as Edith Simcox, George Henry Lewes and many of her readers.

Eliot relied on the support, opinions and knowledge of her “second self” to comfort her persistent “distrust in myself, in my work, in others’ loving acceptance of it.”<sup>98</sup> Whenever she was unsure of the quality of her work, Lewes was usually able to confirm its value, which made her look at it more objectively and more proudly. He

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<sup>96</sup> Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, eds., *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p.126.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>98</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 90; 19<sup>th</sup> June 1861 and 19<sup>th</sup> April 1861.

functioned as her alter ego, who signified her as a person and as a writer. When Eliot was in the process of writing *Romola* (1863), she noted in her diary that she was “extremely spiritless—dead, and hopeless about my writing.”<sup>99</sup> Then however, Lewes’s appreciation of her writing helped her regain her spirits: “After this record, I read aloud what I had written of Part IX to George, and he to my surprise entirely approved it.”<sup>100</sup> Similarly when working on her drama *Brother Jacob* (1864), she reported to her diary that:

During the last week I have been worse than ever—with continual bilious headache. But yesterday and today I seem to be emerging from this swamp of miseries. I have written to the 16<sup>th</sup> page of the Third Act. The other day I read to George and he approved it highly.<sup>101</sup>

We see that Eliot was incapable of properly judging herself and needed Lewes’s opinion to evaluate her work. Her first note of the year 1865 likewise demonstrates her reliance on Lewes’s appraisal of her experimentations in poetry: “for the first time in my serious authorship I have written verse and George declares it to be triumphantly successful.”<sup>102</sup> Here, she neither stated what she thought of her poetic creations, nor the subject of her new line of work, but immediately substituted her own opinion for Lewes’s, which she deemed superior to her own.

Eliot even went so far as to credit Lewes with her own virtuous self-control, attributing her own will power to him. It seems that Lewes acted as the super-ego who restored Eliot’s mental balance and self-esteem: “In each other, we are happier than ever: I am more grateful to my dear husband for his perfect love, which helps me in all good and checks me in all evil—more conscious that in him I have the greatest of blessings.”<sup>103</sup> Again, when she felt “much depressed in the morning, feeling my work

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 114; 17<sup>th</sup> December 1862.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 121; 5<sup>th</sup> December 1864.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 122; 1<sup>st</sup> January 1865.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

worth nothing,” Lewes was able to help: “talking over my fourth act with George, I recovered some hope.”<sup>104</sup> By 1875 her reputation as a writer was all the more established after having published *Middlemarch* in 1872, but she nonetheless felt overwhelmed by the writer’s task: “the two first volumes of *Daniel Deronda* are in print and the first Book is to be published on February 1<sup>st</sup>,— I have thought very poorly of it myself throughout, but George and the Blackwoods are full of satisfaction in it.”<sup>105</sup> This constant insecurity may have stemmed from the internalisation of the cultural beliefs in the inferiority of female writers, which I have discussed in Chapter One. Generally, Eliot can be seen to display both unorthodox and conventional gender politics. I agree with Shirley Foster, who has argued that Eliot’s open marriage and her acceptance as a woman within the masculine sphere of literary writers proved that she was a “rebel.”<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, Foster confirms, Eliot’s success very much depended on Lewes’s motivational support: “She was positively assisted by her consort; she would probably never have written fiction at all without Lewes’s initial encouragement and consequent dedication to her success, over-protective though it may seem.”<sup>107</sup> The diary shows that indeed, Lewes was the driving force that pushed Eliot towards progress and counteracted her ubiquitous lack of confidence.

In conclusion, we find that Eliot suffered enormously from her inability to reconcile the numerous responsibilities she heaped upon herself. She expected herself to be a social reformer while at the same time effacing her presence. Although she needed to adhere to the “Religion of Humanity” to compensate for her loss of religious faith, she did not have the energy or confidence of a resolute Carlyle or

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123; 30<sup>th</sup> January 1865.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145; 13<sup>th</sup> January 1875.

<sup>106</sup> Shirley Foster, *Victorian Women’s Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 185.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188. On George Henry Lewes’s role in Eliot’s career as a writer, see also Rosemary Ashton, “How George Eliot Came to Write Fiction,” *The George Eliot Review*, Special Issue: Scenes of Clerical Life (2009), pp. 7-13.

Smiles. The fact that the medium through which she hoped to bring about social change was crafted fiction greatly added to her difficulties to live up to her own expectations of other-directed behaviour. The creation of literature was a necessarily solitary activity that encouraged a focus on the self, which meant that Eliot critically examined her own work and was unable to find it of a high enough quality to translate her moral idealism. Her guilt of being privileged as well as the awkwardness of being successful can thus be seen to have represented an ideological problem for the self-effacing Eliot, which only Lewes could solve for her. Eliot, like Gissing, struggled because she wanted to achieve too much.

### **Money is Time: Gissing and Work**

George Gissing did not “possess” his life because it was dominated by his financial struggle and the consequent excruciating loneliness. Opposed to the worshippers of work and self-improvement, such as Smiles and Carlyle, Gissing reversed the maxim of “time is money” into “money is time.” Although Gissing himself tended to portray work as simply a painful necessity, Paul Delany has convincingly argued that Gissing made work his source of personal value; a “project [...] to be productive at all costs, to live under a daily discipline and have something to show for it.”<sup>108</sup> Despite his personal tendency to “subordinate [his life] to self-discipline,” the self-declared pessimist seems like a grumpy dissenter in the context of Victorian culture’s glorification of work.<sup>109</sup> Gissing can indeed be seen as “the Victorians’ antidote to Samuel Smiles,” as Philip J. Waller has claimed, because he refused to cherish work as a “blessing,” in the fashion of George Eliot.<sup>110</sup> The unending anxiety about money

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<sup>108</sup> Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. 30.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Philip J. Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 60.

which dictated Gissing's reality prevented him from extending his personal work ethic to a wider ideological construct. Although all his novels depict characters in desperate financial trouble, their struggle for survival represents merely the catalyst of the novels' development and does not express the author's desire for reform. Gissing lacked Eliot's ideological vigour and took a stance of pessimistic determinism, and was, as Delany has convincingly argued, sure of his personal powerlessness in confrontation with social grievances:

Gissing's politics were rooted in his immediate personal situation; he cared little for political philosophies beyond what he himself had seen and suffered. He firmly believed that for the social question there could only be individual solutions; and he believed just as firmly that for most people there was not going to be any solution.<sup>111</sup>

We see that Simon J. James's claim that "the subject of money preoccupies Gissing more than any other novelist in English literature" is true for Gissing's personal life as well. In many ways, Gissing's work *was* his life because he wrote novels in order to survive and to fulfil the criteria that his personal standards of literary quality demanded.<sup>112</sup>

Gissing's work ethic proposed that intellectual work of high standards could attribute value to the individual, but he felt that 'work for work's sake' was a meaningless concept as the necessity to work subtracted time off life, instead of validating it. Neither in his diary, nor in his other autobiographical records did he deal with this subject, but his semi-autobiographical character Henry Ryecroft comments on the irrelevance of hard labour for moral growth, as advocated by Carlyle and Smiles: "Agriculture is one of the most exhausting forms of toil, and, in itself, by no means conducive to spiritual development; that it played a civilizing part in the history of the world is merely due to the fact that, by creating wealth, it freed a

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<sup>111</sup> Delany, *George Gissing*, p. 91.

<sup>112</sup> Simon J. James, *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), p. 1.

portion of mankind.”<sup>113</sup> Possibly in response to the culture of self-improvement, or Gissing’s shameful imprisonment, Ryecroft adopted a cynically materialistic attitude to hard labour, reducing it to a source of commercial profit and denying its spiritual nourishment. Gissing himself was as much afraid of a career as a clerk as he was of the prospect of ending up in a workhouse, which added enormous pressure to the literary process.

The character Henry Ryecroft, who strongly reminds us of Gissing, tellingly comments on the harsh reality of the literary profession and openly derides the maxim of “time is money” by calling it “the vulgarest saw known to any age or people.”<sup>114</sup> According to Ryecroft, who as a young man did not feel in possession of his life, “money is time” would be more accurate, because all the time available to him had to be invested in work:

Have I not lost many and many a day of my life for lack of the material comfort which was necessary to put my mind in tune? Money is time. With money I buy for cheerful use the hours which otherwise would not in any sense be mine; nay which would make me their bondsman. Money is time, and, heaven be thanked, there needs so little of it for this sort of purchase.<sup>115</sup>

Ryecroft, like Gissing, finds himself in a circular economy: he must sacrifice all his time to work, in order to have the money necessary to afford leisure time, from which then to draw the inspiration that is essential to his profession. His life is kept captive by the ceaseless pressure for material gain, which is the only means by which he can recover control. Arlene Young has identified the same dynamic in *Eve’s Ransom* (1895), in which money purchases “freedom.”<sup>116</sup> Hilliard tells his friend Robert Narramore: “Here’s four hundred pounds. It shall mean four hundred pounds’-worth

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<sup>113</sup> George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (London: Constable & Co., Ltd, 1912) p. 200.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Arlene Young, “Money and Manhood: Gissing’s Redefinition of Lower-Middle-Class Man,” *Gissing Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3 (July 2001), pp. 16-24 (p. 21).

of life. While this money lasts, I'll feel that I'm a human being."<sup>117</sup> Money is thus seen as a humanising factor, allowing the individual not merely to survive, but to live in dignity.

As we shall see, for Gissing, the enjoyment of life consisted of reading, travelling and the contemplation of art. However, all of these depended on financial solvency. Annarita Del Nobile is right when she argues that "Gissing wrote in order to be able to travel [...] and he travelled in order to write."<sup>118</sup> Gissing's 1888 trip to Italy starts off in Paris, with an excited life-affirming attitude, which stems from financial security: "Rose in astonishing health and spirits. The knowledge that I am safe from penury for a year has helped me wonderfully" (October 7<sup>th</sup> 1888).<sup>119</sup> Indeed, money bought him the agency to manage his time at will and enabled him to pursue his passions.

Money also determined the way he perceived the territories he visited. Museums tended to charge entrance fees, which had a detrimental effect on his research and the enjoyment of the art on display. When in Naples on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1888, he was only able to "glance at the Grotto of Sejanus, in passing," because he "[could] not afford to pay every entrance fee."<sup>120</sup> This financial imperative to choose his destinations with respect to their cost caused him great inconvenience because the ubiquitous fees rendered a total immersion into the artistic patrimony of Italy impossible: "[I] must lose much that I should like to see."<sup>121</sup> Gissing felt that this commodification of art discriminated against those whose movements were limited by financial want. On December 31<sup>st</sup> in Florence, the museum's charges all but ruined his experience:

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<sup>117</sup> George Gissing, *Eve's Ransom* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 17.

<sup>118</sup> Annarita Del Nobile, "Travel and Writing: George Gissing's Ideological Journey in Italy," *The Gissing Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 19-22 (p. 20).

<sup>119</sup> Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 46.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

“Went to the Uffizi, the Pitti, the Museo in the Bargello, and the Belle Arti. Something like despair is the result; it is cruel to have my opportunities of study curtailed by having to pay a lira each visit.”<sup>122</sup> Gissing was greatly distressed to find himself in such close proximity to his “favourites,” but still to be separated from his ideal because of financial reasons.<sup>123</sup>

Despite his financial struggles, Gissing maintained extremely high standards for both his novels and his short stories, which ultimately determined his self-worth. His letter of January 15<sup>th</sup> 1899 to Fleury condenses his pride over his serious work ethic: “it has never been my habit to write flippantly, idly; I have never written only to gain money, to please the foolish. And my reward is that—however poor that I have done—I do not feel ignoble.”<sup>124</sup> Gissing deemed the constant re-writing, mental work and self-discipline that he invested in his novels to be superior to the “debased hackwork,” which, according to Kevin Swafford, he criticises in *Ryecroft*.<sup>125</sup> Swafford has convincingly argued that for *Ryecroft*, “the practice of art and authentic writing *should* be beyond the fray of the market because its subject is truth.”<sup>126</sup> Artistic veracity elevated remarkable writing from commodified literature and “remove[d] the individual from the mass of humanity.”<sup>127</sup> In this case, *Ryecroft* functioned as Gissing’s ventriloquist, voicing the latter’s satisfaction of having maintained his standards for artistic creation. The highest distinction was the respect Gissing had for himself; he possessed the dignity of an individual who had prioritised artistic quality over financial prosperity.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 99; December 16<sup>th</sup> 1888.

<sup>124</sup> Pierre Coustillas, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury* (New York: New York Public Library, 1964), p. 95.

<sup>125</sup> Kevin Swafford, “Mourning, Pleasure and the Aesthetic Ideal in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*,” *The Gissing Journal*, vol. 38, no. 3 (July 2002), pp. 1-13, p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



Although Gissing thought himself lucky to be a writer instead of a clerk, he refused to romanticise the daily toil that characterised literary production. I agree with critic Simon J. James who has argued that:

In contrast to the valorisation of labour's redemptive quality by most Victorian fiction, for Gissing the debilitating effects of labour, 'the curse of curses,' are such that it is only undertaken resentfully in order to continue existence, even intellectual labour, as *New Grub Street* shows.<sup>128</sup>

*New Grub Street* (1891) indeed paints a uniquely grim picture of the writer's profession as it disregards the rewards that literary art can bring. Although it is tempting, we cannot read Reardon as a purely autobiographical character, because he embodies solely the dissatisfying aspects of literary production. His despair, however, is comparable to Gissing's, when the former "dipped his pen for the hundredth time, bent forward in feverish determination to work. Useless; he scarcely knew what he wished to put into words, and his brain refused to construct the simplest sentence."<sup>129</sup> This clearly recalls Gissing's own obligation to be creative on command: "With what terrific reluctance I sit down to work every afternoon!"<sup>130</sup> Writing is pleasurable if it gives expression to narrative currents that have been damming up in the mind, but Gissing was under the torturous pressure to squeeze out an average of 3000 words per day in order to survive.

Like Henry Crabb Robinson, Gissing struggled to (re)gain the status of respectability after the Manchester episode. His financial success and the critical approval he received proved that he had risen above the status of poverty, which filled him with the pride of having overcome material difficulties through his art. Liz Hedgecock has identified "contradictions or at least incongruities in Gissing's practice

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<sup>128</sup> James, *Unsettled Accounts*, p. 84.

<sup>129</sup> George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 47.

<sup>130</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 34; June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1888.

of his profession, and an ambivalence in his ideological position within it.”<sup>131</sup> Despite the pressure to produce as abundantly and speedily as possible, Gissing insisted on the quality of his literary output, which is why he rejected many of his projects, even at an advanced stage. Hedgecock is indeed correct when she points out that Gissing combined “both ‘artist’ and ‘tradesman’ characteristics in labouring over his novels.”<sup>132</sup> Money, for Gissing, did not suffice to distinguish a respectable author. He produced numerous short stories for “quick cash,” which is why, according to Emanuela Ettore, they are generally considered to be “the inferior product[s] of an otherwise talented author.”<sup>133</sup> However, Gissing did not seem to make a major difference between the types of story he produced. On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1894, he congratulated himself on having “earned by literature in 1894 no less a sum than £453-12-5. Bravo! I see that my total expenses were £239-6-9.”<sup>134</sup> Gissing was immensely proud of making a profit off his literary work because it meant that he had overcome poverty and gained respectability without compromising his intellectual standards.

Gissing’s refusal to glorify the work process denoted his support for thinkers such as the socialists John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896), who were critical of Victorian culture’s glorification of work, as well as the wider capitalist system, and insisted that work was only valuable if its content was. In “The Nature of Gothic,” Ruskin condemned the mechanical and repetitive tasks that construction workers had to execute as dehumanising. He insisted that unless they were posed an intellectual challenge which allowed them to develop their creativity

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<sup>131</sup> Liz Hedgecock, “Men at Work: Gender, Class and Ideology of Employment in *In the Year of Jubilee*,” in Bouwe Postmus, ed., *A Garland for Gissing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 91-105 (p. 95).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Emanuela Ettore, “‘The Salt of the Earth’ and the Ethics of Self-Denial,” *Gissing Journal*, vol. 31, no. 3 (July 1995), pp. 19-30 (p.19).

<sup>134</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 358.

and integrate their own ideas into the architectural product, they were likely to focus only on their work's monetary reward. Unlike Adam Bede, they would "throw away their tools" as soon as they could, because "they [had] no pleasure in the work by which they [made] their bread, and therefore [looked] at wealth as the only means of pleasure."<sup>135</sup> The "thoughtful part" had to be cultivated, as the slavery of modern human machinery was a waste of human life.<sup>136</sup> William Morris, in his essay "Useful Labour versus Useless Toil," which was published by *The Socialist Platform* in 1885, similarly commented that "there is some labour which is so far from being a blessing that it is a curse."<sup>137</sup> "Repulsive" work would always be a "burden" to the human being and it was "manly" to "refuse" work that was mechanical and degraded human intelligence.<sup>138</sup>

As his diary shows, Gissing's work was, more often than not, utterly repulsive to him. However, he was resolved to live a strict "life of the mind" and excel at it, as Delany has argued, because, with the Manchester episode, he had "shut himself out of all the other learned professions."<sup>139</sup> The ideal that Gissing envisaged resembled Eliot's life: academic study, frequent travel and domestic bliss. His diary demonstrates a constant bitterness which was caused by the stark contrast between the life Gissing felt he deserved and the one he was forced to lead.

### **Working for the Ideal: Gissing's Diary**

As we have seen, the necessity, as well as the ability to work determined Gissing's fitness and value as a writer. Any disruption of his work routine both led him to

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<sup>135</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997), p. 6; John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1867), p. 163.

<sup>136</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 2, p. 161.

<sup>137</sup> William Morris, *Signs of Change* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 73.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. 29.

question his intellectual superiority to a clerk, and posed a practical threat to his own existence and his family's. Gissing's high standards dictated that he had to produce remarkable literature with the promptitude of a machine, which complicated the creative process by introducing the binaries of success and failure as well as aspiration and satisfaction. Unlike Eliot, Gissing tended to blame external factors as the cause of his perceived failure, rather than himself, as his metaphorical appraisal of creativity, stress-related illness and the suffering induced by perpetual loneliness show. Gissing's pessimism may have originated in his lack of freedom of movement. All his autobiographical writings show that Gissing longed for remote geographical places, especially Italy and Greece, and bygone centuries in which art flourished. He always underwent a change of mood when he managed to "escape" from "the wrong world" that was England into the "ideal world" in Italy, to use Del Nobile's terms, and drew consolation from studying the classics and from decorating his domestic environment with portraits of his literary heroes.<sup>140</sup>

Gissing's life was dominated by an escapist movement towards his ideal. When he was travelling, the despair that distinguishes his diary was greatly alleviated and he reported exhilarating happiness. Like his character Reardon in *New Grub Street* (1891), Gissing "loved the old writers with all his heart; they had been such a source of strength to him in days of misery."<sup>141</sup> Literature and art provided spiritual nourishment to Gissing and he thought of their creators as his intellectual company. As Delany has observed, travelling dramatically changed the dynamic of Gissing's life, because it "became one of receiving impressions, rather than actively pursuing any of his desires."<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Gissing's professional life was characterised by observing society, adapting scenes for his novels and producing work that met his

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<sup>140</sup> Del Nobile, "Travel and Writing," p. 20.

<sup>141</sup> Gissing, *New Grub Street*, p. 66.

<sup>142</sup> Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. 150.

standards; all of which involved active extraverted crafting. The “ideal world” that Gissing encountered on his journeys was there for him to internalise and possess. I shall first examine the portrayal of work and its obstacles in Gissing’s diary. I will then discuss the function of the ideal in Gissing’s mental life.

### **Work and Hardship**

Gissing’s diary primarily presents work as the struggle to overcome the challenges of poverty and creative impotence and it constituted both the source of and the vent for intense frustration and despair. Gissing suffered intensely under the pressure to produce work of lasting quality under the constraints of time that his poverty imposed upon him. The combination of these factors can be seen to have caused Gissing’s writer’s block, which he perceived as a bodily dysfunction. He also tended to blame his loneliness and domestic troubles with Edith for his inability to work. Ultimately, however, his work did supply pride and self-affirmation.

Although Roger Milbrandt has noted that only during the first years in London, Gissing was “starving,” effectively, his life was distinguished by recurring periods of extreme want, as in this entry of March 14<sup>th</sup> 1890: “do not really have enough to eat, but no help for it.”<sup>143</sup> Hunger was a highly disconcerting factor, which, in combination with publishers’ demands could be held accountable for “the familiar block of thought and fancy,” of which Gissing complained repeatedly; April 6<sup>th</sup> 1890 being one of many entries.<sup>144</sup>

The literary success of a completed novel was immediately undone by the necessity to produce more. Although within three weeks of the publication of *The*

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<sup>143</sup> Roger Milbrandt, “How Poor Was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing’s Income between 1877 and 1888,” *The Gissing Journal*, vol. 43, no. 4 (October 2007), pp. 1-17 (p.13); Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 211.

<sup>144</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 213.

*Nether World* on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1889, Gissing had worked on several short stories and written poetry, this did not suffice, as can be seen in his entry of April 5<sup>th</sup> 1889: “Of course no work. By heaven, I must set to, to-morrow!”<sup>145</sup> Such periods devoid of literary yield seemed to coincide with a state of general inoperativeness in the author. He reported that April 28<sup>th</sup> 1889 was: “a very unsatisfactory day. Nothing done, nothing really read. [...] These long breaks in my writing suit me very ill. [...] Dull day until evening; heaviness upon me. Never am I well when I break off my work.”<sup>146</sup> Work and a habitual work routine are here portrayed as the source of health; the absence of which resulted in an aggravation of the depressive episode.

Although Gissing produced a surprising amount of work, a large part of it remained unfinished because it did not meet his standards, as his entry of April 7<sup>th</sup> 1889 shows: “I shall have to abandon all I have written, and begin a new story. Am dissatisfied with the subject I have undertaken. And had finished 31 pp.! Always the same, each new book.—A vile day. Did nothing but rack my brains.”<sup>147</sup> The process of creating literature was thus characterised by a constant movement of conception and termination. Gissing’s aspirations to excellence, which did not allow him to publish work he thought inadequate, significantly increased his frustration. As a consequence, Gissing at times felt “stupid,” when composition proved to be difficult, as the entry for June 24<sup>th</sup> 1889 shows: “Have no confidence in this novel of mine, but must finish it, because I am all but penniless.”<sup>148</sup> Again, Gissing found himself in the “money is time”-circle where he had to invest the time he really needed to recover and gather his creative energies into new work that might buy him time.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

Gissing tended to relate his professional success or lack thereof directly to his personal life. Only a week before meeting Edith Underwood, on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1890, Gissing prophesised gloomily: “I know I shall never do any more good work until I am married!”<sup>149</sup> The hasty marriage to Edith was the result (and the cause) of years of unhappiness and loneliness, which led Gissing to ignore the signs that Edith might not be a suitable partner in the first place. Pierre Coustillas has claimed that “a certain masochism” and a desire to avoid “sexual frustration” were at the root of Gissing’s decision, but he also viewed Edith as a project, as Paul Delany has argued.<sup>150</sup> The union ended in disaster, as Edith, eager to get attention from hard-working Gissing, fought with her husband constantly.

The episodes of debilitating loneliness that motivated this romantic choice always coincided with professional unproductiveness. In a letter to Gabrielle Fleury of September 11<sup>th</sup> 1898, looking back on his life, he explicitly stated that “I was made solitary by hard circumstances and the necessity of ceaseless work.”<sup>151</sup> With poverty forcing him to work constantly, he had neither the time nor the means to associate with the people he felt were worthy of him, and this was partly because Edith belonged to the “low-class Londoners,” whom Gissing despised.<sup>152</sup> By marrying Edith, Gissing increased rather than cured his loneliness, as his entry of April 21<sup>st</sup> 1891, composed two months after his marriage, shows: “Wrote to Mrs. Harrison, telling her of my marriage, and that henceforth I am shut off from educated people.”<sup>153</sup> The discontent triggered by Edith’s intellectual inequality, as well as her temper tantrums, frequently made work impossible. The “wrangling and uproar down in the kitchen,”

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>150</sup> Pierre Coustillas, ed., *Collected Articles on George Gissing* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968), p. viii; Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. 165.

<sup>151</sup> Coustillas, ed., *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, p. 60.

<sup>152</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 287; October 30<sup>th</sup> 1892.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

which Gissing described on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1892, obliged him to separate the spheres of home and work: “Things going so badly in the house that I had to go and engage a sitting-room, at 7 Eaton Place, Heavitree Road, to use daily as a study.”<sup>154</sup> In order to concentrate, Gissing had to invest money in renting an office to buy his own time, repeating the circular economic of “money is time.”

Gissing believed that the years of “ceaseless quarrel and wretchedness” with Edith permanently transformed his health.<sup>155</sup> In 1899, in a letter to Gabrielle Fleury of February 25<sup>th</sup>, Gissing displayed extreme relief when he discovered that he had rightly blamed his health troubles, which had continuously interfered with his productivity throughout his life, on his emotional despair: “I am so glad you have learned that emphysema can be produced by mental suffering. One reason why I think of my past life so bitterly, is because I *know* that my health was destroyed by the moral torments I underwent.”<sup>156</sup> This can perhaps be seen as the reason and consequence for the environmental determinism that Gissing displays in his novels, which, according to Stephen D. Arata, “repeatedly show how, over time, social injustice becomes immutable physical fact.”<sup>157</sup> More specifically, Ian J. Deary has argued, Gissing’s perpetual financial insecurity and the pressure to use his time beneficently can account for the “somatopsychic distress,” which is Deary’s term for the “self-limiting factors,” such as the “bouts of anxiety” and “minor [medical] ailments,” that Gissing frequently identified as the obstacles to literary emanation.<sup>158</sup> For instance, Deary counts forty-one diary entries in which Gissing complained of

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292; December 15<sup>th</sup> 1892.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

<sup>156</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, p. 109.

<sup>157</sup> Stephen D. Arata, “Realism, Sympathy and Gissing’s Fictions,” *VIIJ*, vol. 23 (1995), pp. 27-49 (p. 36).

<sup>158</sup> Ian J. Deary, “Somatopsychic Distress in the Life and Novels of George Gissing,” *Gissing Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 1-17 (pp. 2, 3).



headache, which is abnormally high in comparison to the “lifetime prevalence in the general population” of twenty-five.<sup>159</sup>

Gissing metaphorised his powerlessness to be creative on demand by conceiving of contaminants located within his body that impeded coherent thoughts from forming. After his return from Italy and Greece in 1889, for instance, Gissing felt that his creativity was blocked. Despite his rigid work routine, he was unable to counteract the perceived limitations to his expressiveness. He wrote on July 24<sup>th</sup>: “Worked 9 to 1 and 4.30 to 8.30, doing 4 pp. Had to rewrite last ½ p. of yesterday. Working with that miserable sense of clog on the brain which comes now and then; seems to be a physical obstruction to thought,—and no doubt is.”<sup>160</sup> Like Carlyle, Gissing viewed creativity as an illumination that could not wilfully be retained or regained even by the most zealous effort. The “clog” in the brain extinguished the inspirational spark, as it were, depriving Gissing of all control. Gissing reported a “slight relief” at “about 12 o’clock,” when he was surprised by “a sudden flow of composition for a few lines,” which then “[stopped] again.”<sup>161</sup> This “flow” of ideas represented the creative energy that managed to circumvent the barricade of the “clog.”

When confronted with the immense undertaking of creating a new literary work, Gissing did not blame the enormity of the task at hand for his lack of ideas, but rather held his neurological constitution responsible, as this entry of August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1890 shows: “made a beginning of a new novel [...]. Wrote 3 pp., but in the evening saw that they are no good.—Am on the verge of despair and suffering more than ever in my whole life. My brain seems powerless, dried up.”<sup>162</sup> He thus portrayed creativity

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>160</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 157.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

as an essence the individual could produce by sheer effort of will, which means that he considered his brain as too feeble to exert itself sufficiently to generate creative output; it had used up its resources and there were none left to draw from. In *New Grub Street*, Reardon, who can be seen to reflect the unpleasant aspects of being a writer, reports a similar grievance: “I am at the mercy of my brain; it is dry and powerless. How I envy those clerks who go by to their offices in the morning!”<sup>163</sup> The unpredictability of the creative spark and the lack of control the writer possessed over the “trivial accidents” that might impede him from working, made writing for money an “insane thing.”<sup>164</sup> Both for Gissing and Reardon, it was impossible to be inventive on command, yet they both depended on forced creativity to make a living.

However, work was not merely the tedious and worrisome activity of “fiction-grinding”—it also determined Gissing’s prominence as an intellectual and thus confirmed his status as an artist.<sup>165</sup> The comparatively few entries in which Gissing rejoiced over his intellectual and financial achievements appear in the later stages of his career. The *Commonplace Book* presents an aphorism on the dynamic between self-doubt and pride that characterises writing: “The pains of lit. composition. How easy any other task is in comparison. Forcing of mind in a certain current, the temptation of indolence with a book. Yet, the reward, when effort once made.”<sup>166</sup> Gissing recorded several instances of praise in his diary that filled him with pride as others’ approval established him as a great writer. The entry of August 21<sup>st</sup> 1893 contains the most flattering praise that Gissing could have wished for: “letter [...] of acknowledgment from P. Bergson who says that he takes my books with him everywhere, and that they continue the qualities of Shakespeare, Marlowe and

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<sup>163</sup> Gissing, *New Grub Street*, p. 50.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 430; December 27<sup>th</sup> 1896.

<sup>166</sup> Korg, ed., *Gissing’s Commonplace Book*, p. 67.

Euripides!”<sup>167</sup> Gissing’s aspiration to be equal to his literary heroes was affirmed by his direct association with their genius. He finally belonged amongst those he admired the most.

### **Ideal and Escapism**

Ultimately, and in this I agree with Delany, the main source of Gissing’s perpetual discontent was his conviction that his miserable situation was undeserved, which was particularly accentuated when he taught his upper-middle-class students: “[Gissing’s] sense of poverty came from his relative position and what he considered due to a man of his education and talents.”<sup>168</sup> Gissing tended to escape from the frustrations of his reality by studying the classics and imagining himself among the great thinkers of the past. He underwent a healing change of identity whenever he delved into a world saturated with artistic and historical monuments and was able to leave his life in England, which was dominated by work and financial pressure, behind. The diary displays a marked change in mood, attitude and openness to the world during Gissing’s travels.

Gissing’s diary conveys the sense of personal limitedness that he experienced in England, whereas he was able to adopt his ‘real’ or ‘ideal’ self abroad. Upon commencing his 1888 trip to Italy, on October 19<sup>th</sup>, for instance, Gissing told his diary that he had switched identity and had laid off the role of the novelist who struggled to make a living: “on crossing the Channel, I have become a poet pure and simple, or perhaps it would be better to say an idealist student of art.”<sup>169</sup> Travelling was an act of self-assertion as time abroad could be used at leisure and Gissing went “abroad for

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<sup>167</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 313.

<sup>168</sup> Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, p. 54.

<sup>169</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 54.

[his own] pleasure and profit.”<sup>170</sup> His letter to Edward Bertz (1887-1903) of 1890 clearly shows the necessity to leave England and enter the geographical place that could host his ‘true’ self: “I work only in the hope of getting away very soon [...] I am in the wrong world [...] I am so much more myself when abroad.”<sup>171</sup> In the proximity to great art and architecture, Gissing felt at ease and inspired—the person he could have been if he had not been constantly preoccupied with professional matters. His entry of December 14<sup>th</sup> 1888 proves that once the load of work was lifted, Gissing’s depression faded as well.

Woke early this morning and enjoyed a wonderful happiness of mind. It occurs to me—is not this partly due to the fact that I spend my days solely in consideration of beautiful things, wholly undisturbed by base necessities and considerations? In any case this experience is just remarkable.<sup>172</sup>

Gissing was finally able to break the exhausting cycle that perpetuated his depression, which David Grylls has identified as a product of the former’s simultaneous belief in determinism and determination: “he toiled on to counteract his dark depression, but excessive toil only made him more depressed.”<sup>173</sup> In the absence of the pressure to fight demotivation by increased will power, Gissing could invest all his energies into the contemplation of art, such as his “favourites” at the Capitoline Museum, or “[lounging] with delight in my favourite Sala Rotonda.”<sup>174</sup>

Gissing’s inner world changed drastically with the variation of scenery. Confronted with amazing artefacts, he was able to retrieve the passionate interest in art he had had as a child, when the future was not yet threatening. Whereas in England, he recurrently reported “frequent waking in the night with fears of the future,” in Italy,

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 55; October 21<sup>st</sup> 1888.

<sup>171</sup> Arthur C. Young, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903* (London: Constable, 1961), p. 108.

