

**Profession, Vocation, Trade:
Marian Evans and the Making of the Woman Professional Writer**

By **Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi**, University of Exeter

<1> The profession that those working in the mid-Victorian periodical press most liked to talk about was their own. Indeed, the abundance of self-conscious articles discussing its business and practices, as well as those taking stock of its expansion, influence and readership, is a crucial index to the emergence of reviewing and journalism as a profession. Yet articles defining the role of the reviewer often put forward models founded on the adherence to a masculine, public voice. Walter Bagehot, in his essay “The First Edinburgh Reviewers” (1855), which traced the history and importance of the format, typically claimed that the “the talk of the man of the world” was “the very model of our modern writing.” (qtd. in Fraser *et al.* 5) Yet where did this leave women writers like Marian Evans, Harriet Martineau or Margaret Oliphant, who contributed frequently to nineteenth-century periodicals and struggled over their recognition as professionals? Even as Bagehot was writing his article, Marian Evans was working as a paid reviewer for the *Westminster Review* after being its unpaid editor under the nominal editorship of John Chapman for three years. This article aims to examine how she conceived her professional roles as editor and reviewer in the male-dominated institution of the nineteenth-century periodical press during 1851-57.

<2>Recent work by Marysa Demoor, Hilary Fraser, and Barbara Onslow have demonstrated the difficulties that nineteenth-century women faced in their roles as editors, reviewers or fiction writers, and the choices they made in terms of periodical publications, publishing modes and policies. There is also a large scholarship on Marian Evans’ reviews in relation to her fiction (see, for example, Rosemary Ashton’s *George Eliot: A Life*), which traces the continuities between the theory of authorship that she put forward as a journalist and the “cultured” model of authorship that she practised as George Eliot. However, less work has been done on the interconnection between her roles as editor and reviewer. Dallas Liddle has argued that, where Marian Evans is concerned, her reviews have moments of “sudden self-consciousness” in which she reflects upon her position. (16) Taking Liddle’s observation as its starting point, this article will explore the way in which some of Evans’s reviews provide an implicit commentary upon her editorial work for the *Westminster Review* and reviewing, and reveal a concomitant tension between the growing confidence of her professional voice as a woman writer and the need to subsume it under the masculine, corporate voice of the journal. Its overall aim is to show how this conflict exhibits a more general concern with the emergence of the professional writer, which as a career path offered the potential for vocational fulfillment for her and others, but also created an anxiety that literary writing could become a trade at the beck and call of the market-place.

<3>It is important to note that Marian Evans was unique in her position as editor in the mid-Victorian period (see Brake 92; Fraser *et al.* 129; Onslow 226). In her recent article “A COMMON FUND: George Eliot and the Gender Politics of Criticism,” Kimberly J. Stern has traced how Evans initially envisioned a radical quarterly like the *Westminster Review* as a dialogic forum of competing views – akin to Foucault’s *heterotopia* – which could allow otherness to be heard. Together with Chapman, Evans tried to create a forum for intellectual collaboration by commissioning articles on miscellaneous topics (theology, philosophy, history, literature) and recruiting contributors of heterogeneous ideological positions (for example, James Martineau, George Combe). Significantly, Stern has noted that Evans’s pet project was an “Independent Contributions” section in Chapman’s *Westminster Review*, which, as the Prospectus states, would serve writers who “differ widely on special points of great practical concern, both from the editors and from each other.” (qtd. in Stern 48) Evans’s initial editorial aspirations were only ever partially realized though, and when she began reviewing, her essays on literary women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller or Madame de Sablé are characterized by a heteroglossic quality—to use a well-known Bakhtinian term—that created not a productive multivocality but a tension between the independence of her voice and the corporate identity of the *Westminster Review*. In other words, Evans’s attempt to encompass these different voices ultimately led to dissonance rather than diversity, as her promotion of the model of a “sympathetic” reviewer and editor could not be reconciled with the masculine voice of the *Westminster*.

<4>Faced with her own singularity, Marian Evans theorized the making of the woman professional writer through her attempts at women’s literary historiography. She looked to the past to emulate new feminine ideals that would allow her female contemporaries to negotiate their position as women of the press within an expanding literary market-place. Evans tried to define her role and status as a female editor and reviewer by rescuing from obscurity literary women who shared her belief in the potential of sympathy to develop into a feminine and feminist discourse. A close reading of some of these essays— particularly “Woman in France: Madame de Sablé” (October 1854) for the *Westminster Review* and “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft” (October 1855) for the *Leader*—demonstrates her concern with the different ways in which such women were wronged by the critical establishment. What is interesting is that these essays are very different from her reviews of reputable male poets (for instance, Edward Young) in terms of their interplay of voice and adoption of personas.

