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IDLERS AND COLLABORATORS: ENTER THE DOG

By Beryl Gray

Both George Eliot and her older contemporary, Charles Dickens, introduced dogs into their fiction before introducing any into their homes. By the time Dickens was given the first of his many dogs he had invented Ponto, the sagacious pointer described by Jingle in *The Pickwick Papers;* Bull’s-eye for *Oliver Twist;* and Jerry’s performing dogs for *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Before George Eliot received her first dog – the Pug presented to her by her grateful publisher John Blackwood – the narrator of her first story, ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, had justified in the following terms the unprepossessing curate’s fortune in having so lovely and gentle a wife as Milly:

I, for one, do not grudge Amos Barton his sweet wife. I have all my life had a sympathy for mongrel ungainly dogs, who are nobody’s pets; and I would rather surprise one of them by a pat and a pleasant morsel, than meet the condescending advances of the loveliest Skye-terrier who has his cushion by my lady’s chair.1

Protective of Mr Barton though that analogy is, the statement represents George Eliot’s own attitude to dogs only up to a point, for her fiction – and her letters – show her just as capable of sympathy for pedigree pets as she is for mongrels (she is even beguiled by the King Charles spaniel, Jet, she gives to the sublimely selfish Countess Czerlaski in Amos Barton’s own story). In the second scene of clerical life, ‘Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story’, Mr Gilfil is given the companionship of an ‘old brown setter’ (84), another Ponto, as solace for his declining years. Lying ‘stretched out at full length on the rug with his nose between his fore-paws, [Ponto] would wrinkle his brows and lift up his eyelids every now and then, to exchange a glance of mutual understanding with his master’ (84). For the same story George Eliot also created Rupert, Sir Christopher Cheverel’s old bloodhound, whose moderately anthropomorphized but beautifully observed role as a guardian escort anticipates that of Monk in *Middlemarch* (1871-2). Rupert offers the grateful heroine, Caterina Sarti, vigorous expressions of his friendship and ‘the honour of his approbation and society’ (134) on the walk she takes to relieve the agitation caused by Anthony Wybrow’s love-making, and it is he who leads Sir Christopher and Mr Bates the gardener to Anthony’s body, warning Mr Bates with his ‘deep alarmed bark’ (165) that something is gravely amiss; returning to his stricken master in order to lick his ‘trembling hand, as if to say “Courage!”’ (165); and then ‘waiting and watching’ while Sir Christopher bends over his nephew’s body hoping for signs of life, ‘licking first the dead and then the living hands; then running off on Mr Bates’s track as if he would follow and hasten his return, but in a moment turning back again, unable to quit the scene of his master’s sorrow’ (166).

In *Adam Bede,* the novel that immediately followed *Scenes of Clerical Life,* the titular hero has his tailless Gyp, while the Reverend Adolphus Irwine takes his ease or his breakfast in the society of his Juno (another brown setter) and her two hyperactive pups, and of the Pug who superciliously watches them.2 It was of course to reward her for the huge success of this novel that George Eliot was given her Pug. In the same novel, Bartle Massey’s humanity is fully revealed through his tender treatment of, as opposed to what he says to, or about, his mongrel Vixen and her illegitimate pups, while the illegitimately pregnant Hetty’s vulnerability is
highlighted by the lost little King Charles spaniel trembling on the cart which carries her on one stage of the journey she makes in the desperate hope of finding her seducer, Arthur Donnithorne.

As this brief compilation shows, neither Dickens nor George Eliot needed to own dogs in order instinctively to observe and acknowledge them, and to include them in his or her very different fictive worlds. Yet while everyone remembers that there are lots of dogs in Dickens, George Eliot's dogs seem not to spring out of their contexts in the way that Dickens's are able to, perhaps because the roles of George Eliot's tend to be more discreet than his; all the same, they are part of the life of her fiction, and of the life experienced by many of her human characters. Her created worlds reflect, like Dickens's, the degree to which, by the time she came to write fiction, dogs had generally come to be recognized as our fellow-travellers - 'idlers with us [....] as well as being collaborateurs', as she was to describe them in an 1864 Christmas letter to her positivist friend Maria Congreve.