<sup>172</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 98.

<sup>173</sup> David Grylls, “Determinism and Determination in Gissing,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 1 (Mar., 1984), pp. 61-84 (p. 83).

<sup>174</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 99; December 16<sup>th</sup> 1888; p. 104; December 21<sup>st</sup> 1888.

his sleep was untroubled and he was able to connect with a truly inspired former self:<sup>175</sup> “I have had moments of strange peace lately. If I awake in the night, I lie thinking of only the pleasantest things, and experience a strange revival of the feelings of my boyhood—the peculiar love of art, etc.”<sup>176</sup> Incidentally, Gissing was able to reconnect to the enthusiasm for art that his father had instilled in him. When he went to the Loggia in Rome, the “Bible pictures” he saw filled him “with keenest joy,” because “they [brought] back the earliest longings of the days when I copied several of them from outline engravings that father possessed.”<sup>177</sup> In Italy, Gissing was able to contemplate the originals of works of art that had been in his consciousness since his childhood. So far, they had existed purely in the realm of the mind and the actual encounter provided deep reassurance.

The locations that Gissing visited during his travels to Italy and Greece had been sanctified by their occurrence in the study of the classics and had come to embody the associations with the extraordinary art they accommodated or the unforgettable historic events that happened within their confines. Gissing was thrilled to visit such sacred spots. In the Vatican, on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1888, Gissing was awed by the tremendous significance of the place: “impossible to look at anything [...] with the excitement of being on such ground.”<sup>178</sup> The aura of the Vatican suffused Gissing’s entire being, overwhelming him with feeling, which made objective study impossible. Similarly, when in Athens, a place which his studies had rendered familiar to him, he was filled with profound respect when he actually experienced its monuments: “went onto the Acropolis. So in truth I have trodden this sacred soil!”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 306; June 8<sup>th</sup> 1893.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 87; December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1888.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 94; December 11<sup>th</sup> 1888.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 176; November 20<sup>th</sup> 1889.

The mental images of these spots that Gissing had been forming for years were now exchanged for tangible reality.

For Gissing, these places possessed a deeply subjective meaning as they embodied the literature in which they figured, which had offered Gissing emotional refuge in times of acute despair, as is apparent in his letter to Fleury of August 26<sup>th</sup> 1898: “but for Greek and Latin poets, I should perhaps have been brutalized in the long years of poverty. How many a time I have read Homer when I was living in a wretched garret, and had scarcely enough to eat!”<sup>180</sup> Classical literature seemed like the guarantor of civilisation, reminding Gissing that the human being was capable of creating sublime art, which constituted a source of pleasurable distraction for him.

The physical proximity to the greatness of Rome and Athens, among other cities, enabled Gissing to realise his ideal. The complementation of mental images with physical reality bequeathed Gissing with a deep satisfaction and a sense of arrival. The Commonplace Book presents an entry in which Gissing described the perfection experienced in Rome as the high point of his life:

Perhaps the supreme moment of my life was that when I woke one night in Rome, & lay with a sense of profound & peaceful *possession* of what for so many years I had desired. Before going to bed I had read Horace. Never have I been so free of temporal cares (in soul, that is to say) & so clearly face to face with the ideal of intellectual life.<sup>181</sup>

This entry exemplifies the deep fulfilment Gissing drew from the unification of imagination and reality, which enabled him to finally “possess” his experience. Reading a classical Roman author in the very city in which he wrote gave Gissing a sense of presence, and he “possessed” the reassurance that this place was not a mere fabrication but that ancient Rome lived on through its literature and its monuments.

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<sup>180</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, p. 49.

<sup>181</sup> Korg, ed., *Gissing's Commonplace Book*, p. 65.

Gissing's ideal had become real and he accomplished the appropriation of the lived moment by writing down his experience.

When exploring Rome and Athens, Gissing tended to identify with the imagined consciousness of the historical figures that inhabited these structures. He stepped out of his self and attempted to see the place with the eyes of personalities long dead. When on December 17<sup>th</sup>, he contemplates Rome from a distant hill, he combines his knowledge of history and the sights in front of him to form a hypothesis of past conditions: "what a delightful view of the city there must have been from Tusculum, which was up by Frascati!"<sup>182</sup> Gissing tries to mentally inhabit a past moment by adopting the perspective of now fictionalised humans. In Athens, on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1889, Gissing feels connected to Socrates because of the shared location; the banks of the river Ilissus. He tries to imagine the conditions of 400 B.C., assuming Socrates's viewpoint: "When Socrates sat on this spot, under the plane-tree, and discoursed the 'Phaedrus,' the conditions must have been very different. It was then, of course, outside the city."<sup>183</sup> Again, his academic knowledge and the present place serve as a basis to imagine the past and Socrates's reality.

This section has exemplified the striking contrast between Gissing's and Eliot's ideas of community. Eliot wrote in search of a response, but Gissing, at least until he met Fleury, orbited indefinitely in a life of the mind. As Graver has shown, by the time *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) was published, "[Eliot's] audience had become extraordinarily responsive to her compassionate realism. It seemed that she was indeed having the effect she hoped to have."<sup>184</sup> Both imagine an other, but whereas Eliot sought to extend her own "blessings" to the community, Gissing struggled to possess his own life. In his attempts to escape the pressures of writing for money, he

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<sup>182</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 100.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>184</sup> Graver, *George Eliot and Community*, p. 253.

delved even deeper into the realm of the mind, which can perhaps account for an increased need for the diary as a signifying other to validate experience.

### **Pessimism versus Optimism: Gissing and Eliot**

Despite the abundance of critical readings that analyse the depiction of Gissing's political stance in his novels, such as *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *The Nether World* (1889), Gissing's writing was not motivated by the spirit of reform. In order to explain the ontological differences between Eliot's and Gissing's social consciousness, which resulted in fiction of a very distinct realism, I shall recall Eliot's personal motivations for turning to positivism and contrast them to Gissing's refusal to believe in the individual's responsibility towards the community. Whereas Eliot's self-effacement was intended to increase her openness to others, Gissing's pessimism demanded the paradoxical union between egotism and self-effacement.

As I have mentioned, Eliot envisaged a fundamentally ascetic self, who believed in the "interconnectedness" of all human beings and felt morally obliged to work towards the improvement of society "in [her] day-to-day relationships," as Tim Dolin has stressed in his recent biography.<sup>185</sup> Obligated to obey her "economic of compensation," Eliot minimised her self in order to empower her reader, which is evident in her compulsive desire to express her gratitude for her "blessings."<sup>186</sup> Her altruistic utopia forbade her to indulge in pleasure as well as pain without redeeming artistic production. She was thus unwilling to accept physical and mental illness and forced herself to actively rebel against such weakness, with a vehemence that recalls Bain and Eastlake, as can be seen in the following entry of November 28<sup>th</sup> 1860:

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<sup>185</sup> Tim Dolin, *George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 112.

<sup>186</sup> Hertz, "George Eliot's Debt-in-Life," p. 60.



I am getting better now by the help of tonics, and I should be better still if I could gather more bravery, resignation and simplicity of striving. In the meantime my cup is full of blessings: my home is bright and warm with love and tenderness, and in more material vulgar matters we are very fortunate. I have invested £2000 in West Indies Stock.<sup>187</sup>

Eliot urges herself to convalesce by exerting optimistic self-control. Although Eliot ultimately feels unable to gather the mental strength to improve her health, it is evident that she expects herself to do so. After complaining about her health and admitting this flaw in her willpower, Eliot feels obliged to restore her positive outlook by assuring herself of her gratitude over the affection and affluence in her life.

Optimism, for Eliot, was a quality of character she had to actively cultivate by consciously diverting her attention towards those factors of her life that gave her satisfaction and blocking out those that could give rise to complaint, as this entry of December 30<sup>th</sup> 1868 demonstrates: “I enjoy a more and more even cheerfulness, and continually encreasing [sic] power of dwelling on the good that is given me, and dismissing the thought of small evils.”<sup>188</sup> She invariably relativised her own condition in relation to that of the under-privileged other when she reassured herself that she had not lost sight of her unique beatitude. In the reverse situation, she diminished her own happiness through expressing regret that her advantages were not universal, as can be seen in this entry of December 30<sup>th</sup> 1870: “Here is the last day of 1870. [...] In my private lot I am unspeakably happy, loving and beloved. But I am doing little for others.”<sup>189</sup> As George Levine has observed, Comte’s philosophy had obviously shaped Eliot’s self-image, so that to her “every act, no matter how trivial, has a vast number of consequences, not all of them traceable [and she] felt that it [behaved] every human being to exercise the greatest care in his actions to avoid causing misery

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<sup>187</sup> Harris and Johnston, eds., *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 87.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

to others.”<sup>190</sup> The individual thus had to exert strict self-control, as Chapter One has shown, in order to guarantee the sanctity of the common good. Levine confirms my point that “the mark of strong will, according to George Eliot, is the ability to avoid being influenced by merely selfish causes.”<sup>191</sup> Self-effacement and unbending other-directedness were thus the necessary attitudes of the respectable individual. Eliot’s diary shows that her social aspirations had a direct impact on her personal life, which caused her “struggle between the legitimate claims of individualism and the imperative need for a ‘coherent social faith and order,’” which Dolin has accurately identified as the core of her fiction.<sup>192</sup> Gissing experienced no such moral struggle as he both lived and wrote for his personal benefit. He drew the material for his novels from his own experience, which returned to him in a circular economy as monetary value. As we have seen, the money he made from his literary production allowed him to cultivate his self through travel and the purchase of books. Openly egotistical, Gissing evidently abstained from supporting any political causes.

After a brief flirtation with positivism, Gissing disapproved of its organised idealism and concluded that only disinterested sincerity, divorced from religious or ideological codes, could achieve true sympathy—an endeavour which strictly other-directed behaviour was incapable of achieving. The deterministic message of his novels and his ambitions to be an acclaimed author—“I can’t endure to be nobody”—demonstrate an egotistical desire for personal gratification that he maintained throughout his life.<sup>193</sup> He retained the conviction that life in itself was meaningless and that the individual’s responsibility did not extend beyond the assurance of his or

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<sup>190</sup> George Levine, “Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot,” *PMLA*, vol. 77, no. 3 (Jun., 1962), pp. 268-279 (p. 272).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>192</sup> Dolin, *George Eliot*, p. 113. Dolin quotes the “Prelude” of *Middlemarch*.

<sup>193</sup> Coustillas, Mattheisen and Young, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing 1886-1888*, p. 14.

her own survival, which in itself was not desirable—Gissing’s pessimism went as far as to question the legitimacy of human reproduction.

Although Gissing’s oft-quoted essay “The Hope of Pessimism” (1882) was certainly the product of an extremely defiant mood and can by no means be considered a manifesto of Gissing’s outlook on life, his personal despair led him to devalue human life consistently. He shared with Schopenhauer, as well as some of his literary heroes, the conviction that life was a sequence of unnecessary pain, toil and disappointment. Life began in misery and ended with the sorrow of others: “we enter the gates of life with wailing, and anguish to the womb which brings us forth; we pass again into the outer darkness through the valley of ghastly terrors, and leave cold misery upon the lips of those that mourn us.”<sup>194</sup> Reproduction was selfish and unnecessary, because it could only lead to work, worry and mourning.

“The Hope of Pessimism” can be seen as an extreme expression of Gissing’s life-long, relentlessly deterministic doubt that led him to question the individual’s ability to rise socially. The essay’s advocacy of the complete “suppression of the Will” denotes the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer’s (1788-1860) philosophy on Gissing’s ontological outlook.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, Gissing’s essay resembles Schopenhauer’s chapter “On the Vanity and Suffering of Life” (1819) to an astonishing degree.<sup>196</sup> Pierre Coustillas has advised caution as to Schopenhauer’s influence on Gissing, and has warned that “these ideas were not common knowledge at the time” because the first English translation of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* did not appear until

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<sup>194</sup> Pierre Coustillas, ed., *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 91.

<sup>195</sup> See C.J. Francis, “Gissing and Schopenhauer,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Jun., 1960), pp. 53-63.

<sup>196</sup> See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp, vol. 3 (London: Trübner & Co., 1886).

1883.<sup>197</sup> Gissing did know German, so the possibility of influence cannot be ruled out. To me, the two essays present commonalities that seem too striking to be parallel developments.

In these texts, Schopenhauer and Gissing contemptuously reject both positivism and religion and condemn the validation of life by the fear of death that characterises these creeds as the foundation for “envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness.”<sup>198</sup> Gissing criticised the adepts of both Christianity and positivism, who stressed the blessedness of humanity and encouraged altruism, for their willingness to deceive and be deceived. Their optimistic determination to cherish life necessarily included the intense fear of death, which was seen as “the one dread foe,” who “puts an end to our joyful labours.”<sup>199</sup> Gissing strongly agreed with Schopenhauer’s view that optimism assumed the human being at the centre of the universe because it “[presented] life to us as a desirable condition and the happiness of man as the end of it.”<sup>200</sup> The reality, however, was bleak and had but desolation in store: “work, deprivation, misery and suffering,” which could only be alleviated by death.<sup>201</sup>

In this essay, Gissing mocked the naïveté of the positivist who attempted, as Eliot did, to signify an essentially empty universe and refused to recognise the futility of their endeavour. He derided the Religion of Humanity as a “creed” in which,

the unconscious optimism of the average man [was] embraced as a philosophical sufficiency, the scientific doctrine of evolution [was] made to yield a principle of beatitude, and the very agonies of existence [were] turned to the service of an all-hoping, all-enduring faith.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Coustillas, ed., *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, p. 18.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>200</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, p. 397.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>202</sup> Coustillas, ed., *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, p. 77.

Disregarding the “eternal truth that the world is synonymous with evil,” positivism, in its insistence on the brevity of life and the necessity to maximise altruistic work, was seen to “strengthen the natural forces of egotism.”<sup>203</sup> Precisely by basing the value of life in mortality, the optimistic doctrines of positivism and Protestantism imbued the individual “with [the] desperate determination to win what he [deemed] his just share in the enjoyments of life.”<sup>204</sup> The constant awareness that time was running out and that every moment was unique in its irreversibility was the source of malevolent selfishness, inevitably resulting in the opposite of Eliot’s aspirations. Altruism, for Gissing, was opposed to progress, because it deprived the individual of personal agency. He ridiculed the positivistic “renunciative instinct,” which maintained that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” and attacked its “joys of self-forgetfulness” and its “worship of Humanity.”<sup>205</sup> Disparaging these “beautiful ideas,” Gissing commended “the competitive system,” for its absolute sincerity and realistic practicality, deeming it “the grandest outcome of civilisation,” which put him at odds with Ruskin and Morris.<sup>206</sup>

In the absence of the mollycoddling inherent in the Religion of Humanity, the pessimist was solely responsible for his or her own life. He or she was “robust and self-reliant,” and “[expected] no mercy in the battle, and accordingly [gave] no quarter.”<sup>207</sup> The pessimist’s acceptance of life as a miserable journey and the unashamed self-centeredness with which he or she endured life until death came, constituted “the final triumph of mind, the highest reach of human morality, the only hope for the destruction of egotism.”<sup>208</sup> Optimistic selfishness, which was the product

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 81; p. 89.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

of the desire to take full advantage of the human being's allotted time, was contrasted with the pessimistic refusal to attribute value to life. Because the pessimist expected and wanted nothing from life, he or she was personally detached from the will to live through the anticipation of death.

Pessimism was not only a theoretical idea that Gissing developed in his youth, but his passionate outcry against the will to live, which was summed up in his cruel conviction that: "our existence is something which should not be; the vehement desire of its continuance is sin," durably determined his reluctant attitude to reproduction.<sup>209</sup> Gissing's relationship to children was heavily influenced by his worry that their lives might be long and unhappy. In his *Commonplace Book*, he describes an (undated) instance in which he witnesses a playing puppy and "laughed with delight."<sup>210</sup> He then ponders that "most people, I believe, derive the same pleasure from watching a child."<sup>211</sup> Gissing cannot find the sight of a baby endearing as he "cannot take pleasure in its oddities & prettinesses because [he is] oppressed by the thought of anxiety it is costing in the present, & of the miseries that inevitably lies before it."<sup>212</sup> For Gissing, life is deplorable and the world "evil" and hence he sees no purpose in creating another human being.

This pessimistic reluctance to embrace life became obvious when his son Walter was born. In his diary, he reports the birth in a very detached and matter-of-factly manner as the entry of December 10<sup>th</sup> 1891 demonstrates: "5.15. Went to the study door and heard the cry of the child. Nurse, speedily coming down, tells me it is a boy. Wind howling savagely. So, the poor girl's misery is over, and she has what

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>210</sup> Korg, ed., *Gissing's Commonplace Book*, p. 22.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

she so earnestly desired.”<sup>213</sup> Gissing, unlike most Victorian fathers, according to historian K. Theodore Hoppen, does not assist the birthing process.<sup>214</sup> Occupying himself downstairs, Gissing puts himself deliberately at a distance and learns of the birth through the “study door” and through the excited nurse’s alert. The desire to have a child seems to have come from Edith, which, in combination with Gissing’s pessimism, explains his joyless entry, as well as his reluctance to associate with the child which lasted for several months.<sup>215</sup>

Yet, Gissing’s cynicism did allow for human sympathy and mutual care. However, unlike Eliot’s overbearing concern for others’ happiness, which forced her to sacrifice and belittle her own interests, Gissing believed that human companionship was possible because the despair over the human condition, devoid of an afterlife, affected all human beings equally. If humans delved into the “immense self-pity [which] took possession of the imprisoned soul,” when contemplating their dreadful fate, then they could connect to their fellow humans who shared the same lot.<sup>216</sup> For Gissing, self-pity was not selfish, as Bain and Eastlake claimed, but this earnest capacity to feel sorry for oneself was the source of human kindness: “the compassion which each man first feels for himself, let him extend to his fellow-sufferers.”<sup>217</sup> In

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<sup>213</sup> Coustillas, ed., *The Diary of George Gissing*, p. 263.

<sup>214</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 325.

<sup>215</sup> Schopenhauer’s principal argument against reproduction consists of the fact that we cannot be conscious of “the three greatest blessings of life, health, youth and freedom, so long as we possess them,” and thus human life is effectively marked by “pain and want,” the only states that “can be felt positively” (p. 385). With death being the climax of the pessimist’s existence, human life is utterly devoid of value and reproduction seems an uncalled for creation of unneeded life. To stress the pointlessness of producing offspring, Schopenhauer cites Sophocles, who in *Oedipus Colonus* (1225) claimed that: “Not being born is superior to all other fates: yet if one has been led out to the light, the next [best] thing is to return as speedily as possible to the place one came from” (p. 400). Non-existence is a state that is desired, not feared. This advocacy of preventing procreation can also be found in Gissing’s reflection on the “generation yet unborn,” where he goes as far as to announce that “to create a being predestined to misery will come to be deemed a crime” (“The Hope of Pessimism,” p. 97). In this sense, it is the responsibility of the individual, not to ensure the survival of his or her progeny, but to impede its existence altogether.

<sup>216</sup> Coustillas, ed., *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, p. 93.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

order to care about others and establish meaningful connections to them, Gissing believed, the individual had to tap into his or her emotions instead of silencing them.

In what might be seen as a response to the gradual secularisation of nineteenth-century culture, Eliot combined the remnants of her religious heritage with her positivistic frame of mind, which inspired her with the duty to create literature that could accomplish social change. Gissing, on the other hand, resisted his culture's push towards self-improvement and altruism and believed that material circumstances shaped the individual, which fiction alone was powerless to alter. Despite this fundamental difference in outlook, for both writers, success and discipline in work were the principal factors that determined their sense of self-worth and defined the "value of the individual." The differences in the perception of duty were informed by social status, which had a direct impact on the meaning that work had for both. Eliot felt the guilt of the privileged and used her work to redeem herself by *giving* to the other, whereas for Gissing literary success depended on his *being given* approval and subsistence. To both, however, the self and its allotted time became a project whose standards of quality and productivity were incredibly high.

In conclusion I would like to emphasise that, both for Eliot and Gissing, the pressure caused by the unending, self-imposed, duty to work restricted the ripening of creative thought. Work became its own obstacle. The following chapter will show that for John Ruskin, the duty to observe his visual environment and to translate it for his readers constituted a similar source of frustration and guilt. Gissing had to be imaginative on command and likewise Ruskin expected himself to emotionally react to the visual splendour he encountered during his explorations of nature and art. When he was unable to feel amazed awe at the beauty that presented itself to him, he blamed himself for wasting precious time and experience. Like Eliot, he felt culpable of



neglecting his readers, who, in his eyes, depended on his guidance in the proper appreciation of art. Not only did Ruskin torture himself in order to produce critical observations with unfailing regularity like Gissing; but moreover he required himself to invest genuine emotion into his critical labour. Ruskin's diary demonstrates that he worked compulsively in order use the time available to him as productively as possible and to educate his reader. We see that Lady Eastlake (Chapter One) erred when she accused him of making his life a self-obsessed refuge into art because in fact, Ruskin was consistently other-oriented and felt a very strong responsibility towards the moral health of his audience. Gerard Manley Hopkins, as we shall in Chapter Four, completely abnegated his private life and intended to devote his entire existence to the fulfilment of his divine duties when he joined the Jesuit order. Despite his willingness to obliterate the self completely, which is obvious in the act of destroying all his poetry, his dutiful self-effacement was punctured by recurring instances of self-assertion, as the re-uptake of poetic composition and the act of keeping a diary demonstrate. Thus, all the diaries that this thesis examines are distinguished by the tense conflict between self-effacement and self-assertion.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Visual and Temporal Appropriation in John Ruskin's Diaries.**

John Ruskin's diary, which he kept throughout most of his long life, shows that he was obsessed with theorising the processes inherent in the perception and representation of visual experience. Despite the conflicting statements Ruskin made in regard to the photographic medium, he was governed by a photographic mindset, which drove him to obstinately peruse his environment for sights he desired to appropriate through artistic representation by drawing or writing. He did, however, try to redeem this self-assertive, self-centred and often entirely isolated condition of the observer by not only training his eye for the maximisation his own pleasure by publishing work that aimed at making the reader see. Pleasure was thus legitimised by a philanthropic concern for the intellectually less privileged other. Because enjoyment was a vital part of perceiving the world "properly," Ruskin, like Eliot and Gissing, expected himself to switch on emotional receptivity at will, trying to control ungovernable aspects of the self and to make them function at maximal productivity. Ruskin's diaries show that for him seeing and feeling were work, which can account for his frequent lamentations of personal inadequacy. While for George Eliot work and pleasure were mutually exclusive opposites, Ruskin was constantly trying to turn pleasure into a form of productive labour.

This chapter focuses primarily on Ruskin's hunger for visual and temporal possession in his diaries. Despite the unquestionably self-assertive nature of his appropriation of visual reality, Ruskin used his own experience as instructive material for his readers, thus effacing his right to privacy. He devoted his entire life to the study of his external environment and constructed himself as a prophet on whom his readers depended for aesthetic and moral education. Although Ruskin asserted his self

by resisting the pressures to comply with traditional domestic conventions and by cultivating his eye through ceaseless observation, he simultaneously effaced his self by making the community of his readers the recipients of his own artistic illumination. Ruskin's diaries served as a medium which allowed him to focalise his visual experience and, through insertion of selected diary entries into his published works, communicated it to his readers. They show that, for him, perceiving and representing the external world correctly was an incontrovertible obligation, both on a personal and a social level.

In Ruskin's diaries, self-cultivation took the shape of constant attempts at a complete rendition of experience, conveying his strong desire to possess selected objects/events and to preserve all his impressions in well-indexed diaries and sketchbooks: "I shall put down here whatever is worth remembering of the casual knowledge that we gain so much of every day, in conversation, and generally lose every tomorrow. Much is thus lost that can never be recovered from books."<sup>1</sup> This entry of March 31<sup>st</sup> 1839 is indicative of Ruskin's efforts to retain those elements of reality that would otherwise fall through the cracks of memory, thus imitating the comprehensiveness of a photographic record. In his endeavour to memorialise his personal experience, Ruskin was always eager to avoid accusations of practicing the "Pathetic Fallacy" and tried to leave his self out of the observations. In order to do so, he legitimised strong emotion and personal involvement in his work through by constantly addressing his reader. This attitude announces the simultaneously personal and communitarian concerns that motivated *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), such as

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse, eds. *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 74.

his indefatigable eagerness to save great art from the vulgar modernisation of nineteenth-century restorers by appropriating its visual reproduction.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, emotion was an integral part of Ruskin's observational work, because for him, an object was only really seen when the observer was deeply touched by its exquisite appearance, as *The Stones of Venice III* shows: "how is [art's] truth to be ascertained and accumulated? Evidently, and only, by perception and feeling. Never either by reasoning or report."<sup>3</sup> Throughout the diaries, Ruskin's inability to feel such amazement on command caused him great frustration, as he considered this numbness a waste of resources and a neglectful treatment of God's creations. Like Eliot, Ruskin felt an intense sense of responsibility towards those who were unable to properly perceive the world of nature and architecture, and it was them that he neglected when he felt that he was emotionally unable to connect to his environment. Ruskin understood that lack of feeling was the natural consequence of physical and mental fatigue, as well as visual oversaturation, as can be seen in the justifications of this undesirable phenomenon in *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) and *The Stones of Venice*.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Ruskin never allowed himself any rest and, like Eliot and Gissing, forced himself to work ceaselessly, to the point that, more so than for the latter, his life became his work. His private writings can be seen as evidence that he tirelessly attempted to live the theories on art he developed in *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*. Ultimately, however, his unwillingness to separate the abstract concepts that were the foundations of his work from the private, more direct, experience of the world was the source of deep dissatisfaction with his own abilities.

Despite Ruskin's perpetual insistence on the emotional receptiveness of the observer, his theorisation and rationalisation of emotion only legitimised emotion that

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<sup>2</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vols. I-III (Orpington: George Allen, 1898).

<sup>3</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vols. I-V (Orpington: George Allen, 1897).

was the product of exquisite natural beauty. The result of this selective repression of personal feelings was the dehumanising self-abnegation which led to overwork, isolation, despair and, perhaps, insanity. Ruskin's attempts to silence the self consisted of a persistent focus on the visual and a continuous identification of himself as a professional observer. He was unable to uphold this utopian self-construct because of his human limitations of satiability, indifference and coldness.

The desire for visual possession is present in Ruskin's diaries from its earliest volume, the *Cumberland Diary* (1830).<sup>5</sup> It is particularly elaborate in the 1835-1847 diary, whereas the *Brantwood Diary* (1876-1883) seems characterised by complaints over a general lack of "worthy" emotion and a panicked desire to control and appropriate temporal reality.<sup>6</sup> Jay Fellows is right when he argues that for Ruskin, the fear of loss was a strong motivational factor:

Among other things, he would like to preserve the notion of 'present possession.' More specifically, he would hold onto the present tense, or at least memoranda of the present. Even in his early diaries, the fear of a lost present is apparent. To forget is to lose time.<sup>7</sup>

Ruskin's "autobiographical impulse," to use Fellows's term, is synonymous with his photographic mindset, which entailed the problematic mechanisation of pleasure manifesting itself most significantly in the *Brantwood Diary*. When first published, many reviewers of Evans and Whitehouse's 1956 edition of the 1835-1847 diary deemed its study to be pointless, as it "merely [confirmed] facts already known," as C.H. Salter wrote.<sup>8</sup> T.S.R.B. wondered similarly "how much the diaries add to our

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<sup>5</sup> James S. Dearden, ed. *A Tour of the Lakes in Cumberland—John Ruskin's Diary for 1830* (Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Helen Gill Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Jay Fellows, *The Failing Distance: The Autobiographical Impulse in John Ruskin* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> C.H. Salter, "[Review of] *The Diaries of John Ruskin* by Joan Evans; John Howard Whitehouse," *Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 9, no. 34 (May, 1958), pp. 229-31, (p. 229).

knowledge of Ruskin's thought and personality."<sup>9</sup> I believe that the diaries do provide crucial insight into the ways in which Ruskin situated himself in the world, beyond simply "providing factual details," as George P. Landow wrote about the *Brantwood Diary*, or Van Akin Burd's insistence that the diary for 1842 was primarily an "objective study of beautiful forms."<sup>10</sup> Like diary critic Robert A. Fothergill, I believe that diaries should be "[treated] as books rather than people" and that the literary analysis of the themes as well as the style of diaries, rather than the inverse process, can shed light on the diarist's subjective processing of reality.<sup>11</sup>

The interpretation of Ruskin's photographic desire can further our understanding of how his visual experience influenced the way he felt in the world. Martin Seddon has convincingly argued that Ruskin chose writing primarily for teaching others, whereas the pictorial media (drawing and photography) served a more personal desire to assure possession and avert loss.<sup>12</sup> The very high standards that Ruskin set for both his written and pictorial work came near his expectations of the ideal artist. Although, and perhaps because, the emotions were vital constituents to Ruskin's perceptive process, their unreliability and their tendency to become saturated, tired and uncontrollable made them tedious obstacles to his determination to permanently observe his environment. These revelations can improve our understanding of Ruskin's subjective experience and are not merely rehearsals of established scholarship.

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<sup>9</sup> T.S.R.B., "[Review of] *The Diaries of John Ruskin, 1835-1847* by Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 99, no. 655 (October, 1957), pp. 350-351 (p. 350).

<sup>10</sup> George P. Landow, "[Review of] *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*," *The Journal of English and German Philology*, vol. 71 (1972), n.p.; Van Akin Burd, "Another Light on the Writing of Modern Painters," *PMLA*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Sept., 1953), pp. 755-63 (p. 755).

<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London, Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Seddon, "Ruskin and Visual Media," *International Conference: Ruskin, Venice and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Cultural Travel*, Venice, 25-27 September 2008. (Unpublished conference paper).

Interestingly, although Ruskin cultivated his love of natural and architectural beauty in his diaries, the latter did not represent an introspective mirror, as for instance, in the French “intimistes,” but astound through their tireless effort “to move the imaginative focus away from self-contemplation towards an autonomous subject,” as Hilary Fraser has noted.<sup>13</sup> Although Ruskin deemed the emotions to be sensors of primary importance in the process of perception, he was eager to monitor and contain the intensity of his “emotional response” because it might disturb his observations.<sup>14</sup> In tune with some of the Victorian codes of conduct presented in Chapter One, Ruskin asserts in *Modern Painters III* that the selfish nature of “all violent feelings” tends to cause misrepresentation as “they produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterise as the ‘pathetic fallacy.’”<sup>15</sup> Ruskin despised the sentimentality of the Romantics, although he enjoyed Wordsworth, and was anxious to avoid a self-obsessed contemplative stance. As an observer, Fraser writes, “[Ruskin] sought a solution in the objectification of the emotions themselves,” which is confirmed by his insistence in *Modern Painters IV* that the ideal artist must “receive indeed all feelings to the full but, having a great centre of reflection and knowledge, he [must stand] serene and [watch] the feelings, as it were, from afar off.”<sup>16</sup> Ruskin refrained from giving in to emotion, but he constantly struggled to maintain his objective stance, as can be seen in his diary entry of August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1847: “I, with every hope, every power, every right pleasure at command, have yet no inconsiderable difficulty in restraining myself from merely

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<sup>13</sup> Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 128. The “intimistes” were a group of French-speaking writers of the nineteenth century whose habit to keep a diary was extraordinarily developed, to the point that the diary kept them in a passive state of self-pity, unable to engage with life. Some examples of intimistes are Benjamin Constant (1767-1830), Maine de Biran (1766-1824), Stendhal (1783-1842) and Henri-Frederic Amiel (1821-1881). For a fascinating discussion of their work, see Beatrice Didier, *Le journal intime* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, p. 165.

<sup>16</sup> Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, p. 129; Ruskin, *Modern Painters IV*, p. 169.

sensual pleasures!”<sup>17</sup> Like many of his contemporaries (Chapter One), he felt “great shame” at his own failure to withstand what he would later call the “victory of devil.”<sup>18</sup> Despite Ruskin’s “vision of an objective, unchanging reality” his “profound subjectivism” indeed could not be suppressed and would frequently resurface.<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1840, Ruskin resolved to “keep one part of diary for intellect and another for feeling.”<sup>20</sup> This decision suggests a clear wish to treat the emotions as an object of study, but the diary destined for feeling has disappeared. To me, there is reason to doubt whether it was ever written, because it seems that Ruskin generally did not separate between his professional and his private life, but rather adjusted the private to the professional, displaying a very strong personal involvement in observation, which was a full-time occupation he pursued with vigour.