<5>While her experimentation with the sleights and shifts of emotive language is well-known in both her reviews and fiction (see, for example, Rachel Ablow’s *The Marriage of The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot*), it is important to stress that Marian Evans’ advocacy of sympathy was shaped and developed as a discourse of intellectual tolerance from the beginnings of her editorial career at the *Westminster Review*; it defined the professional role she later adopted as a reviewer and ultimately as a literary writer. The following extract from the Prospectus to the first issue of the *Westminster Review* (January 1852), which describes how this quarterly Review intended to treat religious questions, testifies to the early centrality of sympathy to Evans’s efforts to promote intellectual diversity as an editor of the *Westminster*:

In the treatment of Religious Questions the Review will unite a spirit of reverential sympathy for the cherished associations of pure and elevated minds with an uncompromising pursuit of truth. The elements of ecclesiastical authority and of dogma will be fearlessly examined, and the results of the most advanced Biblical criticism will be discussed without reservation, under the conviction that religion has its foundation in man's nature, and will only discard an old form to assume and vitalize one more expressive of its essence. While, however, the Editors will not shrink from the expression of what they believe to be sound negative views, they will bear in mind the pre-eminent importance of a constructive religious philosophy, as connected with the development and activity of the moral nature, and of those poetic and emotional elements, out of which proceed our noblest aspirations and the essential beauty of life. (qtd. in Haight 33-34)

Sympathetic feeling was, for Marian Evans, an aesthetic and ethical agent of social change. This is why perhaps she treated sympathy as a mode of gender solidarity in her essays on Wollstonecraft and de Sablé. Evans's sympathetic reading of these "cultured" women, who did not, in her view, occupy the position they deserved in the literary canon, reveals an underlying concern over her own position, which deserves further investigation.

<6>Evans's anxiety over her professional status shifts attention away from patriarchal oppression to women's literary exploitation, which marks her difference from other female contemporaries (such as Matilda Hays, Bessie Rayner Parkes and Adelaide Procter), who were campaigning against women's legal and economic state of dependency on men. In this light, her appreciation of de Sablé and Wollstonecraft was not as disinterested as she claimed. Marian Evans once ironically described herself as someone suffering from a peculiar mental condition, according to which she needed constant confirmation of her friends' sympathies (and, in the case of her authorship, of the reading public) without having to return the affection. (*The George Eliot Letters* II, 402) It is precisely this kind of "disinterested sympathy" that she sought from her readership, and which she offered, as a reader herself and historiographer, to Madame de Sablé and Wollstonecraft, whose declining reputation, unlike Edward Young's, proved the extent to which women were wronged with literary obscurity.

<7>In her review of Madame de Sablé, which, significantly, marked the beginning of her reviewing career at the *Westminster Review* in 1854, Marian Evans celebrated de Sablé's literary salon of the 1640s and 1650s as a terrain where feminine voices were not only heard but celebrated for their inspiring influence. In spite of publishing various treatises and maxims, Evans claimed that de Sablé's "forte was evidently not to write herself, but to stimulate others to write: to show that sympathy and appreciation which are as genial and encouraging as the morning sunbeams." (see *Essays of George Eliot* 74) After the death of her husband in 1640, de Sablé was a confidante to many of the most eminent men and women of the day who engaged themselves in the latest theological and scientific discussions.

<8>It is hard not to see Marian Evans' appraisal of the sympathetic role of the salon, and the position of women within it, as a reflection on the intellectual stimulation created by the circle of liberal writers and thinkers, who regularly gravitated around John Chapman's house at 142 Strand in London. (see Rosemary Ashton's *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London*)

The importance of Chapman's house as an intellectual gathering point is evident in his Friday *soirées*, where Evans mingled with figures such as Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Barbara Leigh Smith (later Bodichon), and Harriet and James Martineau. The recognition that Marian Evans enjoyed at 142 Strand contrasts with the relative anonymity, at least outside of literary circles, of her career as editor for the *Westminster Review*, as well as with her need to subsequently assimilate, as its reviewer, her essay writing with that of its corporate voice.

<9>Marian Evans' description of de Sablé as a facilitative force inspiring a heterogeneous mixed-gender intellectual community is an echo of her own just relinquished editorial role at the *Westminster*. In recovering de Sablé from an obscurity based on her lack of authorship, Evans is implicitly reflecting upon, and perhaps justifying to herself, her previous editorial role as a professional that facilitates the creative work of others. Yet her fondness for the aurality of the seventeenth-century literary salon also provides a standpoint to communicate her ambivalence towards the patriarchal character of nineteenth-century print culture. An excursus into French literary history and her celebration of the hidden work of de Sablé soon shifts into a tantalizing analysis of the restrictions upon women writers who enter the public world of print. She attacks the requirement for contemporary female writers to imitate or exaggerate a "masculine" style, a venture which, in her opinion, women were inevitably doomed to fail, leading to works that were "like the swaggering gait of a bad actress in male attire." (*Essays of George Eliot* 53) Yet the situation of these writers is contrasted with seventeenth-century French women, who because they "were not trying to make a career for themselves, they thought little, in many cases not at all, of the public." (54) Unlike Marian Evans, who was dictated to by the public world of print, they could write in their own "habitual language" precisely because their writing consisted of their memoirs and letters to lovers and friends.