Of course, dogs have lived in close association with humankind since prehistoric times. They have co-operated with man as hunters, herders, and fighters; they have protected his property and his person; they have been used as messengers, rescuers, carriers, draught animals, and guides; they have been trained as entertainers; and they have been bred as pets. But humankind has a history of ambivalence in its attitude to them, at one extreme regarding them as embodying all that is base and filthy, and at the other as emblemizing devotion and fidelity. Although this ambivalence was (and remains) persistent, and is reflected in the work of many of George Eliot's contemporaries, including Dickens, numerous individual pre-nineteenth-century dogs, from Ulysses' Argus to William Hogarth's Pugs, were renowned for their nobility, or affectionately memorialized as companions or, in the case of Hogarth's Pugs, depicted as the artist's self-representatives; but – in Britain at any rate – it was in the course of the nineteenth century that, as the human population migrated in droves from the country to the town, and the tendency to allow dogs into the home as members of the family grew, that the species became established as part of, rather than an adjunct to, human society. By 1857, when the Scenes were appearing in serial form, it was socially ubiquitous. The ways in which George Eliot integrates dogs into her narratives, therefore, is both a matter of the personal inclination that has already been mentioned and an accurate reflection of the social picture.

The ubiquity of the Victorian dog is evident in an enormous range of writing – fiction, poetry, journalism, and letters, so that its non-appearance on the pages of a nineteenth-century novel is more striking than its presence (its virtual exclusion from Anthony Trollope's drawing-rooms, for example, is remarkable, though Trollope certainly makes us aware of the huntsman's need for his hounds, and of his appreciation of their points), while its popularity as a subject for artists such as Edwin Landseer and George Earl was unbounded: Dickens and George Eliot were not alone in inviting the reader (or viewer) to take account not only of the presence of dogs and their breed characteristics (or lack of them), but also of their individuality as responsive beings. Where George Eliot excels is in conveying the sense of a dog's interior life; of its capability of exchanging with its human companion that 'glance of mutual understanding'. Moreover, she keeps faith with its place in the narrative, or in the overall scheme, of the work in which it belongs; and without allowing it to take precedence or otherwise to predominate, she also persuades the reader that it is integral to the scenes in which
it appears. These considerations by no means necessarily apply to every other Victorian novelist who allows dogs onto the social scene. Mary Braddon, for instance, the author of a wealth of sensation fiction that includes *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, brings many dogs to the reader's attention, but often in a nonce kind of fashion. Two dogs in just one of her novels, *John Marchmont's Legacy*, serve as examples.

In chapter 12 of this novel the reader's interest is aroused by the dog in the scene depicting Olivia Marchmont sitting in her husband's study after the departure of his funeral cortège. The reader is told that 'A fire burned in the low grate at her feet, and a rough cur – half shepherd's dog, half Scotch deer-hound, who had been fond of John, but was not fond of Olivia – lay at the further extremity of the hearth-rug, watching her suspiciously.' The demeanour, positioning, and suspicious regard of the unnamed dog are well enough observed, and are clearly intended to underscore the presentation of Olivia as unloving and seemingly unlovable. But we have reached this chapter without ever having seen or heard of the animal before, and we never hear of it again. We are given no indication of how it came to be there, or what becomes of it, and its introduction here fails even to integrate it retrospectively into the household.

A kind of counterpoint to this scene occurs much later in the novel when, with the hero, Edward (who believes himself to be a widower), we survey the 'humble', 'simple' sitting-room of his quaint old rented cottage. The room is made welcoming by a bright fire.

A silver tea-service and a Sèvres china cup and saucer, which Mrs Arundel had sent to the cottage for her son's use, stood upon the small oval table: and a brown setter, a favourite of the young man's, lay upon the hearth-rug, with his chin upon his out-stretched paws, blinking at the blaze. (332)

The similarity between this setter's attitude and that of Mr Gilfil's Ponto is self-evident. What is absent from the domestic sanctum is, of course, its angel, whom Edward could fancy 'bending over the low silver teapot'.

He conjured up the dear dead face, with faint blushes flickering amidst its lily pallor, and soft hazel eyes looking up at him through the misty steam of the teatable, innocent and virginal as the eyes of that mythic nymph who was wont to appear to the old Roman king. (332-333)

As Edward sits broodingly over the fire, drinking his tea, he 'did not deign to notice the caresses of the brown setter, who laid his cold wet nose in his master's hand, and performed a species of spirit-rapping upon the carpet with his tail' (333).