Ruskin’s extreme need for self-enriching photographic possession is expressed in his perennial habit to collect sights, memories and objects. The written representations of visual reality that characterise Ruskin’s diaristic records can thus be seen to claim ownership over lived experience and denote a refusal to exert self-abnegation. Through my theoretical exploration of the photographic gesture I aim to shed light on the possessive and retentive behaviour with which Ruskin governed his visual environment. Ruskin’s typical choice of non-human objects to contemplate and anthropomorphise represents an act of self-assertion in that it defied the Victorian idealisation of family and community (Chapter One), but the fact that he increasingly (especially in the 1870s) deplored his isolation indicates that he had renounced his need for human companionship by his consistent focus on inanimate objects. Although this chapter will primarily consider *The Stones of Venice* and *Modern*

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<sup>17</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 355.

<sup>18</sup> Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> Fraser, *Beauty and Belief*, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. v.



*Painters*, Ruskin's vast body of socially engaged work reveals a desire to put his perceptive skills and influence to good use. Whereas the *Cumberland Diary* exemplifies Ruskin's beginning passion for didactic observation, the 1835-1847 diary demonstrates his struggle between his human needs, his aesthetic moralism and his ability to experience pleasure. The frequent recognitions of loneliness in the *Brantwood Diary* can be seen as the consequences of a life that was lived in an attempt to find pleasure purely in visual reality, disregarding other aspects of human existence.

### **Possessive Genres: the Photographic and the Diaristic Gesture**

Initially, the photographic gesture in Ruskin's diary can be seen as a self-assertive attempt to possess the intangible lived moment. The diary, in its ekphrastic endeavour, and the photograph stem from a similar desire to appropriate a fleeting reality through materialisation. Both transpose spatial and temporal reality into a manageable form that invites re-visitation by the means of technological reproduction.

The concept of ekphrasis, also mentioned in my chapter on Gerard Manley Hopkins (Chapter Four), is of primary importance to an analysis of Ruskin's gesture of visual appropriation. The term "ekphrasis" designates the principle of "ut pictura poesis" (as is the picture, so is the poem), which consists of the verbal representation of visual and temporal reality. Some critics, such as Pia Brinzeu have insisted that "the result of the ekphrastic transmutation should always be a literary production" and should focus on an "artistic object."<sup>21</sup> Others, such as Murray Krieger, seek to "broaden the range of possible ekphrastic objects by re-connecting ekphrasis to all 'word-painting,'" tracing "the ekphrastic as it is seen occurring all along the spectrum

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<sup>21</sup> Pia Brinzeu, "Ekphrasis: A Definition," *British and American Studies*, vol. 11 (2005), pp.247-58 (p. 251, 250).

of spatial and visual emulation in words.”<sup>22</sup> Ekphrasis can be seen as the artistic principle that dominates Ruskin’s diary because he constantly verbally appropriated landscapes, buildings and paintings. The visual, for Ruskin, was always already verbal, as he wrote in *Modern Painters III*, “to see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion,—all in one,” but necessitated completion by the actual ekphrastic act of inscription.<sup>23</sup> George Landow has suggested that Ruskin was familiar with the ekphrastic tradition from reading the work of eighteenth-century critics and artists, such as Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Henri Fuseli (1741-1825) and James Barry (1741-1806), as well as Leonardo Da Vinci’s (1452-1519) *Treatise on Painting*.<sup>24</sup>

The ekphrastic impulse is part of a larger desire to take possession of spatial and temporal reality, namely, the photographic gesture. Before the visual could be transmuted into the verbal, Ruskin needed to study the object/event in question in as much detail as possible. The fact that Ruskin composed such lavish diary entries denotes a sincere fascination with nature and architecture, as well as an inherently selfish desire to identify with and possess the observed object/event. However, he also used these sumptuous descriptions of extraordinary beauty to cater to his intense feeling of responsibility towards his reader, for whose benefit his studies were supposedly conducted. An ontological comparison between the diary and the photograph can help us understand Ruskin’s unwillingness to be separated from his visual conquests, his desire to counteract loss of life through visual reproduction of selected objects/events and his unwavering need to ensure their symbolic presence. Both modes of representation were acts of self-assertion, which Ruskin, through his work, universalised by teaching others.

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<sup>22</sup> Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, p. 278.

<sup>24</sup> Landow George, “The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin,” The Victorian Web, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/atheories/1.1.html>, 15 January 2009.

The French photography critic Philippe Dubois has visualised this selfish desire to retain the lived moment in his analysis of the interpersonal dynamics in the Scottish artist David Allan's (1744-1796) 1775 work "The Origin of Painting," which depicts Dibutates's daughter drawing the shadow of her lover on the wall to retain a trace of his presence.<sup>25</sup> This possessive gesture, according to Dubois, expresses the anticipation and elimination of total loss, which are essential components of the diary genre:



In order to call up the impending absence of her lover and preserve a physical trace of his presence, at this turning-point, tense with desire and fear, the young girl gets the idea to represent the other's silhouette on the wall, using a stick of coal. The other is projected onto the wall in the last flamboyant moment, in order to kill time and fix the shadow that is still there but will soon be gone.<sup>26</sup>

Anticipating the painful yearning for her absent lover, the woman creates a reassuring substitutive presence for herself that is a constant reminder of the happiness that has disappeared: "the shadow always affirms a 'that is there.' Whereas the drawing of the

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<sup>25</sup> Philippe Dubois, *L'acte photographique* (Paris: Nathan, 1992); David Allan, *The Origin of Painting*, 1775 (Edinburgh National Galleries of Scotland).

<sup>26</sup> « Afin de conjurer l'absence à venir de son amant et de conserver une trace physique de son actuelle présence, dans cet instant-charnière tout tendu de désir et de peur, la jeune fille a l'idée de représenter sur le mur, avec du charbon, la silhouette de l'autre qui s'y projette : dans l'instant ultime et flamboyant, et pour tuer le temps, fixer l'ombre de celui qui est encore là mais sera bientôt absent. » (My translation). Dubois, *L'Acte photographique* p. 118.

shadow affirms a ‘that has been there.’”<sup>27</sup> This effort to hold on to the beloved being in a symbolic form clearly evokes the act of taking a photograph as much as writing a diary entry; the latter being less immediate, yet trying to achieve a similar preservation of the escaping moment. The photograph represents a precious presence that was just about swallowed by oblivion, and similarly, the diary holds the inscribed embodiment of an avoided loss. Based on this painting, Dubois offers an engaging analysis of the mechanisms inherent in the photographic gesture in this lengthy passage:

The shadow, which is the image that only existed in the moment, when drawn, inscribes itself into a duration and into a determined state once and for all. [...] By this inscription, the shadow loses its place within its temporal index and sends its spatial indiciality to the past. This loss of indiciality, this gain of iconisation, this temporal autonomisation, which, while maintaining a real connection with the referent, presents it as anterior, like a past origin. This responds to a grand fantasy of every representation of an element of an index: to affirm the existence of the referent as an irrefutable proof of what has occurred, which is to eternalise it, to fix it beyond its absence; but also, similarly, to pronounce this mummified referent to be irretrievably lost, presently inaccessible in the shape that it once had. In this same movement the referent is forever turned into a statuesque sign and sent back to the past—into an interminable absence, oblivion, deficit, death. This is how the process of indicial fixation operates, and one could assume that it thus functions globally, in all cases—be it the occurrence of fixation by drawing or by photography.<sup>28</sup>

Through the act of pictorial or written representation, the “image,” which is synonymous with the object/event to be captured, is extracted from the ephemeral and inserted into a new temporality, which makes it durable and preservable. Its status

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<sup>27</sup> “L’ombre affirme toujours un ‘ça est là.’ Tandis que le dessin d’ombre affirme toujours un ‘ça a été là.’ » Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> [L’]ombre, l’image qui ne vivait que dans l’instant ; dessinée, elle s’inscrit dans la durée et dans un état déterminé une fois pour toutes. [...] Et cette perte d’indicialité, ce gain d’iconisation, cette autonomisation temporelle, qui, tout en conservant un rapport de connexion réelle au référent, le donne comme antérieur, comme origine *dépassée*, on voit bien que cela répond enfin à un grand fantasme de toute représentation indiciaire : à la fois affirmer l’existence du référent comme une preuve irréfutable de ce qui a eu lieu, et en même temps donc l’éterniser, le fixer par-delà sa propre absence ; mais aussi, par la même, désigner ce référent momifié comme inéluctablement perdu, désormais inaccessible comme tel pour le présent : c’est dans le même mouvement, le statufier à jamais en tant que signe et le renvoyer comme référent à une inexorable absence, à l’oubli, au manque, à la mort. Voilà ou engage ce processus de fixation à l’index, et on peut considérer, globalement, que cela vaut dans tous les cas, qu’il s’agisse en l’occurrence de fixation par le dessin ou par la photographie. » (My translation) Ibid.

changes as the object/event is no longer a temporal or spatial element—it has become non-existent—but through its reproduction belongs to the realm of physical concreteness, having become “iconic;” a symbol for what is past. This icon stands in for its origin, proving that the object/event was once “there” and that it still is present, despite its absence, in a different form. The awareness of the absence is evident, as is the conscious giving back of the origin to the past (time). No complete loss of the origin has occurred, since the object/event is retained in space, and will be accepted as a representative of that origin. Despite the relief of having averted the total loss of the object/event, the photographic or written record can never be more than a reminder or a “souvenir,” in critic Susan Stewart’s terms, which “may be seen as emblematic of the nostalgia that all narrative reveals—the longing for its place of origin.”<sup>29</sup> Photography and the diary thus rise out of a yearning for reconnection with the reproduced original object/event.

The French film critic André Bazin (1918-1958) has insisted on the fragmentary status of the photograph as a visual splinter of a past reality rather than a living work of art whose meaning will evolve through time. Ruskin felt the same limitations as Bazin did, deeming the photograph to be too firmly tied to its origin—or “referent,” which is the term commonly used by photography critics— and leaving too little space for the interpretations of its viewer to be admitted as a timeless artefact. Bazin writes that: “Photography does not, like art, create eternity, but rather embalms time, and subtracts only for its own profit. Photography benefits from a transfer of reality between the thing and its reproduction.”<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, Bazin deems the

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and New York: Duke University Press, 1993), p.xii.

<sup>30</sup> André Bazin, « Ontology de l’image photographique, » in *Les problèmes de la peinture*, Gaston Diehl, ed. (Lyon : Confluences, 1945), p. 14: « La photographie ne crée pas, comme l’art, de l’éternité, elle embaume le temps, elle soustrait seulement à sa propre corruption ; (...) la photographie bénéficie d’un transfert de réalité de la chose sur sa reproduction. » (My translation).

photographic gesture as an act of withdrawing the object/event from reality and holding on to its reproduction, which is a non-creative transposition of a past reality onto an “embalming” surface.

Bazin’s argument evokes Philippe Dubois’s comments on photographic space, presenting an analysis of the fundamental differences between photography and painting in the context of time. His comparison between the photographic and the pictorial moment could situate the diary entry as in between the two on a temporal axis, enabling us to identify the decisive difference between the photographic nature inherent in the photograph and that of the diary:

Photographic space is not given. Neither is it constructed. On the contrary, it is a space to be taken (or to be left), an appropriation of the world, subtracted by the bulk. The photographer is not in the position to progressively fill an empty frame that is already there. His gesture rather consists in snatching a space that is already ‘full’ in one strike. The question of space to him is not one of input but of removal in one piece.<sup>31</sup>

The selected object/event is chosen from infinite possibilities but is not assembled, even if previously staged, because it already exists in its entirety. By photographing, the object/event is immediately represented and completely fills the designated physical space: the photograph. This process was evidently prolonged in Victorian times, but nonetheless the nineteenth-century photograph depicts the totality of the object/event presented to the photographer’s lens.

Unlike a painting, which is a slow, arbitrary assemblage of shapes that, when finished, can constitute a work of art, a photograph can only benefit from the corrective moves of “composition” after it has been shot and developed.<sup>32</sup> The diarist

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<sup>31</sup> « L’ESPACE photographique, lui, n’est pas donné. Pas plus qu’il ne se construit. C’est au contraire un espace à prendre (ou à laisser), un prélèvement dans le monde, une soustraction qui opère en *bloc*. Le photographe n’est pas du tout dans la position de remplir progressivement un cadre vide et vierge, déjà là. Son geste consiste plutôt à soustraire d’un coup tout un espace ‘plein,’ déjà rempli, à un continu. La question de l’espace pour lui, n’est pas de *mettre* dedans mais d’enlever d’une seule pièce. » (My Translation) Dubois, *L’Acte photographique*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters I* (Orpington: George Allen, 1897), p. 208.

makes a similar decision to the photographer in that he or she “snatches” objects/events essential enough to be recorded, picking them from the realm of present reality (although there can be embellishment and the unavoidable fictionalisation by language), but then moves on to the techniques of the painter, by inscribing them one after another, as synaesthetic immediacy in the writing process is not possible. Unlike in painting, editing after inscription violates the representational codes of the diaristic genre as it implies a falsified rendition of the object/event, disobeying the careful adherence to the veracity of the moment. Ruskin, unlike other diarists such as Pepys (Introduction), felt deeply uneasy about changing his records in any way, as this entry of August 4<sup>th</sup> 1879 shows: “Monday. I’ve written Saturday yesterday—but I don’t like scratching out.”<sup>33</sup> Erasing parts of his entries interfered with the authenticity of the endeavour and devalued the credibility of the diary by interrupting its illusion of immediacy and comprehensiveness.

Like the diaristic gesture, photographic representation establishes a connection between selves—the past self that took the photograph and the present self looking at it—as well as between the individual and his or her world. To the aesthetic philosopher Vilém Flusser (1920-1991), the representational potential of image and text are analogous. He holds that “writing is a mediator—just like the image.”<sup>34</sup> Photographing and (diary-) writing are attempts to materialise and appropriate reality, making it more manageable. Ruskin’s desire to embody an object/event in its most visually accurate form, render its every feature and inscribe it into an anthological record can thus be seen to derive from the photographic gesture.

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<sup>33</sup> Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 188. Despite this statement, Ruskin destroyed his notebooks that were designated for « feeling » and on several occasions in the diaries, pages are missing.

<sup>34</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Pour une philosophie de la photographie*, Jean Mouchard, trans. (Belval : Circé, 2004), p. 13 : « L’écriture est elle-même médiatrice—exactement comme les images. »

Robert A. Fothergill, whose historical survey study of English diaries comprises a wide range of canonical writers such as Samuel Pepys, James Boswell, Fanny Burney, Walter Scott, Alice James and Anais Nin, does not explicitly comment on the gestural similarities between the diary and the photograph, but employs photographic terminology to convey the fundamental constituents of the genre: “the imprint is the mark on the page left by a person living.”<sup>35</sup> Like reactive film, the material surface of the diary registers the intellectual and emotional activity of the diarist, which creates a “more or less intricate, variegated, and comprehensive” image of the writing subject.<sup>36</sup> The desire for such a record is always an act of self-assertion, which Ruskin, more so than the other diarists this thesis examines, used as a resource for his work. In fact, by making his emotions integral parts of the observational process, Ruskin constructed himself as a medium between nature, architecture and humankind.

According to Philippe Lejeune, the diarist’s self-image is based on his or her “need” to write and retain the world from his or her subjective perspective: “to the writer, the diary presents itself as a literary process which permits him or her to simultaneously capture instantaneous impressions, or fleeting nuances of impressions and to render the particular nuance that defines a human being.”<sup>37</sup> Lejeune refers to both the gestural and generic characteristics of the diary. The idea of the diary as a “process” to be engaged in implies the conscious framing of the diarist’s mind to receive and register the ephemeral, which for Ruskin was part of his professional requirements. The consequent rendition of the subjectively felt experience is seen to entail and reinforce the self-image of the diarist.

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<sup>35</sup> Fothergill, *Private Chronicles*, p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Les Brouillons de Soi* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), p. 34. (My translation).



The diary is thus constituted of the interplay between the diarist and the text. The selected content of the diary influences the diarist's self-image and from the perspective of this constructed identity, he or she proceeds to register future experiences. Alain Girard has held that, for the diarist, "the internal landscape necessarily reflects the variations of the external landscape," which is evident in Ruskin's as well as Hopkins's diary.<sup>38</sup> This mimicking of the external environment can be seen as the essence of the dynamic inherent in Ruskin's process of perception, which results in emotional exaltation when in the proximity to an exquisite landscape and desolation and boredom when surrounded by dullness. Because Ruskin professionalised emotion, he reacted against such natural feelings of disinclination and this necessity to feel turned pleasure into pressure and indifference into failure.

### **Ruskin's Diary and the Photographic Gesture: Visual Truth**

For Ruskin, the artist's duty towards the community consisted of observing and preserving natural, artistic and architectural grandeur and guiding the reader towards "direct perceptual experience."<sup>39</sup> Ruskin defined the "greatness" of a writer or painter "not by the mode of representing and saying, but by what was represented and said."<sup>40</sup> The vehicle of communication was seen as secondary; the content was essential and defined the usefulness of the artist, which accounts for Ruskin's tireless explorations. Ruskin's attitudes to photography reveal the prominent position the emotions occupied in his value system. Because the mass production and ceaseless flow of photographic images that Ruskin witnessed during the second half of the nineteenth century were devoid of emotional authenticity, they, in his opinion posed a danger to artistic genres that were more labour-intensive, such as engraving, and threatened to

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<sup>38</sup> Alain Girard, *Le Journal Intime* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *In the Mind's Eye: The Visual Impulse in Diderot, Baudelaire and Ruskin* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), p. 233.

<sup>40</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters I*, p. 8.

devalue culture generally. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ruskin was not necessarily in favour of excessive labour. He was mainly worried that modern techniques of visual reproduction omitted the component of the observer's subjective emotional experience, which determined the value of a work of art. Reacting against the ontological void of mechanical reproduction, Ruskin pressured himself to make every (developed) aspect of his life meaningful, which meant that the observational process had to be conducted using the observer's full intellectual and emotional attention, which then had to be translated in the written or pictorial representation. Ruskin's consistent attempt to execute this ideal in his personal life was the source of ceaseless stress, which in the end was responsible for Ruskin's empty and merely gestural appreciation of reality, characteristic of the modern tourist.

Although Ruskin coveted the photograph's inclusiveness of detail (at least early on in his career), he was skeptical of the medium because he believed that unlike pictorial or verbal rendition, photography was unable to capture the feeling that dominated the depicted scene. From the perspective of art history, Wettlaufer explains that Ruskin, like Turner, broke with "the linear formalism of contemporary academic painting and embraced an aesthetic that privileges color, movement, expression and imagination over strict mimetic fidelity."<sup>41</sup> Ruskin indeed remarks that whereas photography "renders subtleties of form which no human hand could achieve" and is very nearly perfectly accurate, "a certain veracity is altogether wanting."<sup>42</sup> Thus, Ruskin privileged the emotional energy conveyed by a painting over its ability to mimic reality. As Daniel A. Novak has shown, many Victorians, such as George Eliot, associated the photograph with the "distortions of literary fiction."<sup>43</sup> "Art

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<sup>41</sup> Wettlaufer, *In the Mind's Eye*, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters IV*, pp. 65, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel A. Novak, *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

photography,” as it was practiced in the 1850s, implied the collage-like “transposition” of shots of figures, as well as isolated body parts, from “one scene to another;” a technique that “[tore apart] the photographic body and its private identity.”<sup>44</sup> This mutilation of reality involved a desire to improve upon reality and a violation of the natural integrity of the depicted objects or scenes, whose authenticity was converted into an eerie half-fictional, half-real hybridity; all of which would have been “detestable” to Ruskin.<sup>45</sup>

Ruskin initially shared his culture’s excited responses to the appearance of the daguerreotype in 1839, as it allowed the individual to possess the visual aspect of far-away buildings or mountains, which could obliterate the spatial distance separating the observer from remarkable architecture and nature. Contemporary reactions tended to stress the magical simplicity of the photographic process which accentuated the idea that “images [painted] themselves,” enabling travelers “to bring back to France the most beautiful monuments, the most beautiful scenes of the whole world.”<sup>46</sup> In this oft-quoted letter to his father from Venice on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1845, Ruskin writes: “Daguerreotypes [...] are glorious things. It is very nearly the same thing as carrying off the palace itself: every chip of stone and stain is there, and of course there is no mistake about proportions.”<sup>47</sup> Photography seemed to realise Ruskin’s utopian dream of total visual possession, which he tried to imitate in writing. On a practical level,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 2, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Reprinted in Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays and Images: Illustrated Readings in the History of Photography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 17. Originally from *La Gazette de France* (Paris), January 6<sup>th</sup> 1839, Beaumont Newhall, trans. For an in-depth study of the reception of photography in Britain and the appearance of a “new critical language” which sought to contain the new medium, see Helen Groth, “Literary Nostalgia and Early Victorian Photographic Discourse,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2003), pp. 199-217. For the French equivalent, analysing photography’s place in French realism, see Jill Kelly, “Photographic Reality and French Literary Realism: Nineteenth-Century Synchronism and Symbiosis,” *The French Review*, vol. 65, no. 2 (December 1991), pp. 195-205.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Michael Harvey, “Ruskin and Photography,” *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1984), pp. 25-33 (p. 25).

even when his scepticism towards the medium had grown, he still used photographic records for the purpose of work on the finesse of architecture, like the companion folios to *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskin considered such spatial copies to be valid tools of representation, but because they were reduced to a single momentary angle, they could not capture the emotional energy inherent in the process of observation of a “good and great human soul,” and hence could not be art.<sup>48</sup>

As the century progressed and photography became more widely accessible, Ruskin’s attitude towards the photographic medium changed into what many critics have read as a fundamental dislike of photography.<sup>49</sup> Principally, however, Ruskin disliked the “flood of photos [sweeping] away the dams of memory” that came with the “capitalist mode of production,” to use Siegfried Kracauer’s expression, not necessarily photography itself.<sup>50</sup> According to Nancy Martha West, for Ruskin, after the 1840s, “photography [...] became symptomatic of an age in which the male artist had been stripped of his subjectivity by the ease of mechanism, and led to value ornamentation of photographic detail rather than the essential qualities of manly art.”<sup>51</sup> West is right when she suggests that photography’s dissemination may have threatened Ruskin’s public appreciation and critical authority. He may not just have feared for the status of art generally, but may also have worried about being dethroned as a critic.

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<sup>48</sup> E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. II (London: G. Allen, 1903-1912) p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> See also Michael Harvey, “Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites and Photography: A Most Blessed Invention,” *British Journal of Photography*, vol. 120 (March, 1973), pp. 234-237; G.M.H. “Ruskin and the Aclands,” *Sphaera*, vol. 11 (Spring, 2000), p. 7; G.M.H., “Ruskin Daguerreotype,” *Sphaera*, vol. 11 (Spring, 2000), p. 6.; Brian Hanson, “Carrying Off the Grand Canal: Ruskin’s Architectural Drawing and the Daguerreotype,” *Architectural Review*, vol. 169 (Feb., 1981), pp. 104-109.

<sup>50</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Thomas Y. Levin, ed. (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 58, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Nancy Martha West, “Men in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Masculinity, Photography, and the Death of Engraving in the Nineteenth Century,” *Victorians Institute Journal*, vol. 27 (1999), pp. 7-31 (p. 14).

Ruskin would probably have had more respect for the inclusive approach demonstrated by photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) with whom he corresponded.<sup>52</sup> Heather Birchall has argued that because photographers such as Cameron, Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) and Frank Meadow Sutcliffe (1853-1941) “put photography on a par with fine art,” they destabilised Ruskin’s belief that photography merely served conservational purposes.<sup>53</sup> Birchall contends that Ruskin completely ignores artistic photographers in his work, and indeed, nowhere do we find a sustained discussion of contemporary photography as art. It does seem that Ruskin would have supported, at least in theory, Cameron’s attempts to capture both the soul and the body of her subjects in her photographs:

When I have had such men [“the great Carlyle”] before my camera [,] my whole soul has endeavoured to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man. The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer.<sup>54</sup>

Like Ruskin, Cameron was dedicated to producing an all-encompassing visual record of her subjects. Seeking with her “whole soul” to penetrate her subject and to depict his or her essence, Cameron invested all her imaginative ardour into the photographic act, focusing her perceptive powers onto the subject’s entire being.

For Ruskin, the beauty of selected visual scenes and his own passionate impulse to create records of them (“Vidi”) was far more important than the realism of the representation.<sup>55</sup> When assessing artistic status, Ruskin did not blame any medium for the poor quality of its product, but held the maker responsible for failing to

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<sup>52</sup> Heather Birchall, “Contrasting Visions: Ruskin—The Daguerreotype and the Photograph,” *Living Visions: The Journal of the Popular and Projected Image before 1914*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2003), pp. 2-20 (p.14). Birchall holds that Ruskin thought that the daguerreotype had artistic potential, but that the photograph was merely a recording device; a differentiation which, to me, is unnecessary as both stem from the photographic gesture that seeks temporal and spatial control.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Julia Margaret Cameron, “The Annals of My Glass House,” (1874) reprinted in Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays and Images: Illustrated Readings in the History of Photography*, p. 137.

<sup>55</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III*, p. 37.

involve “the inner part of the man” in the creative process.<sup>56</sup> He did not differentiate between the photograph and the drawing’s artistic status, for neither could be considered a work of art if “made directly from nature.”<sup>57</sup> All media equally failed to produce art without the input of the artist’s full attention: “It is no more art to lay on colour delicately, than to lay on acid delicately. It is no more art to use the cornea and retina for reception of an image, than to use a lens and a piece of silvered paper.”<sup>58</sup> Skilled drawing, or “detail sought for its own sake” as in the “calculable bricks of the Dutch house-painters,” did not produce art; detail had to be “referred to a great end” and be “treated in a broad and impressive manner.”<sup>59</sup> Ruskin’s “desire for totality,” which according to Lindsay Smith consisted in “the dual facility [...] to ‘botanize’ and to infinitise simultaneously,” required the close study of minute details which could only be signified and raised to the status of art when viewed through an “active perceiving intelligence,” as Alexandra K. Wettlaufer has held.<sup>60</sup>

In both *The Stones of Venice I* and in the well-known *Lecture on Art VII*, Ruskin rejects mere replication of the external world and pleads for the viewer’s active engagement with his or her surroundings: “Have we only to copy, and again copy, for ever, the imagery of the universe? Not so. We have work to do upon it.”<sup>61</sup> As this work consists of establishing an emotional connection to the observed object, photographs, although “they are invaluable for record of some kinds of facts,” “will give you nothing you do not work for.”<sup>62</sup> The work required to really see an

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters I*, p. xxxii.

<sup>60</sup> Lindsay Smith, *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 19-20; Wettlaufer, *In the Mind’s Eye*, p. 224.

<sup>61</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice I*, p. 349.

<sup>62</sup> John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art: Delivered before the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1870* (Read Books, 2008), p. 215.

object/scene consists of conscientious study; the observer must see and feel the object, devoting “the appointed price of [his] own attention and toil” to capture its essence.<sup>63</sup>

Ruskin warned that a photograph could never replace the “eye-witness”-experience of a landscape that is more than “spoiled nature” and could truly put the observer in touch with nature.<sup>64</sup> Guido Carboni has noted that in Victorian England, especially by the 1880s, “any fool” could take a photograph “without undergoing any serious learning experience.”<sup>65</sup> Ruskin was greatly disturbed by this mechanical process that, without the sufficient use of human labour, produced an “excess of mimesis” and erased the human effort that characterised great art.<sup>66</sup> Photography was too easy and too perfect to translate the artistic impulse of a great mind. Ruskin’s “all-consuming desire to make his reader see,” to use Wettlaufer’s phrase, motivates all his ekphrastic writings, and he informs his students that once they “learn to watch the course and fall of light by whose influence [they] live,” they will not need photography.<sup>67</sup> “Sun-blackened paper” depicting “a panorama of a belt of the world photographed round the equator,” pales in comparison to “the dappling of one wood-glade with flowers and sunshine.”<sup>68</sup> The true observer, who is “in possession of a quiet heart, a healthy brain and an industrious hand,” thrives on the contemplation of local beauty and is happy to abstain from the “restless, heartless and idle” photographic frenzy.<sup>69</sup> Caroline Levine has highlighted that Ruskin, throughout *Modern Painters*, insists that the variety of nature can “[teach] us to resist industrial

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III*, p. 37; *Lectures on Art VII*, p. 215.

<sup>65</sup> Guido Carboni, “Struggles for the Transparent Eyeball: from John Ruskin to Alfred Stieglitz,” in Toni Cerutti, ed., *Ruskin and the Twentieth Century: the Modernity of Ruskinism* (Vercelli: Mecurio, 2000), p. 148.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>67</sup> Wettlaufer, *The Mind’s Eye*, p. 212; Ruskin, *Lectures on Art VII*, p. 216.

<sup>68</sup> Ruskin, *Lectures on Art VII*, p. 216.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. For a discussion of Ruskin’s views on local natural history, see Jerome Bump, “Manual Photography: Hopkins, Ruskin, and Victorian Drawing,” *Texas Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1973), pp. 90-116 (p. 103).

society.”<sup>70</sup> Again, the humble and attentive observer, who appreciates natural beauty when he or she encounters it, is closer to the truth than any explorer in possession of professional photographic equipment. Truthful observation depends on the observer’s mindset even beyond the choice of subject and means of representation.

In order to see the truth, for Ruskin, the observer of nature and art has to train his or her eye and acquire the “habit of representing faithfully all things, that we can truly learn what is beautiful and what is not.”<sup>71</sup> Crucially, mere observation is not enough, but the active rendition of the object/event completes the contemplative process. In *Modern Painters V*, when comparing Dürer’s and Landseer’s glass blades, Ruskin invites his reader to “take a pen and copy a little piece of each example, you will soon feel the difference.”<sup>72</sup> Only in physically imitating the pictorial process can the reader understand the visual differences between the two artists’ techniques. For Ruskin himself, as this chapter emphasises, the pictorial and linguistic reproduction of reality was essential to close study. Gail S. Weinberg has highlighted Ruskin’s life-long habit of “copying paintings while studying them.”<sup>73</sup> She explains this impulse by quoting Ruskin’s letter to his father of June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1845 in which he insists that “unless I draw a bit of a thing, I never arrive at conclusions to which I can altogether trust.”<sup>74</sup> Visual truth was thus accomplished by the consistent investment of all of the individual’s critical and emotional faculties.

Driven by his duty to see and to educate, Ruskin himself was unable to maintain a calm contemplative stance and constantly pushed himself to maximise his visual

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<sup>70</sup> Caroline Levine, “Visual Labour: Ruskin’s Radical Realism,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2000), pp. 77-86 (p. 81).

<sup>71</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters V*, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> Gail S. Weinberg, “‘First of All First Beginnings:’ Ruskin’s Studies of Early Italian Paintings at Christ Church,” *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 134, no. 1067 (February 1992), pp. 111-120 (p. 115).

<sup>74</sup> H.I. Shapiro, ed., *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to his Parents: 1845* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 124.



intake. Certainly without intending to do so, Ruskin participated in the picture-making craze, which, according to Karen Burns, characterised the nineteenth-century tourist, by his urge to “[produce] documentation.”<sup>75</sup> Burns’s assertion that despite his sophisticated standards, Ruskin “[enacted] the tourist” by “producing diaries, and sketches [and] collecting souvenirs such as paintings, bought from artists or dealers” is confirmed by Ruskin’s diaries.<sup>76</sup> Ruskin involuntarily distanced himself from the truth he sought to capture by his very need to ceaselessly observe and appropriate what he saw.

### **The Cumberland Diary: Performing the Observer**

Ruskin began to establish himself as an observer at the age of thirteen. The *Cumberland Diary* (1830) documents his nascent urge to chronicle, as well as his experimentations as an author. This diary was co-authored by his cousin Mary Richardson (1815 - 1849) who travelled with the Ruskins and it is fuelled by the notion that unrecorded life is meaningless. Despite the objective stance of these entries—they contain very little personal information and are mainly written in a style that is typical of travel guides—the *Cumberland Diary* displays Ruskin’s burgeoning desire to possess his visual experience and to counsel and guide his reader.

Through their highly descriptive entries, Ruskin and Richardson constructed themselves as authorities, possessing comprehensive knowledge of the landscapes they traversed. Although there were books presenting the same facts in a professional fashion, the cousins’ verbal appropriation of visual reality established them irrefutably as authors who enjoyed the position of knowing, authoritative signifiers and who exercised power over the described objects/events, organising them as they pleased.

