Chapter 2

Economies of Emotion in the Diaries of George Eliot and George Gissing

At first glance, the diaries of the Victorian realists George Eliot and George Gissing appear to epitomise the bare-boned diary, because they diligently document books read and pages written but remain relatively silent when it comes to what we would nowadays call personal matters. Nevertheless, these irregularly-kept arrays of what Fothergill would qualify as “non-entities and non-events” are by no means to be disparaged as “artless” lists, but have to be recognised as testimonies of the sophisticated economies of value that both authors established in and through their diaries.[[1]](#footnote-1) Both diarists estimated and negotiated their personal and authorial value through the formal mechanisms of their diaries, which allowed them to manage their emotional resources and ensure maximal productivity and creativity. Through their much-desired professional success, Eliot and Gissing were able to create the monetary and personal value that gave them the gratification of establishing themselves among the intellectual elite of their time. Neither Eliot nor Gissing was, however, able to enjoy these rewards—for both, success raised the bar of the self-set standards of quality and productivity that dictated their work ethic and professional routine, to the point that the emotional self came to be seen as a resource to be aggressively exploited. Despite the many similarities in form, purpose and process, the two diaries display a radically different philosophical agenda: while Eliot expected to be emotionally moved by the external world and hoped to change the emotional make-up of her readers through her fiction, Gissing emotionally fused with the artwork and landscapes he visited in Italy and cared more about the artistic status than about the emotional impact of his work. This chapter shows that these diaries, though generated by different ideological outlooks, were the means by which Eliot and Gissing sought to gauge their own creative potential, intellectual prowess and authorial authority through an economic process.

Although the formal characteristics and professional focus of Eliot’s and Gissing’s diaristic writing initially suggest the authors’ categorical omission of their private selves, their professional and private selves are in fact closely intertwined. While early twentieth-century diary critics tended to adhere to the standards of literary quality that Robert A. Fothergill established in his pioneering *Private Chronicles* (1974), requiring flawlessly crafted prose and a high degree of self-disclosure as criteria of quality, I will show that these supposedly bare-boned diaries not only acquaint us with the material conditions of authorship in the nineteenth century, as Nancy Henry and Pierre Coustillas have demonstrated, but also allow us to gain insight into the interrelations between economic and philosophical thought.[[2]](#footnote-2) Significantly, Fothergill cites Eliot’s diary as an example of a meaningless text when he establishes his diaristic canon: “A diary will be more or less noteworthy depending on the range and interest of its ‘symptoms’. Though neither of them is especially valuable *per se*, the diary of Lady Frederick Cavendish is worth a good deal more than what survives of George Eliot’s.”[[3]](#footnote-3) While Cavendish’s social diary accommodates the reader through providing entertaining detail, Eliot’s, though clearly aware of the presence of a potential reader, consists mainly of notes on her reading and on her health.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Even though Fothergill insightfully views “the journal-habit […] as the physical counterpart of that mental attitude which cultivates systematic and discriminating observation” and presents “the journal [as] an instrument for seeing more clearly and remembering more profitably,” he does not acknowledge the intricate economic of value that characterises Eliot’s diary.[[5]](#footnote-5) Similarly, Robin Barrow ignores the motivational and evaluative work that Gissing conducts in and through his diary, when he disapproves of the “tedious” nature of the diary, which fails to “endear the author to us,” in his 1980 review of Pierre Coustillas’s 1978 edition of Gissing’s diary.[[6]](#footnote-6) It is indeed true that the “diary gives a very restricted and limited view” of Gissing’s inner life because of its fragmented style and its lack of descriptive detail.[[7]](#footnote-7) I shall show that although Gissing’s diary seems “remarkably reticent” when compared to the visual richness of Ruskin’s or the emotional disclosure of Simcox’s, it is nevertheless distinguished by a relative confessional openness that reflects Gissing’s philosophical outlook and his experience as an ambitious but constantly struggling writer.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The evaluative balance-sheet entry that we encounter in both diaries tends to be a combination of numerical figures and evaluative statements. Eliot wrote very extensive evaluative reports at the end of each year, in which she aimed to establish a balance between achievements and disappointments, challenges she had overcome and hindrances that seemed insuperable, as well as her hopes and rewards. Moreover, through her diary, she appraised her professional performance just about daily. The following short sequence of entries of October 1862 illustrates the variety of her authorial experiences, such as the inability to work, financial reward and the pains of rejection and revision:

\*18. An unfruitful week. Only at p. 45 of Part VII [of *Romala*].

20. Wrote nothing because of indisposition. Began ‘Il Principe.’ 22. Received £180 from Blackwood for Adam Bede. 6/-ed.

24. Only at p. 51, having rejected a chapter which I had begun, and determined to defer it to the next part.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This entry illustrates the alternation of progress and regression, as well as the stagnation that characterised Eliot’s authorship. Due to the abundance of entries of this type, the chapter focuses on analysing the yearly evaluations. Gissing’s diary also presents an abundance of short, staccato entries, such as “Wed. May 8 [1889]. Suffering from sore throat. No reading, except a little Boswell. Worked from 3.30 to 9.30 and did 5 pp., being the 3d chapter [of *The Emancipated*].”[[10]](#footnote-10) Due to their immense number and lack of explicit confession, these countless bare-boned entries in both Eliot’s and Gissing’s diaries are relatively resistant to analysis. Nevertheless, this type of entry not only testifies to the reality of authorship, helping us understand the authors’ temporal organisation and giving us insight into Victorian publishing practices, but it serves as evidence of applied emotional management, demonstrating the diarists’ habit of inscribing the act of professional and emotional monitoring into their diaries.

While for years, critics have neglected these diaries on the basis of their preoccupation with tracing and promoting professional progress, Philippe Lejeune identifies this objective of “counting and managing” to be the very root of the genre: “the diary, like writing itself, was born of the needs of commerce and administration.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The tallies of works completed and money received, the lists of books read and the numbers of pages written or translated, indeed indicate the diarists’ efforts to gauge their personal and artistic value through the quantification of their intellectual work, as quality becomes quantified through money: “the diary begins when traces in sequence attempt to capture the movement of time rather than to freeze it around a source event.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Although the diaries incorporate the monetary recognition of work, they are not mere account books, as they stage the writers’ emotional accountancy through which they managed the personal, temporal and emotional effort invested into each piece of work in relation to the monetary and social reward hoped for. Lejeune explains that “accounting serves two purposes: an internal (business management based on full and accurate information) and an external purpose (to stand as evidence in the event of a dispute).”[[13]](#footnote-13) This observation is instrumental in explaining the dual role that Eliot and Gissing attributed to their diaries, using them to both keep track of their financial situation, to privately savour the rewards of creative work, and to publicly assert their position as serious authors. Through registering their professional achievements in their diaries, Gissing and Eliot proclaimed ownership of their work and their lived experience: “to keep an account means that you can write and that you own something: it is a way of exercising a modicum of power, however limited.”[[14]](#footnote-14) For the authors in question, this assertion of power was of private and of public importance. Both had been involved in scandal: Eliot by “eloping” with George Henry Lewes in 1854 and Gissing by marrying the prostitute Nell Harrison in 1879.[[15]](#footnote-15) Through their fictional and academic writing they were both able to re-establish respectability and, with varying ease, live off their literary production. Great achievements, even if presented in a neutral tone, are thus both savoured by a triumphant self and directed towards a potential, probably judgmental, reader, creating constant shifts in the private or public stance of the diary.

It is likely that the economic nature of diaries, already detectable in the “family books” of the Florentine merchants of the fourteenth century, developed considerably in the nineteenth century. Mary Poovey has recently shown that “just as financial journalists began to borrow literary conventions in the middle of the decade, so novelists soon began to introduce financial themes into their fiction.”[[16]](#footnote-16) In both fiction and financial writing, she identifies “a structural dynamic that was central to both the growth of Victorian companies and the appeal of Victorian fiction: the constitutive relationship between disclosure and secrecy.”[[17]](#footnote-17) While financial journalism combined a focus on facts and numbers with the first-person point of view and personification common in contemporary fiction in order to craft an image of reliability, Eliot’s and Gissing’s diaries can also be seen to strategically reveal or conceal different aspects of their private and public lives, constructing a persona of the hard-working, determined and, first and foremost, efficient writer. Eliot’s and Gissing’s diaristic writing was not only suffused by numbers but by an extensive system of signification based on their personal standards of quality and the public reception of their works, which they established and developed in order to determine and increase their value as individuals, but mostly as writers. Based on George Rae’s *The Country Banker* (1885), Poovey has demonstrated that “the certified accountant’s balance sheet” came to be seen as “the one reliable voucher of [a man’s] actual position: all other information that we can gain respecting him […] may be delusive. But there is no mistaking the figures of an honest balance-sheet.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Indeed, both Eliot and Gissing employed numerical facts and verbal evaluative accounts in order to create unambiguous public personas in their diaries. These personas of course also had a private function as they were in part designed to invigilate a potentially slacking self and maintain the high standards of literary quality that both authors had set (and constantly raised) for themselves.

