

REVIEW FORUM

***The Journals of George Eliot*, edited by Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.**

Hilary Fraser

"Utterly desponding about my book," wrote George Eliot of *Romola* in a diary entry of 28-30 October 1861. On 5 November she recorded feeling "*Dreadfully depressed about myself and my work*," and on the following day, "So utterly dejected that in walking with G, in the Park, I almost resolved to give up my Italian novel." 8 December finds her asking, "Shall I ever be able to carry out my ideas? Flashes of hope are succeeded by long intervals of dim distrust." Glimpses into the crippling self-doubt and despondency privately suffered by this novelist, whose published work is notable for its magisterially confident and authoritative tone and whose dazzlingly successful professional career seemed so unswervingly ascendant, can be found in Gordon Haight's biography of George Eliot (1968), and indeed John Cross's *Life* (1885) was also built on heavily edited extracts from his wife's journals and letters. But it was not until Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston published their handsomely produced edition of the journals that we have been able to appreciate their full import in the context of Eliot's entire autobiographical oeuvre.

The editors persuasively argue that "there is . . . a case for reading [the journals] as an autobiography of George Eliot" (xxiv). To be sure, for the most part these piecemeal entries, recording fluctuating moods and day-to-day experiences, suggest the diarist's immersion in the moment rather than the autobiographer's more detached and retrospective self-construction. Nevertheless there is also a strong sense of the writer's agency and controlling purposefulness in her own life's narrative, manifest not only in such structural devices as her annual summing up of the old year's achievements and her hopes and ambitions for the new, but also in the rigorous and positively motivated self-scrutiny that crucially frames entries such as the above on her lack of progress with *Romola* as she endeavours to develop strategies to become more productive. Bidding farewell in 1877 to the personal journal she has kept for more than sixteen years, Eliot observes: "I have often been helped by looking back in it to compare former with actual states of despondency from bad health or other apparent causes. In this way a past despondency has turned to present hopefulness" (148).

Like Virginia Woolf, who imagines herself at fifty reading what she now writes in her diary ("I fancy this old Virginia putting on her spectacles to read of March 1920 will decidedly wish me to continue. Greetings! my dear ghost"¹), Eliot writes of the present as a stage in the continuum of her life and is always conscious of herself as reader as well as writer of this text. She sometimes reads aloud to Lewes from her journal, as from her fiction-in-progress, as a special mark of their intimacy. This is no self-indulgent exercise, but rather an acknowledged mechanism to facilitate her writing and promote her mental health. By no means does she use her journal as a confessional. Indeed, as the editors note, it offers tantalisingly few insights into the more intriguing

¹ Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth, 1982) 24.

aspects of her life—her relationship with John Cross for instance, whose defenestration into a Venice canal on their honeymoon in what appears to have been a suicide attempt passes without comment.

The journals are reticent too on the question of the genesis of the writing identity “George Eliot,” but the editors’ decision to publish the two brief essays, “How I came to write Fiction” and “History of Adam Bede” as a separate section titled “The Making of George Eliot 1857-1859” for the first time recognises the integrity of these writings as a clearly demarcated account of the birth of the author as public persona. This volume gives us a powerful sense of Eliot’s development as a professional writer: of her working methods, her punishing regime of private study, her growing knowledge of the ins and outs of literary production and confidence in negotiating with publishers, her interest in the literary market, her astuteness as a business woman, the anxieties and pleasures associated with the reception of her work. It also enables us to appreciate the diverse uses of her journals which, as well as recording details of both her inner and her professional life—her program of reading, her progress on her books and articles, her transactions with publishers—incorporate a domestic chronicle of her extended family: records of their increasingly complicated financial arrangements and accounts, lengthy descriptions of the natural landscape, and travelogues, both running and retrospective, detailing the numerous trips she and Lewes took in their twenty-four years together. They reveal the woman behind the sibylline myth John Cross created in his biography, one who suffers endlessly from headaches and biliousness but who also enjoys “zoologizing” and “delicious” walks (61) and can endearingly exclaim “*Jubilate*” (75) and “wonderful out of all whooping!” (183).

