THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

ROUTLEDGE

Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain

The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot

JOANNE WILKES

WOMEN REVIEWING WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

To the Memory of Three Fine Scholars
W. Scott Allan (1958–2004)
David G. Wright (1952–2008)
Terry Sturm (1941–2009)

Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain

The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot

JOANNE WILKES
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2010 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Wilkes, Joanne.
Women reviewing women in nineteenth-century Britain: the critical reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. – (The nineteenth century series)
1. Austen, Jane, 1775–1817 – Criticism and interpretation – History – 19th century. 2. Brontë, Charlotte, 1816–1855 – Criticism and interpretation – History – 19th century. 3. Eliot, George, 1819–1880 – Criticism and interpretation – History – 19th century. 4. Women and literature – Great Britain – History – 19th century. 5. Women critics – Great Britain – History – 19th century. 6. English literature – 19th century – History and criticism. 7. English literature – Women authors – History and criticism. 8. Book reviewing – Great Britain – History – 19th century.
I. Title II. Series
820.9'9287'09034–dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Wilkes, Joanne.
Women reviewing women in nineteenth-century Britain: the critical reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot / Joanne Wilkes.
p. cm. – (The nineteenth century series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7546-6336-2 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. Criticism – Great Britain – History – 19th century. 2. English prose literature – Women authors – History and criticism. 3. Women critics – Great Britain. 4. English literature – Women authors – Book reviews. 5. Women and literature – Great Britain – History – 19th century. 6. Austen, Jane, 1775–1817 – Criticism and interpretation – History. 7. Brontë, Charlotte, 1816–1855 – Criticism and interpretation – History. 8. Eliot, George, 1819–1880 – Criticism and interpretation – History. I. Title.
PR75.W56 2010
820.9'9287–dc22

2009023952

ISBN 9780754663362 (hbk)
ISBN 9781315546674 (ebk)

Contents

This page has been left blank intentionally

The Nineteenth Century Series
General Editors' Preface

The aim of the series is to reflect, develop and extend the great burgeoning of interest in the nineteenth century that has been an inevitable feature of recent years, as that former epoch has come more sharply into focus as a locus for our understanding not only of the past but of the contours of our modernity. It centres primarily upon major authors and subjects within Romantic and Victorian literature. It also includes studies of other British writers and issues, where these are matters of current debate: for example, biography and autobiography, journalism, periodical literature, travel writing, book production, gender, non-canonical writing. We are dedicated principally to publishing original monographs and symposia; our policy is to embrace a broad scope in chronology, approach and range of concern, and both to recognize and cut innovatively across such parameters as those suggested by the designations 'Romantic' and 'Victorian'. We welcome new ideas and theories, while valuing traditional scholarship. It is hoped that the world which predates yet so forcibly predicts and engages our own will emerge in parts, in the wider sweep, and in the lively streams of disputation and change that are so manifest an aspect of its intellectual, artistic and social landscape.

Vincent Newey
Joanne Shattock
University of Leicester

This page has been left blank intentionally

Acknowledgements

This book is the result of several years' research into nineteenth-century literary criticism, research which has been aided by a number of people. I am especially grateful to Dr Ellen Jordan of the Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing at the University of Newcastle (Australia) for sharing with me her and her colleagues' findings about Anne Mozley's likely contributions to the *Christian Remembrancer*, as well as her transcriptions of the correspondence between Mozley and members of the Blackwood publishing firm held at the National Library of Scotland. I would like to thank as well Professor John Morrow, of the Political Studies Department, University of Auckland, for guidance with sources on the 'Froude–Carlyle' controversy, Kristine Moruzi, of the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, for directing me to an article of Mary Ward's in *Atalanta*, and Dr Amanda J. Collins, formerly of Sydney University, for assistance with my work on Julia Kavanagh.

I am grateful also for the unfailing assistance from the staffs of the manuscript collections I have consulted – at the National Library of Scotland, the Wordsworth Trust collection at Dove Cottage, Cumbria, the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, and the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. I thank the National Library of Scotland for permission to quote from the correspondence in the Blackwood Papers between members of the Blackwood firm and Margaret Oliphant and Anne Mozley, and the Wordsworth Trust for permission to quote from their holdings of the letters of Maria Jane Jewsbury and Sara Coleridge. Gratitude is also due to Mrs Priscilla Cassam for permission to quote from letters and manuscripts of Sara Coleridge held in the Harry Ransom Center.