Even though they came from different ideological backgrounds, both diarists’ philosophies of value were built on a dynamic of expectation and merit. In what might be seen as a response to the gradual secularisation of nineteenth-century culture, Eliot combined the remnants of her religious heritage with a positivistic frame of mind, which inspired her duty to create literature that could accomplish social change. Gissing, on the other hand, resisted his culture’s push towards self-improvement and altruism and believed that material circumstances shaped the individual, which fiction alone was powerless to alter. Despite this fundamental difference in outlook, for both writers, success and discipline in work were the principal factors that determined their sense of self-worth and defined the “value of the individual.”[[19]](#footnote-19) The differences in the perception of duty were informed by social status, which had a direct impact on the meaning that work had for both. Eliot, as her career progressed, came to feel the guilt of the privileged and used her work to redeem herself by *giving* to others, whereas Gissing depended on *being given* approval and subsistence. To both, however, the self and its allotted lifetime became a project whose standards of quality and productivity were incredibly high.

**George Eliot’s Diary: Valuation and Evaluation**

In Eliot’s diary, the generic characteristic of counting, numbering and quantifying lived experience coincides with the financial reality of Victorian Britain to a striking degree. Several scholars have commented on Eliot’s economic mindset, highlighting the correlations between her fictional plots and her financial activities. Neil Hertz has observed Eliot’s tendency to portray her work as the “acquittal of a debt” she had to pay in order for her life to have “value” and meaning.[[20]](#footnote-20) While this “economics of compensation” is evident in the diary, particularly as she became a more and more successful writer, it is not the primary means of acquiring personal value.[[21]](#footnote-21) Nancy Henry has argued that “[Eliot’s] life and writing were continuous with and influenced by nineteenth-century economic transformations that democratised the stock market and exported increasing amounts of British capital to the colonies.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In order to view Eliot, “the author and woman,” in her historical context, Henry has investigated her relationship to the Empire, examined the former’s financial records and shown that she was not just an investor of money, but also of affection.[[23]](#footnote-23) This “mentality of measuring human value as an investment,” which Henry observes in *The Mill on the Floss*, also dominates the diary.[[24]](#footnote-24) But while her works and letters allow her to discuss the value of the individual, the diary deals almost exclusively with evaluating, maintaining and increasing her own value as a writer and person. This self-signifying self-assessment was also influenced by the contemporary economic models that shaped her work. As Catherine Gallagher has helpfully pointed out, Eliot’s writing in the 1870s was deeply influenced by models of motivation, such as Alexander Bain’s “Law of Relativity, Mind and Body,” which claims that “any feeling depends on our consciousness of it, and our consciousness depends on the feelings preceding it.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Like Bain, or perhaps following Bain, Eliot conceptualises her experiences as either adding to or subtracting from the quantity of happiness in her possession. Her diaristic practices also display affinities with William Stanley Jevons’ “marginal utility theory,” which holds that “utility must be considered as measured by, or even as actually identical with the addition made to a person’s happiness.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The diaries evidence that even before the 1870s, Eliot never considered her self to be a blank slate, but always sought to trace the evolution that the previous self had undergone, noting progress and improvement as well as failure and depreciation. The assessment of quality through the experience of pleasure that Eliot demonstrates in her early travel reports is palpable throughout the diaries. From her early valuations of artistic and cultural encounters onwards, in which her own pleasure was paramount, Eliot conceptualised the increases in her own happiness in terms of “additions.” She maintained this desire to eagerly record the additions she made to her readers’ happiness until she started using preformatted diaries in 1877.

*Travel: Consuming and Belonging*

The diaries that Eliot composed from 1854–1855 record the trips to Weimar and its surroundings (20 July–3 November 1854) and Berlin (4 November–13 March 1855), which she undertook with George Henry Lewes. These reports are remarkable because they document her burgeoning identity as a professional writer. They also show that the young Eliot presented herself as an avid consumer of visual sights and cultural artefacts and, at times, as a prejudiced and judgmental critic. I devote considerable attention to the 1854 diary because it displays the creation of her distinctly economic outlook as a traveller, which also transpires in her diaristic inscription of herself as a novelist and person. Given her later emphasis on balanced fairness and a sympathetic evaluation of human beings and their motives and creations, her unabashed demand for receiving cultural stimulation is surprising.

The entries documenting the trip to Germany, Margaret Harris and Judith Johnson have pointed out, cannot be considered as “travel writing […] in the full sense,” because they were not “designed to bring home the exotic and unfamiliar to an English audience.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Indeed, these diaries can be seen as early, informal and usually numberless balance sheets that record the pleasures and discomforts that Eliot experienced on her journey. Although they completely omit the intimate life of the couple, they can be seen as private accounts that render Eliot’s subjective, unapologetic responses to new environments. Anticipating the instructions for artistic appreciation given in Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (1873), Eliot bases her evaluations of the aesthetic and cultural value of artefacts and landscapes on the nature of the emotional reaction that these new contexts manage to incite in her, relying on criteria very similar to Pater’s evaluation questions: “What is this song or picture, this engaging personality to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it really give me pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, under its influence?”[[28]](#footnote-28) Eliot thus tends to approach the new geographic territories with the expectation of being emotionally stimulated, of conquering and judging, rather than discovering and understanding. She therefore dismisses unsatisfying towns and objects with a certain annoyance. Although these diaries do present several entries in which Eliot seeks to efficiently balance gratification and disappointment, she generally tends to collect exciting sensations, adding them up until satiety puts a stop to the inquisitiveness of her tourist gaze.

When establishing the aesthetic and cultural value of landscapes and works of art, Eliot tends to transfer the emotionally felt quality of the respective sight into an economic framework of comparison in which quantified emotion functions as an indicator of quality. The linguistic techniques through which she manages this economic system of emotion range from the simple comparison of two objects to the comparison of reality and expectation, quantifying emotional stimulation and presenting novelty as superlative value. Her entry of 20 July 1854 from Antwerp exemplifies several of these techniques and shows that Eliot rather passively expected objects and landscapes to move her emotionally. Unlike Ruskin, who engaged with his environment through ekphrastic representation, or Hopkins, who sought to verbally capture the essence of the objects he contemplated, Eliot tends to omit description and approaches the world as a critic rather than as an observer. She seems less interested in capturing visual detail than in uttering evaluative judgment when she notes that “the interior of the Cathedral is less striking than the exterior.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The altar piece by Rubens (The Assumption of the Virgin) proves a disappointment as it “did not please us much.”[[30]](#footnote-30) While here she dismisses the entire work of art that did not move them, she finds “the face of Jesus” in The Elevation of the Cross “sublime” as it is “certainly […] the finest conception of the *suffering* Christ I have ever seen.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Although the depiction of the face mounts to the top of the evaluative scale, “the rest of the picture gave me no pleasure.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Unlike Ruskin, Eliot and Lewes consider satiety an integral part of travelling: “after walking through the Place Verte to look at Rubens’s statue, which is very fine, we felt that we had our fill of beauty and went home to dine and rest.”[[33]](#footnote-33) With the demand for emotional stimulation quenched, the travellers get some rest, which then creates renewed desire: “in the evening we saw more of the town with increasing admiration.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Eliot and Lewes, more so than Ruskin, manage their observational process through monitoring their emotional excitability.

In Eliot’s logic, the observer’s emotional stimulation was, however, not only an indicator of the value of the object or landscape powerful enough to conjure it up, but it also distinguished the observer as artistically and intellectually knowledgeable. When, on 22 July 1854, Eliot sees Rubens’s Crucifixion, she insists that it is “even more beautiful to me than the Descent from the Cross” and that “these two pictures profoundly impressed me with the miserable lack of breadth and grandeur in the conceptions of our living artists. The reverence for the old masters is not all humbug and superstition.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Eliot constructs a circular economy of value that establishes her subjective emotional reaction not only as a proof of the quality of Rubens’s work, but also as an indicator of her superiority over contemporary critics and artists who cannot grasp the value of the old masters. She thus creates personal value through valuing a valuable artefact. Her entry of 2 August 1854 from Frankfurt am Main displays a similarly auto-validating reaction to Danneker’s Ariadne:

I never saw a sculpture equal to this—the feeling it excites is the essence of true worship—a bowing of the soul before power creating beauty. […] The splendid view we had of Marburg by the setting sun was worth the whole journey.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Moved by the novelty value of the statue, Eliot here portrays her emotional reaction to the artefact as an indicator of her ability to recognise sublime beauty and be appropriately moved by it. She then draws the balance between the cost and time they expended on the “delightful instead of fatiguing” journey and the benefits of having undertaken it. She is content with the efficient use that she and Lewes have made of their temporal and financial resources.

Eliot rationally doubts the reliability of this emotional evaluation system, but consciously subscribes to its association of emotional pleasure and artistic quality. After a performance of *Tannhäuser*, on 3 October 1854, she struggles to decide whether to situate the locus of quality within herself or within the artistic performance she attended:

The overture and the first and second acts thrilled me, but the third I felt rather wearisome. The tragedy in this act is very fine, but either I was too much fatigued to relish the music, or it is intrinsically monotonous and spun out beyond any but German patience.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In this entry, Eliot tries to rationally identify the cause of the disparity between conventional knowledge about the well-known opera and her subjective appreciation of it. She was engrossed in the first two acts, but the third is unexpectedly boring and she debates whether her own lack of emotional receptivity or the essential nature of the piece have prevented her from feeling emotionally moved.