The volume does indeed, as its editors claim, constitute a new text by George Eliot. Not only is one-quarter of the material here published for the first time, but the complete text of her diverse extant journals and diaries, in six manuscript volumes, spanning the last twenty-six years of her life, has been intelligently and imaginatively presented in a form that is admirably accessible and informative to modern scholars and students. The volume is divided into sections, each of which is introduced by a helpful contextualisation of the material to come. Particularly valuable is the detailed explanatory index which functions as a glossary as well as a guide to contents and obviates the need for extensive distracting footnotes. Here we find useful cross-references to Eliot’s other writing such as her letters and essays which round out and complete what may be only a brief notation in the diary. Thus a short note on 24 February 1863 to the effect that Eliot “received a letter from Miss Faithfull asking [her] to write a story for a new Magazine of hers” leads us to the entry on Emily Faithfull in the index which explains her involvement with the Langham Place feminists, the establishment of the Victoria Press, and the founding of the *Victoria Magazine* (1863-1880). It tells us that Eliot declined to write for the magazine and refers us to the relevant letter in *The George Eliot Letters*.

The Journals of George Eliot is a model of scholarship and a milestone in Eliot studies. My only disappointment in reading the volume was the discovery that I was almost certainly mistaken in an earlier conjecture of my own as to the source of Piero di Cosimo’s portrait of Tito Melema in *Romola*; I had identified it as an arresting painting by Titian that Eliot *must* have remembered from her visit to the Belvedere Palace in Vienna in 1858. It was with some dismay that I read her account of that expedition: “It

is a magnificent collection of pictures at the Belvedere, but we were so unfortunate as only to be able to see them once . . . and so many pictures have faded from my memory even of those which I had time to distinguish" (323). This leaves me feeling, like Eliot's landlady in Weimar, "grandios dumm" (221) but more grateful than ever that there is at last an impeccably scholarly edition of George Eliot's journals that will save me from perpetrating yet further myths about that most mythologised of women writers.

Joanne Shattock

The Journals of George Eliot are the last of her manuscripts to be published. Portions of them were printed by John Walter Cross in his *George Eliot's Life* (1885) where they were carefully "edited," and by Gordon Haight in his magisterial edition of her *Letters* (1954-78). It is Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston's major achievement to have demonstrated that they are worth publishing in their entirety, and that even those elements which are familiar, notably "How I came to Write Fiction" and the "History of Adam Bede," have a freshness and new resonance when presented in their original context.

The form of the journals did not make the process of publication straightforward: six notebooks, one written in at either end and two which utilised the restrictive format of a "Beechings' Annual Diary." The journals differ also in substance. Some, as the editors comment, are the daily log of a busy professional journalist and novelist. Others are more discursive travel narratives, often expanded from the entries in the diaries. One of the narratives, "Recollections of Weimar," was further developed into two articles for *Fraser's Magazine*.

For Marian Evans journals were sites of routine record keeping and account rather than the repository of intimate reflections and confessions. She recorded her reading, her ailments, the progress of her writing, her social life, her income. The year's end prompted summary and prolepsis. The journals are not without emotion and, as might be expected, the silences are often significant. The extant volumes begin in July 1854 with what the editors remind us was a honeymoon. Marian Evans and George Henry Lewes embark for Germany, the beginning of their quarter century of life together. The journals end less than three weeks before her death in December 1880.

The value of the journals is in the domestic detail they provide of her writing life and of their life together, their "happy solitude à deux" as she described one of their early Christmases. There are accounts of prodigious and ambitious reading, executed solitarily during the day and companionably aloud in the evenings; excursions both at home and abroad; socialising; and running through it all, their writing. As the editors point out, the balance of their professional lives shifts dramatically after 1860 when George Eliot's becomes the predominant career and the dominant income. Prior to this she assists in the preparation of the *Life of Goethe*, the pretext of the visit to Weimar; in *Sea-side Studies*, the result of the visit to Ilfracombe; and in *The Physiology of Common Life*, the main reason for the German tour of 1858. The gradual "lift off" of Eliot's career is recorded graphically in the journals, beginning in 1856 with a program of commissioned reviews, mainly for the *Leader* and the *Westminster*. The idyllic days in Weimar and Ilfracombe are interrupted by reviewing deadlines. The annual summary of accounts tells its own story. In 1856 the sum received for the lengthy list of reviews

totalled £237; the first fruits of *Scenes of Clerical Life*—£800—appeared in 1857; in 1859, with *Adam Bede* and *The Lifted Veil*, the sum was £1942; the grand total for 1860, which included *The Mill on the Floss* as well as *Adam Bede* and *Scenes of Clerical Life*, was £8300.