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<sup>75</sup> Karen Burns, “Topographies of Tourism: ‘Documentary’ Photography and ‘The Stones of Venice,’” *Assemblage*, no. 32 (April 1997), pp. 22-44 (p. 28).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

When young Ruskin and Richardson told themselves/their audience the way to Matlock on June 8<sup>th</sup> 1830, “you enter the dale,” “you have the first view,” “you next see Dovedale castle,” they established themselves as instruction-giving agents, performing the selves they wanted to be.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, they seemed to be aware of the performativity of their role, as can be seen in this entry describing the castle, greenhouse and Punch Bowl of Leamington as being “so well known we need not give descriptions of it” (May 26<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>).<sup>78</sup> This entry considers an audience and clearly sets up the authors of the diary as experts on the object/event described, portraying their subjective experience as objective fact.

In the *Cumberland Diary*, Ruskin and Richardson cultivated their combined self by using the information they inscribed into their common diary to make themselves extensions of the prestigious objects/events described. For instance, when reporting on the pictures of great artists in Haddon Hall, Thorpe, their entry is coloured by a desire for identification and inclusion, which becomes evident in the diarists’ ‘critique’ of the paintings, dealing with,

[works of art] amongst which were some by Carlo Dolce, Claude Lorraine, Rembrandt, Caracci, & c they were wonderfully done, and every touch shewed the hand of a master, some appeared to be so carelessly thrown off, you could hardly distinguish the outline, but yet such an effect was produced you could easily see, whose hand pencil had touched the canvas.<sup>79</sup>

The diary allowed them the space to construct themselves as art critics, capable of recognising artists by the ‘touch of hand.’ They not only strove to make the object/event their possession by establishing themselves as specialists, but they also attempted to possess the virtual authority and agency of the roles they adopted, by having the object/event reflect its aura of quality upon them. Their status, or identity,

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<sup>77</sup> James S. Dearden, ed. *A Tour of the Lakes in Cumberland—John Ruskin’s Diary for 1830* (Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1990), p. 34.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35; entry of June 11<sup>th</sup> 1830.

correlated with the chosen content of the diary. In order to perform this role convincingly, Ruskin and Richardson endeavoured to dutifully present a complete, consistent record. Comments such as “we neglected to say in the morning,” or “we *must* now describe them [Pillars of Gloucester Cathedral]” document both the pressure to chronicle and the desire to possess and preserve, if these two are separable, which inspired the diarists with the responsibility of reproducing reality.<sup>80</sup>

From the beginning, Ruskin used his diaries to construct himself as an observer, who processed visual reality for a reader. A much-used source of material for his theoretical work, Ruskin’s diaries can be seen to reflect the formative process of observation on which his discussions of nature, drawing and art criticism were based. Within this process, the diaries were the elements that made the process of visual perception complete. Like the preliminary jottings of the composer or the painter, Ruskin used them “to fasten down [...] an idea in the simplest terms.”<sup>81</sup> Despite Ruskin’s eagerness to capture the immediacy of the moment, the constraints of language forbade such simplicity, and many of his entries are long and elaborate. Numerous extracts from the diary were copied straight into Ruskin’s published works—his autobiography *Praeterita* (1885) is just one prominent example—which shows that the basis for his public persona was crafted in the private realm of the diary.<sup>82</sup>

### **The 1835-1847 Diary: the Problems of Ekphrasis**

Ruskin’s 1835-1847 diary presents an even stronger preoccupation with visual appropriation. Ruskin was keen on possessing the amazing sights he encountered

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<sup>80</sup> Dearden, ed., *A Tour of the Lakes in Cumberland—John Ruskin’s Diary for 1830*, p. 39; June 17<sup>th</sup> 1830, Liverpool; p. 60; entry of August 4<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, Cheltenham (my italics).

<sup>81</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters V*, p. 202.

<sup>82</sup> Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004).

during the extensive travels he conducted during this period and demonstrates a compulsive desire to possess the lived moment. Gaps in his visual records were odious to Ruskin, and he felt great frustration when his verbal renditions were incapable of carrying a precise memory, as can be seen in this entry of October 10<sup>th</sup> 1841: “I have grievously forgot the lovely bit of landscape which we saw from the hill above Le Puy this time last year. It made a great impression on me, too; but how utterly useless all words are to arrest any of these strong distinctive impressions.”<sup>83</sup> Upon re-reading his diary of 1840, Ruskin is displeased with the limitations of language which caused the loss of a memory he had hoped to keep. Oblivion deprives the entry of its signification as it is forever separated from its referent and becomes meaningless. The diary entry, like a photograph, represents the moment in which Ruskin’s desire for possession became concrete, but although the visual experience had been captured, possession was not assured.

Despite his constant “awareness of language’s expressive insufficiencies,” to use Wettlaufer’s term, Ruskin defied the limitations of verbal communication and composed innumerable ekphrastic transcriptions, particularly in the 1835-47 diary.<sup>84</sup> Ruskin was driven by what Murray Krieger has called the “ekphrastic ambition” which craves to fix “the literally unrepresentable.”<sup>85</sup> Words, as Krieger writes, are unable to capture spatial and temporal reality as they “cannot have capacity, cannot be capacious, because they have, literally, no space.”<sup>86</sup> Words are mere signs, symbolising the referent from which they are separated by an insuperable gap. Ruskin’s obsessive desire to “have the world captured in the word” is, according to Krieger, a fundamental component of the Western imagination: “The exhilaration [...]

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<sup>83</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 216.

<sup>84</sup> Wettlaufer, *The Mind’s Eye*, p. 211.

<sup>85</sup> Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: the Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

derives from a dream—and the pursuit—of a language that can, in spite of its limits, recover the immediacy of a sightless vision built into the habit of our perceptual desire since Plato.”<sup>87</sup> In Ruskin, the hope that through verbal description some of the depicted reality may attach itself to the words is always paired with the utopian desire to conquer and possess the mesmerising object or scene.

Ruskin’s ekphrastic records were generally attempts to intensify fragile memories and make them last. He felt the duty and the insuppressible desire to depict extraordinary sights in order to own them in times of want and to open up this visual territory to others later. Through the other-oriented nature of his work, Ruskin channeled his desire to be the first/only person to have captured the scene, which motivated his youthful 1830 diary as well as the following one, towards the education of a wider community. On June 20<sup>th</sup> 1844 in Chamonix, Ruskin described the “most beautiful sight that ever morning gave me among the Alps” and subsequently rendered this surprising delight of the “whole aiguille du G[ou]ter [looking] pure and serene in intense light.” This he contrasted with the dreary dullness that followed, which made this moment outstanding:<sup>88</sup> “But all passed away as soon as seen; the bank of grey cloud rose and extended; now all is sunless.”<sup>89</sup> Retrospectively reporting exceptional beauty, Ruskin refused to let these fleeting moments disappear into the realm of oblivion and sought to immobilise and eternalise them through verbal (and pictorial) representation, which he later universalised through publication.

In some entries, the observation of dazzling beauty and verbal representation coincide on a temporal axis, which demonstrates Ruskin’s craving for total possession of his immediate visual reality and his indomitable desire to record *during* observation.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 288.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

On June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1844, for instance, Ruskin's compulsion to verbally photograph Mont Blanc is evident:

9 o'clock morning. There is a strange effect on Mont Blanc. The Pavillon hills are green and clear, with the pearly clearness that foretells rain; the sky above is fretted with sprays of white compact-textured cloud which looks like flakes of dead arborescent silver. Over the snow this is concentrated into a cumulus of the Turner character, not heaped, but laid sloping on the mountain: silver-white at its edge, pale grey in interior. The whole of the snow is cast into shadow by it and comes dark against it, especially the lower curve of the aig[uille] du Goûté.<sup>90</sup>

This entry's sense of photographic immediacy is communicated through the use of the present tense and the inclusion of the exact time at which the entry was composed. In addition, the announcement of rain and the detailed description of such transient meteorological phenomena as clouds, which can pass or dissolve, heightens the impression that Ruskin has only just caught an ephemeral scene that was about to disappear. In this entry, Ruskin's struggle to verbally render an atmosphere he can only describe as "strange" becomes obvious. Despite his employment of visual language and the accentuation of the contrasts between materials and colours, he fails to find an accurate verbal description of the cumulus cloud and thus resorts to labelling it "of the Turner character."

Why did Ruskin not photograph or draw this scene? Martin Seddon has argued that Ruskin's "visual approach to life," generally did not, as we would expect, translate into "a pictorially visual means of expression."<sup>91</sup> The innumerable sketches, watercolours, engravings, daguerreotypes and photographs that Ruskin made and commissioned throughout his life usually were aide-mémoires that served illustrative purposes and scientific study. Seddon's point that "broadly speaking, Ruskin drew for himself whilst he wrote for others" can be confirmed by the fact that even Ruskin's

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>91</sup> Martin Seddon, "Ruskin and Visual Media," p. 1.

diaries were not strictly intended for private use because he frequently inserted extracts into his published work to support the theories he presented.<sup>92</sup> In addition, Christopher Newall has argued, Ruskin viewed himself as an “amateur” when it came to artistic creation, which is why his drawings were largely kept away from the public in his lifetime, apart from an exhibition of his drawings in the United States in 1879.<sup>93</sup> We can deduce from these critical appraisals of Ruskin’s generic choices that in this 1844 entry, Ruskin sought to render an atmosphere rather than study the physical properties of a visual phenomenon.

Verbal expression was exceedingly complicated. In *Modern Painters I*, Ruskin deplored the ekphrastic problems he encountered when describing Turner’s work, establishing that “words are not accurate enough, to express or trace the constant, all-pervading influence of the finer and vaguer shadows throughout his works, that thrilling influence which gives to the light they leave its passion and its power.”<sup>94</sup> Indeed, words could only vaguely approximate the breathtaking gradations of colour in a Turner painting and therefore Ruskin supplanted his own efforts to translate a visual experience through the verbal medium by exchanging one image (the cloud) for another (the Turner painting), thus by-passing language altogether. Wettlaufer has noted that for Ruskin, “the artist’s goal [was] not to reproduce the actual scene, but the *experience* of that scene, the mental state provoked.”<sup>95</sup> Both the painter and poet had to provide an “emotional equivalence” to the original image in order to create art.<sup>96</sup> Although Christopher Newall has explained that Ruskin “had no professional ambitions as an artist,” the expectations he had of his own work come very close to

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Christopher Newall, “Ruskin and the Art of Drawing,” in Harriet Whelchel, ed. *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), p. 114.

<sup>94</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters I*, p. 188.

<sup>95</sup> Wettlaufer, *The Mind’s Eye*, p. 216.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

the standards he set for the artist when he sought to “illustrate the *whole* feeling” of this scene.<sup>97</sup> Ruskin tried to “transcend his own language of words,” to use Wettlaufer’s term, by forsaking ekphrasis and offering a more powerful visual image than his verbal representation of the original object could have rendered.<sup>98</sup> Significantly, he described clouds in a way that any of his readers would have been able to grasp, which again accentuates the semi-public nature of his diary.

This desire to appropriate visual stimuli through verbal representation did not just inform Ruskin’s professional life, but it dominated his personal life as well, if the two can indeed be separated. His identities as a critic, an artist and a human being all depended on the visual richness of his environment—fascinating scenery tended to make Ruskin happy and dullness made him feel like he was neglecting his duty to perceive and translate the external world.<sup>99</sup>

### **Desire and Duty**

Ruskin’s process of perception was greatly disturbed by the dialogical movement between desire and saturation, which is most clearly displayed in his 1835-1847 diary. Because observation was work for Ruskin, he viewed his failure to feel excited by exquisite sights as spoiling a unique and irretrievable opportunity to collect experience. As we have seen, the semi-private renditions of visual reality, which filled Ruskin’s diary, were the building stones on which his work was based.

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<sup>97</sup> Whelchel, ed., *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye*, p. 114; Ruskin, *Letters Addressed to a College Friend During the Years 1840-1845* (Macmillan & Co, 1894), p. 83.

<sup>98</sup> Wettlaufer, *The Mind’s Eye*, p. 217.

<sup>99</sup> Newall has noted that Ruskin’s different styles of drawing reflect his moods. “Calm deliberation” produced “microscopically detailed and intensely colored drawings,” whereas in his states of “euphoric delight,” Ruskin created “frenzied patterns” and “seething masses of light and shade.” It seems to me that his desire to be in control called for accuracy while passionate outbursts could not be contained by meticulous pencilling, Whelchel, ed. *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye*, p. 114.



Ruskin could not realise his “omnivorous” desires, to use the words of John Dixon Hunt and Michael Bartram, as can be seen in this entry of December 30<sup>th</sup> 1840 from the French Alps:<sup>100</sup>

I was tormented with vague desires of possessing all the beauty that I saw, of keeping every outline and colour in my mind, and pained at the knowledge that I must forget it all; that in a year or two I shall have no more of that landscape left about me than a confused impression of cupola and pine. The present glory is of no use to me; it hurts me from my fear of leaving it and losing it, and yet I know that were I to stay here it would soon cease to be beauty to me—that it *has* ceased, already, to produce the impression and the delight. I believe the only part of a journey really enjoyable to be the first six weeks, when every feeling is fresh, and the dread of losing what we love is lost in the delirium of its possession.<sup>101</sup>

Although Ruskin longed to be a “true Seer” who “always feels as intensely as anyone else; but he does not much describe his feelings,” he did not manage to eradicate his human flaw of satiability.<sup>102</sup> This entry clearly exemplifies Ruskin’s photographic desire to grasp the scene in its entirety and keep a record of it. However, rather than describe the beauty of nature, Ruskin’s silenced self flares up with a vengeance and he confesses his inability to remain a detached, yet emotionally invested, observer. Ruskin cannot clasp ‘that landscape’ in all its magnificence and is only capable of real enjoyment during the ecstasy of “the passionate thrill of delight” that comes with “novelty.”<sup>103</sup> Pleasure thus inevitably means pain, even at the very moment of experience, before the loss has actually occurred. Another time-related issue is broached in this entry: the idea that beauty must be mortal in order to be precious; if the moment could indeed be captured in its entirety, it would inevitably terminate in banality.

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<sup>100</sup> Michael Bartram, *The Pre-Raphaelite Camera: Aspects of Victorian Photography* (London: Weidenfeld Nicolson, 1985), p. 76; John Dixon Hunt in Dixon Hunt and Faith M. Holland, eds., *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin* (Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 130.

<sup>102</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, p. 279.

<sup>103</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 119; December 4<sup>th</sup> 1840.

Possession never led to satisfaction, nor should it, as this annihilated the glory and uniqueness of the experience. In *The Stones of Venice III* Ruskin advocates disinterested observation, insisting that rational possession may be coveted but may never be fulfilled:

Once thoroughly our own, the knowledge ceases to give us pleasure. It may be practically useful for us [...] but, in itself, once let it be thoroughly familiar, and it is dead. The wonder is gone from it, and all the fine colour which it had when first we drew it up out of the infinite sea.<sup>104</sup>

Ruskin constantly seemed to find himself in a Faustian dilemma, as possession led to stasis and despite the impulse to exclaim: “Beautiful moment, do not pass away,” an over-saturation of beauty would put an end to dynamic curiosity, which was fuelled by desire, and instate boredom.<sup>105</sup> Ruskin could only “feel it” when he was in this state of longing for possession; when possession had been completed, he was filled with numbness and desired new objects/events, as is manifest in the following entry of December 18<sup>th</sup> 1840:

I am losing all the feeling of intense interest that the Italian landscape used to rouse a few weeks ago. [...] I am getting tired of Rome as I thought I should, and long for Venice and the Alps. When I get there I shall long for home; and when I get home, for Rome.<sup>106</sup>

The abundance of beauty is impossible to process and Ruskin’s sincere admiration cannot be maintained. Ruskin feels guilty for losing the “freshness in feeling” and for no longer wholeheartedly appreciating exquisite objects/events.<sup>107</sup>

Although in theory Ruskin considered monotony to be the necessary contrasting background against which splendid natural and artistic beauty stood out, he was intensely bored and frustrated when confronted with a landscape he did not

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<sup>104</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III* (Orpington and London: George Allen, 1898), p. 52.

<sup>105</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Faust*, David Luke, trans. (Oxford World Classics: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 52.

<sup>106</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>107</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III*, p. 9.

care to possess because it left him indifferent. During his tour of Switzerland in 1835 he seemed disillusioned with his ekphrastic endeavour:

The opening to Airolo is beautiful, but what is the use in describing it. There were villages and fields, rocks and torrents, and grassy mountains and snow covered Alps, and we have had all of that before. Objects on paper are always the same, it is by the disposition of them that nature gives variety, and therefore you can say no more than that—the opening to Airolo is beautiful.<sup>108</sup>

The monotony of the landscape is reflected in Ruskin's unimaginative language. He simply offers an uncaring "beautiful" as a description and seems to say that the encountered objects in themselves are unremarkable. The passage also indicates Ruskin's frustration with ekphrasis, which fails to clearly distinguish the wide variety of "objects on paper" from one another and thus makes the description "beautiful" completely meaningless.

Because Ruskin was so invested in the perceptive process, he was unable to simply overlook repetitive visual reality and was annoyed by the "tiresome enough" aspect of the valley connecting the Swiss Grindelwald and Lauterbronn.<sup>109</sup> Overabundance of geological specimen had dulled his interest and he felt like he was merely ploughing through more rock formations: "I had seen so many instances of twisted strata that I was little interested in the numerous and remarkable contortions of these strata till I observed one very peculiar, fig. 24."<sup>110</sup> An unexpected noteworthy layer of soil punctured Ruskin's boredom and gratified his investigations.

Excess of beauty similarly deprived the observer of the desire he or she needed in order to conduct his or her visual investigations. In *Modern Painters IV*, Ruskin wrote that "it is not good for a man to live among what is most beautiful," because the constant confrontation with "the utmost the earth can give is the surest

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<sup>108</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 41.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57; August 1835 in Interlaken.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

way to cast him into lassitude and discontent.”<sup>111</sup> On September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1835 in Bormio, Ruskin was taken aback by the beauty of the landscape: “the whole scene foreground (or foresnow) and distance, astonish as much as they delight the eye that is not accustomed to the scenery of such elevations.”<sup>112</sup> He clearly distinguished between the eye that was used to mountain scenery, and therefore indifferent, and the overwhelming surprise that the unaccustomed eye experienced.

Ruskin repeatedly voices angry self-reproach due to his lack of necessary emotion. On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1840, he writes: “All was exquisitely beautiful [...] and I saw this though I could not feel it, and got into a rage with myself, to no purpose.”<sup>113</sup> Here Ruskin, like Henry Crabb Robinson (Chapter One) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (Chapter Four), who at times viewed themselves as devoid of creative drive, felt powerless to appreciate nature because he felt emotionally drained and could not gather the necessary passion to create, or even contemplate, beauty. On June 6<sup>th</sup> 1844 after descending from his “old seat on the block of the Breven” in Chamonix, Ruskin complains of an inability to surrender to the visual marvels presenting themselves to him: “I do not feel as I ought to feel. For the first time in my life I miss the exhilaration of spirit which these scenes awakened in my childhood.”<sup>114</sup> Desire, once satisfied by possession that is achieved through representation and intense study or attenuated by the “heavier cares of the world,” fades.<sup>115</sup> The self that once desired cannot sympathise with the self that now possesses and vice-versa:

How little could I have imagined, sitting in my home corner, yearning for a glance of the hill-snow, or the orange leaf that I should at entering Naples, be as thoroughly out of humour as ever after a monotonous day in London—more so.

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<sup>111</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters IV*, p. 138.

<sup>112</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 69.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277

<sup>115</sup> Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 55; October 8<sup>th</sup> 1877.

[...] And I shall read and remember this hereafter and be mad (Naples, January 9<sup>th</sup> 1841).<sup>116</sup>

When, after a long period of anticipation, Ruskin finally reaches the destination he has yearned for, he often has difficulty seizing and cherishing the present moment. Although in *Modern Painters II*, Ruskin explains that the “Imagination Contemplative” is always superior to lived reality because “there is an unfailing charm in the memory and anticipation of things beautiful” that cannot be matched by their presence, his diaries show that he never accepted this fact in reality and was always eager to engage with reality directly.<sup>117</sup>

In Ruskin, the acknowledgment that the observer was easily “sated” or “wearied” by the actual experience of desired objects/events coincided with the moral obligation to respond to natural and architectural beauty with intense emotional excitement. In *The Stones of Venice I*, for instance, Ruskin portrays desire as a mandatory attitude when he tells his reader: “you were made for enjoyment, and the world was filled with things which you will enjoy, unless you are too proud to be pleased by them.”<sup>118</sup> Beyond the requirement to personally “examine” and “measure” the external world, the observer was compelled to “enjoy” the visual delights provided for him or her, as failure to do so was equated with unrespectable, contemptible arrogance. Although Ruskin’s experience taught him differently, he continued, like Bain, to believe in the individual’s ability to control his or her emotions through exerting “self-discipline to prevent the mind from falling into a morbid condition of dissatisfaction with all that it immediately [possessed], and continual longing for things absent.”<sup>119</sup> Ruskin actively attempted to counteract this attraction to an imagined “self-inscaping” (Chapter Four) experience when he insisted

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<sup>116</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 139.

<sup>117</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters II*, pp. 131,132.

<sup>118</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice I*, p. 44.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

on his duty as an observer, who had to seek out and appreciate the beauty of “God’s work” and communicate it to others.<sup>120</sup>

When Ruskin did not desire to ingest his visual environment, he forced himself through the motions that were necessary to avert the guilt of the ungrateful spoiler of precious experience. Ruskin’s diary shows that he was continuously driven by his dutiful desire to capture, appropriate and enjoy his experience and, in an attempt to artificially create the sensation of novelty and surprise, he incessantly hunted for fresh sights and sensations. Although there was a consistent attachment to selected places, such as Venice and Mont Blanc, Ruskin tended to be exhilarated by the surprise of novelty and then to gradually lose interest as he reached saturation. On February 26<sup>th</sup> 1841 in Sorrento he stated that “I seem always in a hurry, or not where I should like to be, now. [...] There is a bad restlessness upon me.”<sup>121</sup> Although suffering from fatigue, Ruskin was obsessed with taking in and capturing as many sights as his limited time allowed him to. He thus rushed from scene to scene and was prevented from thorough enjoyment by his “restlessness,” which on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1841 he defined as: “the desire to see something finer, newer, different.”<sup>122</sup> This impatience was followed by “fatigue, with a total loss of all feeling of the place or its spirit,” and the pressure to “begin drawing” and “a desire to get it done.”<sup>123</sup> Ruskin’s fixation with photographic intake, combined with his obsessive fear of wasting time, accounts for this hectic type of day, which brought him “twenty-five minutes enjoyment and the rest desire.”<sup>124</sup> Ruskin recognised that his photographic mindset and the inherent pressure to maximise visual conquest, could lead to “discontent,”

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<sup>120</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice I*, p. 42.

<sup>121</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 158.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

impeding him from “tasting all these pleasures” and “shutting out” future ones.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless he was pushed on by his duty to report his visual experience to others.

As if to rectify and legitimise the behaviour depicted in his diary, in *The Stones of Venice II*, Ruskin theorises the hunt for exquisite sights and the fatigue that is its natural consequence. He writes: “we must bear patiently the infliction of monotony for some moments, in order to feel the full refreshment of the change.”<sup>126</sup> In reality, as his diaries show, he suffered from the “diseased love of change” that made him unable to bear the “pain” of recovering and rushed him onwards in search of future delights.<sup>127</sup> He had long understood the invincible “weariness which is so often felt in travelling, from seeing too much.”<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless he consistently neglected to take his own advice of “letting [the imagination] rest” and directly experienced the “imaginative faculty [fainting] utterly away, beyond all further torment or pleasure, dead for many a day to come.”<sup>129</sup>

The “innocence of the eye” that Ruskin strove to maintain was a utopian endeavour because it omitted the period of recovery that the mind needed in order to appreciate beautiful objects and scenery.<sup>130</sup> The eye was only innocent and could only resist conventional thinking if in a state of probing desire. On December 6<sup>th</sup> 1840 in Rome, Ruskin bemoans the fact that he cannot uphold a steady interest in his observational work: “I wish I could keep myself in the humour, especially in the desire of raking together all possible scraps of information from everyday

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 352; July 30<sup>th</sup> 1847.

<sup>126</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice II*, p. 175.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters III*, p. 136.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>130</sup> Phrase coined in Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, Lawrence Campbell, ed. (Courier Dover Publications, 1971), p. 27. Originally published in 1857.

occurrences.”<sup>131</sup> There were limits to Ruskin’s inquisitiveness and his mind was plagued by indifference and fatigue.

In order to accomplish his duty as an artist, however, Ruskin constantly forced himself to develop his “perceptive [and his] sensitive, retentive faculties.”<sup>132</sup> Moreover, as a human being, he wrote in *The Stones of Venice III*, it was his responsibility to observe the world and be deeply touched by it: “we live to contemplate, enjoy, act, adore.”<sup>133</sup> Although these obligations were articulated in 1853, the diary shows that observation, for Ruskin, had been of a moral nature since the early years. On January 27<sup>th</sup> 1841, near Naples, Ruskin reported that “I am gradually losing my zest for scenery.”<sup>134</sup> He did not, however, allow himself to relax after intensely exciting experiences, but pushed himself to be emotionally receptive: “[I] stood at the window to night, while the sunset was touching the sprinkled snow on the lovely forms of the Mt. Angelo, rather with the sense of discharging a duty in drinking the draught of beauty than because it gave me pleasure.”<sup>135</sup> Ruskin expected himself to be profoundly moved by this sight that he knew to be exquisite, but he was unable to feel the delight that he thought he should: “Yet all this could not touch me. I felt as if my whole spirit had been turned into ice.”<sup>136</sup> Contemplation, for Ruskin, was incomplete without the emotional reaction of the observer, as “perception and feeling” had to be inseparably intertwined to assure the “truth of essence” the artist was supposed to be concerned with.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 120.

<sup>132</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III*, p. 38.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>134</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 146.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice III*, pp. 37, 36.



Ruskin viewed himself as the recording device that transmitted beautiful sights to his audience. In *Praeterita*, for one, he realises that this self-construction opposed the cultivation of human relationships:

In blaming myself, as often I have done, and may have occasion to do again, for my want of affection to other people, I must also express continually, as I think back about it, more and more wonder that ever anybody had any affection for *me*. I thought they might as well have got fond of a camera lucida, or an ivory foot-rule: all my faculty was merely in showing that such and such things were so; *I* was no orator, no actor, no painter, but in a minute and generally invisible manner; and I couldn't bear being interrupted in anything I was about.<sup>138</sup>

We see that Ruskin feels unable to evaluate his personal value, or lovableness, apart from his usefulness. He portrays himself as an essentially empty container, or rather, a photographic surface upon which visual objects/events were projected, but who is non-creative and merely mimics visual reality. In his professional capacity, Ruskin did not enter into direct contact with human beings, but acted as a meta-critic, teaching his readers how to see landscapes and paintings other artists had created. Stressing his role as a mediator, Ruskin simultaneously asserts and annuls his own importance by making his “invisible” actions visible through autobiographical intervention. Although, for Ruskin, the artist had to be a disinterested “instrument” that faithfully recorded “the visible things around him,” leaving out “no shadow, no hue, no lobe, no instantaneous and evanescent expression,” and also capturing “the emotions which they are capable of conveying to the spiritual which has been given him,” he claims acknowledgment for his work.<sup>139</sup>

Failure to conduct private observation adequately had a direct effect on the reader who was deprived of valuable lessons. *The Stones of Venice I* illustrates

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<sup>138</sup> John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 371.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Ruskin's firm identification with the artist who had to visualise and "explain" the world to others:

This infinite universe is unfathomable, inconceivable, in its whole; every human creature must slowly spell out, and long contemplate, such part of it as may be possible for him to reach; then set forth what he has learned of it for those beneath him; extricating it from infinity, as one gathers a violet out of grass; one does not improve either violet or grass in gathering it, but one makes the flower visible; and then the human being has to make its power upon his own heart visible also, and to give it the honour of the good thoughts it has raised up in him, and to write upon it the history of his own soul.<sup>140</sup>

Ruskin felt that it was his mission to invest his utmost effort in studying and reproducing the visual world in a tangible form in order to enlighten those who had not found a way to appreciate the delights of God's creation. Rather than imagining and staging a more stunning reality, the artist had to show the natural beauty of the object through communicating the delight he or she received from it.

Despite the solitary nature of Ruskin's observational process, he sought to interrupt strictly self-centred behaviour and, at least in theory, reach out to a human other—his reader. Ruskin's ekphrastic writing often took on an educational character because he did not only feel responsible to worship God's creations, at least before his loss of faith, but, like Eliot, he sought to redeem his 'guilt of the privileged' through illuminating his readers and providing perceptive skills to those whose sight had been obstructed by academic conventions or lack of education. Ruskin was aware of his exceptional genius of observation and felt a strong moral obligation to use it, as can be seen in the following entry of June 1<sup>st</sup> 1844 in Geneva: "I think always of those who have no power of seeing what I see, and am full of remorse that I see it, and of the time that may—and that must—come when I shall not see it myself."<sup>141</sup> Excited discovery thus became a duty. Not only did Ruskin have to compensate for others'

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<sup>140</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice I*, p. 349.

<sup>141</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 275.

deficiency in visual perception but, with blindness looming, he needed to maximise his own visual intake to provide for his old age.

The duty of the artist to *feel* his visual sensations was not only a source of barely tolerable pressure, but it also established Ruskin as the observing other who had to follow the world as it revolved. On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1840, Ruskin describes a French girl and her *bonne* “laughing and chattering with an expression of perfect happiness on their faces, thinking no more of the Alpine heights behind, or the sweep of city before—which they never looked at, than of Constantinople.”<sup>142</sup> They are entirely oblivious to that which formed the content of Ruskin’s life—the observation of mountain scenery. Completely unresponsive to the natural grandeur at their doorstep, their sensitivity is greatly inferior to Ruskin’s, who has “every faculty cultivated and directed to receive the impression of beauty, with every sensation and feeling raised [...] to a great degree above theirs.”<sup>143</sup> Ruskin is theoretically equipped and prepared to embrace the “truth of essence” of this wonderful spot, but he, although he can see the “glory in things” to which they are blind, cannot feel: “[I] was in a state of severe mental pain, because I could perceive materials of the highest mental pleasure about me, and could not receive it from them.”<sup>144</sup> Ruskin suffered from this failure to accept what was so generously offered to him. Instead, he had to stay at the surface of creation, having to content himself with the visual aspect of the scene and forced to renounce the “whole” experience. The incapacity to feel reduced Ruskin to the status of a mere onlooker who was shut out of the sublime, which clearly threatened his identity as an observer. Despite his understanding that feeling was spontaneous and could not be fully mastered, Ruskin treated feeling like work, which caused endless frustration and depression.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

The diary shows that the reality of successful observation was complicated, as Ruskin had to homogenise the enormous responsibility he attributed to the artist/observer, the ephemeral nature of his emotions and the changeable external environment. Moreover, Ruskin knew his best efforts at verbally reproducing reality to be inadequate. His diaries are characterised by the pressure to gather visual experience and to unravel the mechanisms inherent in the act of perception, which informs *The Elements of Drawing*, *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*. His responsibility towards the unknown reader can be seen to partially motivate his restless urge to conquer new visual territories. The pressure to feel became particularly strong when Ruskin re-visited geographical places that he had once liked. The repeated visits and the ardent admiration for a spot's beauty inspired Ruskin with feelings of deep love, to the point that these places can be seen to have replaced human affection. When emotionally numb, Ruskin was forced to question his connection with these places because the emotional support he drew from them had been destabilised, which perpetuated his isolation.

### **Attachment to Place and Objects**

Although Eastlake had unjustly criticised Ruskin for being indifferent to human beings, his diaries clearly foreground nature and architecture over emotional, inter-human relationships. He consistently silenced experience that gave him personal pain, such as his failed marriage, or the bitterness he felt over his disappointed love for Adèle Domecq, as can be seen in this entry of December 27<sup>th</sup> 1840: "This day last year was the last I ever spent with [Adèle] I do not like writing on these anniversaries, but I must do so for exercise. I am getting confoundedly blue—or black—and must

shake it off.”<sup>145</sup> The diary presents very few such explicit invocations to exert emotional self-discipline that involve a human being. Generally, Ruskin seems to have channelled his personal frustration through a focus on work-related issues.

In order to counteract his human isolation, Ruskin cultivated and anthropomorphised the bonds that connected him to selected places, such as Venice and Chamonix, which he considered his “two bournes of earth.”<sup>146</sup> Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ruskin seemed to feel genuine affection for geographical locations, which was in some ways comparable to the romantic love for a person. Ruskin not only worshipped and idealised the visual splendour of natural and architectural objects, but he felt that they responded to him as well, which again recalls Hopkins’s imagined communication between the observer and the observed. This geographical romance was subject to the dynamic of desire and saturation I have just examined, which led to emotional exhilaration as well as unfulfilled longing and despair. The basis for this intense attachment to certain places was their visual attractiveness. Indulging in self-assertive impulses, Ruskin yearned for the possession of these exquisite sights so intensely that he hungered for fusion with these places and their associated objects. Ruskin’s photographic desire to capture every detail of Venice, for instance, was motivated by an eroticised craving of complete possession which was mellowed by his self-effacing duty as a superior observer towards those he wanted to educate.