To an extent that we cannot now determine, Eliot’s emotional reactions to the art work and scenes she encounters are conditioned by preliminary readings; presumably articles from scholarly magazines and illustrated newspapers, as well as various travel writings and fictional representations. On 22 July 1854 in Antwerp, for instance, Eliot reports that they were “rather disappointed in the bull’s head (in the adoration of the Magi) so much lauded by Ruskin.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Based on Ruskin’s text, Eliot has developed high expectations about the quality of the work of art. These attitudes fuelled her impassioned demand for a satisfying emotional response, which could give her both pleasure and recognition, and created an unbridgeable gap between anticipated emotion and actual emotion. Expectation thus determined both the intensity of Eliot’s desire and the extent of the surplus needed to create novelty and surprise. When traveling to Coblentz on a steamboat on 30 July 1854, Eliot did “not expect much pleasure from [the] Rhine, so [she] took all that came in good grace.” In her articulation of her critical outlook, Eliot abstracts her expectation in quantitative and spatial terms, establishing a correspondence between the negligible amount of beauty required —“not much”— to satisfy her and the ensuing widening of her observational perspective. Expectation severely compromises her direct subjective experience because it necessarily implies a retrospective and comparative outlook that is integrated into an already formed value system—novelty and surprise have already been consumed in the imagination before consumption can take place in actuality. And indeed, “the banks of the Rhine from Coblentz surpassed [Eliot’s] expectations.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Ugliness usually struck Eliot not as a necessary, but as an annoying or disappointing aspect of traveling, which suggests that she had formed a mental conception of the places to be visited and was surprisingly intolerant of disruptions that detracted from the sum of her accumulated pleasures. On July 28 1854, for instance, Eliot describes the Church of St. Jacques in Liège as “perhaps the finest thing we have seen on our journey.”[[40]](#footnote-40) When the couple return to the place in the evening to hear the organ, they are dismayed by “the Belgian voices which accompanied it or rather overpowered it [and] prevented us from getting much extra enjoyment out of the music.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Eliot’s regret at missing out on the additional pleasure she had anticipated and hoped to gain shows that she thought of her experiences in terms of possession and loss, employing her diary as a balance sheet. In Cologne, on 29 July 1854, Eliot offers a dramatic report of her visit to the Cathedral: “When I entered it the sight of the ugly wall which shuts out the choir—the proper vista of the nave, shocked me as one would be shocked by an ugly wooden arm attached to an exquisite marble torso.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Eliot again records a collision between the anticipated enjoyment of beauty and the unexpected confrontation with ugliness, demonstrating the patterns at work in her categorisation of reality. Eliot’s diary testifies to her clear awareness of her expectations and indicates that she sought to organise her experiences before she lived them, which means that the diary is not simply a retrospective account of her actual life, but also one of a hypothetical imagined life.

The confrontation with unanticipated ugliness introduces disorder into Eliot’s system of expectation, forcing her to adjust emotionally to new circumstances. When on 10 August 1854, she meets Princess Wittgenstein at Liszt’s house, she records the emotional commotion caused by the former’s unattractive aspect:

The appearance of the Princess rather startled me at first. I had expected to see a tall distinguished looking woman, if not a beautiful one. But she is short and unbecomingly endowed with embonpoint; at the first glance the face is not pleasing, and the profile especially is harsh and barbarian, but the dark, bright hair and eyes give the idea of vivacity and strength. Her teeth, unhappily, are blackish too.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Faithfully rendering the immediacy of her reaction, Eliot first reports her “shock” at realising the absence of continuity between assumption and certainty and then explains it, building up a climax of expectation from “distinguished looking” to “beautiful.” The suspense is broken by a sober and pitiless “but” and a critical, almost reproachful, sketch of the Princess’s physique, accentuated by the repetition of the damning verb “to be” in the present tense. Eliot opts for a second “but” in the same sentence to stress her sympathetic turn towards a more balanced account of the Princess, conceding that the grotesque-looking object might possess worthy human attributes.

Eliot, though exhilarated by novelty, really needs reality to confirm and validate her expectations to maintain her emotional balance and maintain the state of feeling pleased. For Eliot, travel is less a journey of discovery than a substantiation of imagined places and things, because she sees Germany through a lens of mental preconceptions that she wants the scenes, objects and persons encountered to accommodate. Through spatial proximity, Eliot hopes to authenticate her imagined relationship with the German writers and philosophers and establish emotional nearness. In her overwhelming wish for the embodiment of her idea of Gluck, Goethe, Schiller and Kant, she scrutinises sculptures of them, hoping for an emotional connection to form. Her reports of her encounters with these visual representations indicate that, again, Eliot compares the busts to mentally preconceived images, which, for her, are the guarantors of authenticity. On 11 August 1854, at the Bibliothek in Weimar, she identifies the bronze bust of the opera composer Christoph Willibald Gluck (1715–1787) by Jean-Antoine Houdon as “the most remarkable” among others, on the basis that “the rugged power of the face is given wonderful reality, as far as possible from the feeble idealisation one generally sees in busts.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Eliot does not assess the quality of the likeness through comparing it to a portrait or to others’ sculptures, nor does she explicitly comment on the artist’s techniques; she rather seems to judge the bust by its resemblance to a mental image. Because her idea and the artistic reproduction coincide, the bust retains its novelty value even upon revisitation: “the bust of Gluck by Houdon gave me new pleasure. I never saw more reality and animation even in a portrait” (17 October 1854).[[45]](#footnote-45) Eliot again fails to distinguish between the realist techniques of the artist and the reality of the living person, which indicates that her emotional comfort with the bust leads her to accept Houdon’s work as an authentic representation. Her subsequent statements that “the bust of Lessing too impresses one as a probable likeness” and that “there is one likeness of [Goethe] that is really startling and thrilling from the idea of perfect resemblance” show her belief that “reality” and “probable likeness” can be authenticated by her own emotional reaction.[[46]](#footnote-46) She establishes the “perfect resemblance” of a work of art to an actual person as a necessarily subjective “idea.” Having started out in the tone and manner of an art critic, her personal interest in the matter of authenticity becomes clear when she notes that “there is a portrait of Kant which one likes to look at in the faint hope that it may resemble him a little.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Like Gissing, Eliot sought to merge her imagined image of her intellectual companions with a physical representation that satisfied her demands for emotional thrill. Although Eliot does not approach her environment in a disinterested fashion, her consumption of culture is geared towards satisfying a deep-rooted need for connection, but also a need for the public recognition of her emotional connoisseurship.

*Self-Assertion and Authorship*

For Eliot, travel was an opportunity to confirm her ideas, establish herself as a knowing person and acquire new knowledge. In her emotional economic, the correlation between emotional expectation and its confirmation resulted in a personal gain as it permitted the fulfilment of a hopeful demand for the actualisation of thought through experience. After 1854, Eliot, except through reading lists, no longer documented these economic transactions of knowledge in her diary, as work became her primary preoccupation and her focus changed from receiving satisfaction through consumption to producing literature and scholarly articles that could fit into or change her readers’ emotional systems of value. Her emotional capacity to connect to and enjoy her environment through knowledge now mattered less than her ability to fulfil her literary potential.

Critics like Shirley Foster tend to stress George Henry Lewes’s role in Eliot’s literary career: “She was positively assisted by her consort; she would probably never have written fiction at all without Lewes’s initial encouragement and consequent dedication to her success, over-protective though it may seem.”[[48]](#footnote-48) More recently, Brenda Maddox has similarly insisted that Lewes’s love “transformed” the “brilliant, depressive” Eliot “into one of the greatest novelists of English literature.”[[49]](#footnote-49) The diary shows that Lewes was indeed an important motivational force behind Eliot’s progress whose satisfaction with her work she accepted as a mark of its quality. In her diary entry “How I Came to Write Fiction” of 1857, however, Eliot asserts herself as an author and openly defies Lewes who, according to her, did not believe in her ability to write a novel. This entry can be seen as a public statement in which she exemplifies her moving away from writing down observational reports to a type of writing further removed from her personal experience of reality. This change in focus implied a new dimension in her emotional economic: the gap or lack created by expectation could no longer be catered for by the other because now Eliot herself represented the territory to be explored and she herself was the instance that could or should deliver satisfaction.

During this “new era” in Eliot’s life, which began in September 1856, she established the framework through which she would perceive herself as an author throughout her career, portraying her self as a resource that could provide personal satisfaction and conceptualising it as a recipient of value containing unknown amounts of mental power, which could, given the appropriate effort, become a personal possession. Writing fiction had always been a “vague dream” for Eliot, who had had a dim awareness that “some time or other [she] might write a novel.”[[50]](#footnote-50) This hope for the concretisation of a highly desirable—and thinkable— reality gave her hypothetical, yet to some extent real, value, but she gradually “lost” confidence in her ability to write a novel. The loss of hope thus also annulled her potential, creating a double gap that separated Eliot from the state and status she desired. Confronted with these two absences and thus convinced that she “*was* deficient in dramatic power,” Eliot asserts her strengths: “I *felt* I should be at my ease in the descriptive parts of a novel.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Her insistence on her ability to write beautiful prose is based on emotional perception and would come to outweigh her essentialised deficiency in structural management.

