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## Review of The Victorian Diary: Authorship and Emotional Labour

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**Anne-Marie Millim, *The Victorian Diary: Authorship and Emotional Labour* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 216. ISBN 978 1 4094 3576 1. £54.00.**

The diary genre has been repeatedly explored both as a confessional, retrospective form of writing and ‘as an inherently female genre’ (p. 17). Refreshingly, Millim challenges these approaches by stressing not only the genre’s multiplicity, but also its ability to shape future, rather than past, experiences. This study is positioned alongside the more recent ‘pragmatic, rather than ideological’ (p. 23) approaches of Delafield’s *Women’s Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (2009) and Steinitz’s *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (2011). Millim’s *The Victorian Diary* is less wide-ranging (unlike Delafield and Steinitz, she does not also tackle fictional diaries), but bravely engages with some of the more unaccommodating species of the genre, such as the ‘bare-bones’ diary.

One of Millim’s most thought-provoking contributions to diary scholarship is her insistence on the economic and managerial properties of the genre. Strikingly, the study proposes that its selection of diarists used the form less as a ‘repository of lived experience’ than as a tool to ‘achieve maximal professional productivity through imagining, establishing and/or maintaining an ideal self, an emotional balance, or state of contentment, which they perceived as necessary for optimal professional performance’ (p. 25). Millim, drawing on the work of Philippe Lejeune, traces this function back to the origin of the diary as an accountancy tool. In the opening chapter, Elizabeth Eastlake (the famously disapproving critic of *Jane Eyre*) and Henry Crabb Robinson are discussed alongside each other as the authors of ‘public autobiographical, rather than informal private, writing’ (p. 32). Both, Millim argues, used their diaries to explore their ambivalence towards emotion. Crabb Robinson felt that he lacked the necessary emotional make-up to achieve success as a writer, but also distrusted ‘open fervour’ (p. 55), while Eastlake privileged emotion which presented itself as respectable and altruistic, and used the diary, shaped into a series of aphorisms by her nephew, to teach emotional self-awareness. Ruskin (discussed in chapter three), felt that ‘perception was governed by an inherent emotional dynamic’ (p. 144) and, in order to maintain this dynamic, recorded experiences he would be able to draw on in times of emotional exhaustion.

George Eliot’s diaries have been repeatedly mined for biographies of the novelist, but have rarely been the direct focus of critical attention. (One exception is Bellanca’s chapter on the novelist’s Ilfracombe journals in her *Nature Diaries in Britain, 1770-1870* (2007), which argues that Eliot was ‘exploring new configurations of mimesis and artifice, of quest for factual knowledge and play of imagination’, p. 175.) Here, the diaries are discussed in the second chapter, which presents evidence of the novelist’s ‘economic mindset’ (p. 71) in two ways. As Harris and Johnston wrote in the introduction to their invaluable edition of Eliot’s journals, these demonstrate ‘her competence in practical matters of finance and business’ (Harris and Johnston, p. xix). For Millim, however, it is her use of the diary form itself which shows Eliot’s management of her career and emotions. First, Eliot’s foreign diaries reveal her as a traveller eagerly collecting sensations, but ultimately less in search of discovery than in the substantiation of her preconceptions regarding foreign places and artworks. In doing so, she ‘draws the balance between the cost and time they [Eliot and Lewes] expended on the ... journey and the benefits of having undertaken it’ (p. 75). Second, Millim considers how the diaries helped Eliot sustain professional productivity. When feeling uncertain about her work, as she so often did, Eliot could re-read older entries and take comfort from the journal’s

narrative of progress and improvement. Acknowledging the diary's emotional terseness, Millim concludes that Eliot 'sought to make herself feel differently *through* the diary, but that she had decided not to feel *in* the diary' (p. 88). (Similarly, Gissing, whose is discussed in the second half of the chapter, used his diary to achieve the emotional contentment he relied on in order to write.)

Eliot scholars will also be interested in the lengthy section of chapter four on Edith Simcox, whom Millim somewhat unfairly describes as being 'mostly known for her sexual life' (p. 169). Despite the study's preoccupation with economical concerns, Millim does not consider the *Autobiography of a Shirtmaker's* discussion of reform and trade unions, but instead looks at Simcox's management of her feelings for Eliot. Millim suggests that Simcox perceived her relationship to Eliot as lying at the heart of her own productivity, and used the diary to combat the frustration she felt at the lack of reciprocity in the relationship. While insightful, the chapter illustrates how quickly Millim's discussion of genre can slip into biographical speculation. The author's vision of the diary as 'a 'way of living' ... rather than a way of writing' (p. 25) is a stimulating one, but runs the risk of reducing Simcox and Hopkins (who is also discussed in the chapter) as 'Victorian writers whose identity was not primarily shaped by their literary and scholarly output' (p. 182) but by their sexuality and religion.

Millim's attention is firmly and constructively focused on strategies of emotional management in the diaries, and the price paid for this is the neglect of issues surrounding the composition and publication of the diaries. The monograph would have been enriched by engaging with the surviving manuscript diaries, which do not appear to have been consulted. For example, Millim notes that the editors of Eastlake's and Crabb Robinson's diaries 'have heavily interfered with the original structure, length and wording of the diaries and letters' (p. 29) though it is unclear how this judgement has been reached, and what some of these interferences involve. Similarly, Millim describes the title of Simcox's diary as 'evidence of its wish to be read' (p. 171), but an analysis of the manuscript currently held in the Bodleian library might have yielded further insights. Nonetheless, *Victorian Diary* is a welcome addition to an area that, despite the flourishing academic interest in life-writing, remains undertheorized.

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