The editors of the journals had to make two important decisions. The first was how to present the notebooks in terms of their complex chronology. The second was how to annotate the diverse material they contained. In both cases the correct decisions were taken, but they are not without problems. The temptation to integrate the various “Recollections” of Weimar, Berlin, Ilfracombe and others at the appropriate points within the diaries was outweighed by the nature of the travel narratives which are more expansive about events and individuals and about cultural encounters generally. More telling, in the editors’ view, was Marian Evans’s habit of writing her daily entries at one end of a notebook, and the more discursive “How I Came to Write Fiction” and the “History of Adam Bede” at the other, as if consciously separating “George Eliot” from Marian Evans. The editors give this section of the journals the title “The Making of George Eliot” to reinforce the point. Included within it are some daily entries dealing with the publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life* which the new author forgot to enter at the front of her notebook, and which give further testimony to her sense of an emerging career as a writer of fiction. The headnotes provide helpful links between the discrete diaries for 1854-61, 1861-77, 1879 and 1880, as well as the more expansive sections. There are occasional reminders of the odd composition of the journals, as in an entry for May 1859 where Eliot writes: “My Journal is continued at the opposite end, by mistake as a continuation of the ‘History of Adam Bede,’” or the entry for 3 March 1869 which begins: “We started on our fourth visit to Italy,” and is followed within a few lines by the entry for 5 May which begins: “We reached our home after our nine weeks’ absence.”

There is one aspect of the design of the *Journals* which does make for difficulty: the absence of detailed running heads for the diaries themselves. Those for Weimar 20 July to 3 November 1864, Berlin 3 November 1854 to 13 March 1855, and England 14 March 1855 to 19 June 1861 have only the inclusive dates provided as running heads throughout. The diary for 1861-1877 has more precise dates, but these often cover an entire year. The organisation of the volume and the headnotes require the reader to move between the travel narratives and the relevant entries in the diaries. The careful reader needs also to move within the diaries themselves and to link journal entries with the volumes of published letters. Without dates at the top of pages, or even a highly visible indication of the year within the text itself, it is often difficult to find one’s way.

The question of annotation was solved by the use of a glossarial index. This works well for figures within Eliot and Lewes’s immediate circle of family and friends. It is easy for example to identify those attending her wedding to John Cross, or the small circle of regular visitors in her bleak year of widowhood. Writers, artists and other notables encountered on her travels are appropriately identified: feminist Fanny Lewald and the historian Adolf Stahr, the art critic Gustav Friedrich Waagen, the philosopher Otto Friedrich Gruppe, the physicist Hermann von Helmholtz. In each case the likely reason for Eliot or Lewes’s interest in them is suggested in the index. Where the annotations are less sure-footed is with comparatively well known British figures: John Henry Newman, “one of the founders of the Oxford Movement which aimed to revive

High Church traditions within the Church of England"; Benjamin Brodie, "author of *Psychological Inquiries: in a series of essays, intended to illustrate the mutual relations of the physical organisation and the mental faculties* (1854)"; Bessie Rayner Parkes, appropriately identified as a "feminist writer and activist, met GE in 1852 and they became friends," to which is added: "She was the first editor of the *English Woman's Journal*, founded in 1858 with Barbara Bodichon and others, but after her marriage to Louis Belloc in 1867 she abandoned her feminist activities. Following Belloc's sudden death in 1872 she got into financial difficulties because of an imprudent investment." The entry for Eliot's close friend Barbara Bodichon is equally and unnecessarily prolix. The art of constructing notes for the general as well as the specialist reader is never straightforward, but succinctness is a good rule of thumb.