Eliot presents emotion as the generative root of her authorial self, but her confidence in the validity of emotion as a motivator wavers. While in the aforementioned case, Eliot presents emotion as supra- and super-rational knowledge, she later uses it to efface her intention to reveal herself as an author: “Something led me to read [my introductory chapter] to George.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Disguising her feelings of confidence and pride as an instinctive and slightly irrational “something,” Eliot writes her conscious decision to share her work with Lewes out of her entry. In an effort to stress the quality of her writing and her self-belief as an author whilst still maintaining public decorum, she describes the process of convincing her partner of her literary abilities: “he was struck by it as a bit of concrete description, and it suggested to him the possibility of my being able to write a novel, though he distrusted, indeed, disbelieved in, my possession of any dramatic power.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Eliot presents Lewes as emotionally and artistically moved by this introductory chapter but as unable to trust his emotional instincts. She stages his scepticism about her fundamental abilities as an obstacle that she overcomes through her faith in her emotional self-knowledge in order to highlight her agency in crafting her authorial self. While in her later diaristic reports, Lewes functions as the signifying instance that validates her work, at this point she seeks to outdistance him as an authority and guarantor of quality: “bye and bye when we came back to England and I had greater success than he had ever expected in other kinds of writing, his impression that it was worth while to see how far my mental power would go towards the production of a novel, was strengthened.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Only after the public success of her work does Lewes get a full grasp of its quality and provides encouragement: “You must try and write a story.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Although Eliot constructs her emotional self-confidence as an indicator of her potential to produce fiction of a high standard, she does seem to need the assurance of Lewes’s demand for her work as a permission to launch her career. Even in this early, semi-private manifesto, Eliot seems to be preoccupied with the “‘too much’ of literature,” to use Catherine Gallagher’s terms, as “there should be just enough literature, which should be just sufficiently contained in books just adequate to express only the important thoughts of just those authors capable of genuine originality.”[[56]](#footnote-56) This idea that literary production can only be justified if there is sufficient demand for it and that otherwise its utility is questionable, indicates the profoundly economic nature of Eliot’s world view.

*Efficient Re-Reading*

The emotional labour that Eliot conducted in and through her diary was geared towards the maximisation of the quality of her creative work. By appropriating her temporary selves through writing, Eliot created structures of past emotion that functioned as buffers absorbing and re-balancing present states of demotivation and despair. As she recorded and preserved her professional and emotional reality at different points in the compositional process, re-readings of previous entries facilitated a reconnection with former selves. She drew lessons and comfort from previously experienced sadness, love, failures and success, which helped her to temporarily overcome the murderous linearity of time and to effectively use the past as a resource. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Eliot used her diary to position present states of mind within a daily continuum of emotion, balancing fears of feebleness with the knowledge of having overcome comparable difficulties before.

While re-reading is an integral part of Eliot’s diary-keeping from very early on, it only gradually develops into a useful practice. Early entries that document re-reading are marked by the frustrations of her search for what we might call internal comparison, as for instance the one of 31 January 1862:

The last day of the month! This evening I have been reading to G some entries in my note-book of past times in which I recorded my malaise and despair. But it is impossible to me to believe that I have ever been in so unpromising and despairing a state as I now feel.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Eliot’s attention to the finality of January shows that she measures her productivity based on the temporal units of the year. Hoping to rely on touchstones of feeling as easily discernible and regulated as standardised time, Eliot scans her past, but cannot find records manifesting despair acute enough to match and annul her current state. Her quest for former selves with which to identify was both an effort at normalising unpleasant emotion and at economising the time and effort wasted by demotivation and insecurity. By attempting to integrate the current self and its “malaise” into the realm of the known and knowable, Eliot sought to gain control over her emotions through her rational will. Her entry of 26 February 1862 shows that she conceptualised her lack of professional confidence as an expropriation of emotional and creative capital: “I have a distrust in myself, in my work, in others’ loving acceptance of it which robs my otherwise happy life of all joy. I ask myself, without being able to answer, whether I have ever before felt so chilled and oppressed.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Eliot seems more interested in gauging the dimensions of her emotional reactivity than in experiencing the consolations of confession, which indicates her plan to establish an inventory of her emotional states.

By the end of the 1860s, Eliot’s diary has developed into a richer emotional archive that offers a wider array of experienced states to which she could compare, and against which she could value, her current self. Her entry of 11 September 1869, for instance, shows that the diary served as evidence for estimating her potential: “I do not feel very confident that I can make anything satisfactory of [Middlemarch]. I have need to remember that other things which have been accomplished by me, were begun under the same cloud.”[[59]](#footnote-59) In times of professional directionlessness, Eliot’s frustration is not limited to her professional self, but throws her entire self into question, as is evident in her entry of 25 March 1865: “About myself I am in deep depression feeling powerless. I have written nothing but beginnings.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Given the total devaluation of the self entailed by a lack of productivity, it is surprising that Eliot writes about the will-power she mustered to overcome professional crises out of the 1869 entry through choosing the passive voice. The fact that Eliot foregrounds the published and applauded “other things” and hides behind a timid “by me” highlights her tendency to remember and record different stages in the act of completion—pages written and confidence felt—but not the emotional steps taken to achieve that completion. Based on emotional touchstones that were past entries, Eliot sought to measure and confirm her emotional potential in terms of creativity and resilience: “It is worthwhile that I record my great depression of spirits, that I may remember one more resurrection from the pit of melancholy.”[[61]](#footnote-61) This entry of 24 September 1869 shows the economic reasoning underlying her diaristic process—Eliot believed that a renewed awareness of the proven circumference of her emotional and creative potential could reignite her hope in her abilities and thus allow her to exploit her potential. The diary traces the movements of the self as a series of achievements and failures, linked and signified through quantitative comparisons, and as a spatial trajectory; the latter being apparent in the entry of 27 October 1870: “Since [September] I have been continually suffering from headache and depression, with almost total despair of future work. I look to this little book now to assure myself that this is not unprecedented.”[[62]](#footnote-62) As we have seen in the diary of 1858, Eliot did not enjoy exploring new, potentially disappointing territory and used the diary as an efficient shortcut to skip over unpleasant experiences she had already undergone in the past and therefore did not need to endure over again.

*Eliot’s Evaluative Reports 1857–1877*

With the launch of her career as a professional writer, Eliot’s diaries evolve into testimonies of her literary and journalistic progress and rarely describe excursions or emotional experiences. Although Eliot strictly abstains from using her diary as a confessional outlet, it constitutes an essential tool in the management of her emotional life and can be compared to an account book in which she balances pleasure and suffering. Nancy Henry has identified a connection between emotion and accounting in Eliot’s diary, contending that Eliot gave in to the “consoling power of counting her money” when Lewes died, in order to “[manage] her grief by taking on her business affairs.”[[63]](#footnote-63) As I have shown, for Eliot, emotional management had been closely associated with the practices of book-keeping from the beginning of her diaries, which indicates that she believed that she could exercise her creative faculties through abstracting her potential and taking control over her resources. This section focuses on the extensive evaluative reports with which Eliot ended her professional and familial year from 1857 to 1877. By listing her achievements, failures, pleasures and disappointments and by comparing yearly reports, Eliot supervised her emotional and creative apparatus, estimating the impact and extent of its potential and governing its resources. She can thus be seen to engage in a “financial” activity as these reports were as much “acts of conclusion” of finished projects and satisfied ambitions as initiations of new hopes, “aspiring increase” and “growth.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Through thus taking stock of her life, Eliot assured herself of its stability and potential, conceptualising her financial, intellectual and emotional movements in terms of possession.

Throughout her evaluative accounts, Eliot draws comparisons between previous (usually unspecified) states and current ones, records the growth of her fulfilled an unfulfilled potential, adjusts her standards for her work and conducts prospective comparisons. Her very first report in 1857 presents itself in two parts, with the first written on 19 December and the second on 31 December. The first part can be seen as a continuation of the “How I Came to Write Fiction”-entry because of the confident elan and semi-public tone with which Eliot announces her achievements as an author:

I have written the Scenes of Clerical Life—my first book—and though we are uncertain still whether it will be a success as a separate publication, I have had much sympathy from my readers in Blackwood, and feel a deep satisfaction in having done a bit of faithful work that will perhaps remain like a primrose root in the hedgerow and gladden and chasten human hearts in years to come.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Eliot stresses the “great and unhoped for blessings” that have been added to her life through her authorship and her controversial relationship, such as “inward progress” and “outward advantages,” before declaring herself the author of *Scenes*, thus asserting that her personal success pre-exists external approval. Though the ultimate value of the work cannot yet be assessed, Eliot confidently uses her feeling of “deep satisfaction” as the standard of quality. The book’s potential of affecting others is also a factor in her valuation, but this first semi-official statement as an author confirms Eliot’s ability to create fiction, which was still doubtful in her previous estimation of her talent.