<10>Marian Evans' experiences at the *Westminster Review* played an important role in her desire for a model of female authorship free from a "masculine" style. Yet, ironically, or perhaps revealingly, one can detect an overtly masculine voice for the first and only time in her review of Madame de Sablé, when Evans compares the neglected cultural benefits of the literary salon with the greater diffusion of ideas through print. The masculine voice in the following passage arguably enacts what it describes in that it declares that the literary salon, as a space in which women could participate, was superseded by a print culture, which, by operating in the more democratic, yet abstract name of "the public," actually silenced women's voices:

It is no longer the coterie which acts on literature, but literature which acts on the coterie; the circle represented by the word 'public' is ever widening, and ambition, poising itself in order to hit a more distant mark, neglects the successes of the salon. What was once lavished prodigally in conversation, is reserved for the volume, or the 'article'; and the effort is not to betray originality rather than to communicate it. As the old coach-roads have sunk into disuse through the creation of railways, so journalism tends more and more to divert information from the channel of conversation into the channel of the Press: no one is satisfied with a more circumscribed audience than that very indeterminate abstraction 'the public', and men find a vent for their opinions not in talk, but in copy. We read the 'Athenaeum' askance at the tea-table, and take notes from the 'Philosophical Journal' at a soirée; we invite our friends that

we may thrust a book into their hands, and presuppose an exclusive desire in the 'ladies' to discuss their own matters, 'that we may cackle with the *Times*' at our ease. (60)

In contrast to many of her contemporaries, Marian Evans drew attention to what was lost in the shift from the aurality of the literary salon to the world of print: not only these women's voices but also her own voice at the *Westminster*. That Evans felt reviewing, and the homosocial literary culture around it, to be creatively restrictive is typified by her comment in the above quotation that the production of the "article"—in contrast to conversation—has to work at conformity rather than originality.(1)

<11>There is, however, a fundamental contradiction in the review of Madame de Sablé. Although Marian Evans complains about women's iteration of a masculine style, she uses a masculine persona in order to contrast the mixed-gender gatherings of the salon with the separate spheres that, in her view, permeated mid-Victorian print media, where "ladies" discussed their own matters in order that the gentleman could talk about the latest issue of *The Times*, or perhaps the *Westminster Review*. As Kimberly J. Stern claims, "Not only had the journal replaced more direct forms of intellectual sociability; it had also erected an impassable barrier between literate clubmen and the presumably unlearned ladies who were not admitted either to the clubs or to the ranks of the critical elite." (55) Evans's adoption of the masculine "we" in this passage embodies the split subjectivity imposed on her by the periodical press. Its use epitomizes the way that the sphere of authorship had overlooked the enabling work of de Sablé, much as it silenced the work of Marian Evans herself. Yet the inherent contradiction is that Evans could only articulate these views in a way that subsumed her under the masculine voice of the Review.

<12>The conclusion of Evans's essay attempts to break the contradiction facing women writers by using Madame de Sablé to argue that women must have equal access to the stores of knowledge that men have. This was the essential condition of what Evans saw as being "true womanly culture and of true social well-being." (*Essays of George Eliot* 81) It was only when "the whole field of reality be laid open to women as well as men" that sexual difference would cease to be an artificial division, a source of discord or frustration, and, instead, be a "necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life." The concluding sentence stresses that a healthy society, founded on gender solidarity, needs the combination of thought and feeling within individuals, which both men and women must be able to express through their interaction with one another. What is problematic, however, is how Marian Evans's elitist model of access to culture through the salon could translate into broader social terms, without losing the face-to-face interaction that made it distinct.(2)

<13>While "Woman in France: Madame de Sablé" indirectly communicates the challenges Marian Evans faced as a reviewer, her essay "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft" for the *Leader* anticipates her trials as a literary author. Significantly, Evans praised Fuller's book for having "the enthusiasm of a noble and sympathetic nature." (200) As well as the obvious link between Fuller's and Wollstonecraft's feminism, Evans saw similarities because "In both writers we discern, under the brave bearing of a strong and truthful nature, the beating of a loving woman's heart, which teaches them not to undervalue the smallest offices of domestic care of kindness." (201) In other words, Marian Evans's laudatory characterization of Wollstonecraft as

“nothing if not rational,” but, at the same time, as someone whose work displayed sympathy, is a precursor to her own attempts to combine reason and feeling. Evans’s critique of the misreading of Wollstonecraft as a woman of sensibility functions as a prelude to her disapproval of the critical acclaim falsely attributed to popular fiction writers in “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” (October 1856) for the *Westminster Review*.