So, where the suspicious watchfulness of the so-called cur in John Marchmont's study suggests that Olivia's nature is unsympathetic, the (also unnamed) setter's affectionate and unreciprocated demonstrativeness in this scene underscores the presentation of Edward as inherently worthy, though mournfully preoccupied. But like that of Olivia's uncompanionable companion, the promise in the depiction of Edward's disregarded but devoted (and also previously unmentioned) setter is destined to be unfulfilled. Neither dog has an integral part to play; neither has any function beyond the moment; neither is intrinsic to the plot or narrative.
To the extent that the reader’s interest in each animal is caught, then, it remains unsatisfied. George Eliot, on the other hand, acknowledges that dogs have their own history – at least, she does so in almost every case. The story of Yap, for example, the ‘queer white cur with the brown ear’ – or, more definitely, ‘that queer white cur with the brown ear’, as George Eliot describes him in chapter 1 of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) – who belongs to both Maggie and Tom, and whose first function is to quicken into immediacy the dream-picture surveyed by the revisiting narrator in the novel’s opening chapter, is brought nearly to its conclusion by Maggie, who tells Philip Wakem in Book II, ‘School-time’, that ‘poor Yap’ has ‘got a lump in his throat’ (165), from which knowledge she understands he will die – though she won’t tell Tom about it because it would ‘vex him so’ (165). Even the tiny Maltese puppy famously proffered as a courtship gift by Sir James Chettam to Dorothea in chapter 3 of *Middlemarch*, and loftily rejected by her, appears to be given a future, for in chapter 55, when the widowed Dorothea is visiting Freshitt, and the conversation between Celia, now Lady Chettam, and Mrs Cadwallader turns to the subject of (early) remarriage, Sir James conceals his annoyance by playing with Celia’s Maltese dog. There is nothing momentous about the action, which can be read as just a neatly inserted little piece of business. Nevertheless it reminds us that Dorothea – with the protective Great St Bernard, Monk, by her side – had earlier softened her hasty condemnation of small breeds as parasitic by asking Sir James, whom she thinks would be a good husband for Celia, not to judge her sister’s feelings by her own. ‘I think she likes these small pets’, she says, before going on to explain that the ‘tiny terrier’ that Celia had once owned had made her, Dorothea, unhappy because she feared her short-sightedness would cause her to tread on it. Because the Maltese – surely the puppy of chapter 3 grown into adulthood (though it was not presented to Celia immediately after its rejection by Dorothea) – whom Sir James plays with in chapter 55 demands relatively little of the reader’s attention, he is easily, and generally, overlooked; yet his appearance is evidence of George Eliot’s sense of continuity, and of her artistry; and it is with the place of the dog in her art that I am principally concerned.

In fairness to Mary Braddon, however, another dog in *Middlemarch* (a novel with a notable canine population) should be mentioned. This one appears in the Lydgates’ drawing room more than half way through the novel: in Book V, ‘The Dead Hand’. In chapter 46 we see Rosamond sitting elegantly at the tea table (having decided not to look at her husband because she has noticed that he is perturbed), and observe that Lydgate, who is indeed perturbed, is sprawled sideways in a fireside chair. Characteristically,

> Will Ladislaw was stretched on the rug contemplating the curtain-pole abstractedly, and humming very low the notes of ‘When first I saw thy face’; while the house spaniel, also stretched out with small choice of room, looked out from between his paws at the usurper of the rug with silent but strong objection. (417)

While the spaniel’s claim to the rug appears to be an established one, and though his ‘silent but strong’ resentment endows him with a personality and an inner life, like the fireside dogs in *John Marchmont’s Legacy* he is there only for the sake of the moment – not merely for the sake of the picture, perhaps, but as an ironic comment on what is conveyed about the preoccupations of the human individuals in it. A spaniel stretched on a rug by the fire would normally suggest
domestic harmony; here all sense of harmony is belied by the information we have been given. But though the spaniel is given this little role, the fact remains that we have never seen him before, and never see him again. His presence is in any case an anomaly, for it is difficult to imagine either the fastidious Rosamond accommodating him, let alone taking an interest in him, or to believe that Lydgate would manage to ignore him. It seems that he represents a rare lapse on George Eliot’s part.

All the same, as we can see even from that extract, the dog image certainly has a place in George Eliot’s pictorialism. She became very familiar with 17th-century Dutch genre painting through her visits with Lewes to German art galleries in the winter of 1854-1855 (before she began to write fiction) and again in 1858, when she spent three months in Munich after Scenes had appeared in its two-volume form, and where she worked on Adam Bede. In between those two visits she reviewed, in April 1856 and July 1856 respectively, volumes 3 and 4 of John Ruskin’s Modern Painters, both articles appearing in the Westminster Review. As commentators often note, she venerated Ruskin, proclaiming him the ‘finest writer living’; akin to Wordsworth. That kinship is much in evidence in Modern Painters, for not only does Ruskin cite Wordsworth repeatedly throughout the work, but each of the five volumes prints as its epigraph the same set of lines from Book Four of Wordsworth’s The Excursion: Ruskin’s self-identification with the poet with whom she was herself in such sympathy would have recommended him to George Eliot from the moment she began to read the volumes. But though she found him a great and inspiring Teacher (and she uses a capital ‘T’ when applying the word to him), she was not altogether uncritical of him, and did find him capable of error, and sometimes a little harmlessly absurd. She certainly looked at Dutch art with different eyes.