While this first part addresses an imagined, potentially judgmental, public, the second part surveys Eliot’s personal gain in enjoyments and in her capacity to enjoy. In order to grasp and verbalise the magnitude of her emotional development, Eliot compares her self on “the last night of 1857” with “this time last year,” when she was writing the introduction to “Mr. Gilfill’s Love Story,” exclaiming: “What a world of thoughts and feelings since then!”[[66]](#footnote-66) These experiences have improved the receptivity of Eliot’s feeling and creating self, which she conceptualises as an increase in spatial dimension:

My life has deepened unspeakably during the last year: I feel a greater capacity for moral and intellectual enjoyment, a more acute sense of my deficiencies in the past, a more solemn desire to be faithful to coming duties, than I remember at any former period of my life. And my happiness has deepened too: the blessedness of a perfect love and union grows daily.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Because Eliot has been establishing emotional enjoyment as the indicator of quality and utility, the deepening of her awareness and gratitude imply her heightened connoisseurship and excellence. The fact that she views her evolution through “what [she] has suffered and enjoyed” as her “everlasting possession while my soul’s life remains,” shows that she converts lived time both into property and personal value.[[68]](#footnote-68) In an effort to guarantee the authenticity of her account, Eliot contrasts the areas in which she is thriving with the “severe suffering this year from acute anxiety about my sister and what will probably be a final separation from her.”[[69]](#footnote-69) The minimisation of her familial worries through her quick diversion “there has been no other real trouble” shows that Eliot prefers to evaluate her emotional life in terms of areas to be covered and assessed as either growing or receding rather than to delve into and describe her emotions.[[70]](#footnote-70) Her reluctance to express sadness with the same intensity as happiness reveals that her diaristic agenda was self-protective in its demarcation of areas too private to be reconciled with the semi-public nature of the diary.

Throughout Eliot’s diaries, utterances in which she asserts her personal value to herself irregularly alternate with others in which she communicates her quality and respectability to an audience. Having reviewed her emotional year with its joys and grievances in the report of 1857, Eliot, with unexpectedly frank self-confidence, compares her emotional status to that of the collective body of womanhood, writing that “Few women, I fear, have had such reason as I have to think the long sad years of youth were worth living for the sake of middle age.”[[71]](#footnote-71) While Carolyn Heilbrun reads Eliot’s quietly triumphant statement as an expression of her delight at overcoming the limitations of her plainness, it seems to me that Eliot uses the semi-public forum of the diary to assert the healthiness of her relationship to Lewes and to present herself as liberated from the state of unhappy renunciation in which those countless women, who have not dared the emancipatory leap away from respectability, are lingering.[[72]](#footnote-72) In this statement, Eliot’s public and private motivations overlap: the self-assertive public defence of her romantic choices is underlain by the private emotional economic through which she rationalises and utilises a past sadness as a source of present joy. She portrays the years of emotional dearth as the source of her current happiness, retrospectively attributing value to them and annulling their hardship. After thus establishing her past self as the source and resource of her current happiness, she draws a prospective comparison to her future self: “So goodbye dear 1857! May I be able to look back on 1858 with an equal consciousness of advancement in work and heart. Money received for work in 1857 [followed by list].”[[73]](#footnote-73) We see that Eliot evaluates herself first through the eyes of those who might doubt the quality of women’s writing, then through the eyes of a past self and, at last, through her monetary value.

While the remaining reports of the 1850s tend to abound in assurances of accomplished self-superseding at which Eliot seems thrilled and surprised, those of the 1860s, in contrast, manifest her struggle to not simply prove, but to manage and fully utilise her emotional, creative and intellectual potential. On 31 December 1860, for instance, Eliot justifies the fact that “the time has not been fruitful in work” by explaining that “distractions about our change of residence have run away with many days [and] my state of health has been depressing to all effort.”[[74]](#footnote-74) In light of the body of entries of 1860, the public character of this entry becomes apparent, as Eliot writes out the authorial conflict that preoccupied her that year. Thanks to the positive reception of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Eliot had “achieved a greater success than [she] had ever hoped for it” (1 July 1860), which raised her expectations of quality and inspired her with the debilitating worry that this achievement had depleted her potential: “I feel much depressed now with self-dissatisfaction and fear that I may not be able to do anything more that is worth doing” (28 August 1860).[[75]](#footnote-75) Eliot expects herself to “work well again” (28 November 1860) through the sheer force of her willpower, not even allowing herself to be weakened by illness: “I am getting better now by the help of tonics, and I should be better still if I could gather more bravery, resignation and simplicity of striving.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Although in the report she blames external factors for her professional fruitlessness, in effect, she considers herself to be the obstacle that impedes her from fulfilling her potential.

With her literary successes multiplying, Eliot struggled with the self-imposed pressure to keep up and supersede previous achievements and began to experience her self-set standards as limitations to future work, as can be seen in her “midterm report” of 19 April 1861, in which she exclaimed: “If it were possible that I should produce *better* work than I have yet done! At least there is a possibility that I may make greater efforts against indolency and the despondency that comes from too egotistic a dread of failure.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Eliot’s writing has reached an oppressive standard because it leads her to question the current dimensions of her potential and generates her fear that she may be at her limit. Although she has no way of gauging the remainder of her creative resources, she seeks to fuel her creativity by actively counteracting her emotional indifference and her self-protective avoidance of critical ridicule, which, in her mind, wasted her potential and deprived her readers of possibly great works.

Ironically, throughout her diaries, Eliot seeks to relieve the self-imposed pressure created by her success through balancing out present despair by recalling the achievements of a past self. In April 1861, she puts a closure on her “old book in which [she] wrote for the first time at Geneva, in 1849.”[[78]](#footnote-78) Looking back on the emotional and motivational fluctuations undergone during the course of these recorded years, she seems both astounded and relieved at her personal evolution: “What moments of despair I passed through after that— despair that life would ever be made precious to me by the consciousness that I lived to some good purpose!”[[79]](#footnote-79) Eliot’s association of professional quality and human quality causes an enormous amount of anti-productive pressure: “It was that sort of despair that sucked away the sap of half the hours which might have been filled by energetic youthful activity: and the same demon tried to get hold of me again whenever an old work is dismissed and a new one is being meditated.”[[80]](#footnote-80) Eliot’s ambition to create ever-more valuable work turns her into the very demon who keeps her from being productive. Within her personal ethic of improvement, success was immediately assimilated as ‘work done,’ opening a crater of expectation that new work not only had to fill, but surpass. Because Eliot evaluated her work through the rule of novelty, each success made it harder for new work to be considered successful and it became impossible for her to gauge her potential: “Shall I ever be able to carry out my ideas” (8 December 1861)?[[81]](#footnote-81) Success produced a dichotomy between creative potential and literary value which Eliot sought to resolve through managing her emotions.

A fundamental problem in this emotional management was the fact that only valuable work could—temporarily—reassure Eliot of her personal value and give her satisfaction, leading to the spiralling circularity of self-signification that Chapter 4 discusses in more detail:

The return of this Saint Cecilia’s day finds me in better health than has been usual with me in these last six months. But I am not yet engaged in any work that makes a higher life for me—a life that is young and grows, though in my other life I am getting old and decaying. It is a day for resolves, and determination.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Having compared her current self to a sequence of past selves, Eliot considers her health much improved, but her emotional balance is still off because she is not in the imagined superior state that is necessary *for* creating literature, which can only be brought about *by* creating literature. Although Eliot realises that her expectations to produce art on command and to maintain this “higher life” are utopian, she refuses to let go of her ambitious striving for ever-higher quality. Instead, she resolves to increase her determination to turn the futile moment of inspired creative transubstantiation in which material life loses all importance into a permanent state to be possessed. Only a few weeks after this private confession of temporary creative impotence, Eliot writes a very public evaluative entry in which she reports successful emotional management: “I enjoy a more and more even cheerfulness, and continually encreasing power of dwelling on the good that is given to me, and dismissing the thought of small evils” (30 December 1868).[[83]](#footnote-83) In order to establish an emotional balance, Eliot decides to limit her expectations instead of increasing the overall quality of her life.

The diary was a vital tool in managing Eliot’s emotional efficiency and it is clear that she believed it to be conducive to greater professional productivity. In her last evaluative report (31 December 1877), Eliot consciously and ceremoniously renounces the economical diaristic practices she had exercised for over twenty years and abandons the diary as a site of emotional labour. She introduces her drastic decision to “record no more in this book” and to “keep a more business-like diary” by an incomplete eulogy that is both a retrospective manifesto epitomising the function of the diary in her emotional management and an assessment of the future directions that this management ought to take:[[84]](#footnote-84)

Today I say a final farewell to this little book which is the only record I have made of my personal life for sixteen years and more. I have often been helped by looking in it to compare former with actual states of despondency from a bad health or other apparent causes. In this way a past despondency has turned into present hopefulness.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Despite the tenderness of the term “little book,” Eliot very rationally lays out the economic usefulness of writing down her emotions and presents it as a process that can generate creative potential out of apparently lacking resources. Her move from the “little book” to a commercially printed Beecham’s Annual Diary represents a clear change in emotional management, but her approach does not become “more business-like” but rather less productivity-oriented.

The diary of 1878 has unfortunately been lost and those of 1879 and 1880 are heavily preoccupied with her mourning of Lewes and her marriage to Cross respectively, so we cannot be sure of the shape that her emotional management took immediately after this re-invention of her diaristic persona. Given the complete disappearance of emotional balance sheets and the frequent substitution of narrative utterances by poems and aphorisms, it seems that Eliot had decided to de-professionalise her records and her life. She had always visualised her creative potential as a depletable resource, which, due to the now large number of her literary successes and her deteriorating health, seemed increasingly difficult to gauge:

But of course as the years advance there is a new rational ground for the expectation that my life may become less fruitful. The difficulty is, to decide how far resolution should set in the direction of activity rather than in the acceptance of a more negative state. Many conceptions of works to be carried out present themselves, but confidence in my own fitness to complete them worthily is all the more wanting because it is reasonable to argue that I must have already done my best. In fact, my mind is embarrassed by the number and wide variety of subjects that attract me, and the enlarging vista that each brings with it.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Through her rigorous emotional management, Eliot had been able to turn an apparent loss of potential into a gain, but she now suspects that with growing age, the nature of her resources is in the process of changing. Situating the premises of “fruitfulness,” which is synonymous with potential, both in her self-confidence and her constitutional fitness, Eliot doubts that the power of her will, body and intellect could execute her ideas. Because of the lack of emotional reference points in old age, Eliot can no longer estimate whether creative difficulties are subject to insufficient will power or insufficient brain power.