The anthropomorphisation of inanimate objects/events through which Ruskin counteracted the loneliness of the observer is evident in a sequence of entries of March 1841 in which he continuously personified Mount Vesuvius as “an old friend,” making this natural structure the recipient of his affection. The parting with the

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<sup>145</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 128.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183; May 6<sup>th</sup> 1841.

beloved volcano, on March 16<sup>th</sup>, was extremely dramatic and shows Ruskin's frustration of forever being a spectator, who is always giving but never directly receiving love: "Sorry to bid him goodbye. I wish Vesuvius could love me, like a living thing; I would rather make a friend of him than of any morsel of humanity."<sup>147</sup> Feeling always involved an immense personal effort and although Ruskin expressed passionate sentiments towards the mountain, he wished the companionship he imagined when exclaiming "Adieu mon ami, mon volcan!" to be real.<sup>148</sup> Ruskin's relationship with the visual world was always contrived due to the obligation to study natural and architectural objects and to feel intensely about them. When thus craving a response from non-human objects/events, Ruskin expressed a desire for an organic, effortless relationship with his beloved other(s), which could overcome the distance between the observer and the observed.

Dramatic leave-taking became a reassuring, ritualised duty for Ruskin, which catered to his possessive desire to supply himself with provisions of memorable experience. When in April 1841 Ruskin visited Rome, he is initially enthusiastic and "very full of feeling" although he suspects that he has to "go home and get up the steam again" in order to refresh his eye.<sup>149</sup> Because he cannot "feel now as [he] could five months ago," his exploration of Rome is mechanical and forced, and his goodbye consists of a very contradictory evaluation: "I date 'Rome' for the last time this year, at least; probably for a long time to come, for though I am sorry to leave the place—more so than I thought—there is something about it which will make me dread to return. Farewell Roma mia!"<sup>150</sup> Ruskin pushes himself to acknowledge the significance of his departure by emphasising its finality. He is relieved to leave Rome

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 166; March 17<sup>th</sup> 1841.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 171; April 10<sup>th</sup> 1841.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 172; April 16<sup>th</sup> 1841.

because he can stop forcing himself to feel, but at the same time he regrets being separated from the beauty he will soon long for. In the following days he “bid farewell to St. Peter’s with some feeling,” and to his “pet Raphael;” the latter giving him the most pleasure, along with the Venus and Michael Angelo’s Bacchus.<sup>151</sup> The stay in Rome was exhausting because Ruskin, despite trying his hardest, failed to develop a meaningful connection with the city. By inscribing these farewells into his diary, he accomplished his duty to live correctly. However, representation without emotion was a mere performance which Ruskin failed to invest with meaning.

When in May 1841, Ruskin finally reached the long-anticipated Venice, “the Paradise of cities,” he deemed himself “happier than I have been in these five years—so happy, happier than in all probability I ever shall be again in my life.”<sup>152</sup> At the heart of human-made beauty, Ruskin felt the exquisite “thrill” of this “feline, sensual and orientally feminine” city, to use the words of Clive Wilmer.<sup>153</sup> Proximity to this “adored object,” as J.B. Bullen has called the city, put Ruskin “in good humour with all the world.”<sup>154</sup> But even the delight of visiting Venice, his “place of dreams,” was no longer “childish” as Ruskin was disillusioned with the decay of the city, finding “the canals [...] shallower [and] dirtier than they were of old.”<sup>155</sup> Ruskin’s disgust with modernity’s pollution and architecture, as well as his eagerness to preserve the Byzantine and Gothic architecture he so admired, motivated the creation of the great ekphrastic record *The Stones of Venice*, which was the product of the possessive photographic gesture.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 183; May 6<sup>th</sup> 1841.

<sup>153</sup> Clive Wilmer, “Ruskin, Venice and Verona,” *International Conference: Ruskin, Venice and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Cultural Travel*, Venice, 25-27 September 2008, p. 2. (Unpublished conference paper).

<sup>154</sup> J.B. Bullen, *Continental Crosscurrents: British Criticism and European Art 1810-1910* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 165.

<sup>155</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 185; May 9<sup>th</sup> 1841.

<sup>156</sup> This was, of course, before Ruskin associated photography with the abhorred “effects that mechanisation and industrialisation were producing on the landscape and on society,” as critic Michael

Ruskin's desire to identify with and appropriate the city gave rise to an immensely large collection of meticulously sketched, and photographed, magnificent scenes and isolated visual detail. Ruskin obviously felt the need to create a physical copy of lived reality for private use and, through drawing the city, made it into a non-human, two-dimensional companion. However, Ruskin devoted this selfish accumulation of drawings to his readership, as these images formed the basis for *The Stones of Venice*, as the Preface of 1851 shows: "when I planned the book, I had materials with me, collected at different times of sojourn in Venice during the last seventeen years."<sup>157</sup> J. Howard Whitehouse has argued that "Ruskin rarely sat down to paint a picture in the conventional sense. He always drew with a purpose. [...] But his immediate interest was to record, not to make a picture."<sup>158</sup> Indeed, Ruskin sketched for appropriative reasons rather than for the pleasure of aesthetic expression; he drew to take and to teach, rather than to impress.

Despite Seddon's argument that Ruskin's drawings were designed for private consumption, the diaries show that he measured them against the very high standards he set for his own work as much as for others'. Recording was work for Ruskin, as can be seen in the entry of May 9<sup>th</sup> 1841: "I have got all wrong with my drawing too, and that upsets me in humour."<sup>159</sup> Like not being able to feel, the failure to create an accurate representation of the city and its atmosphere resulted in deep frustration as unrecorded experience was forever lost and thus wasted. Ruskin was relieved when he finally managed to "get" his "subject of the Grand Canal," as it was "almost the only

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Harvey explains in his impressive study of Ruskin's varying attitudes towards the photographic medium. Michael Harvey, "Ruskin and Photography," p. 31.

<sup>157</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice I*, p. v.

<sup>158</sup> J. Howard Whitehouse, *Ruskin the Painter and his Works at Bembridge* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 15.

<sup>159</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 185.



thing I have got in Venice worthy of Venice.”<sup>160</sup> The perceptive process was not complete until Ruskin had represented, fixed and appropriated the observed scene or detail on paper. More generally, Ruskin perceived unrecorded spectating of natural grandeur as a waste, as he noted on March 31<sup>st</sup> 1844: “I am afraid all my watching is of very little use unless I get a pencil in hand.” Sketching allowed him to capture specific aspects of nature scenes and his vocabulary was often distinctly photographic, as for instance in this entry of October 24<sup>th</sup> 1840 in Nice: “I climbed and sketched; got two general views.”<sup>161</sup> The verb “get” clearly accentuates Ruskin’s desire to remove and own the depicted scene.

Just like the photograph captivates and represents selected spatial and temporal aspects of reality, Ruskin’s diaries are preoccupied with arresting the transience of lived experience. His ekphrastic and photographic records of Venice respond to a voracious need for appropriative intake, which was intensified by the threat which modern industrialisation posed to the authenticity of this masterpiece of a city. However, beyond the preservation of Venice, which was intended for his personal and the universal good, Ruskin generally tried to evade the passage of time. His diary was an essential instrument in his struggle to use his remaining time efficiently because its photographic and ekphrastic gesture allowed him to preserve and re-appropriate time that had lapsed.

### **Obsession with Time: the 1835-1847 Diary versus the *Brantwood Diary***

Before investigating the significance of time in the *Brantwood Diary*, I shall examine the 1835-1847 diary’s preoccupation with remembering the past, which shows that Ruskin forced himself to keep a continuous written record for future consumption.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 187; May 14<sup>th</sup> 1841.

<sup>161</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 95.

Ruskin viewed time as a precious resource, which became the standard against which he measured the quality of his life. He frequently debated whether an experience he had just noted was worthy of the time spent on it. In the *Brantwood Diary* (1876-1883), Ruskin was less concerned with the time occupied with recording; now he panicked because the years were “narrowing to end,” as he wrote on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1879.<sup>162</sup> He anxiously looked into the future and consciously tried to make the most of the past (by frequently re-reading his diaries), the present and the future. Ruskin’s health was fragile: he had suffered episodes of dementia and feared that the strike of blindness might deprive him of the visual delights he so cherished. Accordingly, with death looming, Ruskin became all the more determined to “spend” time “well” and was obsessed with calculating the days he had left. Diary-keeping and the sensible use of time became inseparable tools through which Ruskin intended to maintain his mental health.

During 1835-1847, Ruskin treated the diary as storage for his visual memoranda. He sought for the diary to imitate the comprehensiveness of a photographic anthology by transferring visual information onto its pages. The process of compilation was less important than the hoped-for result—Ruskin consistently needed to convince himself that the self-discipline required to verbally encapsulate time ultimately served his endeavour to perceive his life as a “whole.” The diary of the 1840s is thus scattered with entries in which Ruskin laments the tediousness of the task. On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1840, for instance, he confesses that “I should write much more here. [...] It is a great bore to keep a diary but a great delight to have kept one.”<sup>163</sup> Keeping a diary is thus seen as a present investment in the future. The present

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<sup>162</sup> Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 187.

<sup>163</sup> Evans and Whitehouse, eds., *The Diaries of John Ruskin 1835-1847*, p. 129.

self anticipates the future self's need for reconnection and therefore sacrifices time into recording visual experience.

Ruskin measured the magnitude of the depicted experience in terms of how much time it deserved in his diary and hierarchically ordered the material that merited the diary's attention. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1841, for instance, Ruskin regrets omitting anecdotes from his social life over the depiction of a sublime moment listening to music: "I wish I could note more of the conversation yesterday—or rather, all—for it was thoroughly interesting or amusing; but I cannot spend much time over this."<sup>164</sup> He then at length describes "the purest piece of music I have yet met with," asserting the prominence of art over the self.<sup>165</sup>

The scarcity of available time reinforced Ruskin's tendency to treat his professional and private life as one, which is obvious in the occasional conflation of his diary and his letters. Shortage of time seemed to temporarily obliterate the diary's need for privacy. The entry of February 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> 1841 indicates that, for Ruskin, in imitative representation, the generic outlet used for expression was of minor importance, given that expression took place at all: "I have been writing so many letters that I forgot [the diary]."<sup>166</sup> The letters, although they provided an expressive vent, deprived Ruskin of the possession of his experience, which is why the diary quickly regained importance after periods of substitution by the letter.<sup>167</sup> On September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1841 in Leamington, Ruskin realises the necessity of diaristic activity: "I have considered my letter home as diary enough lately, but in case they are not kept I shall begin again. I have had a good deal of pleasure looking over this thing to night.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>167</sup> Again in 1845, on his first trip abroad without his parents, Ruskin wrote them a letter everyday and neglected his diary all year.

I begin to feel poetical about the places now.”<sup>168</sup> Ruskin refuses to be separated from the experience that he nostalgically feels belongs to him and resumes the time-consuming habit of self-writing.

The choice to recommence his diaristic activity is significant, because at times Ruskin seemed to be not altogether assured of the purpose of these records. The amount of time the diary necessitated was a recurrent concern for Ruskin, already in the 1835-47 diary, as can be seen in the following entry of March 16<sup>th</sup> 1841, in Mola di Gaeta, now Formia, near Naples: “I have kept this stuff of diary for a year; it has taken up quantities of time, and is a heavy thing in one’s desk—I don’t know how much else it is good for, yet it may be amusing, some time or other.”<sup>169</sup> Again, Ruskin debates whether the quality of the amassed memories can justify the time their representation requires. The entry of April 10<sup>th</sup> of the same year similarly ponders whether the value of time has exceeded the value of the diaristic record: “I am neglecting this at present. I usually consult my inclinations with respect to it, and have not made up my mind what time is really due, or whether it is all waste.”<sup>170</sup> The diary’s content is thus dictated by Ruskin’s emotional preferences, and because of the strong emotional bias that is inherent in the compositional process, its value is questionable. However, Ruskin seems to distrust neither the quality of his writing, nor the remarkableness of his memories, but is most concerned about whether he has put time to good use.

These doubts relating to the fruitful employment of his temporal resources are juxtaposed with entries that display a sheer obsession with the accurate rendition of a temporal sequence. On June 27<sup>th</sup> 1841 in Calais, Ruskin writes up his continental journey and displays a strong desire for photographic completeness: “I hardly know if

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

it is wasted time, but I have missed two or three important hours in the hurry of the stuff above, which I may as well note; so I go back to Vallombrosa.”<sup>171</sup> Ruskin’s eagerness to create an all-encompassing retrospective account aims at preventing gaps in his memory, because, as I have shown, for Ruskin “wishing [he] had kept more diary” was a sinful waste of resources.<sup>172</sup>

In the *Brantwood Diary*, Ruskin’s intense preoccupation with the correct employment of time took the shape of retrospective doubt. His loneliness increased as can be seen in this entry of September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1879: “every year leaves me more lost to myself and to my memories—a gleaner in reaped or ravaged fields.”<sup>173</sup> Because his receptiveness to visual stimulations had decreased immensely, observation, which had for so long been the primary content of Ruskin’s life, no longer connected him to the external world. Like this entry suggests, he had extracted everything he could from ephemeral visual pleasures.

Ruskin’s seclusion became manifest when he realised that the insubstantial nature of visual reality, which provided but momentary joy, could not console his isolation as an ageing man. In March 1878, in his *Notes on Turner*, Ruskin laments the utter futility of his perceptive project:

Oh, that some one had but told me, in my youth, when all my heart seemed to be set on these colours and clouds, that appear for a little while and then vanish away, how little my love for them would *serve* me, when the silence of the lawn and wood in the dews of the morning should be completed; and all my thoughts should be of those whom, by neither, I was to meet more!<sup>174</sup>

The discontent behind this passage may stem from the fact that Ruskin, like Hopkins, had filled this emotional emptiness with the observation of the external world and

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 214; September 30<sup>th</sup> 1841.

<sup>173</sup> Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 198.

<sup>174</sup> Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 12 (London: George Allen, 1912), pp. 409-410. My italics.

never knew the “joy of approved love,” which he greatly laments in *Praeterita*.<sup>175</sup> Christopher Newall similarly mentions this escapist tendency, referring to an instance in Chamonix of 1854 when Ruskin was determined to forget about his failed marriage by concentrating on his drawings.<sup>176</sup>

Having effaced his needs for human affection through focussing on nature and art, by the late 1870s, Ruskin felt that he had invested his energies wrongly. Because he had concentrated on the ephemeral all his life, Ruskin felt lost in an increasingly depopulated world. A belated return to the self through the creation of self-portraits, which the American author and professor of art Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908) had suggested to Ruskin as a means to control his mental illness, proved to be a difficult endeavour. There is surprisingly little critical material on these self-portraits, but Christopher Newall finds that they “speak of unhappiness and frustration.”<sup>177</sup> The look in the mirror did not bring about the hoped-for consolidation of the self, but, as Newall notes: “as the artist looked at himself, he was confronted by the reality of his own isolation.”<sup>178</sup> Making himself the object of study might have clashed with his early Evangelical beliefs but, most importantly, it seems that Ruskin was confronted with a self he had never aspired to and resorted to reading himself instead of seeing himself.

The *Brantwood Diary* shows that Ruskin’s rigid adherence to his lifelong habit of diaristic recording rose out of an effort to maintain mental sanity. Newall has observed that since the 1850s, Ruskin had used drawing as a means to escape emotional despair. Furthermore, since the 1860s, “[Ruskin] suffered increasingly from

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<sup>175</sup> Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p. 190.

<sup>176</sup> Whelchel, ed., *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye*, p. 103.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

bouts of deep depression [and] turned to drawing as an aid to mental stability.”<sup>179</sup> Whereas drawing allowed Ruskin to “forget himself,” he used his diary as a means of keeping himself organised when this became increasingly difficult. The diary became a ledger, an organisational tool and a forum for his quantitative approach to time, which was seen as both the poison that would kill him and as a life-giving resource. Ruskin developed an obsession with the countable nature of time and increasingly deplored his own uselessness and that of the material he gathered in his diary. His habit of dutifully recording astonishing visual spectacles remained unbroken and defied the obstacles of mental illness, blindness and listlessness, as can be seen in his entry of October 15<sup>th</sup> 1877: “I never wrote diary with so little care or satisfaction, feeling how the useless mass accumulates—but must note this most terrific morning of rain with frantic N.W. wind I have ever seen.”<sup>180</sup> Ruskin’s habit of keeping a diary is stronger than his languor and the moral necessity to depict outstanding phenomena withstands the general “[numbness] and [uselessness]” that he reported in October 1877.<sup>181</sup> The photographic gesture was now devoid of emotional intensity and Ruskin at times devalued the content of his diary. Thus, neither desire, nor the typical admiration for the subject, motivated this entry, but it was a product of reflex and therefore mere gesture.

Ruskin sought to stay in control of his life by using the limited time available to him as productively as possible through naming time’s entities. In 1883, the dates of many of the entries were preceded by the number of days until his seventieth birthday, as this entry of July 5<sup>th</sup> shows: “Wednesday, 2024, [2]6<sup>th</sup>, [2]7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, all work against me, with great general vexation for a result.”<sup>182</sup> Like Eliot and Gissing,

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>180</sup> Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 55.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 58; October 30<sup>th</sup> 1877.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

Ruskin directly associated time with his sense of self-worth, as can be seen in the deep shock he experienced upon the discovery that his system for calculating life expectancy was flawed:

Why,—I have miscounted grievously. There are now only 148 days left of this year—the five whole ones—1725 and 39 in 1889, altogether only 1912 [.] How I got my number of 2145, at p 62 [March 25] I can't think—but even taking that, there have been 144 days since, so I have missed count of two [.] Today, by that count would be 2001, which I'll go on with—as it is so.<sup>183</sup>

Ruskin's obsession with time compelled him to approximate the moment of his death, which he deemed necessary to a maximisation of experience. He tried to get as much work done as possible and thus needed to know the limits within which he was operating.

As for Alexander Bain, for Ruskin, the discipline the diary required was a deliberate effort to both retain and regain a clear and balanced mind: "I CAN'T understand how so extremely rational a person as I am can lose their wits [...] I do think if it were to go crazy again for the third time I should know I was so."<sup>184</sup> Despite its limited efficiency, the diary constituted a reassuring self-monitoring device, which offered an opportunity for therapeutic self-retrieval through re-reading, allowing Ruskin to see himself as a "whole." However, Ruskin seemed to find the diary an effective monitor of his professional output. Work and rigid self-control were needed to keep Ruskin's condition from getting worse, as his entry of February 15<sup>th</sup> 1878 shows: "I *must* get to work,—or I shall get utterly into dreamland."<sup>185</sup> Ruskin was exceedingly busy with other-directed study during the last years of his life; he founded the Guild of St George, wrote *Fors Clavigera*, numerous lectures and his autobiography. He also taught at Oxford.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 330; August 15<sup>th</sup> 1883.

<sup>184</sup> Unpublished letter of August 20<sup>th</sup> 1881; quoted in Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin*, p. 258.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 92.



As with the other diarists, work and emotional agitation often interfered with Ruskin's duty to keep a diary, despite his best efforts to be disciplined, as he reported on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1882: "It is infinitely strange to me that I can't keep this book regularly—resolve as I will."<sup>186</sup> Like reading Plato, writing the diary was seen as a necessary and beneficial form of mental exercise, as this entry of January 27<sup>th</sup> 1879 shows: "Monday. After the most solemn resolutions always to do this first thing, here I've missed two days."<sup>187</sup> Ruskin equated the interruption of the regularity of these healthy activities with self-neglect, which was the source of guilt: "A whole week unrecorded—no Plato done—nor much else."<sup>188</sup> Although his experience proved the contrary, Ruskin believed he could be in control of his mental health by exerting rigorous self-discipline and he thus viewed the deterioration of his condition as his personal responsibility. Ruskin's honest account of his deficiencies, which recalls Eliot, takes on a confessional character that denotes a desire for an absolving other to forgive the shortages that even extreme self-control and incessant effort to be both creative and efficient could not equalise.

Ruskin's diary resembles George Eliot's and George Gissing's diary in that it treats the execution of duty towards the self and the other as a primary subject. Like Eliot, Ruskin was uncomfortable with cultivating the self without being socially conscious and desired to educate those that were not given his extraordinary perceptive skills or the opportunity to travel. His diary's concern with work is comparable to Gissing's, but since Ruskin had no money worries, the premises of the lives of these two diarists are radically different. However, we can identify a principal characteristic that unites these three diarists: the duty to observe the external and

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 172; March 28<sup>th</sup> 1879.

social environment and create didactic (Gissing to a lesser extent) representations with ceaseless energy and motivation. The accomplishment of this duty determined the value of the individual.

Despite his intense dislike of the ontologically void mechanisation that came with modernity and despite his humanistic defence of fallibility in *The Stones of Venice*, it seems that Ruskin expected himself to function with the regularity and precision of a machine. The fact that no visual medium could render the reality Ruskin sought to represent in satisfying quality reveals that Ruskin did not accept his own imperfections. Like Eliot and Gissing he constantly strove to achieve the humanly impossible and even his own realisation that perception was governed by an inherent emotional dynamic did not lessen the disappointment he felt about his shortcomings as an observer. The diary was seen as a means to capture, organise and preserve Ruskin's visual and professional experience and was both the product and the witness of his photographic possessiveness.

Ruskin's obsession with arresting ephemeral visual reality can also be seen in the diary of Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose desire to possess the visual aspects of the natural world was so intense that he longed to be part of them. Ruskin's anthropomorphist attachment to places and nature can also be found in Hopkins's work. However, Hopkins, the Jesuit, obviously lacked the large audience that Ruskin enjoyed and was forced to keep his creative work to himself. Because he was motivated by a strong desire to observe and appropriate visual sights, he emphasised the religious importance for the observer to establish a dialogue with the natural world, responding to nature's fundamental need to be seen. Hopkins's diary presents photographic representations of nature scenes that could be compared to Ruskin's, but

Hopkins, much more so than Ruskin, kept the emotional self out of his diary and constructed himself purely as an observer.

## Chapter Four

### **Finding a Place for the Self: the Ontological Struggle of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889).**

In the work and diary of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the pressures that the previously discussed diarists perceived to be acting upon them, such as emotional repression, self-discipline and the obligation to record visual experience, mingled. All his life, Hopkins struggled to reconcile his homosexual emotions with his love of poetry and his need for ascetic order and human affection. Hopkins greatly exerted himself trying to settle the quarrel between socio-religious convention and personal fulfilment. This chapter argues that in order to evade shameful, unrespectable emotion and contain his ongoing internal conflicts, Hopkins converted to Catholicism and joined the Jesuit order, which promised him shelter through self-effacement. However, this religious choice could not quench Hopkins's need for validation as a human being and a poet. Because his desire to assert himself violated the ascetic stance that he sought to adopt, he designed a system of signification that was based on the concepts of "inscape" and "instress" in order to convert undesirable emotions into divine praise through aesthetic contemplation.<sup>1</sup>

Through imagining nature to be dependent on the human observer for signification, Hopkins could theoretically combine self-effacement and self-assertion and construct his sensual desires as essential to the execution of God's will. In reality, although the Jesuit doctrines provided Hopkins with the tools to exert self-control, he was unable and unwilling to give up his love of beauty. The inability to develop his

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<sup>1</sup> As I shall explain in more detail further on, for Hopkins, "inscape" and "instress" represented the spiritual energies with which God had infused all his creations. Whereas "inscape" designated the unique physical aspect of the natural or architectural object under consideration, "instress" was the name for the internal energy that sustained "inscape." The verb "inscape" translated the communication between the observer and the observed object by which the unique essence of the latter became realised. These concepts formed a vital link between all creations which allowed Hopkins to integrate himself within the world.

poetic talent, the frequent logistic changes and the lack of a human “other” can be seen to have led to the desolation of the “terrible” sonnets of 1885, which, as I shall show, mark the collapse of Hopkins’s ontological construct, crumbling under the weight of the demands of asceticism.

The vast body of religious scholarship dealing with Hopkins has tended to read the “spiritual desolation” of the “terrible” sonnets as an abstract despair in which “the self, abandoned of all support, dwells in a space which is entirely without contents,” as J. Hillis Miller has noted.<sup>2</sup> I, on the other hand, will show that this “lack” of content was not purely of a spiritual nature, but had material implications: Hopkins’s gradually decreasing ability to suppress his emotional self and to focus only on nature and God can be traced back to a lack of interpersonal bonding, the mental exhaustion due to a lifelong lack of belonging and the lack of sources of natural beauty through which to compensate for said lacks. While Miller has rightly observed that Hopkins refused to take responsibility for the “terrible” sonnets and attributed them to “inspirations unbidden,” I will explain that he associated involuntary emotion with those aspects of his self he sought to silence, namely, his homosexual otherness.

Generally, religious critics tend to appropriate Hopkins’s terminology, such as “inscape” and “instress,” in order to conduct an analysis of his work; an approach that, through sympathetic immersion, attempts to recreate Hopkins’s thought processes and perpetuates his circular, self-inscaping ontology.<sup>3</sup> Although the frequently discussed religious elements such as Duns Scotus’s “*hacienda*” (thisness) and Ignatian Meditation reinforced Hopkins’s preoccupation with the external environment, they in

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 354.

<sup>3</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Hopkins, the Self and God* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

themselves did not motivate Hopkins's decision to convert to Catholicism, but were part of his attempts to ground himself in the world. I will therefore not analyse the impact of religious practices on Hopkins's mental states but argue that the perceived pressure to conform to the codes of respectability (Chapter One) caused Hopkins's conflicted identity, which he sought to resolve through religion.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout his life, Hopkins demonstrated an unquenchable need to write. Whereas his early confession notes were written in response to the duty to purge his soul, his poetry was a source of pleasure, his diary contained his observations of the external world and represented a forum for his etymological findings. Through writing, Hopkins sought to mediate between the visual and the spiritual realms of experience, which allowed him to maintain a safe distance from the world while crafting the illusion of proximity. Hopkins's need for ontological integration is obvious in his diary, as he performed the role of masculine poet (Chapter One), describing and poeticising nature rather than processing "dangerous" emotion."<sup>5</sup> The diary can be seen as a basis for Hopkins's poetry; from its beginnings in his undergraduate years, he noted "etymological speculations," which Miller convincingly reads as "the first examples in his work of a reconstruction of the world

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<sup>4</sup> For a compelling discussion of Hopkins's theological development, see Philip A. Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bernard Martin has suggested that Hopkins, in his early adulthood, executed the purification of the body with the regularity of a ritual, as if to exorcise sexual energies from the body: "His repressiveness about physical beauty was surely connected with his painful awareness of his own sexual nature, which had constantly to be doused with cold water, disciplined, refined almost out of existence." Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (Hammersmith and London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 77. Throughout Hopkins's personal records we can discern an ongoing struggle to contain the sexual aspects of the self. He was torn between his attraction to the beautiful and his yearning for a mind that was unsullied by base bodily desires. He admitted to this dualistic tendency and his conscious effort to avert the senses from overpowering the intellectual control mechanisms is evident in the following letter to Bridges of October 22<sup>nd</sup>/November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1879:

No one can admire beauty of the body more than I do, and it is of course a comfort to find beauty in a friend or a friend in beauty. But this kind of beauty is dangerous. Then comes the beauty of the mind, such as genius, and this is greater than the beauty of the body and not to call dangerous. And more beautiful than the beauty of the mind is the beauty of character, the 'handsome heart.'

Claude Colleer Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 95.

through the discovery of rhymes.”<sup>6</sup> Beyond the onomatopoeic connections between words that Hopkins was searching, he used the diary to construct himself as an observer.

Hopkins, like Ruskin (Chapter Three), needed to invest both his visual and emotional capacities into the observed object in order to fulfil his perceived function as an observer. The observer’s emotions had to be passionate, yet devoid of selfish motivations, which shows that Hopkins strove to achieve the delicate balance between the cultivation of his talent and the silencing of the self. Although this tension between self-effacement and self-assertion characterises all the diarists this thesis has dealt with, for Hopkins, giving in to his physical desires for the male body represented a serious transgression against his own masculinity and Victorian sexual conventions.<sup>7</sup> By joining the Jesuits, however, Hopkins compromised both his effeminate sexual desire for men and his masculine wish for the publication of his work. The result was that Hopkins felt like an ineffectual “eunuch,” who violated conflicting codes of behaviour, because none of his identities could be developed.<sup>8</sup> Like Justus George Lawler, I would like to clarify that for Hopkins, manliness never “entail[ed] anything like bluff, male assertiveness.”<sup>9</sup> It is more likely that he thought along the lines of Pater’s 1893 essay on Plato’s aesthetics, which viewed a “man” as an “apt” person advocating “temperance;” someone “full of consciousness of what

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 279.

<sup>7</sup> As David F. Greenberg has shown, “Victorian medical literature tended to condemn homosexuality as an ‘unproductive’ misuse of male energy,” which reinforced its perception as sinful both in economic and religious terms. David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 366.

<sup>8</sup> “Time’s eunuch” (l. 13, “Spelt from Sybil’s Leaves”) in Norman H. Mackenzie, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1990), p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> Justus George Lawler, *Hopkins Re-Constructed: Life, Poetry and the Tradition* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), p. 57.

one does [...] of intention and of consequent purpose,” which reflects some of the codes of respectability that Chapter One has described.<sup>10</sup>

Although Howard J. Fulweiler has called Hopkins “the Victorian poet of the self,” his “self” should not be understood as fulfilled, actualised, or unified.<sup>11</sup> Throughout his life, Hopkins struggled to reconcile his emotional self, the self that society deemed acceptable and an ideal ascetic self. In the 1860s, Hopkins first attempted to redeem his unrespectable emotions through his confession notes (March 1865-January 1866), which he used to monitor and purge his shameful longings for Digby Dolben. Significantly, in the 1860s, Hopkins sought to contain his urges to, if not physically, then definitely visually, establish homosexual contact by using his diary and poetry to affirm his position as a passive observer, wooed by nature. Looking at boys was supplanted by the consistent observation and description of nature. Because Hopkins diverted his gaze and his emotions from the human being to the natural world, he needed to legitimise his attachment to plants and animals by constructing them as animated beings that invited his gaze. Hopkins viewed himself as connected to nature through a relationship of magnetic symbiosis: through investing all his emotional energy into observing natural objects and realising their inscapes, he worshipped God, who had created all this splendour. By thus portraying his emotions as necessary components of an interconnected universe, Hopkins both normalised their subversive nature and validated himself in God’s eyes.

In the 1870s, Hopkins’s diary displays an increased identification with nature which was evidenced by a consistent personification of natural objects. The consciousness he ascribed to the plants he observed became progressively anthropomorphised, as he described the physical particularities of natural objects as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Howard W. Fulweiler, *“Here a Captive Heart Busted”: Studies in the Sentimental Journey of Modern Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), p. 114.



their “behaviour.” Hopkins’s attempt to humanise the natural world can be compared to Gissing’s identification with his literary heroes as both compensated their lack of companionship through clinging to an ideal. Despite actively positioning himself at specific spots from which to conduct his studies of the visual world, Hopkins still insisted on portraying himself as a passive observer. His desire to be an integral part of nature was reflected in this habit of including his own presence in his ekphrastic records. 1875 is the last year of which we possess a diaristic record, but Hopkins’s subsequent poems, letters and sermons provide evidence of a gradual disillusionment with his religio-aesthetic system and a forced resistance to the threat of ontological annihilation.

This disenchantment culminated in the 1880s, a period of much emotional turmoil. Hopkins manifested an immense discontent with his work at University College Dublin which the Jesuits had assigned to him. He felt a growing need to assert his individuality and counteract his feelings of eunuchal ineffectualness through the publication of his poetry. Hopkins realised that, paradoxically, he had lost power over his life by trying to gain control over his emotions, which triggered his simultaneous desire for a total seclusion from the world and a more direct engagement with it. At this point, it seems that Hopkins would have liked to devote his life to his poetry, if this desire for personal validation had not violated the vows of self-effacement that determined his life. His frustration over being a “eunuch” who could produce neither poetry nor offspring culminated in the crisis of 1885, which is represented in the “terrible” sonnets, a sequence of poems that is characterised by intense despair and religious doubt. Because his ontology no longer offered the necessary support, Hopkins found himself in a hell of self-reflexive barrenness in which self-inscaping alone arrested the ever-increasing effacement of his self.