There is much to praise in the editorial apparatus of the *Journals*, not least the excellent headnotes to each of the sections which silently endorse, if further justification were required, the value of publishing the *Journals*. One of the most impressive is the headnote to "Recollections of Italy 1860," which Cross printed almost complete, and which both Acton and Henry James condemned for its tediousness in their reviews of the *Life*. Undeterred by the weight of this distinguished opinion the editors see the journal as marking a watershed, not only in Eliot's ability to understand and assimilate what she was seeing, but in the impact of her travels on her subsequent fiction, marking as they did a movement away from fiction which drew on a well of childhood memories to more intellectually ambitious fiction which had at its heart an interrogation of the historical past and its relation to the present. "From now on," the editors note, "her fiction was to be explicitly concerned with the presence of the past in the present."

There are many details to be savoured from the headnotes, not least some of the "direct transpositions" of the Italian journey into *Middlemarch* some twelve years later. There are also understandable but regrettable absences, notably the decision not to reprint some of her more minute financial reckonings which form part of the original notebooks. And there is the missing journal from 1849 to 1854. Of all the documents which formally constitute a writer's manuscripts, notebooks are unquestionably the most problematic to reproduce. This edition of *The Journals George Eliot* is a triumph of imaginative and intelligent editing. They will take their place among the essential documents in the armoury of Eliot scholarship.

Joseph Wiesenfarth

I have an inescapably personal response to Margaret Harris's and Judith Johnston's edition of *The Journals of George Eliot*. To read them again in this format is for me like finding old friends whom I haven't seen for years but who have clearly prospered since I saw them last. They've made some money, bought a house, and furnished it carefully with choice items; they've doffed their old clothes for something better than just decent. Theirs may not be designer fashions but they look wonderful in them. Which is to say that when I met the journals in the early 1970s while working on *George Eliot's Mythmaking* (1977) I found them often difficult to make out in manuscript and looking only marginally better in a tattered typewritten transcript. But even in such a down-at-heel outfit, the journals were invaluable documents. Now they look a lot better, have an enhanced value, and are universally accessible. Now anyone can use what formerly only

visitors to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University could use. Harris and Johnston have transformed the journals into every scholar's documents by editing them with intelligent care. They present them in a clear text with introductions to the edition as well as to each of its discrete sections, and they also provide the reader with an explanatory index that makes the journals both easy and a joy to use.

My interest in George Eliot's use of mythological references in *Middlemarch*, sparked by "The Key to All Mythologies," first drew me to the journals in their original form. Chapter nineteen of the novel suggested to me that Ariadne and Antigone had something central to do with the extensive patterns of allusion in *Middlemarch*. Similar patterns already showed themselves in *Romola*. Was there some source that could confirm for me that I was really reading something out of these novels, not into them?

I actually found two sources: one was the journals that Harris and Johnston have now made available to us; the other was a Beinecke manuscript labelled "COMMONPLACE NOTEBOOK." As it turned out I later edited the latter as *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879* because it proved to be not a commonplace book but a working notebook. A few pages of entries from Adolf Stahr's *Torso: Kunst, Künstler und Kunstwerk der Alten* may serve as an instance. Eliot made these entries as working notes for her review "The Art of the Ancients" which appeared in the *Leader* in March 1855. The journals told us exactly when she read Stahr's book, and Harris and Johnston tell us that Stahr and "the celebrated novelist" Fanny Lewald, whom George Eliot met in Weimar, "had openly lived out of wedlock" just as Lewes and Marian Evans, soon to be a celebrated novelist herself, were beginning to do (32).