Lejeune associates the impulse of “[unloading] the weight of emotions and thoughts” on paper with “conservation,” but notes that “its affinities are closer to the impulse to destroy.”[[87]](#footnote-87) The act of uninhibited writing thus implies “separating [your emotions] from yourself, purifying and cleansing yourself.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Although Eliot’s diary monumentalises neither her emotions, as Simcox’s does, nor her impressions of the world, as Ruskin’s does, it does conserve her past selves in an abstract fashion, assessing and noting down her states of mind, but never allowing herself to describe or dramatise her despair. The diary functions as a reference book of the spectrum of Eliot’s emotional receptivity and endurance, providing her with models, instructions and strategies for emotional management that originated in her own behaviours and reactions. She released her emotions in a controlled fashion with the strict agenda of employing her diary as a tool for comparison that was both objective and subjective. It is evident that she sought to make herself feel differently *through* the diary, but that she had decided not to feel *in* the diary.

**George Gissing’s Diary: Balance and Belonging**

Gissing documented his emotional economy less meticulously than Eliot did. While she sought to keep a balanced account of her achievements, pleasures and grievances in the different areas of her life (work, couple-life, stepchildren, family), Gissing tended to conceptualise his life either as a commodity he needed to purchase in order to survive or as a possession to be consumed. For years he found himself on the edge of physical survival, with little time and money to ensure his emotional survival. Throughout the diary, he conceived of himself as a whole when the perfect balance of personal desire and environmental stimulation was guaranteed, which, the diary shows, was only the case when he travelled to Italy and Greece. During these trips, Gissing not only absorbed the exquisite sights and sensations these Mediterranean territories afforded, but most importantly, he mentally fused with the intellectual leaders of the past who had once populated them. He often blamed his lack of a companion with whom to recreate this state of mental and emotional wholeness for his blockages in professional productivity. Before he made the acquaintance of Gabrielle Fleury in 1898, he repeatedly complained of devastating, artistically inhibiting loneliness. Since he identified social and intellectual relationships as the source of creativity, his efforts to counteract his loneliness can be seen as emotional labour, because he sought to take control of his authorship through managing his emotions. Apart from failed attempts at love, Gissing’s decorative practice of filling his house with the images of the writers and artists he admired reflects his wish to actualise the parasocial relationships that had helped him survive the hostile conditions under which he worked and thus forms a fundamental part of the emotional labour of authorship.

The diary reflects Gissing’s swelling and shrinking emotional contentment as it primarily documents the extremes of happiness and despair, while the remainder of the spectrum tends to be represented by an inventory of reading and writing. Like Eliot, Gissing does not use his diary to record exotic sights for the education and enjoyment of others, but rather to monitor the gap between his desired self and his current self. When this gap is narrow, Gissing feels emotionally content; when it is wide, he calls upon himself to increase his efforts at being productive. While this observation may seem simplistic, it emphasises that Gissing, even less than Eliot, did not seem to differentiate between a private self and a professional self and that, at least in the diary, his emotional state directly correlates to his literary output. While Eliot re-read her diaries regularly for the purposes of emotional efficiency, Gissing only seems to have discovered the self-unifying potential of his diary in 1902, having kept a diary since 1887, when in Arcachon. On 7 April, he writes:

Yesterday chanced to open the first vol[ume] of my Diary, and found it such strange and moving reading that I have gone on hour after hour.—Who knows whether I may not still live a few years; and if so, I shall be sorry not to have a continuous record of my life. So I resolve to begin journalising once more, after but a year of intermission.[[89]](#footnote-89)

This entry exhibits Gissing’s surprise at discovering that his diary was an important autobiographical document, which shows that his habit of re-reading his former selves was much less consistent than Eliot’s. Only after he had reached financial and romantic stability—Gissing now lived in France with Gabrielle Fleury—did he conceive of himself as a resource deserving of investment.

Most of Gissing’s diaristic writing is characterised by his efforts to determine his personal value by the quality of his literary output, which added the pressure of having to demonstrate intellectual excellence to his excruciating financial burden. Although Gissing often portrayed work as simply a painful necessity, Paul Delany considers it as an important part of his self-design; of his ongoing “project […] to be productive at all costs, to live under a daily discipline and have something to show for it.”[[90]](#footnote-90) Despite his personal tendency to “subordinate [his life] to self-discipline,” the self-declared pessimist seems like a grumpy dissenter in the context of Victorian culture’s glorification of work.[[91]](#footnote-91) Gissing’s struggle to create and defend his respectability and dignity was not ideologically infused by the worship of work and self-improvement that public figures like Samuel Smiles (1812–1904) and Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) preached. Smiles sought to invest time with meaning by monetising and then quantifying it:

Men of business are accustomed to quote the maxim that Time is money; but it is more; the proper improvement of it is self-culture, self-improvement, and growth of character. An hour wasted on daily trifles or in indolence would, if devoted to self-improvement, make an ignorant man wise in a few years, and employed in good works would make his life fruitful, and death a harvest of worthy deeds. Fifteen minutes a day devoted to self-improvement will be felt at the end of the year.[[92]](#footnote-92)

Smiles presents time as a natural resource that the individual is free to consume either mindlessly, thus wasting it, or mindfully, by consciously investing it in self-cultivation. The fruitfulness of life depends on the nature and intensity of the effort expended, which means that the value of the individual is created by his or her will power. Carlyle exclaimed in “Labour” that: “Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has found it, and will follow it!”[[93]](#footnote-93) *Past and Present* (1843) constitutes a eulogy of work in which Carlyle insists that “there is a perennial nobleness, even sacredness, in Work.”[[94]](#footnote-94) As the son of Calvinist parents, Carlyle viewed work as an activity that ought to be fundamentally selfless; the “Reward” of professional effort being strictly non-monetary: “The ‘wages’ of every noble Work do yet lie in Heaven or else Nowhere. Not in Bank-of-England bills [or] in Owen’s Labour-bank.”[[95]](#footnote-95) The fact that Carlyle associated work directly with religion and detached it from the worldly reality of financial necessity would have infuriated Gissing.

For Gissing, the maxim “time is money” was reversed into “money is time.” ‘Work for work’s sake’ was a meaningless concept to him as the necessity to work subtracted time from his life, instead of validating it. Neither in his diary, nor in his other autobiographical records, did he deal with this subject explicitly, but his semi-autobiographical character Henry Ryecroft, who strongly reminds us of Gissing, identifies hard labour and moral growth as irreconcilable opposites, denying the direct correlation between them. In light of the harsh reality of the literary profession, Ryecroft openly derides the maxim of “time is money” by calling it “the vulgarest saw known to any age or people.”[[96]](#footnote-96) According to Ryecroft, who as a young man did not feel in possession of his life, “money is time” would be the more accurate maxim, because all the time available to him had to be invested in work:

Have I not lost many and many a day of my life for lack of the material comfort which was necessary to put my mind in tune? Money is time. With money I buy for cheerful use the hours which otherwise would not in any sense be mine; nay which would make me their bondsman. Money is time, and, heaven be thanked, there needs so little of it for this sort of purchase.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Ryecroft, like Gissing, finds himself in a circular economy: he must sacrifice all his time to work, in order to make the money necessary to afford leisure time, from which then to draw the inspiration essential to his profession. His life is kept captive by the ceaseless pressure for material gain, which is the only means by which he can recover control. Arlene Young has identified the same dynamic in *Eve’s Ransom* (1895), in which money purchases “freedom.”[[98]](#footnote-98) Hilliard tells his friend Robert Narramore: “Here’s four hundred pounds. It shall mean four hundred pounds’-worth of life. While this money lasts, I’ll feel that I’m a human being.”[[99]](#footnote-99) Money is thus seen as a humanising factor, allowing the individual not merely to survive, but to live in dignity.

Although Gissing thought himself lucky to be a writer instead of a clerk, he refused to romanticise the daily toil that characterised literary production. Resisting societal ideologies, Gissing constructed his own system of auto-validation, which was, however, never complete without the appreciation and monetary remuneration by an external audience. Gissing never simply wanted to ensure his survival, but his work ethic dictated strong aspirations to excellence and did not allow him to publish work he thought inadequate. Hence, a large part of his work remained unfinished because it did not meet his standards, as his entry of 7 April 1889 shows: “I shall have to abandon all I have written, and begin a new story. Am dissatisfied with the subject I have undertaken. And had finished 31 pp.! Always the same, each new book.—A vile day. Did nothing but rack my brains.”[[100]](#footnote-100) Poverty always exacerbated Gissing’s despair over feeling “stupid” when composition proved to be difficult: “Have no confidence in this novel of mine, but must finish it, because I am all but penniless” (24 June 1889). [[101]](#footnote-101) Gissing continuously found himself in the “money is time”-circle, forcing him to invest the time he really needed to recover and gather his creative energies into new work that might buy him time.

