recherches contemporaines, une dynamique socio-culturelle apte, entre autres, à enrichir notre appréciation de l'Histoire littéraire.

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It is scarcely surprising that much advanced academic work is being devoted these days to the study of Victorian diaries published during the lifetimes of their authors. But what caught my attention in this new study is the complexity of interrogation and argument now at play in this "hybrid" field. Anne-Marie Millim’s The Victorian Diary: Authorship and Emotional Labour is carefully built upon a large body of scholarly work (biographies, author studies, textual editions, thematic and theoretical analyses) and sets out to offer a fresh way of looking closely at the work of seven diverse, late nineteenth-century diarists – Henry Crabbe Robinson (who wrote many such diaries), Elizabeth Eastlake, George Eliot, George Gissing, John Ruskin, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Edith Simcox. Moving beyond the traditional ways of assessing Victorian diaries – that is, as a neglected or marginalized (literary) form, as individual self-accountings that are emotionally suppressed (personally evasive but earnest in spirit), and as self-assessments that tiptoe along the public-private divide that was, for the Victorians, so fraught a borderland – Millim probes the emotional axes, or “mindsets,” at the heart of these diaries. To that end she borrows the idea of “emotional labour” from sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild; however, she divests the concept of its commercial underpinnings, even though her study gives special emphasis to the idea of “economic self-management,” which she finds at the heart of the diaries of George Eliot and George Gissing.

Diaries written for publication are seen as public texts written out of complex private agendas – they are acts of “public privacy” (8) and, as such, require close cultural reading and attention. They spoke to the “Victorian public’s demand for exciting, but not too personal, diaristic writing by balanced and industrious individuals” (29). Their essential purpose for the writers in question was “to favour and further literary production,” to channel emotion towards “productive [and
respective] venues” (4). In her various chapters Millim seeks to formulate a theory of craftsmanship where none at present exists and to rescue the diary as a serious literary undertaking from the margins of critical attention. For her, diaries allowed their authors to document their “emotional management” of the feelings that most excited or stimulated them (read here “impulses” or “intense feelings”), and to manifest their “observational and critical skills” while clarifying and validating their respective literary positions in the culture which they represented (and in which they expected to be well received and valued for their efforts).

In what smacks of a shared, underlying Protestantism (even for the converted Hopkins), they all wrote to reveal how they controlled emotion in productive ways and they sought to put forward a “proper” state of mind for themselves within their cultural bounds. That state of mind valued moral worth, nobility, respectability, the suppression and mastery of the ego, and “the professionalization of the self” (25). Effectively orchestrated, such public diaries contributed to the monumentalizing of the authors themselves even as they offered a record of their struggles as writers and thinkers and of their desire to be seen as “an ideal, perfectly functioning self” (184) in their time.

Millim delivers the individual studies in pairs, giving John Ruskin a chapter of his own, based on his chosen identity as “a professional observer” (109). Ruskin viewed taste as the only morality and was driven in his diary to articulate his “personal hunger for visual and temporal possession” (110) of those things he set out to observe. Addressing the large audience he anticipated for his diary, he developed his “managerial strategies” for selecting, monitoring, and controlling his “emotional responses” so as to represent images from the external world clearly and correctly. Functioning like a “camera obscura” in his ongoing quest for perfect observation, his most personal observations concerned his worries about his shortcomings as an observer and his ability to illuminate what he chose to describe.

By contrast, George Eliot and George Gissing used their diaries much like account books in which they addressed their struggles as writers facing both daily realities and new creative challenges. Gissing’s diary is “an almost hermetically sealed account of professional activity” (12), couched in his complaints about the economic constrictions he faced on a daily basis and his persistent longing for a supportive partner. Often lonely to the point of debilitation, he sought to connect with his literary heroes from the past through travel, but he wrote pragmatically and steadily (rather than altruistically) in order “to
stay out of the poorhouse” (93). Similarly, George Eliot gave close attention to the economics of her developing career, book by book, even as, unlike Gissing, she enjoyed the benefits of Henry Lewes’s steady affection and moral support. For her, the diary was a means of “manag[ing] her emotional life” (82), whether the issue was personal travel or negotiations with her publisher. Indeed, “she sought to organise her experiences before she lived them” (76). Her agency and control were consciously and consistently self-protective, bent upon “assuring her emotional status and her value as an individual” (148). Millam emphasizes the “profoundly economic nature of Eliot’s world view” (80), even as she strove to be the best she could in her novels.

Relatedly, in her final chapter Millim studies Edith Simcox’s deep sexual attraction to George Eliot. Measuring the strength of Simcox’s feelings for Eliot and the fact of Eliot’s rejection of her overtures, Millim looks closely at Simcox’s self-assertion in “a world of conflicted gender roles” and shows how she used her diary to take stock of her emotional situation” (170). Through a necessary “resignation,” Simcox tamed and adjusted herself, rendering her emotions more “manageable and productive” (170).

Each chapter provides an interesting take on the emotions and mindset of the particular writer under focus. The book also provides a very useful bibliography. That said, I often found the volume frustrating – even vexing – because of its pedantic dutifulness and freighted language. The author is overly deliberate in calling attention to all of her scholarly debts. The limits of my academic tolerance were tested by the book’s heavy-handed, crowded writing and by the use of analytical language that is often opaque and overcooked; it is fraught with words like “etymological” and “ekphrastic” that might discourage even well-informed, general readers who prefer more congenial word choice. In that sense, the study belongs squarely in contemporary academic writing; to my mind the movement from thesis to book could have involved a longer leap toward clarity and a winnowing of its overly technical and off-putting language.

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