Some of the material here has been adapted from earlier publications of mine. I would like to thank the editors of *Women's Writing* for allowing me to reuse part of my article, '"Only the Broken Music"? The Critical Writings of Maria Jane Jewsbury' from *Women's Writing*, 7 (2000): 105–18, and the Editorial Board of Otago Studies in English for permission to reuse part of my chapter '"Clever Women": Anne Mozley, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Brontë', from Colin Gibson and Lisa Marr (eds), *New Windows on a Woman's World: Essays for Jocelyn Harris* (2 vols, Dunedin: Department of English, Otago University, 2005), vol. 2, pp. 297–308. I am grateful as well for having had the opportunity to present earlier versions of some of the material here at conferences: a paper on Jane Williams and Julia Kavanagh at the 2007 conference of the Australasian Victorian Studies Association at the University of Western Australia, and a paper on Anne Mozley at the 2008 conference of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals at the University of Roehampton, London. Thanks are also due to the English

Department of the University of Auckland for funding my attendance at these conferences, plus some of my research travel to Edinburgh and Grasmere.

Aspects of my research into the reception history of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot have been aired in my graduate classes on nineteenth-century fiction. I would like to express thanks to the students in those classes, and particularly to my co-teachers, Aorewa McLeod and Dr Rose Lovell-Smith.

Three of my colleagues at the University of Auckland, Dr Scott Allan, Dr David Wright and Professor Terry Sturm, all fine scholars and good friends, have recently had their careers cut tragically short. This book is dedicated to their memory.

Chapter 1
Introduction

By the time George Eliot's second full-length novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, was being reviewed in 1860, the female identity behind the author's male pseudonym had become common knowledge. The reviewer for the *Saturday Review* in April of that year recalled that Eliot's previous novel, *Adam Bede*, had been 'thought to be too good for a woman's story', and welcomed the disclosure of the novelist's sex:

> We may think ourselves fortunate to have a third female novelist not inferior to Miss Austen and Miss Brontë; and it so happens that there is much in the works of this new writer which reminds us of those two well-known novelists without anything like copying. George Eliot has a minuteness of painting and a certain archness of style that are quite after the manner of Miss Austen, while the wide scope of her remarks, and her delight in depicting strong and wayward feelings, show that she belongs to the generation of Currer Bell, and not to that of the quiet authoress of *Emma*.[1]

This new novelist's work, then, evokes both the achievement of a predecessor, and that of a prominent (if now deceased) contemporary, and the reviewer goes on to explicate the resemblances. Eliot's fiction possesses Austen's 'neatness of finish, a comprehensiveness of detail, and a relish for subdued comedy'. This last trait, moreover, is one where '[w]e seem to share with the authoress the fun of the play she is showing us', without the story-line being broken, and the commentator declares that '[e]very one must remember the consummate skill with which Miss Austen manages this'.[2] On the other hand, George Eliot has a dimension to her mind 'entirely unlike that of Miss Austen, and which brings her much closer to Charlotte Brontë'. That is, '[s]he is full of meditation on some of the most difficult problems of life … the destinies, the possibilities, and the religious position' of her characters. In addition, the story of the protagonist of *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver, is 'entirely in the vein of Charlotte Brontë', showing that Eliot 'has thought as keenly and profoundly as the authoress of *Jane Eyre* on the peculiar difficulties and sorrows encountered by a girl of quick feeling and high aspirations under adverse outward circumstances'.[3]

---

[1] Review of *The Mill on the Floss*, *Saturday Review*, 14 April 1860, repr. in Stuart Hutchinson (ed.), *George Eliot: Critical Assessments* (4 vols, Mountfield: Helm Information, 1996), vol. 1, *Biography, Nineteenth-Century Reviews and Responses*, pp. 18–22, at p. 18.

[2] Ibid., p. 119.

[3] Ibid., p. 120.