<14>For Evans, it was only through the extension of sympathy that literary women could overcome gender discrimination and achieve equality as professional writers. In “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists”, she asserted that the purpose of authorship, as an instrument of culture, was not to give information on life but to offer instead the possibility for emotive experience (203, 205):

A really cultured woman, like a cultured man, is all the simpler and the less obtrusive for her knowledge; it has made her see herself and her opinions in something like just proportions; she does not make it a pedestal from which she flatters herself that she commands a complete view of men and things, but makes it a point of observation from which to form a right estimate of herself. She neither spouts poetry nor quotes Cicero on slight provocation ... In conversation she is the least formidable of women, because she understands you, without wanting to make you aware that you *can't* understand her. She does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture, – she gives you sympathy, which is the subtlest essence. (317)

In this extract, Evans argues that a truly cultured person is defined by the sympathetic ability to understand other people without drawing attention to their limited understanding. Locating their “cultured” nature in the very concealment of their learning, Evans described both the man and the woman of letters in terms of the creation of self-knowledge through observation.

<15>The fact that Marian Evans saw the “cultured” woman as part of the same equation as the man of culture suggests that her demand for a sympathetic rather than an egotistical kind of solidarity did not aim at constituting a specifically “feminine” language any more than Wollstonecraft did. The biased criticism that Wollstonecraft received was grounded in her scandalous life, which, in many respects, resembled Evans’s own with Lewes. In this light, Evans’s sympathetic review of Wollstonecraft, as in the case of Madame de Sablé, was not as disinterested as she claimed because of the way she identified with the latter. Comparing Evans’s discussion of Wollstonecraft’s declining reputation and Madame de Sablé’s obscurity with her criticism of Edward Young’s critical acclaim illustrates that her concern with the discrimination against literary women was tied to an anxiety about commemoration.

<16>In “Worldliness and Otherworldliness: The Poet Young” (January 1857), which was the only review she wrote for the *Westminster Review* during the writing of *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1857, Evans focuses on criticizing the contrast between Young’s obsequious dedications to his patrons, through which he tried to build his literary reputation and livelihood, and his supposedly more “otherworldly” concerns as a religious poet and a priest. The contradiction she castigates could be seen in terms of his separation of profession and vocation. Traditionally, priesthood, law, and the army were seen as the founding professions, which, importantly, were also vocations. For Eliot, Young seems to have treated both writing and the Church as professions,

and, in so doing, made neither his vocation. This compromised not only his religious role but also the character of his poetry (by writing as demanded or desired by his patron). She acerbically describes the way his priesthood oscillates between economics and spirituality:

And no man can be better fitted for an Established Church. He personifies completely her nice balance of temporalities and spiritualities. He is equally impressed with the momentousness of death and of burial fees; he languishes at once for immortal life and for 'livings;' he has a fervid attachment to patrons in general, but on the whole prefers the Almighty. (342)

Marian Evans' critique of Young can be seen as a reflection of her own anxiety about the way that her planned move into fiction was thought of as a vocation, but which would yet require her to tread in an earthly and hard-headed way. It would be a profession, but one whereby, given she had no patron (and would not desire one), she would need the approval of a readership—whose views might be at odds with her own—in order to be a success. In other words, just as her work for the *Westminster Review* might tie her down to certain modes of writing, there might be a tension between her idea of writing as, ideally, an amalgam of profession and vocation, and its potential reduction to mere trade.

<17>Whereas de Sablé could enjoy her influence while remaining in the background, Evans attacks Young for flattering the views of his patron and readers, and for reducing his work to trade because of his separation of professional and vocational fulfilment. In contrast to her favourable reviews of de Sablé and Wollstonecraft, Evans acerbically characterized Young as a cross between a sycophant and a psalmist, a poet “who fluctuates between rhapsodic applause of King George and rhapsodic applause of Jehovah.” (342) She argued that his constant desire to conjure effects in his readers resulted in “*his radical insincerity as a poetic artist.*” (366) He was led into grandiloquent abstraction and away from concrete and genuine emotions, of which the most significant was sympathy. The reference to Jehovah is important since it suggests how Young constructed an image for himself as a dutiful man. In Eliot's work, Jehovah is the God of duty in contrast to Christ who is seen as the God of love.