The process of creating literature was thus characterised by a constant movement of conception and termination, balanced out through the emotional labour that equalised frustration and motivation. While Gissing did not view this creative process as a transfer of emotional energy, it definitely relied on an investment of emotional energy: “I have still perhaps to write a book before the end of August, that is, if I can put my heart into it” (29 June 1890). The following day, Gissing did muster the strength to embark on a new project: “in the morning began my new novel, and by evening did 5 pp., which ought to be my daily quantum. Heavens, the relief I feel! And not much fear in the prospect of toil either. No one could deny my courage. I had half finished the other novel” (30 June 1890).[[102]](#footnote-102) By reaching the quantifiable standard of a set number of pages, Gissing had temporarily acquired self-respect and freed himself from the pressure of having to create. His numerical standards dictated his self-worth: “if I do thirty a week I am satisfied” (30 August 1890) and falling even slightly short of this target compromised the emotional reward of appropriating his life through literary output: “Worked hard but did only 4¼pp” (3 July 1890).[[103]](#footnote-103) Unlike Eliot, who voiced pride and pleasure at least on the day on which she finished a novel—“Put the last stroke to *Romola*. Ebenezer!”—Gissing soberly documents the completion of *New Grub Street*: “Morning 1 p., evening 4. At 9 o’clock wrote ‘The End.’ But I still have the last two pages of Reardon’s death to rewrite” (5 December 1890) and “In the morning rewrote the p. of Reardon’s death and so finished *New Grub Street*” (6 December 1890).[[104]](#footnote-104) Although he expresses relief after completing Volume II—“Heaven be thankit!”—Gissing’s refusal or inability to feel or express joy could be due to his suspicion that even selling thousands of copies of the book would not change his undeserved lot. On 27 May 1891, Gissing complains of the powerlessness and inefficacy that stem from the dichotomy between his legitimate economic and societal status and the abomination of his current treatment by society:

Look at my position, with a novel succeeding as ‘New Grub Street’ has done. I cannot buy books, I cannot subscribe to a library; I can only just afford the necessary food from day to day; and have to toil in fear of finishing my money before another book is ready. This is monstrously unjust. Who of the public would believe that I am still in such poverty?[[105]](#footnote-105)

Despite his literary success, Gissing is financially incapable of nourishing himself intellectually and cannot afford any but the most basic comforts. Because, for Gissing, money did not just procure time, but also the artistic stimulation that defined his identity as a writer, his self was fragmented and only ever temporarily complete.

While for Gissing the fruits of literary production were the source of pleasurable time for the self, the creative process in itself was only emotionally fulfilling when completed successfully. Simon J. James has argued that the pressure to be creative on command transformed Gissing’s literary labour into a tormenting nuisance: “In contrast to the valorisation of labour’s redemptive quality by most Victorian fiction, for Gissing the debilitating effects of labour, ‘the curse of curses,’ are such that it is only undertaken resentfully in order to continue existence, even intellectual labour, as *New Grub Street* shows.”[[106]](#footnote-106) Indeed, the despair that the character Reardon felt when he “dipped his pen for the hundredth time, bent forward in feverish determination to work [,] scarcely [knowing] what he wished to put into words [,] his brain [refusing] to construct the simplest sentence,” recalls Gissing’s own struggle with forced creativity, which he frequently voices throughout the diary: “With what terrific reluctance I sit down to work every afternoon!”[[107]](#footnote-107) Like Reardon, Gissing was forced to produce literature of a high standard on command, in the full knowledge that little more than a proud sigh and a short relief from extreme privation could be the tangible reward. The literary success of a completed novel was immediately undone by the necessity to produce more. Although within three weeks of the publication of *The Nether World* on 3 April 1889, Gissing had worked on several short stories and written poetry, this did not suffice, as can be seen in his entry of 5 April 1889: “Of course no work. By heaven, I must set to, to-morrow!”[[108]](#footnote-108) Such periods devoid of literary yield coincide with a state of general self-deprecating lethargy in the author. He reported that 28 April 1889 was: “a very unsatisfactory day. Nothing done, nothing really read. […] These long breaks in my writing suit me very ill. […] Dull day until evening; heaviness upon me. Never am I well when I break off my work.”[[109]](#footnote-109) Work and a habitual work routine are here portrayed as the source of health; the absence of which results in an aggravation of the depressive episode.

Delany has located the political ideology, or lack thereof, that pervades Gissing’s novels in his personal experience of inefficacy. As opposed to Eliot, who believed in the possibility of changing the emotional and moral make-up of her readers, Gissing’s realism did not have altruistic motives, but sought to depict the reality of the lower-class fight to stay out of the poorhouse:

Gissing’s politics were rooted in his immediate personal situation; he cared little for political philosophies beyond what he himself had seen and suffered. He firmly believed that for the social question there could only be individual solutions; and he believed just as firmly that for most people there was not going to be any solution.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Gissing created plots and characters that expressed his personal doubts about the possibility of social mobility, questioning the validity of self-improvement advice. In this sense, Gissing’s personal emotions of despair, along with his political beliefs, formed the ideological basis of his work. Unlike Ruskin, Gissing did not feel compelled to use joyous emotional energy as material for his work; on the contrary, it seems that Gissing, who lacked ideological vigour and took a stance of pessimistic determinism, tended to infuse his creations with the despair he felt over his own powerlessness in confrontation with social grievances. On 14 January 1895, for instance, Gissing read his “old diary to get material for new story for Unwin,” directly seeking inspiration in his own difficult situation.[[111]](#footnote-111) Because Gissing’s stories are of necessity pessimistic, we cannot consider them to be products of emotional labour in the sense that he purposefully put himself into a desperate state of mind in order to draw creativity from his emotions. Rather, his emotional labour equalled emotional management as it consisted of constructing an emotional foundation strong enough to withstand the taxing effort of writing.

*Becoming a Poet: Travelling with the Diary*

The diary makes clear that Gissing deemed emotional contentment to be at the basis of his creativity and that he longed for an ideal state in which his material and creative self could merge. While in England, the need to make money prevented Gissing from engaging in as many intellectual pleasures as he would have liked, going abroad meant that he had earned enough to buy himself the spiritual nourishment of a stay in Italy or Greece. When leaving for his 1888 trip to Italy from Paris, Gissing, for the first time in his diary, displays an excited life-affirming attitude, which stems from financial security: “Rose in astonishing health and spirits. The knowledge that I am safe from penury for a year has helped me wonderfully” (7 October 1888).[[112]](#footnote-112) Money bought him the agency to manage his time at will and enabled him to adopt his ‘real’ or ‘ideal’ self abroad. The economic transaction through which he traded years of hard labour and deprivation for a year of freedom also provided him with a year of selfdom: “on crossing the Channel, I have become a poet pure and simple, or perhaps it would be better to say an idealist student of art.”[[113]](#footnote-113) Through travelling, Gissing was able to assert himself over his social position and to use his time at leisure as he went “abroad for [his own] pleasure and profit.”[[114]](#footnote-114) His letter to Edward Bertz of 1890 clearly shows his longing for a geographical place in which he could be whole: “I work only in the hope of getting away very soon […] I am in the wrong world […] I am so much more myself when abroad.”[[115]](#footnote-115) In the proximity of great art and architecture, Gissing felt more at ease and more inspired than in he did in England—he was the person he could have been had he not constantly been preoccupied with professional matters.

Travel represented both the motivation and the goal of Gissing’s emotional economy: having financed himself a trip abroad, Gissing reached the state of emotional fulfilment that he conceptualised as inspired wholeness. Annarita Del Nobile locates travel at the epicentre of Gissing’s life, identifying it as the ideal activity around which other tedious activities revolved: “[He] wrote in order to be able to travel […] and he travelled in order to write.”[[116]](#footnote-116) Travelling dramatically changed the dynamic of Gissing’s life, because it “became one of receiving impressions, rather than actively pursuing any of his desires,” as Delany has observed.[[117]](#footnote-117) Gissing’s professional life was characterised by observing society, adapting scenes for his novels and producing work that met his standards; all of which involved active extraverted crafting. The ideal world that Gissing encountered on his journeys was there for him to internalise and possess. For Gissing, the enjoyment of life consisted of consuming literature, philosophy, landscapes and artefacts, but he only gained access to these pleasures through producing short stories and novels and ensuring financial solvency. The fact that work is needed to maintain sustenance is of course not in itself surprising; what is interesting is Gissing’s conceptualisation of himself as non-existent until he is able to transport himself into a time and space that he believes can generate his ideal self.

For Gissing, the experience of travel went beyond the pleasures of discovery and exploration because it represented a reunion-like authentication of his parasocial relationship with the writers and philosophers of Antiquity, upon whose works he had been constructing his spiritual home for years. He perceived Greece and Italy as suffused with the presence of his idols who came to be spiritual companions offering him emotional refuge in times of acute despair, as he affirms in his letter to Fleury of 26 August 1898: “but for Greek and Latin poets, I should perhaps have been brutalized in the long years of poverty. How many a time I have read Homer when I was living in a wretched garret, and had scarcely enough to eat!”[[118]](#footnote-118) Classical literature had been the guarantor of civilisation, reminding Gissing that the sublimity of art could supersede material misery. These extensive reading sessions in England cultivated the expectations and gaze with which Gissing encountered these foreign yet familiar territories. While Eliot tours Europe as a critic, using her diary to account for pleasurable surprises and disappointments, Gissing travels in search of emotional accommodation, employing his diary as a testimony of his emotional completeness.