This commentary on the fiction of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë is quite characteristic of the mid nineteenth century: it was typical to see Austen's work as notable for neatly constructed, well-observed 'subdued comedy', and Charlotte Brontë's for probing female emotional and spiritual experience. But what I would draw attention to is the incipient canon-formation here: the review sketches a history of nineteenth-century English women's fiction as early as 1860. Although there had been few published discussions focused specifically on Jane Austen's fiction since her death in 1817, literary historian Anne Katherine Elwood could note in 1843 'the popularity [her novels] have at last so generally attained'; the year after the 1860 Eliot review, too, Henry Fothergill Chorley commented in the *Athenaeum* that, despite the lack of impact made by Austen's novels on their first appearance, 'they have passed into the small library of English fiction, containing the tales which may endure so long as men and women read "story-books"'.[4] Meanwhile the first novels of both Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, *Jane Eyre* and *Adam Bede* respectively, had been both commercial and critical successes. Then after Brontë's death in 1855, the 1857 *Life of Charlotte Brontë* by her friend and fellow-novelist Elizabeth Gaskell had further stimulated a fascination with the woman and her work which has really never abated. The critical and commercial history of George Eliot's fiction over the nineteenth century was more chequered, but as the part-publication of her penultimate novel *Middlemarch* approached its end in October 1872, critic Richard Holt Hutton claimed that it 'bid[ ] more than fair to be one of the great books of the world'.[5] Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, for all the vagaries of reputation among women novelists over the nineteenth century – including their own – remained central to the developing canon.

As the 1860 review suggests, the three novelists were not all valued for the same qualities. Jane Austen emerges from the cluster of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women writers to be praised for her fiction's social observation, and also for its verbal economy in the age of prolix three-deckers. Charlotte Brontë's novels grab readers from the outset with their compelling narratives, expressed in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* through passionate and independent female narrators, and probe their characters' inner lives. George Eliot's fiction, psychologically penetrating like Brontë's, renders in a vivid and detailed way British society past and present, infused with wisdom derived from wide reading and profound thinking.

None of the three novelists ventured into print initially under her own name. Jane Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), appeared as 'by a Lady', and subsequent novels came out as 'by the author of' the previous novel(s). Her identity was only disclosed after her death, with the simultaneous

---

[4] Elwood, *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England from the Commencement of the Last Century* (2 vols, London: Henry Colburn, 1843), vol. 2, p. 181; [H.F. Chorley], '*French Women of Letters*', *Athenaeum*, 30 November 1861: 717–18, at 717.

[5] 'George Eliot's Moral Anatomy', *Spectator*, 5 October 1872: 1262–4, repr. in Stuart Hutchinson, *George Eliot*, vol. 1, pp. 285–8, at p. 285.

release of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* at the end of 1817, accompanied by her brother Henry's 'Biographical Notice of the Author'. By contrast, Charlotte Brontë chose the implicitly male pseudonym of 'Currer Bell' for *Jane Eyre*, and Marian Evans, the definitely masculine sobriquet of 'George Eliot' for her first published fiction, her series of three novellas, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858). But the identity of each author was soon revealed: Charlotte Brontë's with the publication of her second novel, *Shirley* (1849), and Marian Evans's with the appearance of *The Mill on the Floss*.

This is all familiar information. Equally well-known is that, in the cases of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, the early fictions by the then-mysterious authors generated much speculation about the identities, including the sex, of the writers, and the disclosures of the female names behind the apparently male pseudonyms inflected the reception of the later works. Nevertheless, to the extent that the striking and innovative aspects of their novels were accepted, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot extended the boundaries of what women were considered capable of in literature.

An aspect of nineteenth-century women's writing that has been much less studied than their fiction, however, is their practice of non-fictional writing for periodicals. With the extraordinary burgeoning of periodical writing over the century, women had the opportunity to publish on a very wide variety of subjects. An examination of the five-volume *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* discloses that, although women contributors were much outnumbered by men, especially in the politically and intellectually heavyweight periodicals, they did write on topics in history, biography, travel, science, theology, philosophy, art, and sometimes politics and economics; as far as fiction, poetry and drama were concerned, they published copiously in these areas, including sometimes on the Greek and Roman literature that was seldom included in a woman's education. Other studies have brought to light women's contributions – as both writers and editors – to a larger range of periodicals and newspapers than was covered by the *Wellesley Index*, including periodicals directed specifically at women and children: Margaret Beetham's *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800–1914* (1996), Barbara Onslow's *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2000), and *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, by Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston (2003).