<18>The transition from duty to love was coupled, in Marian Evans' view, with the move from a patron-based literary market-place to a publishing industry working on the basis of demand and supply.⁽³⁾ In her *Leader* review, Evans's aim was to arouse sympathy amongst Fuller's transatlantic readership with Wollstonecraft whose reputation, like Evans's, had been damaged by scandal. For Marian Evans, the “sympathetic” reading public was fundamental to finding vocational and professional fulfilment. In this light, her quest for a kind of art capable of extending sympathy was, in part, a rejection of the reification of the profession of writing and its reduction to trade. This is evident in a section of her essay of January 1857 for *Westminster Review* in which Evans derides the want of genuine emotion in Young.

<19>The essay cites a long extract from Young's poem, “Narcissa” (1741), in which he imagines the consequence of there being no Christian afterlife. Typically, Young conceives of the effect of this in terms of the Hobbesian predominance of brute passions and the complete absence of fellow-feeling. In response, Evans adopts the persona of a family man who loves his wife,

children and friends who did indeed deny “his soul immortal,” but who thereby celebrates the extension of human sympathy over space and time:

The fact is, I do *not* love myself alone, whatever logical necessity there may be for that in your mind. I have a tender love for my wife, and children, and friends, and through that love I sympathize with like affections in other men. It is a pang to me to witness the suffering of a fellow-being, and I feel his suffering more acutely because he is *mortal*—because his life is so short, and I would have it, if possible, filled with happiness and not misery. Through my union and fellowship with the men and women I *have* seen, I feel a like, though a fainter, sympathy with those I have *not* seen; and I am able so to live in imagination with the generations to come, that their good is not alien to me, and is a stimulus to me to labour for ends which may not benefit myself, but will benefit them. ... Fear of consequences is only one form of egoism, which will hardly stand against half a dozen forms of egoism bearing down upon it. And in opposition to your theory that a belief in mortality is the only source of virtue, I maintain that, so far as moral action is dependent on that belief, so far the emotion which prompts it is not truly moral—is still in the stage of egoism, and has not yet attained the higher development of sympathy. (373-74)

In this passage, the extension of sympathy has both a geographical and a temporal dimension in that it moves outwards from the family circle to those whom Evans’s male persona does not know; and also goes into the past and into the future. These two dimensions are significant in terms of her professional aspirations as a writer since, according to this logic, it is only through the invocation of sympathetic feeling amongst her readers that her work can be commemorated. From the beginning of her writing career, Marian Evans hoped her readers would keep her alive in their thoughts because of her advocacy of sympathetic feeling. (*The George Eliot Letters* V, 58)

<20>The different reception of Wollstonecraft and de Sablé from Young revealed to Marian Evans the need for literary writers of the highest rank to be recognized independently of their gender. However, at the same time, it intensified her anxiety behind her own reception as a female reviewer which resulted, according to Shirley Foster, in the internalization of patriarchal values through the assumption of a “masculine” editorial voice. (189) There may be some truth in this claim, but I am uncomfortable with Foster’s argument that Marian Evans “as a writer identified herself with male culture ... felt more at ease with men than with women ... and sought to separate herself from the obvious limitations of her own sex.” (189)(4) Although Evans assumed the role of a male married man in the review of Young, it is interesting that her “masculine” tone emerges when her argument becomes polemical as part of an attempt to become more persuasive about her case. (*Essays of George Eliot* 204-05, 373-74) In my view, the masculinization of Eliot’s voice, which Foster sees as being symptomatic of the latter’s use of irony,(5) reflects a fundamental problem with the periodical’s rhetoric of intellectual tolerance that she tried to establish as an editor of the *Westminster Review*.

<21>The moments of masculinization of Evans’s voice in the three reviews discussed in this article represent a significant compromise of the development of sympathy into a feminine and feminist discourse. Her inability to reconcile her mission to broadcast (feminine) voices with her

role as an editor and reviewer of a radical periodical as the *Westminster Review*, reveals not only the impossibility of her task but also the idealistic nature of her sympathetic discourse in her journalistic work as a whole.