Hopkins prevented a total collapse by admitting his need for a human other and this refusal to give in to despair reflects the same emotional self-discipline the other diarists under examination administered.

However, we see that Hopkins attempted to silence his self more pitilessly than any of the other diarists did. Intending to maintain order in his emotional life, Hopkins gave up personal agency both through substituting his will for God's and handing his body and mind to the Jesuits. Because both work and charity were a necessary part of Hopkins's vocation, his other-directed behaviour seems less heartfelt than George Eliot's as he did not feel attracted to community work. Although George Gissing was forced to work ceaselessly, he had the relative luxury of being able to pick the professional occupation he desired; an avenue that was closed for Hopkins. Hopkins was even less free to travel than Gissing, which intensified his indifference towards the community. For Hopkins, much like the other diarists, albeit for different reasons, the pressure to work with absolute self-discipline was a source of great discontent. Whereas for Eliot, Gissing and Ruskin, the diary offered a forum for constructing a 'work identity' as it were, and allowed them to vent and relativise work-related frustration, Hopkins's diary tends to only portray the self as an observer of nature, displaying relatively few emotional struggles or complaints. This can partly be attributed to the fact that Hopkins expressed his meditations on the self in his retreat notes and redeemed his sins in his confession notes (at least early on in his career), which shows that he abstained from contemplating his self except through the veil of religious practice.

Although Victorian Oxford, according to Alison G. Sulloway, "fostered [intense male friendships] as pedagogical weapons in forming and chastening the young," Hopkins's sexual orientation placed him outside of the realm of respectability,

which he could only re-enter if he permanently distanced himself from his emotional urges.<sup>12</sup> I agree with Julia F. Saville that Hopkins seems to have developed an interest in ascetic religion due to his pathologisation of “same-sex passion as a malady associated with self-indulgence and insidious languor to be remedied with strict self-discipline.”<sup>13</sup> Because homosexual emotions were regarded as completely unacceptable, Hopkins felt guilty of violating the codes of propriety that Chapter One has described, even if he never physically acted out his passions. Hopkins’s drastic decision to convert to Catholicism and to join the Jesuits, by which he hoped to acquire total self-mastery, represented both a “source of spiritual strength” that counteracted emotional subversion and a “regrettably oppressive regimen” from which poetry was the only escape, as Saville has rightly claimed.<sup>14</sup> As I shall show, the temptations of the external world constituted both the source of disgust and fear which Hopkins was glad find shelter from, and a well of fascinating, self-affirming avenues, such as thrilling friendships and the prospect of literary fame which Hopkins longed to take part in. However, the self-abnegation that Hopkins strove towards condemned him to invest his work in unappreciative congregations and students and to reserve his poetry for selected friends.

Hopkins’s diary, in its dual role as both the voice and ‘silencing tool’ of his self, reveals very little personal information. This chapter’s chronological structure aims to decode Hopkins’s poetic diaristic records and reveal their function in the legitimisation and channelling of his shame over his homosexual desires. Before analysing Hopkins’s role as a static, yet dynamic observer in his diary, I will offer a

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<sup>12</sup> Alison G. Sulloway, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Temper* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 21. For an analysis of Greek studies as an academic channel for homosexuality in Hopkins’s environment, see Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Julia F. Saville, *The Homoerotic Asceticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12-1

biographical account of his religious career and explain his terminology. I will then read Hopkins's "terrible" sonnets of 1885 in light of contemporary critical views of the relation between place and subjectivity.

### **Hopkins's Religious Career**

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born on July 28<sup>th</sup> 1844 in Stratford to Manley Hopkins and Kate Smith. Manley Hopkins was a successful marine lawyer who had a strong interest in literature and published several books of poetry and critical reviews. Although Kate had been mildly interested in modern languages in her adolescence, she did not pursue these once she was married. The family was quite well-off financially and their religious beliefs can be described as "mainstream Anglican."<sup>15</sup> After spending nine years at Highgate School, Gerard entered Balliol College, Oxford in April 1863.

Hopkins's life was dominated by an alternating desire to embrace and reject human contact. As his homosexual emotions established him as other to his cultural and familial background, his decision to convert to Catholicism, which involved a drastic dissociation from his family, friends, and a traditional home, caused him both relief and intense anxiety. Converting to Catholicism and joining the Jesuit order can therefore be seen as a resolve to permanently adopt a respectable identity, which made Hopkins disregard his need for a human other.

When Hopkins went to Oxford in 1863, he spent the first months in an excited social frenzy, making many friends and, as he wrote to his mother, he was "almost too happy."<sup>16</sup> According to Hopkins's biographer Norman White, Oxford in the 1860s was populated by different "sets" of students who grouped together according to their

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<sup>15</sup> Norman White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Collier Abbott, ed., *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 79.

aesthetic tastes and artistic and leisurely interests. Because Hopkins was not gifted when it came to sports, he befriended the “readers,” who, like him, cultivated a life of the mind.<sup>17</sup> It soon became obvious that Hopkins could not share his friends’ attraction to girls and was extremely uncomfortable with sexuality in general, which can account for his efforts to minimise his bodily desires and his focus on the visual. Even before the events of February 1865, Hopkins was extremely concerned with the propriety of his own behaviour, to the point that he felt that others’ unrestrained indulgence in the pleasures of the senses corrupted his own purity. Hopkins seems to have been strongly influenced by the cultural scepticism towards unconcealed sexual emotions (Chapter One), which explains his disgust with the coarse, unrespectable behaviour which his friends Alfred Erskine Gathorne-Hardy and Edward Bond displayed on their reading holiday in Wales of August 1864. Hopkins generally had “a hard time of it to resist contamination from the bawdy jokes and allusions of Bond and Hardy,” as his letter to Mowbray Baillie of July 24<sup>th</sup> shows. His friends’ excitement at the presence of four girls from Reading, which degenerated into an “unacademic romp,” to use Michael Matthew Kaylor’s term, intensified his aversion to this giddy debauchery.<sup>18</sup> Hopkins found himself in a liminal space between (at least) three conflicting value systems: first, his culture’s general scepticism towards the display of emotion, second, his own homosexual preferences and third, the heterosexual curiosity and titillation of his friends from which Hopkins wanted to abstain.

During his first months in Oxford, Hopkins felt attracted to Liddon and Pusey’s Anglo-Catholic aestheticism, and, as Jill Muller has convincingly argued, “he might have remained in the Church of England all his life [...] were it not for the

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<sup>17</sup> White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, pp. 58, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Abbott, ed., *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 213; Michael Matthew Kaylor, *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde* (Michael Matthew Kaylor, 2006), p. 151.

emotional and religious crisis he experienced in the early months of 1865.”<sup>19</sup> In February 1865, Hopkins made the acquaintance of Digby Mackworth Dolben, a young religious poet who was going to convert to Catholicism but was impeded from doing so by his tragic death by drowning at age nineteen. Hopkins was extremely taken by Dolben’s beauty and religious devotion. This strong attraction resulted in sexual guilt, which Hopkins immediately counteracted by starting to write confession notes to increase his self-mastery through rigorous self-monitoring. When encountering Dolben, Hopkins’s homoerotic desire flared up and caused anxiety and shame, which he, like many homosexual men of the nineteenth century according to David Hilliard, expressed through the “codes” of Anglo-Catholicism, but particularly through his concepts of “inscape” and “instress,” as I shall show.<sup>20</sup> Hopkins’s desire for a consistent and unified self that could transcend emotional confusion and fluctuation, can thus partly be traced back to romantic disappointment, such as his obsession with Dolben or the friendship with Alexander Strachey, which like many Oxford friendships “hovered somewhere in the undefined area between friendship and love.”<sup>21</sup> David Hilliard’s suggestion that Catholicism might have offered a structure repelling all sexuality, thus sheltering a distressed young Hopkins, seems very convincing:

It seems inherently possible that young men who were secretly troubled by homosexual feelings that they could not publicly acknowledge may have been attracted by the prospect of devoting themselves to a life of celibacy, in the company of like-minded male friends, as a religiously-sanctioned alternative to marriage.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jill Muller, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Victorian Catholicism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life*, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> David Hilliard, “Unenglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Winter 1982), pp. 180-221 (p. 185).

Because his sexual orientation established Hopkins as “other” to the cultural norm, he consciously turned his otherness into a virtue by joining a community that validated non-participants in traditional sexual politics.

Arguably, Hopkins effaced his emotional needs in a radical attempt to silence his homosexual self through converting to Catholicism, which permanently alienated him from his parental home. His “dear” Anglican family experienced a serious shock, prompting their “terrible” reaction at his decision to convert.<sup>23</sup> Manley Hopkins implored his son to forbear the conversion and maintain the integrity of the family in a very moving letter: “O Gerard my darling boy are you indeed gone from me?”<sup>24</sup> Hopkins’s conversion inflicted a severe wound to the family unity and the experience was equally painful for him, as this extract from a letter of October 20<sup>th</sup> 1868 to his mother shows: “You might believe that I suffer too.”<sup>25</sup> Despite the deep conviction that Hopkins’s need for conversion was beyond his need for human support, he was relieved that his family did not exclude and shun him, as can be seen in this letter to his father of October 16<sup>th</sup> 1866: “you are so kind as not to forbid me your house, to which I have no claim, on condition, if I understand, that I promise not to try to convert my brothers and sisters.”<sup>26</sup> The conversion did not fully sever the family bonds but Hopkins’s new identity permanently altered his position in the family. He was still organically connected to his family, but they were “in Christ not near,” which made them spiritual strangers.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Paddy Kitchen, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 60; Letter to John Henry Newman of 1866 in Gerald Roberts, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Collier Abbott, ed., *The Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 95-97.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Prose*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> From his 1885 poem “To seem the stranger” (l. 3) in Mackenzie, ed., *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 154.

Despite his obvious need for the affection of his family, Hopkins longed to be part of the eclectic Jesuit community of the select few, who had absolute control over their senses. Roman Catholicism, more so than “effeminate” Anglo-Catholicism, offered Hopkins the high standards of behaviour which he hoped could help him overcome his sexual self.<sup>28</sup> In an attempt to efface his homosexual tendencies, Hopkins handed all control over the physical and emotional aspects of his self to the Jesuits by entering the Novitiate in 1868. With the consequent abnegation of personal agency Hopkins abdicated his right to enjoy emotional groundedness and to develop tenderness for a geographical spot, which caused his life to become marked by many abrupt and involuntary shifts in location.

After leaving Oxford in 1868, a place he truly loved, Hopkins grew very fond of Stonyhurst where he studied philosophy (1870-1873), but his inability to reside in the location of his choice impeded him from allowing his roots to extend and prevented a secure identification with place. Hopkins was forced to repeatedly retract his emotional bonds and transfer his existence to a new location, which meant that he had to be constantly ready for “instant despatch,” as changes in professional position were announced unexpectedly with no more than a few days notice.<sup>29</sup> For instance, at Stonyhurst, “binding attachments to place or person were never encouraged to develop. Similarly, students were not allowed to keep the same rooms for long periods, but were shifted around.”<sup>30</sup> The objective was of course to force the novices to surrender their need for worldly possessions and to maintain a consistent focus on God.

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<sup>28</sup> On the gendering of religion, see John Shelton Reed, “‘A Female Movement:’ The Feminization of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Catholicism,” *Anglican and Episcopal History*, vol. 57 (1988), pp. 199-238.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to his mother of April 30<sup>th</sup> 1880, quoted in Pushpa Naidu Parekh, *Response to Failure: Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Francis Thompson, Lionel Johnson, and Dylan Thomas* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Kitchen, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pp. 146, 145.



The Jesuit insistence on the erasure of the physical was geared to eradicate personal agency in order to bring about a closer proximity to God. In Roehampton, the place of Hopkins's noviceship 1868-1870, he was not given a new habit, but "an older Jesuit's cast-off," which impeded any formation of worldly vanity or pride.<sup>31</sup> The Jesuits recognised the importance of dress in the construction of the self, as Joseph M. Becker explains: "Dress serves as a shorthand expression, generally understood by all, of how one sees oneself and how one wants to be understood by the society in which one lives."<sup>32</sup> Clothing one's body in unpretentious second-hand attire accentuates a deliberate disregard of the body that is comparable to an obliteration of physicality. This uniform, worn every day, deprives the Jesuit of the choice of how to present himself to others and leaves him always already dressed—the habit becomes and replaces the body, thus guaranteeing chastity.

Material possessions are another aspect of individuality denied to the Jesuit. To let the novices "experience dependence first hand," Alfred Thomas SJ. has explained, they "had to ask permission from the novice master to be allowed to retain the use of certain personal belongings such as a watch, razor, a pocket-knife, or scissors. 'Little leaves,' as the practice was called, were renewable monthly."<sup>33</sup> The cultivation of the self thus had to be purely internal, with the vows of poverty and obedience encouraging a modest life of chastity. The personal space available to a novice was extremely limited, consisting of a small cubicle that resembled a "stall in a well-kept stable, except for the red curtains that could be drawn across the front," according to the autobiography of the Jesuit Denis Meadows.<sup>34</sup> The cubicles were

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph M. Becker, *The Re-formed Jesuits: A History of Changes in the Jesuit Order During the Decade 1965-1975*, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> Alfred Thomas, *Hopkins the Jesuit: the Years of Training* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> Denis Meadows, *Obedient Men* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), p. 14.

empty except for an “iron bedstead, a washstand with a pitcher, and a [...] chamber pot.” We see that, Hopkins’s environment, like Gissing’s, encouraged his aspirations to lead a life of the mind.

The Jesuit life offered little space for self-assertion as both work and leisure time (retreats) were determined by Hopkins’s superiors and he had no say in determining his own future. This complete dependence could feel homely and a comfortable relief from the emotions of a conflicted self. Hopkins initially found the Catholic community to resemble a family that provided warmth, friendship and entertainment, but often felt depressed over his lack of control. As early as 1868, at the debut of his Jesuit career, Hopkins voiced apprehension at the want of assurance concerning his future. He wrote to Bridges from Croydon on January 9<sup>th</sup>:

The year you will be away I have no doubt will make a great difference in my position though I cannot know exactly what. But the uncertainty I am in about the future is so very unpleasant and so breaks my power of applying to anything that I am resolved to end it, which I shall do by going to a retreat at Easter at the latest and deciding whether I have a vocation to the priesthood.<sup>35</sup>

Presumably still filled with the rather romantic hopes which influenced his decision to convert to Catholicism, Hopkins seemed threatened by the impending and incomprehensible change.<sup>36</sup> The “unpleasantness” connected to an undefined future prevented him from forming a concept of self that was adapted to the upcoming situation.

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<sup>35</sup> Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> In a well-known letter to his father of October 16<sup>th</sup> 1866, Hopkins explained his choice to become a Catholic, insisting on his personal agency by refusing to postpone his decision as his parents asked him to and at the same handing the responsibility over to God: “I have no power in fact to stir a finger: it is God Who makes the decision and not I” (p. 92). Although he portrayed his self as belonging to God, Hopkins provided “reasons” for his conversion, stressing the importance of the impact of “strictly drawn arguments,” his own and other people’s, based on “common sense” (p. 93). He cited the Bible as a major influence, as well as Tractarianism. These rational and practical reasons were almost overshadowed by the emotional motivations that drew Hopkins to Catholicism: “its consolations, its marvellous ideal of holiness, the faith and devotion of its children, its multiplicity, its array of saints and martyrs, its consistency and unity, its glowing prayers [and] the daring majesty of its claims” (p. 93). We can deduct from this extract that Hopkins imagined the Catholic institution as a family-like community, with committed children and loving, caring and selfless saints and martyrs. Abbott, ed., *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*.

This constant uncertainty dominated Hopkins's life. At several instances in his career, Hopkins was content in the environment in which he was placed and was unwilling to leave the geographical place he had become accustomed to. After being ordained as priest, in 1877, Hopkins was forced to leave his beloved St Beuno's College as this letter from Hampstead of August 10<sup>th</sup> 1877 shows: "Much against my inclination I shall have to leave Wales."<sup>37</sup> Hopkins was rendered ineffectual like a child, defenceless against the incontestable decisions of his superiors. Hopkins's letter to Bridges from Bedford Leigh near Manchester of October 8<sup>th</sup> 1879 is one of many instances in which he was unsure as to the direction his life was to take: "I have left Oxford. I am appointed to Liverpool, I do not know for what work."<sup>38</sup> In Liverpool, Hopkins had to deal with impoverished crowds and was frequently confronted with alcoholism; social work he was in no way qualified for. A letter to Baillie from Liverpool of May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1880 shows that Hopkins regretted his lack of authority over his own place of residence or his occupation: "I do not think I shall be long here. I have been long nowhere yet."<sup>39</sup> Thus deprived of the possibility to plan ahead and anticipate future tasks and accommodation, Hopkins's self was reduced to a dynamic of pressure and release: extreme involvement in the trivial world in the form of his clerical and educational duties, counterpoised by invigorating spiritual retreats and holidays—none of which Hopkins chose himself.

Similarly, after having taught Classics for about a year at Stonyhurst College (1882-84), a place that he was particularly fond of, he contemplated the prospect of being transferred with a certain degree of fatalism in a letter to Bridges of July 26<sup>th</sup> 1883:

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<sup>37</sup> Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>39</sup> Roberts, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Prose*, p. 94.

It seems likely that I shall be removed; where I have no notion. But I have long been Fortune's football and am blowing up the bladder of resolution big and buxom for another kick of her foot. I shall be sorry to leave Stonyhurst; but go or stay, there is no likelihood of my ever doing anything to last.<sup>40</sup>

Hopkins's consideration of himself as "Fortune's football" constitutes a critical allusion to the arbitrariness with which he was pushed around by his superiors. The image of himself as humbly preparing to receive the impact of another shock denotes a self-ironic acknowledgment of his personal powerlessness and questionable manliness. This lack of self-direction was even experienced as shameful as he admitted on retreat in Tullabeg on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1889:

Five wasted years almost have passed in Ireland. I am ashamed of the little I have done, of my waste of time, although my helplessness and weakness is such that I could scarcely do otherwise. [...] what is life without aim, without spur, without help? All my undertakings miscarry: I am like a straining eunuch. I wish then for death: yet if I died now I should die imperfect, no master of myself, and that is the worst failure of all. O my God, look down on me.<sup>41</sup>

Hopkins's life as a teaching fellow in Greek at University College Dublin (1884-1889) was distinguished by ceaseless, tedious work and the despair of this retreat note is a combination of his frustration over bodily illness and a general lack of command over his actions. He was "helpless" because the locus of control was outside of himself as he had allegedly handed over his will to God, to be administered by his superiors. Although, as he wrote in the same note, in general, Hopkins was "only too willing to do God's work," this particular task, "my work at Stephen's Green," proved to be too draining.<sup>42</sup> Hopkins felt the dishonour of unmanly passivity despite his eagerness to worship God and display a diligent work ethic because his work did not afford him the validation that he needed.

This eunuchal ineffectuality which was the product of Hopkins's constant confrontation with unmanageable tasks is apparent in the oft-quoted passage from

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.165.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.166.

Liverpool of October 26<sup>th</sup> 1880: “one is so fagged, so harried and galled up and down. And the drunk go on drinking, the filthy, as the scripture says, are filthy still: human nature is so inveterate.”<sup>43</sup> Unable to change the chronic vices of those under his care, Hopkins was never fully successful in his endeavours and remained “a lonely began”—not even a beginning which is necessarily followed by a consequence, but a being that had achieved absolutely nothing.<sup>44</sup>

To Hopkins, the distance from the social community was both desirable and hateful—Ireland, his perceived exile, constituted a “third remove” (l. 9-10), as he wrote in “To seem the stranger lies my lot” (1885), from his worldly core and impeded necessary identification with others. Seclusion from the worldly, however, was necessary to the cultivation of his interiority through which he could “give and get” “kind love” (l.10). At the ultimate remove from the world, such as in retreats, Hopkins was the most able to enjoy his life, as we see in “The Habit of Perfection” (1866):<sup>45</sup>

Elected silence, sing to me  
And beat upon my whorled ear,  
Pipe me to pastures still and be  
The music that I care to hear (l.1-4).

This poem from his pre-conversion days demonstrates Hopkins’s need for silent meditation during periods of spiritual and emotional turmoil and the healing powers of deliberate withdrawal from the world. The absence of sound was as pleasant and as real as music because the speaker had “elected” it. Sheltered from work-related pressures as well as homoerotic temptations, Hopkins thrived on the calm and silence he experienced when in deep religious thought. This was the spiritual home from which he drew emotional strength.

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<sup>43</sup> Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> Mackenzie, ed., *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite the very tiring activity of daylong prayer, which was common during the years of training and which reoccurred periodically during the retreats he went on throughout his life, Hopkins reported genuine happiness when he was able to lead a life of the mind. On 12/17 October 1881, during his tertianship in Roehampton, he wrote to his friend Dixon:

My mind is here more at peace than it has ever been and I would gladly live all my life, if it were so to be, in as great or a greater seclusion from the world and be busied only with God. But in the midst of outward occupation not only the mind is drawn away from God, which may be at the call of duty and be God's will, but unhappily the will too is entangled, worldly interests freshen, and worldly ambitions revive. The man who in the world is as dead to the world as if he were buried in the cloister is already a saint. But this is our ideal...<sup>46</sup>

Hopkins had joined the Jesuits in order to be "dead to the world" but his mission work forced him to engage with the social community very closely. He frequently resented these tasks, particularly the years as a professor of Greek at University College Dublin (1884-1889). Hopkins shared Ruskin's moral obligation to represent visual reality through writing and sketching and located his real task in the observation of nature.

### **The 1860s: "Silencing" the Eye**

Because Hopkins had abnegated his body and renounced his ability to travel, his eye represented his principal connection to the external world. Like the body's, the eye's movements needed to be closely monitored as, for Hopkins, both were equally capable of sinful sexual behaviour. As I have explained, Hopkins began writing confession notes (March 1865-January 1866) when he struggled to contain his amorous feelings for Dolben. The initial attempts to control his gaze that these notes display can be seen as the foundation of Hopkins's ontology.

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<sup>46</sup> Roberts, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Prose*, p. 98.

In March 1865, Hopkins began to give confession regularly to Canon Liddon (1829-1890) as well as Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882) at Oxford. Significantly, Hopkins's predominant concern in his confession notes was already his behaviour as an observer, as he self-consciously censored his visual intake. Norman H. Mackenzie has proposed that in order to make the confession as beneficial as possible, Hopkins may have responded to a set of questions from a manual, such as *Questions for Self-Examination: For Common Use*.<sup>47</sup> "Have I sought to be noticed, especially by the opposite sex? Have I taken undue notice of them? Not 'made a covenant' with mine eyes?"<sup>48</sup> The religious framework Hopkins chose for his life thus encouraged the "silencing" immobilisation of the eye by portraying gazing at humans as lustful and inappropriate, which motivated him to monitor his physical attraction to men even more carefully and candidly. Mackenzie has claimed that through such measures, "Hopkins tried to catch at the earliest stage any natural physical impulses that might cripple his ambition to develop to their highest degree his mental and spiritual capacities."<sup>49</sup> By conscientiously noting down these visual "sins" and presenting them at confession, Hopkins tried to not only to silence but to purge these emotions.

We can see that Hopkins sought to repress his homosexual desires through controlling his visual intake because the confession notes portray the eye as directly corresponding to the (physical) emotions. Hopkins attempted to impede his active eye from protruding into forbidden territories, as can be seen in a multitude of confession notes: "looking at a face in the theatre" (June 20<sup>th</sup> 1865), "looking at boys, several instances, and foolishness also. Vanity after looking into glass" (July 5<sup>th</sup>), "imprudent looking at organ-boy and other boys" (July 8<sup>th</sup>), "looking at temptations, esp. at

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<sup>47</sup> *Questions for Self-Examination: For Common Use* (London: G.J. Palmer, 32, Little Queen St. Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1861) in Norman H. Mackenzie, ed., *Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Geldart naked.”<sup>50</sup> It is obvious that Hopkins had sexual feelings for these boys, which he perceived as sinful. It is thus conceivable that Hopkins deflected his gaze from the male body onto unthreatening natural objects.

Although homosexuality was at the top of the hierarchy of inappropriate behaviour, it was not the only type of conduct that Hopkins sought to eradicate. In the confession notes, Hopkins tended to reproach himself for lacking self-control generally, which resulted in “inattentions at morning chapel” (March 25<sup>th</sup> 1865), “speaking impertinently to Liddon (about Jowett)” (March 26<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>), or “laziness in getting up” (April 5<sup>th</sup>).<sup>51</sup> Hopkins’s standards of behaviour became startlingly high as he aimed to attain his ascetic ideal.

Self-control was essential to Hopkins’s existence, because the senses, when unmonitored, threatened to take over and destroy his entire being. The following, oft-quoted, entry of January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1866 was written several months before Hopkins committed himself to the ascetic life of a Catholic novice. It shows that, following the shock of his attraction for Dolben, Hopkins was determined to abstain from unnecessary pleasure and to force himself to keep his focus on his religious duties:

For Lent. No pudding on Sundays. No tea except if to keep me awake and then without sugar. Meat only once a day. No verses in Passion Week or on Fridays. Not to sit in armchair except can work in no other way. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday bread and water.<sup>52</sup>

Although this entry reflects a particularly stern attitude because it addresses Lent, it seems that Hopkins attempted to purify his emotions by pushing his body to the limits of endurance. Hopkins’s confession notes show that he looked to Catholicism to acquire techniques by which to strengthen his will power and maintain control over the senses. This argument confirms Norman Mackenzie’s suggestion that:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 169, 173, 174.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 154, 155, 156.

<sup>52</sup> Humphrey House, ed., *The Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 53.



the unruliness of [Hopkins's] passions was the principal hidden emotional spur to his determination to devote his whole being to God, and for his choice of the Order reputed to be the most exacting, the Jesuits. Certainly his decision against the life of a painter was associated with his resolve to avoid a dangerous 'strain upon the passions.'<sup>53</sup>

Catholicism, and the Jesuits in particular, offered Hopkins an opportunity for complete self-mastery through guaranteed self-effacement in the worldly sense. Even if Hopkins's will had failed to restrain his emotions, his sexual curiosity would have been prostrated by the rigid regime of the Jesuits. Significantly, writing was an integral component in exerting self-control as it increased Hopkins's grasp on reality through the visualisation of abstract ideas. However, because poetry for Hopkins was an expression of sensual experience, he burnt most of his poems in 1868. At this point, the diary became the only immediate extension of the eye, as it had been for Ruskin.

### **“Inscape” and “Instress”**

In order to escape from the temptations of the body, Hopkins sought to tame his gaze through a conscious aversion from the human object to the natural object, which became the only stimulant allowed into his visual consciousness, apart from representations of Christ. Around 1868, Hopkins started validating himself by constructing an ontological system, built on the concepts of “inscape” and “instress,” which allowed him to unite the human being, all natural objects and God.<sup>54</sup> Hopkins imagined himself as spiritually connected to nature through the eye; with the natural object depending on the observer's attention in order to be realised. Although he positioned himself as a passive observer within this interactive system, he integrated himself as a necessary part of its functioning.

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<sup>53</sup> Mackenzie, ed., *Early Poetic Manuscripts and Note-books of Gerard Manley Hopkins in Facsimile*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Hopkins first used these terms in his notes on Parmenides in 1868.

The turn towards nature can be seen as a deliberate movement away from dangerous human beauty into the safe realm of natural shapes. Rebecca Boggs has suggested that due to the impurity of the act of observing human objects, Hopkins devoted his meticulous poetic mind to the portrayal of nature: “Sensual perceptions can be trusted to yield moral truths only when objects in nature are the focus of perception; seeing and admiring other human beings, in contrast, is fraught with difficulties.”<sup>55</sup> Sensuality being the “enemy,” Hopkins can indeed be seen to hide behind the God-given responsibility of the observer to concentrate on the natural world, which is in need of human contemplation.<sup>56</sup>

This ontological system was essential to Hopkins’s self-fashioning because it determined the way he positioned himself in the world throughout his life. According to philosopher J.E. Malpas, an individual’s identity is formed by the narrative framework with which he or she interprets the events of his or her life and which motivates his or her actions: “The construction and reconstruction of our selves in the stories we tell ourselves or that we employ in understanding ourselves—both with respect to our pasts and our futures—is integral in the very content and identity of our attitudes and actions.”<sup>57</sup> Through animating his physical surroundings, Hopkins established himself as the centre of creation around which the natural objects revolved. He was able to legitimise his passion for observation by employing it to praise God. Throughout his work, Hopkins aimed to maintain emotional stability by stressing the connections between all of God’s designs. Although observation without feeling was as unsatisfactory to Hopkins as it was to Ruskin, he rationalised this process through

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<sup>55</sup> Rebecca Boggs, “‘There lives the dearest freshness deep down things:’ Articulating the Distinctions Between Man and the Things of Nature,” *Hopkins Quarterly*, vol. 22 (Summer, 1995), pp. 53-77 (p. 69).

<sup>56</sup> Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life*, p. 114.

<sup>57</sup> J.E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 80.

the neologisms “inscape” and “instress” in order to evade the dangerous, erotic aspect of emotion. The diary played a crucial role in the conventionalisation of these terms on the level of subjective semantics.

Through his gaze, Hopkins sought to protrude into the natural object and gain access to its “inscape,” which J. Hillis Miller has described as “the inner law or pattern which any one oak tree, cloud, or flower shares with similar trees, clouds or flowers.”<sup>58</sup> In Hopkins’s narrative, any natural object belonged to a patterned system, but was ultimately unique in itself. As Walter J. Ong has explained, “the ‘inscape’ of a being is the distinctive controlling energy that makes the being itself and connects it distinctively with all else.”<sup>59</sup> Margaret R. Ellsberg has brilliantly defined “inscape” as “universality and particularity *unified* in a precise identity,” as the form an object or being takes, which makes it recognisable in its individuality.<sup>60</sup> Hilary Fraser has emphasised the direct link between Hopkins’s aestheticism and his religion, which presented nature as a mirror of Christ. Animated natural objects constantly strove to reach as high a level of perfection as possible:

Christ incarnate, the physical manifestation of God, represented for Hopkins, in His selfhood, the pattern, the inscape, to which all created forms aspire. The distinctiveness of certain forms, of certain experiences of beauty, was explained by their resemblance to the uniqueness of Christ’s religious, aesthetic, and poetic experience alike. Christ represented the ultimate inscape, and through His Incarnation the principles of perfect physical and moral beauty, love and sacrifice became manifest in the created world.<sup>61</sup>

Christ was thus the corporeal representative for divine perfection; a view which Hopkins designed to remove the dangerous aspects of beauty.<sup>62</sup> Through observing

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<sup>58</sup> Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 293.

<sup>59</sup> Ong, *Hopkins, the Self and God*, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Margaret R. Ellsberg, *Created to Praise: The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 85.

<sup>61</sup> Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> Jill Muller explains that “Imminent in all phenomena, which are redeemed by his presence, Christ was both the ultimate model or pattern for creation and the guarantor for specificity,” *Gerard Manley*

and “inscaping” Christ in and through nature, Hopkins stressed his own resemblance to Christ, which allowed him to sanctify himself as God’s virtuous servant, consciously extinguishing his sexual self.

The term “instress” designated the energy that communicated the inscape of the object/being to the perceiver. Ellsberg has characterised “instress” as the “undercurrent of energy, the inner pressure that holds things up and together and gives them observable intelligibility.”<sup>63</sup> “Instress” thus shaped the object and allowed it to maintain its “inscape,” which made perception and realisation by the observer possible. Beyond that, however, as Ong has argued, “instress” denominated the observer’s reaction: “‘Instress’ is the action that takes place when the inscape of a given being fuses itself in a given human consciousness in contact at a given moment with the being.” The “instress” of an object/being entered the consciousness of the perceiving other, which then allowed the “inscape” to be realised. Thanks to these definitions, Hopkins could consolidate his belief into the interconnectedness of all of God’s creations.

“Inscaping” and “instress” emphasise the interdependence between the observer and the observed, opposing community to individualism and competition. These metaphors helped Hopkins to counteract his fundamental loneliness, as, through his ontological narrative, he reacted fervently against “atomism,” both in science and society.<sup>64</sup> Hopkins had to believe in the existence of an essence within the observed

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*Hopkins and Victorian Catholicism: A Heart in Hiding*, p. 75. All natural objects were thus unique and bore resemblance to Christ.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> On Hopkins and atomism, see Daniel Brown, *Hopkins’s Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 201. Margaret R. Somers in her article “Deconstructing and Reconstructing Class Formation Theory” has stressed the crucial role of ontological narratives in determining the “social actor’s” self-definition through the “stories [that individuals use] to make sense of—indeed to act in—their lives. [...] Locating ourselves in narratives endows us with identities, however multiple, ambiguous, ephemeral or conflicting they may be.” In John R. Hall, ed., *Reworking Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 84.

object so that it could carry the meaning he projected upon it and signify him in turn as a vital part of creation. He considered “inscape” to be god-given, which negated the

atomist[s’] sense [that] the properties of an object such as the consecrated bread, were caused by the atoms of which it was composed; therefore what appeared as bread had to be bread, and not the flesh of God as the doctrine of transubstantiation required.<sup>65</sup>

Conversely, for Hopkins, the external aspect of natural objects confirmed, rather than denied, the existence of a divine creator, as can be seen in this oft-quoted entry from his diary of May 18<sup>th</sup> 1870: “I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it.”<sup>66</sup> Hopkins’s observations of nature were thus affirmations of his faith, as, in his narrative, God was embodied in his creations.