Looking at the *Wellesley Index* and at the studies just named puts one in awe of the extraordinary versatility and energy of so many women who wrote for periodicals. My focus here, however, is on several women who practised as literary critics, and on what they had to say about women writers – and especially about those increasingly prominent literary entities, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. If these three novelists evidently found venturing into print as women problematic, then how far did women, working in the same environment but as literary critics, respond to these writers specifically as women novelists? Moreover, to what extent was their writing as critics affected by their own awareness of a literary context where women's writing was often seen as different

from men's, and where a woman's intellectual capacities for making authoritative judgments were not universally assumed? Where a novel like *Adam Bede* might be considered 'too good for a woman's story'?

There is now extensive documentation accessible about the critical reception of all three novelists, from their initial publication up to the late twentieth century. Of recent note are the 'Critical Assessments' series from Helm Information.[6] Still very helpful, especially in their introductions, are the volumes in Routledge's Critical Heritage series: Brian Southam's two volumes on Jane Austen (1968, 1987), Miriam Allott's volume on the Brontës (1974), and David R. Carroll's volume on George Eliot (1971). There are also more analytical studies of the novelists' reception history, such as Kathryn Sutherland's magisterial *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (2005), Patsy Stoneman's *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights'* (1996) and, for George Eliot, J. Russell Perkin's *A Reception-History of George Eliot's Fiction* (1990). My study, however, focuses specifically on a number of women critics who were active from the 1820s through to the early years of the twentieth century, and who wrote about one or more of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. There is one exception – Jane Williams – whose book *The Literary Women of England* (1861), a pioneering history of British women's writing focused mainly on poetry, can be related illuminatingly to the women's history produced by Hannah Lawrance, who published on Charlotte Brontë, and Julia Kavanagh, who wrote on Austen. The critics' writings on women novelists have either not been reprinted at all, or have been reprinted only in part. In one case, that of Sara Coleridge, almost none of her commentary on women writers was written for publication, and such as was published appeared mostly posthumously.[7]

The first two critics covered are near-contemporaries Maria Jane Jewsbury (1800–33) and Sara Coleridge (1802–52). Jewsbury's work has received welcome attention in recent years, notably from Monica Correa Fryckstedt, Norma Clarke, Dennis Low and Susan J. Wolfson. But Jewsbury's crucial contribution to Jane Austen's reception history, in producing the first article on the novelist known to be by a woman writer, has attracted little attention – not least because of its unlucky post-publication history, which is one dimension of my discussion of it here. Sara Coleridge, meanwhile, is of interest partly because she chose not to publish most of her literary criticism; much of it is scattered through her letters, only some of which were published in 1873, long after her death, by her daughter

---

[6] *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. Ian Littlewood (4 vols, 1998), *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments*, ed. Eleanor McNees (4 vols, 1996); for the volumes on George Eliot, see n.1.

[7] Solveig C. Robinson has edited a helpful sampling of literary criticism by Victorian women, *A Serious Occupation: Literary Criticism by Victorian Women Writers* (Peterborough, Ontario and Orchard Park, NY: Broadview, 2003), which includes items by Anne Mozley and Margaret Oliphant, plus the article on Jane Austen by Mary Ward that I discuss here, 'Style and Miss Austen'.

Edith Coleridge. As well as drawing on what has been published of her work, I will be dealing with some of Sara Coleridge's unpublished letters and manuscripts. She writes on both Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë.

The next group of critics treated are those who wrote histories of women, and/or of women's writing. Hannah Lawrance (1795–1875) produced histories of Anglo-Saxon and medieval women, but also published a substantial review of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* in 1857 – one that is inflected by the ideas about women's capacities that are both evident in her histories, and expressed in an article on the most prominent woman poet of the mid nineteenth century, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The venture of Jane Williams (1806–85) in producing in 1861 a copious history of women's writing from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards, focusing on poetry from the period after 1700, also involved her articulating ideas about women's literary capacities and the extent to which these differed from men's. In the following year, Julia Kavanagh brought out *English Women of Letters*, which covered women novelists from Aphra Behn onwards, and included substantial discussion of Jane Austen. Kavanagh had already published well-researched studies of women: *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* (1850), *Women of Christianity* (1852) and *French Women of Letters* (1861). Like Lawrance and Williams, she investigated how far women's writing differed from men's, and what its distinctive qualities might be. Although Kavanagh's work as a novelist has received some critical attention, little has been written about her literary criticism, or about that of Lawrance and Williams.