<22>Take for example “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” upon which Foster bases her attack on Marian Evans and in which the more authoritative her strident critique of the inadequacy of contemporary models of authorship became, the less sensitive her understanding was of the limited education and experience of the female reading public. While at the beginning of the essay Evans sided with the female reader, by the end of her review, masculine authority overtook feminine solidarity within a narrative voice that was no longer split or quite as gender ambiguous in its warning against the would-be “lady novelists:”

But in novel-writing [as contrasted to other forms of art like music] there are no barriers for incapacity to stumble against, no external criteria to prevent a writer from mistaking foolish facility for mastery. And so we have again and again the old story of La Fontaine’s ass, who puts his nose to the flute, and, finding that he elicits some sound, exclaims, ‘Moi, aussi, je joue de la flute’;—a fable which we commend, at parting, to the consideration of any feminine reader who is in danger to adding to the number of ‘silly novels by lady novelists.’ (324)

In this concluding paragraph, Evans moves from sympathy to authority. The masculinization of her voice testifies to her inability to sustain a sympathetic understanding of the “lady reader.” Revealingly, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” was the last essay she wrote before she embarked on writing fiction; her acerbic reaction towards amateur “lady novelists” stems, in part, from the fact that their commitment to fiction was motivated by vanity rather than the desire for professional and vocational fulfilment. Evans was annoyed with popular fiction writers because the dilettante nature of their work—from which, in her view, their amateurism and hence lack of professionalism resulted—ended up debasing the literary profession for women. The complicity of the critical establishment in the lack of barriers to women’s entry to literature makes one wonder about the extent to which her promotion of gender solidarity was limited by her desire to control the institutions that could impede her writing career as a would-be fiction writer.

<23>The limitations of Evans’s sympathetic discourse go hand in hand with her disillusionment with the capacity of the *Westminster Review* to promote intellectual tolerance and sympathy-based ethics.⁽⁶⁾ What is notable about her turn away from reviewing is that it is couched in calculated, professional language, as a realization that it was not her true vocation. This is particularly evident in her dismissal of John Chapman’s request for her to review Francis W. Newman’s *The Religious Weakness of Protestantism* (1858), and Bessie Rayner Parkes’ offer for her to contribute to *English Woman’s Journal*. (*The George Eliot Letters* II, 420-21, 426-27, 430) Evans’s rejection of reviewing was not because of her dislike of Newman or because of her rejection of the *English Woman’s Journal*’s campaign for the education and employment of women. Evans explained to Parkes in her letter of 3 February 1858 that she rejected reviewing not so much because of her doubts about the feminist cause but because she could not “shilly-shally” about her new commitment, the writing of books:

My negative about the writing has no special relation to the 'Englishwoman's Journal' but includes that and all other Reviews. I dare say you have not seen Mr. Chapman lately, or have not made any allusion to me in conversation with him, or he would have told you that I have not written for the *Westminster* since the last Christmas but one – that is, just a year ago – and that I have been obliged to say 'No' to all his requests for contributions. I have given up writing 'articles', having discovered that my vocation lies in other paths. In fact, *entre nous*, I expect to be writing *books* for some time to come. Don't speak of that at all; but I tell it to you that you may not in the least misapprehend my negatives. If it were a mere question of a little more or less of effort, I should have contrived to write an article for Mr. Chapman for old friendship's sake. But it is not that. It is a question whether I shall give up building my own house to go and help in the building of my neighbour's garden wall. (431)

Evans's aspirations for fiction writing rather than reviewing is justified in terms of a change in vocation and not just in professional activity. Writing books, even with a male pseudonym, offered her an opportunity for originating an authorial self rather than being subsumed under a generic identity like that of the *Westminster Review*.

<24>Evans's attempts to secure her place as George Eliot in a male dominated literary canon were indebted to Lewes' advice as her literary agent. Although Lewes was a tireless advocate of the production of essays and reviews for periodicals—arguing that short pieces should not be looked down upon because of their length since they could be complete conceptually—he was well aware of the limitations of the periodical press to provide space for the most talented to create “serious work.” (*The George Eliot Letters* II, 378) In his essay “The Conditions of Authors in England, Germany, and France” (1847), Lewes recognized the rarity of literary men and women who were capable of producing the kind of writing that would eventually come to constitute an *oeuvre*:

Those who talk so magniloquently about serious works, who despise the essay-like and fragmentary nature of periodical literature, forget that while there are many men who can produce a good essay, there has at all times been a scarcity of those who can produce good works. A brilliant essay, or a thoughtful fragment, is not the less brilliant, is not the less thoughtful, because it is brief, because it does not exhaust the subject. And yet the author, in all probability, could neither continue his brilliancy through the 'vast expanse' of a work, nor could he, in attempting to exhaust his subject, continue in the same thoughtful strain, but would inevitably fall into the commonplaces which bolster up the heads of all but *very* remarkable men. (289)

While the periodical press was an ideal forum for the majority of good writers, for the most talented who were able to maintain their original treatment of a subject over the space of a whole book, it was also restrictive. Taking “George Eliot” to belong to the category of the most talented, Lewes helped her distinguish herself as a “truly cultured” author through which she came to reassess her views on the relationship between profession and vocation.