My interest in chapter nineteen suggests that the journals often work in tandem with various notebooks that George Eliot kept. They allow a scholar to know exactly when George Eliot read a particular author or work. Let me continue with this one chapter of *Middlemarch* for a moment. A scant 1700 words contain allusions to Dante, Hazlitt, Plutarch, Apollonius, Ovid, Sophocles, Winckelmann, Stahr, Coleridge, Overbeck, Lessing, and Schiller and involve the classical figures of Hercules, Theseus, Ariadne, Dionysus, Antigone, Aeolus, Cupid and Psyche. Seven of these authors appear in the exemplary fifty-six-page explanatory index to the Harris-Johnston edition of the journals, and their writings contain discussions of the mythological figures just mentioned. Let's look at the entry on Winckelmann, for example:

Winckelmann, Johann Joachim (1717-68), head of the Department of Antiquities in Rome and author of *History of Ancient Art* (1763), lived with his patron Cardinal Albani. His *Unpublished Antique Monuments: A catalogue of the highlights of the Villa Albani collection* (1767) includes an engraving of the bas-relief of Antinous
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Page 347 takes us to George Eliot's "Recollections of Italy 1860," which Harris and Johnston give in full, and there we find George Eliot discussing the bas-relief of Antinous, "the least beautiful of all the representations of that sad loveliness that I have seen." She would have earlier read a discussion of Winckelmann's description of Antinous in Stahr; it would have allowed her to compare the ill-fated Captain Anthony

Wybrow in "Mr Gilfil's Love Story" to Antinous, who died young after proving to be beautiful, but nothing else. These few instances show that if one is interested in tracking the chronology of Eliot's readings and their influence on her imagination, the journals as Harris and Johnston have edited them are invaluable.

As *Recollections of Italy 1860* suggest, the journals fed into more than George Eliot's fiction. They fed into a series of recollections of Weimar, Berlin, Illfracombe, the Scilly Isles and Jersey, all of which Harris and Johnston give us. These are autobiographical sketches made from diary and journal entries. But engaging as they are, they do not have the intensely personal side to them that we find in the journals, to which George Eliot confides her and George Henry Lewes's physical ailments and her own emotional fragility. I find myself deeply moved by George Eliot's self-doubt: "I do not feel very confident that I can make anything satisfactory of *Middlemarch*," she writes on 11 September 1869. She has to remind herself that she's been there before: "I have need to remember that other things which have been accomplished by me, were begun under the same cloud." But she didn't find it easy to be cheered up by past events: "I am not hopeful about future work: I am languid, and my novel languishes too. But tomorrow may be better than today," she writes on 20 May 1870 (139). And tomorrow does prove better. Writing of *Middlemarch*, she registers happy surprise: "The reception of the book hitherto has been quite beyond what I could have believed beforehand, people exalting it above everything else I have written. Kohn is publishing an English Edition in Germany; Duncker is to publish a translation; and Harpers pay me £1200 for reprinting it in America" (142). Her constant recording of proceeds from sales shows another side of Marian Evans; certainly she was a careful and successful financial planner!

When Lewes's son Thornton dies, she remarks on 19 October 1869: "This evening, at half past six o'clock our dear Thornie died," and reflects, somberly: "This death seems to me the beginning of our own." She was then just a month shy of her fiftieth birthday. We are reminded of the difference between our life expectancy and that of the Victorians. And although they believed in progress, they didn't believe in personal perfection—at least George Eliot didn't. On 1 January 1874 she writes: "I have been for a month rendered almost helpless for intellectual work by constant headache and nausea, but am getting a little more freedom. Nothing is wanting to my blessings but the uninterrupted power of work. For as to all my unchangeable imperfections I have resigned myself" (144). This doesn't mean, however, that she'll give up fighting the good fight: "And we have no real trouble. I wish we were not in a minority of our fellow-men!—I desire no added blessing for the coming year but these: That I may do some good, lasting work, and make both my outward and inward habits less imperfect, that is, more directly tending to the best uses of life" (134). The journals make it everywhere evident that the most important things in George Eliot's life are her own and Lewes's health, their constantly growing affection, and the effect of her writing on the reading public: "many deeply affecting assurances of its influence for good on individual minds" (143).

These journals give us a very human and affecting picture of a great writer who was in so many ways like us, only better. Better because she always wanted to be a better woman and a better writer. The journals everywhere testify to that. If they do not reveal to us the secrets of George Eliot's creative genius, if they do not explain to us

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

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

Response

Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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