Anne Mozley (1809–91), the subject of the subsequent chapter, was the first to write on all three of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, and two aspects of her work are particularly worth signalling. In reviewing the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, she took up Brontë's own critical comments on Austen (as revealed by Gaskell), to try to define the strong differences between the two novelists in their lives and writing. Then in welcoming *Adam Bede* in 1859, in the review most appreciated by George Eliot herself, she identified the author as female on internal evidence alone. Since much of Mozley's writing, especially that for the *Christian Remembrancer*, is now difficult to identify in the absence of publishers' records, the computer analysis of the *Remembrancer* carried out by the staff at the Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing at Australia's University of Newcastle has been invaluable in studying her work; so too has been the biographical research on Mozley by one of that team, Ellen Jordan.[8] But there exists as yet no study focused on the actual content of Mozley's literary criticism.

The literary criticism of the last two writers covered here, Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) and Mary Augusta (Mrs Humphry) Ward (1851–1920), is better known. They are of course noted novelists as well, a circumstance which influences their

---

[8] Ellen Jordan, 'Sister as Journalist: The Almost Anonymous Career of Anne Mozley', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 37/3 (2004): 315–41; Ellen Jordan, Hugh Craig and Alexis Antonia, 'The Brontë Sisters and the *Christian Remembrancer*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 39/1 (2006): 21–45.

practice as critics. Oliphant's prodigious output for periodicals has been looked at from various angles in recent years, with Joan Bellamy concentrating on her treatment of Charlotte Brontë.[9] Meanwhile Ward's writing on the Brontës has received valuable attention from Beth Sutton-Ramspeck.[10] Especially helpful is the coverage of both writers' responses to Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Eliot in Valerie Sanders's *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (1996). But while I agree with the emphases of Sanders, Bellamy and Sutton-Ramspeck in their treatment of Oliphant and Ward's responses to Brontë, I think there is more to be said about their reactions to Austen and Eliot. In particular, both writers engaged with and appreciated Austen's writing more than Sanders allows for, while Oliphant's access, late in her career, to Eliot's correspondence with her publisher John Blackwood, complicated her reactions to the novelist.

If Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot made publication choices that concealed their identities and/or their sex, then the same option was open to women critics. In fact, for much of the nineteenth century, choosing to publish in a periodical normally involved concealing one's identity, since the convention of anonymity prevailed up to the 1860s, and in some periodicals, for much longer. But as anonymity came under challenge, there was much debate over the implications of anonymity versus signature, some of which is relevant to the choices made by the critics studied here.

A significant new weekly review, the *Athenaeum*, started publication in 1828, and when it was bought by Charles Wentworth Dilke in 1830, he championed anonymity as an article of faith. Disgusted by the habit of some publishers of using reviews they owned to 'puff' their firms' own publications, Dilke believed that anonymous reviewing safeguarded critical independence, since in his view it protected reviewers from coming under pressure from authors and publishers.[11] When the issue re-emerged 30 years later, with some periodicals opting for signed articles, a writer in the *North British Review* argued that signature might make writers vulnerable to political pressure.[12] Meanwhile Eneas Sweetland Dallas claimed that anonymity made periodical writing less personal, and kept down

---

[9] 'Margaret Oliphant: "mightier than the mightiest of her sex"', in Joan Bellamy, Anne Laurence and Gill Perry (eds), *Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge c. 1790–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 143–58, and 'A Lifetime of Reviewing: Margaret Oliphant on Charlotte Brontë', *Brontë Studies*, 29 (2004): 37–42.

[10] 'The Personal is Poetical: Feminist Criticism and Mary Ward's Reading of the Brontës', *Victorian Studies*, 34/1 (1990): 55–75; *Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004).

[11] Leslie A. Marchand, *The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture* (1941; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1971), pp. 105–6.