### **The Passive Observer in Hopkins’s Diary**

Starting with his early poetry, Hopkins adopted the stance of the receiver of impressions in order to guarantee his emotional purity. However, even at this early stage in his religious career, Hopkins was not altogether comfortable with the questionable masculinity which resulted from considering himself as an “all-accepting fixèd eye” (l. 6).<sup>67</sup> Hopkins therefore appointed himself as the signifying centre to the

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<sup>65</sup> William E. Burns, *The Scientific Revolution: An Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>67</sup> Mackenzie, ed., *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 86. The motionlessness of the observer suggests a passive attitude; an openness waiting to be filled by visual stimuli. His poem “The Alchemist in the City,” of May 1865, reflects an intense fascination with nature and the strong desire to visually possess the passing scenarios that the natural world presents to the observer:

My window shows the travelling clouds,  
Leaves spent, new seasons, alter’d sky,  
The making and melting crowds:  
The whole world passes; I stand by (1-4).

The window represents the boundary between the inside, the realm in which the alchemist dwells, and the outside, the place of activity and interaction. The observer is divorced from the ever-changing associations he watches; he is the incapacitated “by-stander,” “powerless” and “lame” (l.20) when confronted with fellow humans. Although not necessarily autobiographical, the poem reveals a slight disgust with the passivity and social feebleness of the “alchemist-artist,” in contrast to what William B. Thesing has called the “accomplishment and the expenditure of creative energy” of the crowd.<sup>67</sup> The

natural world in a Platonic fashion, as his poem “The Earth and Heaven so Little Known” of 1866 shows: “I am the midst of every zone/And justify the East and West” (l. 1-4), which stresses the human being’s active power to organise and possess nature by linguistic and scientific categorisation. Hopkins’s identity as an observer was divided between his role as an independent agent seeking out fascinating sights in a Ruskinian fashion, gratifying nature’s need to be seen, and the unjudging, charitable and endlessly receptive spectator of the natural world.

Although Hopkins selected objects to which to devote his attention, in his diary, he portrayed himself as an observer who waited for the natural objects to present themselves to his gaze and who graciously tended to the dynamic vibrancy of a world in constant movement. He constructed himself as the realiser of “inscapes,” denying his freedom of choice in an effort to silence the selfish pleasure inherent in the observational process. Heuser has proposed that, for Hopkins, “the observer, the fixed register of sense-impressions, became the focus both of reception, acceptance, and of quickening participation.”<sup>68</sup> In the figure of the observer, Hopkins tried to reconcile his conflicting desires: his love of beauty, his need for divine and human affection and the pleasure he took in describing and signifying his external environment.

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stagnation inherent in observation that did not lead to creative output recalls the image of the eunuch so prevalent in Hopkins’s work.

<sup>68</sup> Alan Heuser, *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 16. The static attitude of the poet can be seen to correspond to the means of artistic representation that were available in the nineteenth century. Given that Hopkins, as many nineteenth-century observers considered unrecorded visual experience to be wasted, it is important to remark on the reality of such representation, as Jonathan Crary has done. The equipment required by early photography and the cumbersome easels of the landscape painter problematised observations, tying the artist physically to one spot. Crary accentuates that observation in the nineteenth-century was a serious commitment: “*Observare* means ‘to conform one’s action, to comply with,’ as in observing rules, codes, regulations, and practices. Though obviously one who sees, an observer is more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.” Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1991), p. 6.

The diaristic record of Hopkins's trip to Switzerland, which he undertook in the summer of 1868, presents him as a static onlooker, observing a quickly changing landscape:

Walked up the valley of the Aar, sallow-coloured and torrent, to the Grimsel. The heights bounding the valley soon became a mingle of lilac and green, the first the colour of the rock, the other the grass crestings, and seemed to group above in crops and rounded buttresses, yet to be cut sharp in horizontal or leaning planes below.<sup>69</sup>

Hopkins stressed his agency as an observer when he included himself in the scene, explained his route and stressed the pains it took to position himself as the spectator of this magnificent panorama. However, Hopkins presented the changing colours of the landscape in a way that recalls the motion picture, or the lighting of the stage in a theatre: dazzling mixtures of lilac and green, moving across the frame of his focus, accentuating the dizzying height of the mountains. Nature was established as an animated agent eager to impress the observer, inviting and accommodating the latter's gaze by its visual infrastructure: "at times the valley opened in *cirques*, amphitheatres."<sup>70</sup>

In order to avert an existence as a completely passive, unmanly observer, Hopkins elevated himself to the position of an active signifier of the external world, insisting on his environment's need for his input. For instance, on July 31<sup>st</sup> 1868, when visiting the cathedral in Geneva, Hopkins was confronted with an inscape that time impeded him from tending to: "the mouldings too of two arches near the door we came in by were very beautiful and elaborate and wanted long study, which I could not give."<sup>71</sup> The structure "wanted" Hopkins's complete attention, which denotes that, without his meaning-giving gaze, its existence was futile. Hopkins's personal

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<sup>69</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

investment was essential to the communication between subject and object and absolutely necessary to realising “inscape.”

Hopkins’s explanation of dreams confirms this idea that, for him, the eye functioned independently of the analytical mind. When on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1869, tired Hopkins “shut [his] eyes” during Father Rector’s instructions, he “began to dream.”<sup>72</sup> He identified these “impressions of sight” as “dead,” meaning that the mind did not substantiate them into fully developed visual images, “either because you cannot make them out or because they were perceived across other more engrossing thoughts, [the mind] has made nothing of [them] and brought [them] into no scaping.”<sup>73</sup> Catherine Phillips has remarked that in the diary manuscript, Hopkins had initially written “inscaping” and then struck through the “in.”<sup>74</sup> This corrective move seems indicative of Hopkins’s desire to differentiate between complete images and those that remained fragmentary because, as Phillips holds, the latter “[lacked] a relation to other things, or meaningful context.”<sup>75</sup> These perceptions entered the “all-accepting eye” but were not duly registered by the observer, who consequently was unable to realise the “inscapes” of the objects that had forced themselves into the space “between our eyelids and our eyes.”<sup>76</sup> Only in dreams could these spectral images be revived: “you cannot make them at will when awake, for the very effort and advertence would be destructive to them.”<sup>77</sup> Dreams are seen to be revived imprints of the visual impressions that the eye admitted during the day: “The eye in its sane waking office kens only impressions brought in from without, that is to say either from beyond the body or from the body itself produced upon the dark field of the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 245.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 127.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 126.



eyelids.”<sup>78</sup> Scapes penetrated Hopkins’s consciousness through the opening of the eye, but when the observer’s mind was oblivious to this process, these objects remained unsignified. By thus stressing the observed object’s absolute dependence on his wholehearted acknowledgment, Hopkins established himself as the authority around whom nature revolved.

Accordingly, Hopkins interpreted his own amazement with natural splendour as his reaction to nature’s active efforts to capture his gaze. When in autumn 1869, Hopkins looked at a “fine sunset [...] from the upstairs windows,” he felt enraptured by nature’s luminous plenitude:

My eye was suddenly caught by the scaping of the leaves that grow in allies and avenues: I noticed it first in an elm and then in limes. They fall from the two sides of the branch or spray in two marked planes which meet at a right angle or more. This comes from the endeavour to catch the light on either side, which falls left and right but not all round.<sup>79</sup>

Significantly, Hopkins’s “eye” became aware of the spectacular appearance of the leaves before his “I” did, which indicates that he considered his visual consciousness to precede his analytical mind. Observation thus consisted of the mental process of interpreting visual stimuli. Hopkins again presented himself as having little control over the scapes of the leaves that took control over his eye and ensnared him like lianas. Their “endeavour” to “catch the light” presupposed a desire to shine in order to alert the attention of the perceiver and be inscaped.

Hopkins’s construct of himself as observer was thus a utopian endeavour to simultaneously “silence” his eye and insist on its essential role as a signifier. He sought to distance himself from the guilty pleasure inherent in observation by stressing that natural objects entreated him to “inscape” them and that by doing so he followed God’s will, not his own. In his diary, Hopkins sought to realise his own

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

“inscape” by including himself into the scenes he described and by observing himself in the process of observation. The diary helped Hopkins to strengthen his faith in the indispensability of his input in creation, which allowed him to consolidate the identity he had fashioned through self-signification.

### **The 1870s**

This decade of Hopkins’s life comprised seven of the nine years of training before his ordination as priest in September 1877. As I have explained in my section on Hopkins’s religious career, these years were characterised by frequent, unannounced changes in location and assignment. Hopkins sought to counteract his lack of control over his geographical environment and his inability to create a sense of “rootedness” within a stable home by imagining nature as a nourishing, helpful instance.<sup>80</sup> He not only channelled his sexual energies by focussing his eye on natural objects that were not sexually charged, but, through increased personification, he also perceived these objects as independent agents which provided him with guidance. So far, for Hopkins the process of observation had consisted of the human subject signifying the natural object. In the 1870s, however, Hopkins increasingly anthropomorphised his environment and demonstrated an eagerness to depict this “inscaping” interaction in its fullness, by not only rendering the spectacle that nature staged in order to attract his gaze, but also including his own perspective and specifying his exact position in this process more frequently. This need to be “inscaped” by nature can be interpreted

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<sup>80</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, in his article “Rootedness Versus Sense of Place,” *Landscape*, vol. 24 (1980), pp. 3-8, has differentiated between “rootedness,” which denominates “being completely at home—that is, unreflectively secure and comfortable in a particular locality” (p. 5) and “sense of place,” which “implies a certain distance between self and place that allows the self to appreciate a place” (p. 4). Hopkins never felt rooted, which was arguably the product of his extremely self-conscious experience of place.

as a response to loneliness and lack of control and choice, which impeded Hopkins from forming a sense of belonging.

Hopkins's insistence on his inclusion in the world through his religio-aesthetic ontology can be seen to have become more pronounced as he was sent across the country by his superiors. Since entering the Jesuit order in 1868, Hopkins studied in Roehampton, Stonyhurst and St. Beuno's in Northern Wales. He taught at Mount St. Mary's near Sheffield, went back to Stonyhurst and then was sent to Farm Street, Mayfair (1877-78). Further placements included St. Aloysius at Oxford (1878-79) and Bedford Leigh near Manchester (1879, October-December).

The diaries until 1875 still display countless personifications of natural elements, such as the attribution of agency to the wind operating the clouds in March 1870: "in the Park in the afternoon, the wind was driving little clouds of snow-dust which caught the sun as they rose and delightfully took the eyes."<sup>81</sup> In this entry, Hopkins bestowed consciousness upon the clouds, which are pushed into a favourable light in order to conquer the observer's eye.

Arguably, Hopkins attempted to render his isolation less hostile by assigning human qualities to natural objects and imbuing them with agency. Through this consistent anthropomorphism, the "inscaping" communication resembled actual human interaction to a greater degree if Hopkins imagined the contemplated natural objects to be infused by consciousness. On March 17<sup>th</sup> 1871, for instance, he reported that:

The sycomores [sic] are quite the earliest trees out: some have been fully out some days (April 15). The behaviour of the opening clusters is very beautiful and when fully opened not the single leaves but the whole tuft is strongly templed like the belly of a drum or bell.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.142.

Mary Ellen Bellanca has argued that “the journal can [...] be read as a prose text in the tradition of British nature diaries.”<sup>83</sup> Although the inclusion of the date in this entry and the engaged description of the growing process demonstrates Hopkins’s interest in natural history and scientific observation, he did not write in the naturalist tradition.<sup>84</sup> Hopkins embraced the re-population of nature in the spring because nature provided him with the sense of being needed; he was not purely interested in form. Similarly, his interest in patterns was intended to produce a sense of interconnectedness that was opposed to scientific atomism. The “behaviour” was “beautiful” because it translated God’s presence, not merely because it was aesthetically pleasing and scientifically interesting. Thus, for Hopkins, observation should be concerned with a plant’s “successive sidings of one inscape,” as can be seen in the respectful attention he devoted to the “behaviour” of the flag flower on June 13<sup>th</sup> 1871.<sup>85</sup> The observed object thus deserves earnest consideration, as can be seen in this entry of May 9<sup>th</sup> 1871: “A simple behaviour of the cloudscape I have not realized before.”<sup>86</sup> Meteorological forces are similarly attributed consciousness which heightens Hopkins’s responsibility to “realize” their “inscapes.” Although created by God, the clouds are seen as self-directed beings, again looking to be completed by the inscaping observer’s gaze.

Hopkins’s ontological narrative, which was exhibited in and reinforced by his diary, can be seen to compensate for the lack of coherence his life afforded. Until about 1877, his conceptualisation of reality determined his perception of the world

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<sup>83</sup> Mary Ellen Bellanca, *Daybooks of Discovery: Nature Diaries in Britain, 1770-1870* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 200.

<sup>84</sup> Alan Heuser has noted that Hopkins adopted the scientific observation style of “visionary literalism,” (*The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 34.), which was comparable to Ruskin’s. Again, it is crucial to stress that Hopkins’s interpretations of his visual intake deliberately averted a godless, rationalistic world view “where stands no host at door or hearth” (“Nondum,” (l. 11), Mackenzie, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 92). Instead, they were an attempt to imbue the world with sanctity and company through narrative.

<sup>85</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 148.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

rather than vice-versa. Geographer D.W. Meinig has stressed the symbolic components of landscape description: “any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads.”<sup>87</sup> In Hopkins’s diary, his immense efforts to find meaning in nature represent a compensation for the home he had renounced, which explains the urgency with which he sought to establish an ontological connection between the observer and the observed. Indeed, as Anthony Mortimer has convincingly argued, Hopkins’s descriptions of nature put across a nervous tension, which translates the poet’s eager anxiety to find “rootedness” in nature: “trees, plants, rocks, clouds, ice, waves, flowers—all appear as in some way stretched, drawn out, strained, under pressure.”<sup>88</sup> Hopkins’s writing was indeed characterised by “intense stylization,” which reveals that he was “doggedly determined to find inscape.”<sup>89</sup> In order to make up for the deprivations of his life, Hopkins looked for the universal in the particular and for the human in the non-human. Mortimer has also remarked that Hopkins’s ontological narrative shaped the way he perceived reality: “what Hopkins describes is not what the eye normally sees, nor even what a trained eye sees, but what a trained eye forces itself to see.”<sup>90</sup> Hopkins needed to scrutinise “the glories of the earth,” in order to feel connected to “the hand that wrought [it] all.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> D.W. Meinig, ed., “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Anthony Mortimer, ed., *The Authentic Cadence: Centennial Essays on Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Fribourg: Fribourg University Press Switzerland, 1992), p. 11.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> Hopkins’s poem “Nondum” (1866), which portrays God as an artist, deals with the simultaneous absence and presence of God. The absence of “an answering voice (l. 2) makes vain the prayers of “the trembling sinner (l. 3).” Despite the God’s lack of response to human effort, the speaker ends on an optimistic note: “Let patience with her chastening wand / Dispel the doubt and dry the tear” (l. 45-46). Significantly, Hopkins vows serene persistence, cowering in passive anticipation: “I’ll wait till morn eternal breaks” (l. 54). According to Norman Mackenzie, his poem displays a defiant attitude to natural theology, claiming that although God may not be visible, he is still involved in creation.

Not only did Hopkins's ontological outlook ascribe a conscious desire to be looked at to natural objects, he also imagined them to return his gaze: "what you look hard at seems to look hard at you."<sup>92</sup> This undated entry of 1871 epitomises Hopkins's utopian hope of overcoming the isolation of the observer and establishing a mutually nourishing relationship with nature. Daniel Brown has read this crucial extract as evidence of Hopkins's belief in the power of the "human percipient" to "bring the expressive potential of nature [...] to *energeia* or [...] 'consciousness' as a manifestation of divine being."<sup>93</sup> I would contend that in this instance, Hopkins took the interactions that he imagined to be at work between subject and object beyond mere "inscaping" as he conceived of a response to his presence. He sought to surmount his basic belief in what William A. Cohen has called the "continuity between the external form of natural objects and their effects on human subjects' interiors," when he invested natural objects with a gaze.<sup>94</sup> This imagined interaction was no longer between the eye and the form of the object, but between the human eye and the (invisible) eye of the object, which created a direct, equal and humanised relationship. Michael Matthew Kaylor has argued that although for Hopkins natural paradises were "sensually suggestive in their flow and foliage, they [lacked] the reciprocity necessary to satisfy fully."<sup>95</sup> I would like to take Kaylor's argument further by noting that Hopkins did not only "realize that without human intimacy even the presence of God amidst his creation [implied] an infelicitous loneliness," but that, by furnishing nature with a gaze, he attempted to simulate the mutual action and reaction he longed for.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 140.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Brown, *Hopkins's Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry*, p. 285.

<sup>94</sup> William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 108.

<sup>95</sup> Kaylor, *Secreted Desires*, p. 172.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

In August 1871, during a visit to Scotland, Hopkins portrayed the realisation of inscape as an act of listening to the imagined voice of the object. In order to establish the communication between object and observer, Hopkins depicted himself at once as a passive openness and a focused lens, as the following two entries show. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, Hopkins deplored that the limited time available to him impeded him from fully connecting to Edinburgh's magnificent architectural objects: "I should like to stay here long enough to let the fine inscape of the Castle rock and of Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crag grow on me."<sup>97</sup> Hopkins exposed himself to the city, waiting for the essence of these monuments to permeate him and to inscribe itself upon him, which denotes that he viewed himself as a blank surface, resembling photographic film. At the same time, Hopkins had to actively think about the objects he contemplated and mentally dig into them in order to penetrate their "inscapes," as his entry of August 28<sup>th</sup>, depicting his visit of Glasgow cathedral, shows: "[I] had not time to study the tracery well."<sup>98</sup> Whereas in the previous entry the objects failed to reach Hopkins and "grow on" him, this entry reveals the importance of Hopkins's knowing appreciation in seeking out—catching—the "inscape" of the building and establishing a dialogue.

Hopkins not only anthropomorphised the "behaviour" of specific objects but also their shape, when he described the "beautiful changes" of a streamer in an undated entry of 1871.<sup>99</sup> Although Hopkins had assigned human qualities to natural and architectural objects for years, in the 1870s the complexity of their imagined consciousness augmented, which demanded more input from, and hence more validation for, the observer: "unless you refresh the mind from time to time you

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<sup>97</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 152.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is.”<sup>100</sup> Objects were no longer easily knowable; instead, the elaborate, ever-changing “inscapes” required greater involvement from the part of the observer. Hopkins perceived his role as an observer as gradually more challenging, because he needed a reliable source of personal validation and longed to feel grounded in nature.

In order to place his trust into nature, Hopkins had to establish its benevolent disposition, which is reflected in his portrayal of natural objects as assisting the observer. For instance, in an undated entry of 1871, Hopkins described a nature walk during which he “saw the water-runs in the sand of unusual delicacy and the broken blots of snow in the dead bents of the hedge-banks I could find a square scaping which helped the eye over another hitherto disordered field of things.”<sup>101</sup> Clearly, nature was an animated whole, an aggregation of flora, fauna and geological features which bent over to accommodate the observer and direct his gaze through the visual field. Hopkins’s eye was “helped” to visually organise the objects it perceived by the very elements composing the scene. Again, in the same year, on March 17<sup>th</sup>, he remarked that “the swelling buds carry [the spraying trees] to a pitch which the eye could not else gather.”<sup>102</sup> Without this “selving” of the natural objects, boosting their “pitch,” the observer would not notice them. Hopkins stressed nature’s need for human inscaping and her cognisance of the human observer in his diary, because he needed to create a balance between the mateless existence of the Jesuit and the longing for physical expression.

Hopkins went so far as to replace his need for human affection by a strong personal identification with nature. He did not merely establish a connection to nature through visual contemplation, but he almost felt physically joined to specific natural

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



objects, through, as Rossana Bonadei has pointed out, a specific fondness for trees, which is well-illustrated in this entry of April 8<sup>th</sup> 1872:<sup>103</sup>

The ashtree growing in the corner of the garden was felled. It was lopped first: I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed anymore.<sup>104</sup>

Hopkins's distress is palpable through the breathless urgency with which the entry is composed; it seems that he sought to write down the painful news as quickly as possible.<sup>105</sup> The word "maim" recalls a permanent human injury, which Hopkins seems to have felt himself when he was overcome by "a great pang." The depth of Hopkins's shock would constitute a typical response to the death of a loved human being, but since he had anthropomorphised nature through cultivating his connection to specific objects, the damage done to a tree harmed Hopkins personally. J. Hillis Miller has similarly argued that, for Hopkins, "natural objects [were] not dead, but [were] sustained from within by a vital pressure," which was "inscape."<sup>106</sup> Hopkins felt honest grief over a felled tree because to him it was a living being, created to worship God, "the world's great landlord, owner of earth and man."<sup>107</sup> The destruction of a natural object that was suffused with God's energy was not only an act of blasphemy, but hurt Hopkins personally, as he spiritually dwelled within the "wild and self-instressed (l. 5)" "homing nature (l. 6)" he was to describe in his poem "The Handsome Heart" of 1879.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Rossana Bonadei, "From Diaries to Poetry: Focusing on the Tree," in P. Bottalla, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Tradition and Innovation* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1991).

<sup>104</sup> Humphrey House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 174.

<sup>105</sup> Allan Heuser has similarly stressed the intense personal involvement that went into Hopkins's observations of nature, which is obvious in this passage: "it was not a mere tree that was felled; it was a creature, an emblem of stemmed oneness testifying to the unity of being between Creator and creation. [...] "power rendered visible." *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins* p. 35.

<sup>106</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "The Creation of Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins," *ELH*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Dec., 1955), pp. 293-319 (p.301).

<sup>107</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 283; January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1880 in Liverpool.

<sup>108</sup> Mackenzie, ed., *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 158.

In his descriptions of nature, Hopkins, more consistently than in the 1860s, included his personal point of view, which can be seen as an attempt to overcome the irreconcilable gap between the observer and the object. Hopkins yearned for inclusion into the natural realm, but, as his diary shows, he also longed to be perceived by a human other and to avoid the dangers of eunuchal self-inscaping. By indicating the angle from which he observed specific natural scenes, Hopkins made it possible for an imagined other to relive his experience, as these entries show: “A lunar halo—I looked at it from the upstairs bathroom” on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1872; or “With Wm. Kerr, who took me up a hill behind ours (ours is Mynefyr), a furze-grown and heathy hill, from which I could look round the whole country, up the valley towards Ruthin and down to the sea” on September 6<sup>th</sup> 1874.<sup>109</sup> The precise standpoint offered an opportunity for identification to a possible reader of the diary, thus universalising Hopkins’s very private experience.

Despite his muted longing for a human companion, Hopkins was never able to reconcile his experience of nature and the presence of a human being, which to him was an annoying distraction interrupting the sacred communication between the object and the observer. Hopkins first mentioned this dislike of human company during his trip to Switzerland in 1868, when he insisted that solitude was a prerequisite for inscaping and complained that “even with one companion ecstasy is almost banished: you want to be alone and to feel that, and leisure—all pressure taken off.”<sup>110</sup> Hopkins could only mentally integrate himself into creation during solitary contemplation when the human element was blocked out. Hopkins’s diary entry of December 12<sup>th</sup> 1872 repeats the irony that he felt himself to be incomplete when in company: “I saw the inscape though freshly, as if my eye were still growing, though

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<sup>109</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pp. 158, 210.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

with a companion the eye and ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come.”<sup>111</sup> It seems that the human companion scared “instress” away—both the natural object and Hopkins were incapable of the deep connection that the realisation of “inscape” necessitated.

The diary can be seen as an attempt to substantiate the “inscaping” communication, which, through the mental revisitation of natural or architectural objects, represented a magnification of “inscape” through writing. The ekphrastic transmutation of visual experience into a written record helped Hopkins gain control over his responsibilities as an observer, as it prolonged the communication between object and observer and made it permanent. The following entry of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1874 shows that the diary represented a channel for Hopkins’s pleasurable emotions as well as a guarantor that this (legitimate) pleasure could be maintained:

My eye was struck by such a sense of green in the tufts and pashes of grass, with purple shadow thrown back on the dry mould behind them, as I do not remember ever to have been exceeded in looking at green grass. I marked this down on a slip of paper at the time, because the eye for colour, rather than the zest in the mind, seems to weaken with years, but now the paper is mislaid.<sup>112</sup>

Hopkins’s immediate, almost instinctive, reaction to represent the experienced luminosity on paper can be seen as an effort to complement the bodily deficiencies of the observing eye “[weakening] with years” that Hopkins expected. The “slip of paper” had been lost, so Hopkins compensated for the consequent loss of memory by entering the experience into his diary and thus making it durable. This entry is a rare case in which Hopkins simply described his observations and actions and did not poeticise either, as he did in most of his diary records. Here, Hopkins neglected to transmute the visual into the verbal, which perhaps announced his increasing realisation that he had “[overtrusted] the magic of words,” to cite Jeffrey B. Loomis’s

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

analysis of Hopkins's poem "The Lantern out of Doors."<sup>113</sup> In this instance, Hopkins did not seem to feel restricted by the boundaries of the verbally expressible, because he did not even attempt to specify the shades of green and purple through ekphrastic metaphorisation. We see however, that for Hopkins, as for Ruskin, the process of perception was not complete unless written or pictorial representation had occurred. Through this necessity to "'catch' one moment of static vision" and possess it, as Heuser has noted, the diary acquired the status of materialised memory, which Hopkins called his "treasury of explored beauty."<sup>114</sup>

Hopkins frequently recreated his experiences of nature walks after a considerable lapse of time and even if the precise memory was by then lacking, he insisted on retaining the remaining impressions. This is evident in this entry from August 14<sup>th</sup> 1874, which depicts Hopkins's recollections of Little Haldon, near Dartmoor: "I have forgotten even now much but this was a very beautiful sight."<sup>115</sup> The wish to acknowledge even what had been forgotten, and was therefore absent, recalls Hopkins's descriptions of the Little Matterhorn of 1868, is indicative of a strong desire for control. The same aspiration to possess his experience, even as it had already fled, is evident in the entry from the following day, August 15<sup>th</sup>: "Exeter Cathedral. [...] Some notes to remember it by."<sup>116</sup> Presumably, Hopkins could not transcribe the notes for lack of time, but still insisted on briefly mentioning the experience in his diary and adding the comforting reassurance that some notes commemorating the event existed. The diary as a recording device was thus superior

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<sup>113</sup> Jeffrey B. Loomis, *Dayspring in Darkness: Sacrament in Hopkins* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988), p. 70.

<sup>114</sup> Heuser, *The Shaping Vision of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 14; Letter to Baillie of July 10<sup>th</sup> 1863; Abbott, ed., *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 202.

<sup>115</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 202.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

to flimsy notes, whose immediacy could only be given the status of memory by inscription.

For Hopkins, writing lent permanence and depth to the observer's perceptions and reinforced the dutiful engagement with God's creations. As Rebecca Boggs has argued, "Hopkins [wished] to seize the moment when man [was] at the height of his moral power and purity rather than of his sensual and sexual prowess."<sup>117</sup> The diary's almost exclusive focus on natural phenomena is thus representative of Hopkins's desire for moral purity, using the ontological metaphors "inscape" and "instress" for mediated, but never direct, personal gratification.

### **1875: The Silence of the Diary**

Hopkins's last extant diary ends in February 1875 and we cannot be sure whether he kept similar records of his life after that. As I have shown in the previous section, both Hopkins's deeply felt need to inscribe his visual experience and affirm his religio-aesthetic ontology through his diary indicate that he was likely to have continued this habit. Nevertheless, as his decision to burn (most of) his poems in 1868 proves, Hopkins was prone to drastic changes of mind. The fact that in December 1875, Hopkins, after seven years of silence, composed his ode "The Wreck of the Deutschland" seems unrelated to the abandonment of the diary as ten months elapsed between these events. A possible reason for ceasing to keep a diary could be that Hopkins may have begun to sense the "danger of self-preoccupation," to use Saville's phrase, which would lead to the crisis of the 1880s.<sup>118</sup> Although it is impossible to determine the exact reason why Hopkins did not maintain his diary habit, it is an undeniable fact that the many distractions of his life as a priest (ordained in 1877) did

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<sup>117</sup> Rebecca Boggs, "'There lives the dearest freshness deep down things:': Articulating the Distinctions Between Man and the Things of Nature," p. 68.

<sup>118</sup> Saville, *A Queer Chivalry*, p. 75.

not allow for the extensive observations of nature that Hopkins had been used to in the previous years and thus made him unable to sustain his ontology. In addition, as the gesture of taking up poetry again, as well as the explicit discussions of the possibilities for publication in his letters indicate, Hopkins began to crave the impossible wider acknowledgment of his work which fuelled the despair of the 1880s.

The years following 1875 were characterised by growing discontent, which, like biographer Norman White, I shall trace to the unpleasant nature of Hopkins's ever-changing environment, over which he had no control.<sup>119</sup> Morally obligated to "carry on work for which he had no talent or inclination," Hopkins was forced to invest most of his physical and mental strength into the professional requirements of the priesthood.<sup>120</sup> Although he had wished to channel his homosexual desires by a focus on legitimate natural beauty, he had never coveted a life that was devoid of pleasure altogether. The lack of free time that this role afforded and the uninspiring surroundings of his external environment—with the exception of Oxford, Stonyhurst, and Roehampton—can account for the diminishing ontological grounding that Hopkins demonstrates in his letters and poems during the last fifteen years of his life. Only on retreats was Hopkins able to re-connect with the core of his ontology, as the absence of worldly distractions was the prerequisite for upholding his ascetic ideals.

Hopkins's deep connection with the natural world suffered enormously from the frequent moves he had to undertake, to the point that it transformed his ontological outlook from forced optimism to fatalistic pessimism. Hopkins confirms philosopher J.E. Malpas's thesis that: "the structure of the mind, and of mental

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<sup>119</sup> Douglas Richard Letson and Michael W. Higgins *The Jesuit Mystique* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1995) have explained that finding a place for Hopkins was a difficult task for his Jesuit superiors: "Hopkins didn't make sense; his poetic genius was suspect. [...] Hopkins's delicate sensibility, refined instinct and generally distracted manner prevented him from making a smooth transition to ordinary parochial and communal life" (p.194).

<sup>120</sup> White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 320.

content, cannot [...] be severed from the structure of the world in which the subject is necessarily located.”<sup>121</sup> For Hopkins the natural world had provided a resource which he moulded into his ontology and the absence of such inspiration aggravated his isolation and powerlessness; the very condition he had longed to escape from when he devoted his life to religion.

As we have seen, nature provided an affirmation for Hopkins’s faith and his inability to tap into this source of signification can be held accountable for his crisis of faith. This again reflects Malpas’s insistence on the interdependence of space and subjectivity: “Place is [...] that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established—place is not founded *on* subjectivity, but is rather that *on which* subjectivity is founded.”<sup>122</sup> The individual’s self-concept is formed in relation to the spatial limitations and privileges he or she encounters that represent the necessary other against which individuality takes shape. White supports this idea when arguing that “[Hopkins] reacted most constantly to place: while the Welsh countryside charged his optimistic spirits, the town of Rhyl provoked his disgust at Man.”<sup>123</sup> Like Ruskin, Hopkins was revolted by the pollution and the careless treatment of nature that came with industrial modernity.

Starting in 1877, with his placement at Mount St Mary’s College in Chesterfield near Sheffield (1877-78), the focus of Hopkins’s life switched from study and observation to teaching and community work. His letters began to resemble George Gissing’s in that they were characterised by complaints over the impediments to creativity posed by the obligation to work. As White has explained, in 1877, Hopkins’s

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<sup>121</sup> J.E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, p. 100.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>123</sup> White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 288.

daily theological work and [his final] examinations [were] always mentioned in Hopkins's letters in connection with emotions of worry, tiredness, and tension; not once during the year did he write enthusiastically about his professional studies. He could focus his mind and emotions on nature only when he was off-duty, on half-days, Blandykes, and vacations, officially let loose from work.<sup>124</sup>

Work presented a great distraction to the mental focus that Hopkins's observational process necessitated. Hopkins neglected the responsibility he felt towards the natural world: "the world is full of things and events, phenomena of all sorts, that go without notice, go unwitnessed."<sup>125</sup> Although he did not explicitly express guilt over the reduced attention he was able to devote to nature, work had a destabilising effect on Hopkins's self-concept because he no longer received validation from the communication between object and observer.