<25>This reassessment needs to be seen as part of Evans's attempt to overcome, as George Eliot, what Barbara Herrnstein Smith called 'the double discourse of value'—that is, the economic and

aesthetic axiologies of labour. To be more precise, Eliot's view of her literary work as both profession and vocation went hand-in-hand with her growing suspicion of giving herself up to the market forces. As she told the freethinker and philanthropist, Charles Bray, in her letter of 25 November 1859, she tried to imagine to herself how it would feel to yield to the temptations of financial success to which popular novelists succumbed:

Do you see how the publishing world is going mad on periodicals? If I could be seduced by such offers, I might have written three poor novels and made my fortune in one year. Happily I have no need to exert myself when I say, "Avoid thee Satan!" Satan, in the form of bad writing and good pay is not seductive to me. (*The George Eliot Letters* III, 214)

The metaphor of Satan communicates Eliot's anxiety about the battle between good and bad writing and her rejection of the periodical press in her move to being a fiction writer. It was part of a narrative of temptation and deception in the sense that would-be authors (especially women like Eliot) were susceptible to being deceived into believing that financial success was integral to authorship as a profession. What makes Eliot's treatment of bad writing as a moral issue relevant to this article is that it suggests an overlap between the discourses of aesthetics, ethics and professionalism in her literary work as they define themselves in opposition to the forces of the market. (see Ruth 17)

<26>The contrast between Eliot's pursuit of book authorship and the way in which Lewes earned his living by writing for the periodical press suggests the different authorial roles they self-fashioned out of their varied negotiations of the aesthetic and economic axiologies of labour. Lewes, for example, ended his acting career in 1852 in order to dedicate himself to writing (reviews, essays) as part of his everyday quest, in his own words, for the "obscurity of nobodies." (*The George Eliot Letters* IV, 346) Evans, on the contrary, shifted from reviewing to literature, in the same way that she gave up translating, in order to develop an identity of her own as a writer. (see Stark 119-40) As a translator, she silenced her own voice to faithfully communicate another's authorial voice in another language. Likewise as a reviewer, she wrote anonymously. However, as a book author, she could write, independently of publishing anonymously or pseudonymously, as an individual woman with a voice of her own. (Her desire for voice—which is coupled by her desire for recognition—is perhaps behind her choice to publish her translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen Christentums* (1841, *The Essence of Christianity*) with her real name, Marian Evans, as part of an attempt to rescue it from obscurity.)

<27>Despite the different development of her authorship from Lewes, Evans agreed with him that any kind of professional writing should not be a mere trade. (285) The frivolity of "silly novels by lady novelists," which Evans took as a manifestation of women's lack of seriousness, raises the question of whether authorship, especially by women, should be conducted as a trade, vocation or profession. It was Lewes, indeed, who most clearly distinguished between the three. In contrast to trade, professionalism was a necessary condition, in his view, for answering to one's vocational calling. According to Jennifer Ruth, professionals in the period, such as doctors and lawyers, performed labour but were notable for also having mental "capital" in the form of talent and knowledge. (4) Their double position as both workers and capital owners opened up the term professionalism to redefinition. In "Leaves from a Note-Book" (1884), Eliot argued that

what distinguished the “author’s capital” (that is, “his brain power – power of invention, power of writing”) from the manufacturer of “transiently desirable commodity” was their different response to the rules of production. (*Essays of George Eliot* 439)

<28>Eliot’s determination to place herself in the axiology of culture rather than that of economics played an important role in seeing literary writing not just as a profession which offers vocational fulfilment but as a vocation which is larger than the profession itself. In “Leaves from a Note-Book,” Eliot argued that when a writer’s interest in the economics of publishing dominated over one’s artistic vocation, then s/he “is on the level with the manufacturer who gets rich by fancy-wares coloured with arsenic green” (440):

[A writer capable of being popular] he must not pursue authorship as a vocation with a trading determination to get rich by it. ... An author who would keep a pure and noble conscience, and with that a developing instead of degenerating intellect and taste, must cast out of his aims the aim to be rich. (440-41)

In this extract, the aesthetic axiology of labour, which overlaps with professionalism, becomes larger than the economic one. Its enlargement into an ideology is seen to work as a safeguard against the danger of commodification which may potentially compromise the quality of Eliot’s writing in the same way that it did, in her view, in the case of “silly lady novelists”. While for Marian Evans, the editor and the reviewer of the *Westminster Review*, profession and vocation were conflated in order to be defined in opposition to trade, for George Eliot vocation exceeded the meaning of profession in order to make professionalism synonymous with genius—a genius though whose meaning was defined in opposition not to learning but to popularity.