[12] 'The British Press: Its Growth, Liberty and Power', *North British Review*, 30 (May 1859): 367–402, at 397–8; periodicals that adopted signature included *Macmillan's*

displays of egotism, such as trumpeting one's acquaintance with the famous, telling private anecdotes of others, and engaging in 'virulence' and 'bombast'. Another argument in its favour, according to W.R. Greg, was that articles were judged on their inherent merits, rather than on the reputation of the writers.[13]

Claims like Dallas and Greg's could, however, be turned on their heads. Writers such as Thomas Hughes, George Henry Lewes, John Morley, Anthony Trollope and J. Boyd Kinnear argued strongly in favour of signature. It was a more honest policy: writers could not hide behind anonymity to mount unjust attacks, or to produce lackadaisical writing. It encouraged writers to take more responsibility for their writing, from a sense of having no buffer between themselves and their readers, claimed Morley as editor of the *Fortnightly Review* in 1867.[14] Related to these points was an argument based on the 'market' model: anonymity concealed information vital to readers' judgment as to the value of the product they were buying.[15]

The assumption behind the convention of anonymity was that the voice of a periodical transcended those of its individual writers, was that of a collective entity which might claim to articulate widely held values. Greg described an anonymous article in a 'leading organ of opinion' as 'a mysterious, shadowy, unknown power, made impressive by secresy'.[16] The individual therefore should have a sense of responsibility to the wider 'we' of the journal.[17] This situation might well have a downside for the individual writer – Leslie Stephen, a prominent contributor to one of the *Athenaeum*'s mid-century rivals, the *Saturday Review*, once looked through the weekly's files and found he could hardly distinguish his own articles: 'I had unconsciously adopted the tone of my colleagues like some inferior organism, taken the colouring of my "environment".'[18] It could also mean that those who wrote for a variety of periodicals learnt to adapt their voice to suit the target: Eliza Lynn Linton once explained in a letter accompanying a paper she was sending to Richard Bentley, '[i]f you do not care for it, I will turn it into a different key for

---

Magazine (1859–), *Fortnightly Review* (1865–), *Contemporary Review* (1866–), *Nineteenth Century* (1877–), *Cornhill Magazine* (1878–).

[13] [E.S. Dallas], 'Popular Literature: The Periodical Press', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 85 (February 1859): 180–95 at 185–7; [W.R. Greg], 'The Newspaper Press', *Edinburgh Review*, 102 (October 1855): 470–98, at 488–9.

[14] John Morley, 'Anonymous Journalism', *Fortnightly Review*, ns 2 (September 1867): 287–92.

[15] See Dallas Liddle, 'Salesmen, Sportsmen, Mentors: Anonymity in Mid-Victorian Theories of Journalism', *Victorian Studies*, 41/1 (1997): 31–58.

[16] 'The Newspaper Press', 489.

[17] Dallas Liddle, 'Salesmen, Sportsmen, Mentors', 54–5.

[18] Quoted in Merle Mowbray Bevington, *The Saturday Review 1855–1868: Representative Educated Opinion in Victorian England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 381.

another [periodical]'.[19] Or Mary Margaret Busk might review the same book for different periodicals, mimicking the style expected for each: lively and impertinent for *Bentley's Miscellany*, scholarly for the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, subdued and straightforward for the *Athenaeum*.[20]

Arguments for signature sometimes adduced the honest 'manliness' of the practice. But for women, it was anonymity which promoted manliness, in another sense. It offered them opportunities for adopting voices which, either implicitly or explicitly, might come across to readers as male. Periodicals directed at educated readers assumed a primarily male audience, so that readers would have assumed primarily male authorship. Alexis Easley, in her *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830–1870* (2004), has explored this issue in detail. She mentions *Fraser's Magazine* and its creation, in text and image, of a male editorial board and contributors affecting a male editorial 'we', whereas there were in reality women who wrote for it.[21] Periodicals in general took on women contributors, albeit the old political quarterlies established early in the century, the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, had few. Anonymous publication, Easley points out, 'provided women with effective cover for exploring a variety of conventionally "masculine" social issues', and 'allowed them to evade essentialized notions of "feminine" voice and identity'.[22] So when Harriet Martineau submitted her article on 'Female Industry' to Henry Reeve, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1859, she hoped that he agreed that she had 'succeeded in making it look like a man's writing'.[23] Easley also quotes the comment in 1865 of the proto-feminist activist Bessie Rayner Parkes, that 'if editors were ever known to disclose the dread secrets of their dens, they would only give the public an idea of the authoresses whose unsigned names are legion; of their rolls of manuscripts, which are as the sands of the sea'.[24]