Although Hopkins still created magnificent poetry, his lack of agency and his dissatisfaction with the locations of his appointments stifled his imaginative impulse. St Mary's, for instance, offered no opportunities to conduct excursions into nature. Hopkins deplored that "the air [was] never once clear in this country, not to see distances as in Wales or at Hampstead."<sup>126</sup> The claustrophobic atmosphere rendered "inscaping" impossible and threw Hopkins back upon himself, which set the premises for the self-inscaping distress of the 1880s. With life "dank as ditch-water" and the industrial environment lacking inspiration, Hopkins's "muse [had] turned utterly sullen in the Sheffield smoke-ridden air and [he] had not written a line till the foundering of the Eurydice the other day."<sup>127</sup> Hopkins's poetic creations (and until 1875 his diary) represented linguistic vents that permitted him to channel his physical and mental passions through indirect, stylised and therefore ascetic expression.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp. 288-89.

<sup>125</sup> Roberts, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Prose*, p. 70; Letter to Dixon of June 13<sup>th</sup> 1878 at Stonyhurst.

<sup>126</sup> Abbott, ed., *Further Letters*, p. 143.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 47; February 25<sup>th</sup> 1878; p. 48; April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1878.



Obviously, uninspiring places and the constant duty to work did not arouse Hopkins's need to process reality in poetic form.

The absence in Hopkins's life of what J. Douglas Porteous has called the "satisfactions" provided by the possessive "[assertion] of exclusive jurisdiction over physical space" can thus be seen as the cause of Hopkins's despair.<sup>128</sup> Porteous has convincingly argued that "the personalization of space is an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation. The defense of space is the means by which stimulation is achieved and security assured."<sup>129</sup> Subjecting himself to the vows of poverty and chastity, Hopkins abjured any form of worldly possession or deep emotional attachment and thus forever abandoned claims to personal space and a worldly identity. Hopkins did not only suffer from this lack of territorial authority, but he also lamented the related impossibility to cultivate his identity as a poet.

In the late 1870s, Hopkins felt the emasculating futility of producing poetry for the "banal company" of the self, to use Saville's term, and he increasingly demonstrated interest in publishing his work. However, any act of poetic self-assertion was quenched by his unappreciative superiors: "all that we Jesuits publish (even anonymously) must be seen by censors."<sup>130</sup> After both "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and the "The Loss of the Eurydice" had been rejected by publishers, Hopkins was deeply offended when, during his three-month stay in Stonyhurst of 1878, the authorities refused to place his poem "The May Magnificat" in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary. As White has argued, in his letter to Canon Dixon of June 6<sup>th</sup> 1878, Hopkins insisted not only that validation be given to the former's poetic

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<sup>128</sup> J. Douglas Porteous, "Home: the Territorial Core," *Geographical Review*, vol. 66, no. 4 (Oct., 1976), pp. 383-390 (p. 383).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Abbott, ed., *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, p. 200, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1884.

talent, but this letter “is as close as [Hopkins] came to speaking the truth about his own case:”<sup>131</sup>

It is not that I think that a man is really the less happy because he has missed the renown which was his due, but still when this happens it is an evil in itself and a thing which ought not to be and that I deplore, for the good work’s sake rather than the author’s.<sup>132</sup>

White has noted that Hopkins’s “emphasis on the work, rather than the author underlines his chagrin by trying to hide it.”<sup>133</sup> Indeed, in this instance, Hopkins can be seen to have practiced self-effacement whilst asserting himself. Contending that the absence of praise for work of great merit was unnatural and almost morally wrong, Hopkins gave Dixon the encouragement that he himself was craving and thus covertly vindicated his own poetic genius.

Despite his growing desire to communicate with a wider audience, which became all the more accentuated in the 1880s, Hopkins tried to reconcile himself with the reality of forced muteness, as can be seen in his letter to Bridges of February 15<sup>th</sup> 1879:

When I say I do not mean to publish I speak the truth. I have taken and mean to take no step to do so beyond the attempt I made to print my two wrecks in the *Month*. If some one in authority knew of my having some poems printable and suggested my doing it I shd. not refuse, I should be partly, though not altogether, glad. But that is very unlikely. All therefore that I think of doing is to keep my verses together in one place—at present I have not even correct copies—, that, if anyone shd. like, they might be published after my death.

Hopkins felt torn between his desire to be an ascetic saint and a free creative agent. Significantly, he dissimulated his obvious desire for public acclaim by further abnegating his agency and putting an unknown editor in charge of publishing his manuscripts. By preparing his poems for publication, Hopkins adopted the position of the object that needed to be “inscaped” by the “other”—a very emasculating attitude.

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<sup>131</sup> White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 301.

<sup>132</sup> Claude Colleer Abbott, ed., *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> White, *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*, p. 301.

## The 1880s: Poetic Dryness

The 1880s were characterised by an alternation between moments in which Hopkins admitted that his escape from society and the restrictive identities it permitted had led to endless disappointment, and instances at which he forced himself to restore his faith. Hopkins's lifelong difficulties to negotiate his masculinity accentuated his feelings of having failed, both as a man and as a poet, which shows that he never freed himself from societal conventions in determining the value of individual. As Saville has held, for Hopkins, his homosexuality was the source of an intense anxiety that went beyond the discomforts of social judgment that Chapter One has described, but that threatened his sanity:

attraction to men was—along with nocturnal emissions and masturbatory pleasure—a manifestation of unrestrained male lust liable to lead to moral degeneracy and even mental decline, hence [Hopkins's] anxious insistence on the need for rigorous self-discipline to cultivate manliness in both comportment and poetic style.<sup>134</sup>

Saville has convincingly argued that Hopkins's extremely crafted poems reflect his efforts to 're-masculinise,' as it were. Through his intricate poetic technique, Hopkins distanced himself from effeminate and unrespectable writing (Chapter One).

Hopkins portrayed himself as a eunuch in several different contexts throughout his writing, which demonstrates the impossibility to be wholly respectable and to live correctly. Indeed, as John D. Rosenberg has suggested, Hopkins's self-conceptualisation as an infertile eunuch "changes from the unjust thwarting of his chances in life to his impotence as a begetter of poems."<sup>135</sup> Like the eunuch, Hopkins was always in some respect incomplete: had he asserted himself and devoted his life to poetry, he would have released the dangerous silenced physical and emotional

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<sup>134</sup> Saville, *A Queer Chivalry*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>135</sup> John D. Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of Past in Victorian Literature* (Anthem Press, 2005), p. 161.

impulses that threatened his very existence. On the other hand, eradicating his love for beauty and his need for ontological groundedness would have robbed Hopkins of all livelihood. Hopkins found himself in a constant crisis of conscience because he could only ever reconcile self-assertion and self-effacement temporarily through an enormous effort of the will and an elaborate ontological construct. We see that any code that Hopkins sought to live up to made him violate another code and that consequently he was caught in a web of mutually exclusive duties.

The artificial harmony that Hopkins's religio-aesthetic system created was fragile, as he could only maintain the illusion of groundedness for as long as he had enough time to observe nature and was placed at a strikingly attractive location. When the reality of Hopkins's life changed in the late 1870s, he acutely felt the lack of "presence" in his life, which was primarily built on abstract foundations. Nature had functioned as a signifying mediator between Hopkins and God but this communication became increasingly difficult. Terry Eagleton has similarly suggested that the cause of Hopkins's depression lay in the tragic recognition that his communication with God was in fact one-sided: "a mere awareness of God's presence behind or beneath Nature [was not] enough; some strenuously subjective, realising response to that presence [was] also demanded."<sup>136</sup> Until the late 1870s, Hopkins had relatively successfully, if arbitrarily, imagined that his role as an observer connected him to God.

When his ontological construct became shaky, Hopkins did not only accuse himself of being unable to keep an optimistic outlook and to remain steadfast in his faith, but he also blamed nature's inadequacy to provide accurate proof of God's magnificence. Hopkins's sermon of October 25<sup>th</sup> 1880 suggests that he attempted to

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<sup>136</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Eagleton Reader*, Stephen Regan, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 33.

locate the discordant element—the “something”—that prevented him from durably achieving ontological groundedness:

But yet [...] providence is imperfect, plainly imperfect. The sun shines too long and withers the harvest, the rain is too heavy and rots it or in floods spreading washes it away; the air and water carry in their currents the poison of disease. [...] everything is full of fault, flaw, imperfection, shortcoming; as many marks as there are of God’s wisdom in providing for us so many marks there may be set against them of more being needed still, of something having made of this very providence a shattered frame and a broken web.<sup>137</sup>

In this sermon Hopkins universalised his personal discontent, forcefully stressing his connectedness to the rest of creation. Hopkins did not blame God for the imperfection of providence or the unstoppable destruction of all worldly life. Instead, he isolated an unnamed force that broke the interconnectedness of God’s creations. While thus affirming the groundedness of the individual in the universe, Hopkins also blamed nature’s flaws for his increasingly insecure relationship with God. Nature did not live up to the narrative framework Hopkins had constructed to provide personal validation through universal groundedness and thus rendered universal communication impossible, which alienated Hopkins further and further from God.

In the 1880s, after years of trying to unite the universe through narrative, Hopkins struggled to view nature and humanity as a commonwealth governed by God the “landlord” and could no longer deny the division between God, divine creations and himself. Hopkins’s religio-aesthetic system had been specifically constructed to circumvent the atomistic view that because all creatures were “unlike” himself and unlike each other, he was alone in the world. In “On Principium sive Fundamentum” (1880), however, Hopkins established his individuality as radically different from “and more important to myself than anything I see.”<sup>138</sup> To himself, Hopkins was the “highest pitched” creature in the universe: “Nothing in nature comes near this

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<sup>137</sup> Christopher Devlin, ed., *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 90.

<sup>138</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 309.

unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own. Nothing explains or resembles it.” This growing conviction that in fact there were no connections between creations and that religio-aesthetic communication was an arbitrary construct of the mind stands in stark contrast to earlier writings in its insistence on the insuperable division between the human, nature and God lies at the root of the “world-sorrow” (l. 6) which had replaced the celebration of the signifying interplay between all creations.

Despite this disillusionment, Hopkins consistently attempted to revive his faith by emphasising the productive interplay between God’s creatures, which, although not responsive to each other, nevertheless ensured the flawless functioning of creation as a whole. In his sermon of probably 1881, Hopkins presented duty as the glue that prevented the universe from disintegrating:

The sun and the stars shining glorify God. They stand where he placed them, they move where he bid them. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God.’ They glorify God, *but they do not know it*. The birds sing to him, the thunder speaks of his terror, the lion is like his strength, the sea is like his greatness, the honey like his sweetness; they are something like him, they make him known, they tell of him, they give him glory, but they do not know they do, they never can, they are brute things that only think of food or think of nothing. This then is poor praise, faint reverence, slight service, dull glory. Nevertheless what they can *they always do*.<sup>139</sup>

God’s creations were still animated but Hopkins no longer attributed consciousness to them. Hopkins absolved nature’s flawed ignorance because all natural objects accomplished the tasks they were designed to do without fail. Hopkins again established himself at the top of nature’s hierarchy as the observer on whom all objects depended for being interwoven into the universal web of communication, which can be seen as an endeavour to counteract his status as a eunuch. Hopkins’s

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

obstinate efforts to ground himself in creation of the early 1880s did not suffice to arrest the intense crisis of faith of 1885.

### **The Crisis of Renunciation: the “Terrible” Sonnets**

The group of autobiographical poems that Hopkins composed in the spring and summer of 1885 bear witness to a personal crisis that was directly tied to the downfall of his religio-aesthetic system. Hopkins at that time no longer possessed the necessary mental and physical strength to uphold his signifying narrative and to view the world in terms that stressed his inclusion in a conscious and caring universe. As Loomis has noted, “a man of even such firm faith as Hopkins’s [needed] more trustworthy bonds with Christic substance on which to rely than visions from the landscape.”<sup>140</sup> Nature, once perceived as deliberately inviting the human gaze, was now presented as an atomised, self-contained entity. Hopkins felt offended by nature’s disinterested and cold attitude; running its course independently of his input. As a consequence of this altered attitude towards nature, disillusioned Hopkins felt caught in a circle of unnatural, suffocating self-inscaping.

Hopkins was obligated to attribute meaning to himself in the absence of a response from the natural environment. Because his self was no longer needed as a beholder, it became both object and subject of its contemplative energies, as J. Hillis Miller has claimed: “Within this vacant creation the self is imprisoned in its own immobile self-consciousness.”<sup>141</sup> The unresponsive “behaviour” of nature, not requiring Hopkins’s “inscaping,” and the consequent silence of God established Hopkins as the ultimate eunuch; an impotent, ineffectual and superfluous creature. As Bell Gale Chevigny has rightly argued, Hopkins viewed his earlier nature poems as

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<sup>140</sup> Loomis, *Sacrament in Hopkins*, p. 133.

<sup>141</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “The Theme of the Disappearance of God in Victorian Poetry,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Mar., 1963), pp. 207-227 (p. 224).

the joint effort between himself and nature, representing “a demonstration, or revelation, of [their] fused gaze.”<sup>142</sup> When this imagined cooperation was obliterated, Hopkins’s “eye on God,” was blinded, “as if he were suddenly deprived of vision.”<sup>143</sup> Thus, not only had his religio-aesthetic foundation collapsed because of emotional desolation; but Hopkins’s depression escalated due to the ontological consequences of this break-down.

Many critics agree that Hopkins’s “terrible” sonnets are the products of loneliness, overwork, alienation from the homeland and spiritual confusion. Whereas Loomis, in accordance with Robert Boyle, has viewed the sonnets to enact the “tormenting pangs of rebirth,” of an individual who is desperately willing “to participate in an archetypal process of Christian sacramental biography,” I on the contrary find the sonnets to represent obstructed conception and impossible birth.<sup>144</sup> As opposed to Loomis’s interpretation of the sonnets as a process of spiritual maturation in which “Hopkins’s sanctified soul is readied for its ultimate dwelling place: Heaven,” I believe that the sonnets represent a continuation of Hopkins’s lifelong struggle to maintain and regain an optimistic outlook, which ends in a forced settlement in which Hopkins accepts, but does not embrace, the reality of inevitable renunciation.

There is no known chronology to the “terrible” sonnets but “No worst there is none” can be seen to present the cause of Hopkins’s spiritual crisis. A confirmation of the fears expressed in “Nondum” (1866), this sonnet expresses the inconsolable misery of an isolated being. In a pained cry, the speaker shouts into the void: “Comforter, where, where is your comforting? / Mary, mother of us, where is your

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<sup>142</sup> Bell Gale Chevigny, “Instress and Devotion in Hopkins,” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Dec., 1965), pp. 141-153 (p. 143).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>144</sup> See Robert Boyle, *Metaphor in Hopkins* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Loomis, pp. 142-136.



relief?” (l. 3-4). The speaker’s desperate pleas to God, “wince and sing” (l. 6) and, without being heard or answered, finally capitulate and “leave off” (l. 7). The consolations of religion are revealed to be futile as God and Mary, the sacred immaculate couple do not offer shelter to the speaker’s lonely soul. He must thus rely on the “mind” (l. 9), but the mental constructs he tries to cling to, which could represent Hopkins’s religio-aesthetic system, resemble the slippery “steep”-ness (l. 12) of “mountain” (l. 9) slopes, which cannot ground the human being ontologically.

Yet, the despair does not escalate in suicide because the speaker of “Carrion Comfort” contains his strong emotion through rigorous self-discipline: “NOT, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee (l. 1).” Despite God’s cruel oppressive rule, the speaker rejects the possibility of ever taking his own life: “I can [...] / not choose not to be” (l. 3-4), which is both an assertion of his masculinity and his compliance to the Jesuit codes of conduct. In a poem that is distinguished by its homosexual imagery, Hopkins addresses the conflict between traditional masculinity and religious servitude and attempts to assess whether self-assertion or self-effacement is more laudable. By “wrestling with (my God!) my God” (l. 14), Hopkins defends his masculine pride, but violates God’s authority, whereas the reverse situation would make him a docile and therefore virtuous disciple of God but dishonour him as a male.

The blatantly autobiographical “To seem the stranger lies my lot” illustrates the multiple forms that Hopkins’s “remove” from the social community took. Hopkins’s “lot” was determined by his sexual orientation, which established him as the eternal “other.” His homosexual nature irreconcilably alienated him from the shelter of the traditional family: “Father and mother dear, / Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near” (l. 2-3). Hopkins’s association with Christ represents the alienating factor: “my peace my parting, sword and strife” (l. 4), who has both soothed

Hopkins's spiritual anguish but enkindled new conflicts of an interpersonal and political nature.

"I wake and feel the fell of dark" epitomises this hell of self-reflexive barrenness in which all communication that could give meaning to Hopkins is obliterated: "My lament/ Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent/ To dearest him that lives alas! away" (l. 6-8). In the absence of a signifying "other," Hopkins discovers that his religio-aesthetic system, which he believed to be "God's most deep decree" (l. 9), requesting him to realise the inscapes of the world, was futile and that in fact no such communication ever existed. Instead, the only reality was Hopkins's bodily self, "bones built in me, flesh filled" (l. 11), which he "inscapes" by observing and materialising it in his poetry. But this "inscaping" brings no religious satisfaction without the contemplation of nature: "my taste was me" (l. 10). The corporeality of his self inspires him with disgust and he likens the secretions of his body "blood brimmed the curse" (l. 11) to the "sweating selves" (l. 14) of the "lost" (l. 13), who are tied to their physical desires and obliged to fulfil them—slaves under their own tyrannical rule. In his self-disgust, Hopkins positions himself with the "simple people," whose self-obsession is "their scourge" and to whom "beauty of inscape [is] unknown and buried away" because they do not "[have] eyes to see it," as he wrote in his diary on July 19<sup>th</sup> 1872.<sup>145</sup> The double-consciousness inherent in self-consummation is a sterile and repetitive process and cannot lead to "inscaping:" "Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours" (l. 12). The self does not have the power to "inscape" itself but must depend on God or a signifying human being to attribute meaning to it. J. Hillis Miller has similarly claimed that the self "absolutely requires

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<sup>145</sup> House, ed., *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 161.

help from the outside itself in order to be.”<sup>146</sup> Hopkins’s realisation of his paralyzed and uncreative self leaves him utterly depressed.

Hopkins’s conviction that he must passively hold out until his condition changes—one which characterises “Patience, hard thing!”—recalls the cultural demands imposed on the Victorian artist by critics such as Eastlake and Crabb Robinson, which simultaneously required him or her to exert self-assertion and self-effacement (Chapter One). In this poem, Hopkins portrays patience as a strength that arises from an inner core and the individual cannot effect its emergence. Even to “ask” (l. 3) for it would destroy its delicate essence.

“My own heart let me have more have pity on” is a more sustained attempt to break through the hell of self-reflexivity by asking God to “let” him be gentle and “charitable” (l. 3) with his fallible self and requests permission to stop “tormenting” (l. 4) his already “tormented mind” (l. 3). Daniel A. Harris has argued that through this poem, Hopkins tries to abort his “masochistic scrupulosity in ferreting out his sins” and to employ the “discipline of charity.”<sup>147</sup> The self then, by force of will chooses to be a Christian and have mercy on his soul. The meticulous self-monitoring voice with which Hopkins administers his inner self is replaced by “self-mercy.”<sup>148</sup> Significantly, this poem represents a decision to refrain from self-inscaping and to stop blindly “groping round” in an effort to realise the self and to find meaning in the world.

The fact that Hopkins asked God for permission to have compassion on himself signals a suffocated act of emancipation and a continuation of eunuchal dependency which was representative of the remainder of Hopkins’s life as well.

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<sup>146</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *Victorian Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>147</sup> Daniel A. Harris, *Inspirations Unbidden: The ‘Terrible Sonnets’ of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 76.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Although Hopkins was entirely conscious of the futility of his endeavours to assert his individuality and publish his work, he nonetheless kept working, as this letter to Bridges of January 12<sup>th</sup> 1888 shows:

I am now writing a quasi-philosophical paper on the Greek Negatives: but when shall I finish it? Or if finished will it pass the censors? Or if it does will the *Classical Review* or any magazine take it? All impulse fails me: I can give myself no sufficient reason for going on. Nothing comes: I am an eunuch—but it is for the kingdom of heaven's sake.<sup>149</sup>

Like Henry Crabb Robinson, Hopkins longed for an audience but was deeply concerned that his readers' judgment might not be favourable. The numerous perceived and real obstacles to literary fame caused intense frustration for Hopkins as much as for Crabb Robinson; both can be seen to hide behind the seemingly insuperable impediments to publication. Hopkins thus found himself without motivational drive; at this point his religious duties, besides the academic work in Dublin, consisted simply in non-activity, which was a forced and to some degree chosen, paralysis.

In conclusion, Hopkins was unique among the diarists this thesis has examined in that he silenced his emotions and aspirations much more fiercely than any of them. He experienced his homosexuality as a stigma of otherness, which he sought to hide under the Jesuit habit. Unable to assume the traditional role of husband and father, Hopkins's virginity was a "countercultural sign," to use Philip Healy's term, which alienated him both from his social community and deprived him of the fruits of his labour.<sup>150</sup> Unlike all of the other diarists who, each for different reasons, felt it was their duty to publish their work, Hopkins was impeded from publishing his poetry by the duty to efface, rather than assert, his worldly self. The following extract of

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<sup>149</sup> Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, p. 270.

<sup>150</sup> Philip Healy, "Man Apart: Priesthood and Homosexuality at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan and Sue Morgan, eds., *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd; New York: St. Martin's Press, LLC, 2000), p. 103.

Hopkins's letter to Bridges of October 13<sup>th</sup> 1886 epitomises the unnatural, eunuchal state of forced muteness: "By the bye, I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works."<sup>151</sup> Publication was the only solution to prevent self-inscaping and although it catered to and created feelings of vanity, only the reader could validate the author, as we have seen in Eliot and Gissing.<sup>152</sup>

Hopkins's and Ruskin's visual aesthetic has been compared by numerous critics. Both writers insisted on gaining access to the universal by dutifully tending to the particular and felt the strong compulsion to appreciate God's work. Both contended that the act of observation was beyond the mere reproduction of the visual object and needed to be fuelled by the observer's full emotional and intellectual capacity. Ruskin saw himself as an educator, Hopkins, on the other hand, was a socially isolated observer who did not share Ruskin's desire for total temporal possession—his diary entries are less elaborate than Ruskin's and display less emotional investment in the scenes depicted. For Hopkins, observation was an ontological necessity from which to draw the validation that the other diarists received through satisfying family lives and/or professional success. Unlike them, Hopkins was not integrated in society and led "a single life," which was a "difficult, not altogether [...] natural life."<sup>153</sup> For Hopkins, of all the Victorian spheres, Roman Catholicism was the most welcoming because it discouraged worldly competitiveness and offered

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<sup>151</sup> Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, p. 231.

<sup>152</sup> Eric Griffiths has similarly argued in *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), that publication can disrupt the cycle of self-inscaping and raise the self's objectivity regarding its own merits and flaws: "the printed voice grants the opportunity for an 'external survey' of those states of mind in which one is so at home that they scarcely show as anything more than passing but habitual inflections" (p. 311).

<sup>153</sup> Letter to Bridges of July 18<sup>th</sup> 1884, Roberts, ed., *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Prose*, p. 129.

a life of the mind at the margins of society, one which contained Hopkins's undesirable emotions but asphyxiated, but perhaps beneficially concentrated, his poetic genius.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the ideal self of which Eastlake, Crabb Robinson and particularly Eliot, Gissing, Ruskin and Hopkins conceived and which they attempted to construct in and through their diaries can be seen to reflect the value system of the cultural context in which they wrote. We see that Felicity Nussbaum is right when asserting that, in the diary, “linguistic constructs of the self (or, more accurately, the significations of the subject) are produced through social, historical, and cultural factors; and the ‘self’ both positions itself in the discourses available to it, and is produced by them.”<sup>1</sup> The study of diaries is of great significance for deepening our understanding of nineteenth-century subjectivity and the codes of respectability that moulded individual selves. As this thesis has shown, all these diarists were influenced by their culture’s equation of productivity with personal value, which drove them to strive for professional progress at the expense of personal emotions, time and space—the concepts through which the self articulates itself in these diaries. I have interpreted the striking absence of confession as a deliberate attempt to merge the personal with the public so as to construct a professional self. Hence I have read these diarists’ general omission of personal experience, their frequent silences concerning the self, their recurrent calls for discipline and their expressions of dissatisfaction with personal progress as symptoms of a cultural need for selected repression. Juxtaposing the diarists’ utterances with seminal Victorian texts propagating a diligent work ethic, this thesis has presented some of the socio-cultural influences—the push towards self-improvement and altruism—that acted upon the diarists, who then reinforced and disseminated these standards of conduct through their work.

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<sup>1</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, “Towards Conceptualizing Diary,” in *Studies on Autobiography*, James Olney, ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 129.

Chapter One illustrated the disdain of self-obsession in literary and art criticism and analysed the ways in which Victorian psychology—a burgeoning science—prescribed an ideal human being who was in perfect control of his or her emotions and used them to good effect. Through reading Alexander Bain’s *The Emotions and the Will* in light of contemporary theories of the civilising process, I have visualised a model of the process of ideological indoctrination as proposed by Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault. Through reading the diary, as well as the publications, of the remarkably harsh art critic Elizabeth Eastlake, I have drawn attention to both the pressure that she exerted upon her fellow females— instructing them to be family-oriented, well-travelled and well-dressed at all times— and the intimidation she instilled in the artists who would necessarily have known of her influential work. As a counterpart to this unforgiving cultural commentator, I have presented Henry Crabb Robinson, who, although seemingly less eager to correct the moral flaws of his contemporaries, displays similar convictions regarding the association of both complete self-effacement and self-assertion with weakness in his diary. Eastlake, Crabb Robinson and Bain, as well as the other diarists this thesis has examined, likened strength of character to willpower. The psychological discourse of the time unquestionably reinforced this equation of complete emotional mastery with talent, intelligence and quality.

Through analysing a variety of historical documents, such as religious and anti-theistic psychology handbooks, literary reviews, conduct manuals, letters and diaries, Chapter One highlighted the many sources of cultural prescriptiveness to which a diarist reacted from childhood onward. As even the purpose of the diary was delineated by psychologists such as Bain, it becomes clear that for the writers under investigation, writing a diary was only partially an act of self-assertion, as specific



conduct, such as self-referencing, expressions of pride, feebleness and doubt, as well as laziness, was consistently toned down. The diaries discussed in this chapter were heavily edited, and it is essential that further research considers the manuscripts in order to assess the extent and possible purpose of these editorial omissions. Additionally, a new study based on diaries could compare and contrast the moral, altruistic purposes attributed to the emotions which this thesis has described and the late-Victorian decadent beliefs in the individual's right and duty to experience pleasure.

The examination of the silence of the self in the professional diary consists of an evaluation of the predominance of certain values over others. Chapter Two explained that the selected diarists filled this silence with an intense preoccupation with professional productivity. It illustrated this claim by juxtaposing two very different novelists, who are often mentioned as the prime Victorian advocates of social reform: George Eliot and George Gissing. The study of their diaries calls for an adjustment of these beliefs. Eliot, as assumed, firmly believed in the individual's duty to extend altruistic emotion towards the community. Gissing, however, despite his subject matter, did not fight for social change. Rather, he needed to produce literature for financial survival. Despite these fundamental differences in philosophical outlook, both writers defined their personal value in relation to their professional output, in proportion to the efficiency with which they used the time available to them. They both treated emotion with professional diligence and generally left emotion out of their diaries, because, for them, personal joy or trauma had no place in the diary but were to be communicated in letters. Future research should therefore compare the use that these writers made of the letter to the function that their diary held and discuss the importance of audience. As Eliot and Bain were friends, it would be rewarding to

analyse their correspondence—as well as other texts attesting interactions between them—revealing the ways in which they influenced each other. Reading Eliot's diary in conjunction with George Henry Lewes's and/or her great admirer and friend Edith Simcox's could shed light on the subjectivity of a group of influential Victorian figures.

The analysis of John Ruskin's diaries conducted in Chapter Three makes clear that Ruskin's obsession with productivity and his total identification with his work as an observer can be held accountable for the despair and bitterness that characterised the latter half of his life, which are not to be solely attributed to his disappointing romantic experiences. The diaries reflect Ruskin's choice to cultivate his self as an observer who professionalised emotion and sought to eradicate human fallibility from the persona he constructed. Like for Eliot and Gissing, emotion was an integral part of Ruskin's work. His diaries show that his inability to feel awe on command increased his urge to be stunned by great beauty and left him in a state of over-stimulation and perpetual hunger for more excitement. Reading the diaries in light of *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*, Chapter Three has exemplified that despite his apparent acceptance and even praise of fallibility, Ruskin was consumed by his efforts to eliminate satiability, boredom and indifference from his professional self. Because he expected himself to function as a human camera obscura, eagerly taking in and reproducing visual objects/events for his own possession and for his audience, Ruskin was no longer able to enjoy the act of observation, but still performed the motions of pleasure.

Ruskin, although seemingly existing on the margins of Victorian culture, re-inscribed and reinforced its call for professional and emotional self-discipline. His lessons to his audience were heavily didactic, as can be seen in the introduction to *The*

*Elements of Drawing* of 1857, in which he advised that parents should sternly instill self-discipline in their child by “[praising] it only for what costs it self-denial, namely attention and hard work; otherwise they will make it work for vanity’s sake, and always badly.”<sup>2</sup> This passage, as well as the assiduity with which he treated his own work, shows that Ruskin did more than initiate his readers to a “method of study;” namely, through his teachings on art, he communicated his take on the codes of respectability disseminated in his culture.<sup>3</sup> Ruskin just as severely reproached himself in his diary when he failed to pay sufficient attention to the observed object or scene, namely, when an intrusion of personal emotions, such as over-saturation by visual stimulation and fatigue, made proper observation impossible.

Future research might consider the importance of Ruskin’s diary as a pre-work in the writing of *Praeterita*. It might also inspect the self-concept expressed by his self-portraits of the 1870s, as well as *Fors Clavigera*, and juxtapose it to his diary entries of that time. Because Ruskin’s diaries can further our understanding of his subjectivity to such a significant degree, there is a definite need to introduce undergraduates to these crucial documents with the help of a companion book, proposing ways in which to read this immense diaristic record.

The study of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s diary conducted in Chapter Four, has revealed that Hopkins, even more so than Gissing or Ruskin, existed on the periphery of culture. Because of his homosexuality, physical and mental emotions were doubly subversive to Hopkins, which explains his diary’s stern focus on the visual characteristics of natural objects. This targeted silencing of the unrespectable aspects of the self shows that, through drastic measures (such as joining the Jesuits), Hopkins sought to respect the cultural codes of respectability. His diary reflects cultural

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<sup>2</sup> John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing in Three Letters to Beginners* (New York: John Wiley, 1867), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

circumstances through its deliberate silence and is thus the pinnacle of the selective repression at work in many Victorian diaries. Further research might investigate, contextualise and theorise the interplay between the strict, alternating focus on semantics and visual sights that characterises Hopkins's diary. There is also a need for a study reading Hopkins's diary, letters and poetry in light of the attitudes towards homosexuality he encountered during his lifetime, as for example in textbooks, general medical practices and both explicitly and implicitly stated codes of propriety.

While this thesis has focused on the private records of canonical Victorian writers, it is essential to extend the range of diarists to non-artists and workers, male and female, in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the Victorian culture of self-improvement and individual subjectivity through exploring and comparing the degree of professional zeal and self-conscious repression of emotional needs in their diaries. As the discourse on the emotions can provide such illuminating information on the "spirit of the age" of any period or culture, the methodology used in this thesis would also lend itself to a comparative study of diaries of different languages and nationalities in order to investigate the ways in which individuals have sought to create and negotiate their own value.

Undoubtedly, the diary genre generally deserves further study, both from a generic and a historical point of view. The diary as a literary form should not be discredited as a mere source for biographical references, which, very often, it does not offer. Rather, like novels, diaries deserve to be treated as primary texts and to be read in light of the socio-cultural context in which they appeared, as, without question, they are indispensable documents that allow us to further our understanding of persons and periods.

## **Illustration**

David Allan, *The Origin of Painting*, 1775 (Edinburgh National Galleries of Scotland).

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