Endnotes

(1)For a discussion of George Eliot’s engagement with different notions of originality, see Macfarlane 92-129.(^)

(2)Marian Evans’ concept of the mixed-gendered literary salon as an intellectual forum inclusive to women differed from nineteenth-century women’s clubs which neither privileged reading over conversation nor gendered reading matter (for example, women reading the *Athenaeum* and men *The Times*). In her essay “Toilers and Spinsters” (March 1861) for *Cornhill Magazine*, for instance, Anne Thackeray Ritchie praises Berners Street Club for providing in 1873, like the mid-Victorian “little reading-room in Langham Place,” a “liberal-minded little refreshment-room,” in which the ladies might not only “join in intellectual conversation, but go upstairs and read the ‘Times,’ and the ‘Englishwoman’s Journal,’ and the ‘Cornhill Magazine,’ &c. &c., and write their letters on neatly stamped paper when the meal was over” (9). For a discussion of salon culture in late nineteenth century, see Vadillo 22-34.(^)

(3)Marian Evans’ generalization of Edward Young’s reliance on patronage to the eighteenth-century literary market-place was not accurate. Young differed from other eighteenth-century

novelists (such as Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson) who wrote without patronage.(^)

(4) Susan Rowland Tush criticizes Shirley Foster, alongside Ellin Ringler for suggesting that Eliot's critique of other nineteenth-century women joins forces "with the patriarchy against all women." (2) Tush's reading of Eliot's fiction in the light of "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" convincingly shows how the latter expands the literary conventions of women's popular fiction through parody, which allows her to affect her readers' expectations as she does in her *Westminster Review* article. For the affective role of parody, see Morson 111-13.(^)

(5) The use of irony in Marian Evans' essay cannot be seen separately from the structure of feeling of her review. Treating irony as an affective discourse—"a linguistic emotionality at work" in the words of Denise Riley—is key to reconsidering the ironic interplay in Marian Evans' reviews as a means of affecting her "lady" readers' expectations through the simultaneous extension and withdrawal of sympathy. (2)(^)

(6) For an in-depth discussion of Marian Evans' shift from reviewing to fiction writing in relation to sympathy, see Hadjiafxendi 33-55.(^)

Works Cited

Ablow, Rachel. *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Ashton, Rosemary. *George Eliot: A Life*. Hamish: Hamilton, 1996.

---. *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London*. London: Random House, 2006.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Brake, Laurel. "Writing, Cultural Production, and the Periodical Press in the Nineteenth Century." *Writing and Victorianism*. Ed. J. B. Bullen. London: Longman, 1997: 54-72.

Demoor, Marysa. *Their Fair Share. Women, Power and Criticism in the Athenaeum. From Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield, 1870-1920*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.

Eliot, George. *The George Eliot Letters*. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. 9 vols. London/New Haven: Oxford University Press/Yale University Press, 1954-78.

- . *Essays of George Eliot*. Ed. Thomas Pinney. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things. Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- Foster, Shirley. *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual*. Totowa, N. J.: Barnes & Noble, 1985.
- Fraser, Hilary, Stephenie Green and Judith Johnston. *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Hadiafxendi, Kyriaki. "'George Eliot', the Literary Market-Place, and Sympathy," *Authorship in Context: From the Theoretical to the Material*. Eds Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007. 33-55.
- Haight, Gordon S. *George Eliot and John Chapman with Chapman's Diaries*. New York: Archon Books, 1969.
- Herrnstein Smith, Barbara. *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Lewes, George Henry. "The Conditions of Authors in England, Germany, and France." *Fraser's Magazine*. Vol. 35. (1847): 285-95.
- Liddle, Dallas. "Mentor and Sibyl: Journalist and the End(s) of Apprenticeship in George Eliot." *Victorians Institute Journal*. Vol. 26. (1998): 5-39.
- Macfarlane, Robert. *Original Copy. Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth Century Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Morson, Garyl Saul. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989.
- Onslow, Barbara. *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001.
- Riley, Denise. *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Ringler, Ellin. "Middlemarch: A Feminist Perspective." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 15. No. 1. (1983): 55-61.
- Rowland Tush, Susan. *George Eliot and the Conventions of Popular Women's Fiction. A Serious Literary Response to the "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists."* New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

Ruth, Jennifer. *Novel Professions: Interested Disinterest and the Making of the Professional in the Victorian Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006.

Stark, Susan. "Marian Evans, the Translator." *Translating Literature*. Ed. Susan Bassnett. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997. 119-40.

Stern, Kimberly J. "A COMMON FUND: George Eliot and the Gender Politics of Criticism." *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*. Vol. 30. No. 1. (2008): 45-62.

Thackeray Ritchie, Anne. *Toilers and Spinners and Other Essays*. London: Smith and Elder & Co., 1890.

Vadillo, Ana. "New Woman Poets and the Culture of the *salon* at the *fin de siècle*." *Women: A Cultural Review*. Vol. 10. No. 1. (1999): 22-34.