Of the women critics covered here who chose to publish anonymously, Maria Jane Jewsbury evidently relished anonymity for the expressive freedom it gave her: taken on by Charles Wentworth Dilke when he bought the *Athenaeum* in 1830, she had already shown in some of her published work her strong awareness that the personae projected in writing were to a greater or lesser extent constructs,

---

[19] Letter of 8 April 1894, Bentley MSS, quoted in Nancy Fix Anderson, *Woman Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 71–2.

[20] Elaine Curran, '"Holding on by a Pen": The Story of a Lady Reviewer, Mary Margaret Busk (1779–1863)', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 31/1 (1998): 9–30.

[21] *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830–1870* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 27.

[22] Ibid., p. 1.

[23] Valerie Sanders, '"I'm your Man": Harriet Martineau and the *Edinburgh Review*', *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*, 6 (2000): 36–47, at 44.

[24] Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Essays on Women's Work* (London: Strahan, 1865), p. 121, quoted in *First-Person Anonymous*, p. 2.

often deliberate performances, and could be varied according to the intended audience. This awareness, however, also meant recognising that women writing overtly as women might feel obliged to perform in a constrained way. In reviewing *Woman, in her Social and Domestic Character* in 1832, she claims that when writing avowedly as females, women do so 'under a paralyzing fear of man', such that 'all they decry, and all that they inculcate is subservient to the opinions and tastes of man'.[25] Hence the author (who, incidentally, writes as 'Mrs John' rather than as 'Elizabeth' Sandford) recommends to women only those virtues and accomplishments which please men, rather than acknowledging that women possess 'a separate and responsible intelligence', and need a moral code that is 'based in broad general principles which appeal equally and indiscriminately to all human beings'. Glennis Stephenson has argued of Jewsbury's contemporary, the popular poet Letitia Elizabeth Landon ('L.E.L.'), that when publishing literary criticism as 'L.E.L.', she writes effusively, personally (using 'I' rather than 'we'), and with slapdash grammar, whereas her anonymous piece for the same periodical (the *New Monthly Magazine*), 'On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry', deploys the authoritative 'we', and uses correct grammar and clear and precise diction.[26] That is, when writing overtly as a woman, Landon deliberately comes across as emotional and intellectually limited.

Anne Mozley too welcomed anonymous publication: although signature was adopted by some periodicals during her writing lifetime, she did not seek to publish in any of them, and her long and prolific career as a periodical contributor was only disclosed in 1892, shortly after her death. Anonymity gave her expressive freedom, including the capacity to cover topics not usually seen as women's province. Both she and Jewsbury, in addition, writing from strongly Christian positions, would have been affected by religious strictures against seeking worldly acclaim, reinforced by social strictures against such ambitions on the part of women. Margaret Oliphant, meanwhile, preferred anonymity: she occasionally published periodical criticism as herself, but was more often anonymous, and sometimes adopted an overtly masculine persona. Her attitude differed somewhat from those of Jewsbury and Mozley: known as a writer of novels and other books, she was not confident that she was respected either as a woman or as an individual.

Sara Coleridge is an interesting case, since her short venture into periodical criticism was ill-starred. One corollary of identity and character being invested in periodicals themselves rather than in the individuals who wrote for them was that editors sometimes altered the texts of contributions to fit in with their sense of the periodical's viewpoint. How common this was is now hard to gauge, but Sara Coleridge's review of Tennyson's *The Princess* for the *Quarterly Review* in 1848 was doctored by the editor, J.G. Lockhart, to excise any references to Keats:

---

[25] '*Woman, in Her Social and Domestic Character*', *Athenaeum*, 5 May 1832: 282–3, at 282.

[26] 'Letitia Landon and the Victorian Improvisatrice: the Construction of L.E.L.', *Victorian Poetry*, 30/1 (1992): 1–17.