It was while she was in Munich that she wrote the much-cited passage on realism in art that occurs in chapter 17 of Adam Bede. In this passage, the narrator proclaims her (or his) delight in what she, or he, sees as the truthfulness of the kind of Dutch paintings ‘which lofty-minded people despise’. Ruskin was to reveal himself as one such person in volume 5 of Modern Painters, which wasn’t published until 1860, after Adam Bede had appeared. Dutch artists ‘do not care about the people, but about the lustres on them’, says Ruskin uncompromisingly. Admitting that their paintings do show feeling for rural life, he finds neither ‘truth of humanity’ in them, nor ‘any feeling for beauty’. While he considered Cuyp one of the ‘more skilful masters of the Dutch School’, not even he is allowed to be an exception to this rule, for, says Ruskin,

his work will make you marvellously drowsy. It is good for nothing else [...]. Nothing happens in his pictures, except some indifferent person’s asking the way of somebody else, who, by his cast of countenance, seems not likely to know it. For farther entertainment perhaps a red cow and a white one; or puppies at play, not playfully; the man’s heart not going even with the puppies. Essentially he sees nothing but the shine on the flaps of their ears.

Where George Eliot had found truth, Ruskin finds none. Where he sees only highly skilled surface values, George Eliot had found ‘a source of delicious sympathy’ in ‘faithful pictures’ (II, 5) of the kind that depict ‘old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands’ (II, 7), and men who ‘have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world’ (II, 8), and
‘those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions’ (II, 8). Her eye for the rough curs in these pictures is particularly noteworthy, for it is on the treatment of the dog in many of the paintings he discusses that Ruskin will – sometimes unexpectedly – often choose to focus. For instance, in volume 3 of Modern Painters, the first of the volumes reviewed by George Eliot, he gives as an example of the ‘False [Religious] Ideal’ ‘that school of modern Germanism which wears its pieties for decoration as women wear their diamonds, and flaunts the dry fleeces of its phylacteries between its dust and the law of heaven’. ‘I had rather’, says Ruskin, ‘with great, thoughtless, humble, Paul Veronese, make the supper at Emmaus a background for two children playing with a dog […]’ – which is indeed what Veronese does.16

Veronese (Paolo Caliari) 1528-88. *Supper at Emmaus* (oil on canvas), c. 1559. Louvre, Paris / Peter Willi / The Bridgeman Art Library.

In a chapter entitled ‘Of Imagination Contemplative’ in Volume II of *Modern Painters*, which George Eliot would almost certainly have read though she did not review it, Ruskin had already compared Landseer’s technique in dog painting with Veronese’s – to Landseer’s detriment (Ruskin is often severe on his contemporary, though almost every time he criticizes Landseer’s artistic values he makes an exception of the *Old Shepherd’s Chief Mourner*). In the same volume he enthuses about the dogs the London-based Irish genre painter William Mulready includes in his pictures, suggesting that the Butcher’s dog in the corner of *The Butt: Shooting the Cherry*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1848, is an example ‘of the most refined handling ever perhaps exhibited in animal painting’, and that he – the dog – ‘deserved a whole room of the Academy to himself’.17 He greatly admires the painterly values accorded the spaniel in *Choosing the Wedding Gown*, and the two dogs in the work called *Burchell and Sophia in the Hayfield*, claiming that ‘any of these dogs of Mulready might be taken out of the canvass and cut in alabaster, or, perhaps better, stuck upon a coin’.18 In 1864, the year after
Mulready’s death, Lewes noted in his Journal after he and George Eliot had visited the South Kensington Museum to look at the artist’s pictures that it was ‘interesting to observe the progress of one mind through many changes of taste and fashion’, but saw them merely as the studies ‘of an ambitious and aspiring student’.19 George Eliot mentions the visit in her Journal,20 too, but records no judgement; there is certainly no hint that she was in agreement with Ruskin’s evaluation of Mulready any more than he was with her appreciation of Dutch art. The essential point is that, though they might not always concur in their evaluation of a particular work or school of painting, they are both concerned with the relation of the part to the whole. Whatever their critical criteria, neither to Ruskin nor to George Eliot is the dog in the picture negligible.

The ‘rough curs’ mentioned by George Eliot in Adam Bede belong with the pans and pitchers, certainly, but the mind’s eye recognizes them also as living attachments. That she was highly sensitive to these animate details is clear from her treatment of Gyp in the chapters of Adam Bede she had already written before embarking on the 1858 journey to Germany. Gyp is not a cur exactly, but he is rough – ‘a rough grey shepherd-dog’, to be exact; both a working dog and a prescient, occasionally anthropomorphized, companion. We observe him before we actually meet Adam, for he is the first individualized figure the narrator draws with the ‘drop of ink at the end of [his] pen’ (I, 1) in the carpenter’s shop depicted in the novel’s opening chapter. Gyp is introduced in the second paragraph, lying – precisely as Mr Gilfil’s Ponto had done – ‘with his nose between his forepaws’, and – again very much like Ponto – ‘occasionally wrinkling his brows to cast a glance’ (I, 2) at his master. There is no exchange of mutual understanding between Adam and Gyp at this point, however: the dog’s function is to draw our eyes towards the industriously carving, lustily singing, ‘tallest of the five workmen’ (I, 2): it is thus Gyp who introduces Adam, just as it is Yap who, in George Eliot’s next novel, draws our attention to his playfellow, the little girl in the beaver bonnet who seems to be mesmerized by the movement of the millwheel, but who must be relinquished from the dream picture so that the action of her novel, The Mill on the Floss, can begin.

If Gyp glances as Mr Gilfil’s Ponto, he also anticipates a fleetingly observed figure in the celebrated, nostalgic ‘Author’s Introduction’ to Felix Holt (1866), in which the narrator transports us back through thirty-five years, to 1831, to when ‘the glory had not yet departed from the old coach-roads’.21 We accompany a passenger on the box of a stagecoach as he travels in our imaginations through the unspectacular, lovingly evoked midland plain. The deftly established, morning-illuminated rural landscape directly becomes the setting for once experienced life as our focus is directed towards ‘the full-uddered cows driven from their pastures to the early milking’ (4). ‘Perhaps it was the shepherd, head-servant of the farm, who drove [the cows], his sheep-dog following with a heedless unofficial air as of a beadle in undress’ (4). That is a brief enough description, certainly, but it manages to present the sheepdog as a particular sheepdog while encapsulating the demeanour that is common to those of its kind who remain available for duty while having no immediate task to perform. This upgrading of a conventional pictorial detail – the sort of anonymous little animal figure used as staffage in many a landscape painting, and seemingly created by a dexterous flick of the brush – is typical of George Eliot. Although we see neither him nor his master again, his amour-propre as a dog with a function is retroactively enhanced by the contrasting image projected in chapter 8 of a redundant ‘shepherd-dog in low spirits’ (101).
Adriaen van Ostade, 1610-1685. *The Interior of a Peasant’s Cottage*, 1668 (oil on panel).
The Royal Collection © 2009 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
As I suggested at the beginning of this paper, George Eliot displays as much sympathy for pedigree dogs as for ‘rough’ dogs. If in *The Mill on the Floss* the behaviour and feelings of Lucy Deane’s ‘tiny silken pet’ (365), Minny – who indispensably aids George Eliot’s psychologized presentation of Stephen Guest’s methods and motives first as Lucy’s somewhat patronizing suitor, and then as Maggie’s besotted tempter – are translated into human terms, they describe nonetheless the expressive behaviour of a closely-observed King Charles spaniel, whose persona is never developed beyond the bounds of breed credibility.

Minny’s antecedent in George Eliot’s canon is Caroline Czerlaski’s Jet in ‘Amos Barton’. Jet (who is invested with more character than the Countess’s brother, Mr Bridmain) appears in three of the story’s eight chapters. He is used – or misused – as the Countess’s prop, for she makes him yelp when she throws him down to express her disgust with her brother when he announces that he is to marry her maid; and he provides a means for George Eliot to expose and comment on the Countess’s selfishness and shallowness. Having left her brother’s house and parasitically and seemingly permanently ensconced herself at the impoverished Bartons’, she appears with Jet one morning for her separate breakfast at her usual time of 11 o’clock, and – in a scene strongly reminiscent of the Honourable Mrs Jamieson’s indulgence of her Carlo in chapter 8 of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1851-53) – pours the cream that has been saved especially for her tea into Jet’s saucer, and rings for Milly’s faithful, overworking Nanny to bring her more. This is her undoing: Nanny hates the Countess anyway, and has extended her dislike ‘to the innocent dog Jet’ (60), ‘whom she couldn’t a-bear to see made a fuss wi’ like a Christian’ (60), and whom she resents having to wash every Saturday when she already has to wash all the children. Now she explodes, calls Jet a ‘nasty little blackamoor’ (61), lets the Countess know what she thinks of her and that her presence is giving the Bartons a bad name, and thus succeeds in getting the unwelcome guest to understand it is time to leave. The narrator, however, holds Jet responsible for none of this situation, but regards him, and invites the reader to regard him, as a reasonably opportunistic individual of some charm. The reader may find it easy to resist the Landseerian images of him George Eliot creates, such as the one in chapter 3 when he places one paw on the fender, and holds the other up to warm; or the glimpse of his ‘little black phiz’ (62) as he is carried off in the Countess’s carriage; but we must surely approve his intention of ‘accommodating his person on the silk gown’ (29), and can enjoy the observation that he not only abandons her lap, but turns his back on her in order to take up his fire-side pose. This ability to differentiate between the sensibility of the mistress and the selfhood of her lap-dog – to give any dog its due, even one forced, as Jet is, to wear a crimson ribbon round its neck – is one that George Eliot will continue to manifest throughout her fiction.

As has already been indicated, there is an abundance of references to dogs in Ruskin’s works (he loved and kept dogs himself). He comments not just on painted dogs and sculpted dogs, but also on dogs in literature. Indeed, what seems to me to be his most resonant statement about a dog relates to neither painting nor sculpture, but to Homer. ‘My pleasure in the entire *Odyssey* is diminished’, he wrote, ‘because Ulysses gives not a word of kindness or of regret to Argus’. 22

Ruskin’s recognition of the claims of the dog in art – any art – is matched by George Eliot’s through those she introduced into her fiction from the outset. They are as deserving of attention as any of those discussed by one great contemporary, or invented by another.
Notes


2 Like Lady Bertram’s Pug in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Mr Irwine’s Pug changes sex. In chapter 5 of *Adam Bede* we see him ‘dozing, with his black muzzle aloft, like a sleepy president’ while Juno, the brown setter, is sleeping in front of the hearth with her two puppies beside her. In chapter 16 we are shown the group again, this time with Mr Irwine running his hand along Juno’s back as her pups roll ecstatically around her calmly wagging tail. ‘On a cushion a little removed sat Pug, with the air of a maiden lady, who looked on these familiarities as animal weaknesses, which she made as little show as possible of observing.’


4 *Lady Audley’s Secret* was serialized in *All the Year Round*, 1861-62; *Aurora Floyd* was serialized in *Temple Bar*, Jan. 1862 - Jan. 1863.

5 *John Marchmont’s Legacy* was serialized in *Temple Bar* between Dec. 1862 and Jan. 1864, thus overlapping *Aurora Floyd* (Mary Braddon, eighteen years George Eliot’s junior, was clearly a rapid writer, as well a prolific one).


7 The mythic nymph is the water-nymph Egeria, said to have been the consort of Numa Pompilius, the legendary second king of Rome (715-673 BC), whom she instructed in statesmanship and religion.

8 Dogs also complete the cosy scene (with its virtually obligatory fire) beheld by Edward when he returns to Dangerfield Park after his wanderings. His arrival is unexpected. Unannounced, he approaches the little lobby near his mother’s ‘favourite sitting-room’: ‘The firelight flickered upon everything – on the pictures and picture-frames, the black oak panelling, the open piano, a cluster of snowdrops in a tall glass on the table, the scattered worsteds by the embroidery-frame, the sleepy dogs upon the hearth-rug’ (376). The dogs (what kind, we are not told) complete this stock representation of domestic comfort and security, but the picture comes to no life since the dogs neither welcome nor challenge Edward: his appearance is ignored. Braddon fails to pursue the psychological probabilities of the moment, even in the most elementary way. Later in the same scene, marital harmony is anticipated when Edward is seated by the fire opposite the bashful Belinda (destined to be his second bride), and the falling cinders on the hearth, or ‘the occasional snort of one of the sleeping dogs’ (379), break the pleasurable stillness.


‘[B]lackened square cases containing parchments inscribed with biblical passages [...] worn by Jewish men during weekday morning prayers’ (Collins English Dictionary).


Ibid.