Unfortunately, to a large extent, money determined the way Gissing perceived the territories that he visited. Museums tended to charge entrance fees, which had a detrimental effect on his research and sometimes ruined his enjoyment of the art on display. When in Naples on 7 November 1888, for instance, he was only able to “glance at the Grotto of Sejanus, in passing,” because he “[could] not afford to pay every entrance fee.”[[119]](#footnote-119) The financial imperative to choose his destinations with respect to their cost caused him great inconvenience because the ubiquitous fees rendered a total immersion into the artistic patrimony of Italy impossible: “[I] must lose much that I should like to see.”[[120]](#footnote-120) The discrimination inherent in commodified art allowed Gissing to adopt the persona of the travelling poet, which he considered to be his true self, merely in part. On 31 December 1888 in Florence, the museum’s charges all but ruined his experience, excluding him from the art that could make him complete: “Went to the Uffizi, the Pitti, the Museo in the Bargello, and the Belle Arti. Something like despair is the result; it is cruel to have my opportunities of study curtailed by having to pay a lira each visit.”[[121]](#footnote-121) Gissing was greatly distressed to find himself in such close proximity to his “favourites,” but still forced to remain separate from his ideal because of financial reasons.[[122]](#footnote-122)

The physical proximity to his ideal greatly influenced Gissing’s assessment of his own value, as it confirmed, as well as affirmed, his potential as a knower of and contributor to the world’s artistic patrimony. Like Eliot, he viewed his potential for knowledge and creation as his hope for future productivity. Shortly before his departure to Italy, on 3 June 1888, Gissing declares his disbelief in his resources and his fear of permanently losing control over his life: “it is the habit of my mind, in utter sincerity, to expect no longer tenure of life than [a year]” and that “death, if it came now, would rob me not of one hope, for hopes simply I have not.”[[123]](#footnote-123) In the absence of expectation and hope that his “absolute loneliness” might come to an end, Gissing finds himself without professional and emotional capital and is stuck in a state of regressive stagnation. Once in Italy, however, Gissing finds this non-directional, ineffectual self yielding to a vibrant, enthusiastic and multi-layered one. On 11 November 1888, for instance, Gissing takes the “train for Pompeii, choosing today because admission to the ruins is free” and reports that “of the visit itself little can be said; like everything else here, it exceeded my expectations.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Gissing’s omission of description of a sublime experience here is significant, because it shows that he enjoyed this private bliss and generally felt less compelled than Eliot and Ruskin to inscribe it into the diaristic record to prove his distinction as an observer. Although there are lengthy descriptive entries in his diary, Gissing tends to approach the sights and artefacts on display with less aggressive expectations and does not seem to compete with other connoisseurs. This peacefully absorbing attitude is unfathomable for his temporary travel companion Plitt: “he cannot understand that I enjoy the study of things which I yet condemn” (21 October 1888). Gissing came to Italy neither to assert himself as a critic, nor to be passively mesmerised by his environment, but rather to feel connected to the figures of the past who populated his mind and whose traces were omnipresent on these historic grounds. In Rome, on 2 December, Gissing contemplates some “busts of Euripides; again my delight, as at Naples” and finds that the “one numbered 42 has […] a singular resemblance to Tennyson.”[[125]](#footnote-125) While Eliot is concerned with issues of realistic representation, Gissing compares the physical likeness of two celebrities whom he greatly admires, disregarding the two thousand years that separate them. Clearly valuing emotional relevance over artistic execution, Gissing seeks to reinforce the emotional ties between himself and his heroes in order to further populate his mental landscape. On 16 December 1888, for instance, he spends “the morning in the Capitoline Museum, looking again at my favourites.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Gissing returns to look at his preferred paintings again, possibly with the goal of creating mental pictures with which to decorate his mind. On 21 December, he reports an “afternoon [in] the Vatican Museum,” “eating bread and salame” on his way there and then “[lounging] with delight in [his] favourite Sala Rotonda.”[[127]](#footnote-127) The omission of ekphrastic detail here accentuates his desire for complete immersion in a friendly context. Most visitors of museum spaces pick favourites, but the fact that Gissing does not justify his choices by comparing them to the rest of the collection shows that he is interested foremost in enjoying their presence. Unlike Eliot or Ruskin, Gissing neither quantifies his pleasure nor forces himself to feel. Instead, he presents his experience of the Italian art spaces as an effortlessly satisfying private encounter with an environment that completes his self.

Gissing used his diary to trace the changes that his inner world underwent in accordance with the variety of stimulations that his outer world presented. He presents his formerly atrophying self as a well of past and potential selves, conducting a form of emotional archaeology in his diary. The connection with his artistic heroes and the pleasant Mediterranean climate have a soothingly reassuring effect on Gissing and open up emotional territories that he had long forgotten. Through the confrontation with amazing artefacts, Gissing was able to retrieve the emotional enthusiasm of former selves, realising and embracing himself as a complex being: “If I awake in the night, I lie thinking of only the pleasantest things, and experience a strange revival of the feelings of my boyhood—the peculiar love of art, etc.”[[128]](#footnote-128) Because the originals of works of art that Gissing had access to in Italy had been in his consciousness as reproductions since his childhood, they functioned as touchstones between contemplating selves, connecting them by eliciting similar emotional reactions. While this entry is private in nature due to the casual “etc.,” Gissing adopts a more public persona when reporting his trip to the Loggia in Rome: “Yes, I like these Bible pictures better than anything else of Raphael’s that I know” (11 December 1888). The initial unprompted “Yes” suggests an internal debate that may have been occasioned by the typical practices of cultural appreciation, many of which determined quality through comparison. The images he saw filled him “with keenest joy,” because “they [brought] back the earliest longings of the days when [he] copied several of them from outline engravings that father possessed.”[[129]](#footnote-129) The tone of the entry becomes private again because Gissing foregrounds the continuity of his “longing” for possession and refrains from stressing his intellectual education.

Gissing felt at home in a world saturated with artistic and historical monuments because it allowed him to merge his actual and ideal selves, as well as the multiple selves he had been in the past. He reflects on the effect of the contemplation of art in his entry of 14 December 1888:

Woke early this morning and enjoyed a wonderful happiness of mind. It occurs to me—is not this partly due to the fact that I spend my days solely in consideration of beautiful things, wholly undisturbed by base necessities and considerations? In any case this experience is just remarkable.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Gissing considers the purifying power of “beautiful things” as the root of his emotional elation. It is this state of worriless inspiration that he seeks to re-create through his domestic decorations in England.

When exploring Rome and Athens, Gissing tended to identify with the imagined consciousness of the historical figures that inhabited these structures. He stepped out of his self and attempted to see the place with the eyes of personalities long dead. When contemplating Rome from a distant hill on 17 December 1888, he combines his knowledge of history and the sights in front of him to form a hypothesis of past conditions: “what a delightful view of the city there must have been from Tusculum, which was up by Frascati!”[[131]](#footnote-131) Gissing tries to mentally inhabit a past moment by adopting the perspective of now fictionalised humans. In Athens, on 24 November 1889, Gissing feels connected to Socrates because of the shared location; the banks of the river Ilissus. He tries to imagine the conditions of 400 B.C., assuming Socrates’s viewpoint: “When Socrates sat on this spot, under the plane-tree, and discoursed the ‘Phoedrus,’ the conditions must have been very different. It was then, of course, outside the city.”[[132]](#footnote-132) Again, his academic knowledge and the present place serve as a basis for imagining a past reality.

The proximity to the greatness of Rome and Athens, among other cities, enabled Gissing to realise his ideal by complementing mental images with physical reality. As the *Commonplace Book* shows, these journeys represented fundamental milestones—the high point of his life— that were important for his emotional management:

Perhaps the supreme moment of my life was that when I woke one night in Rome, & lay with a sense of profound & peaceful *possession* of what for so many years I had desired. Before going to bed I had read Horace. Never have I been so free of temporal cares (in soul, that is to say) & so clearly face to face with the ideal of intellectual life.[[133]](#footnote-133)

This entry exemplifies the deep fulfilment Gissing drew from the unification of his imagination and reality, which enabled him to finally “possess” his experience. Reading a classical Roman author in the very city in which he wrote gave Gissing a sense of presence and allowed him to “possess” the reassurance that this place was not a mere mental fabrication but that ancient Rome lived on through its literature and its monuments. Gissing’s ideal had become real and he accomplished this appropriation of the lived moment by writing down his experience.

*Loneliness and Productivity: the Need for Complementation*

As the diary demonstrates, Gissing felt that his freedom to develop his intellectual and human potential was severely compromised by several interlinked factors; primarily his poverty and his loneliness. He identified his undeserved poverty as the reason for his romantic difficulties, which, in turn, caused frequent bouts of acute despair that blocked his creativity. Convinced that emotional stability would create the appropriate climate for artistic development, Gissing deemed a loving home to be the guarantor of productivity that could help him maintain a wise usage of time. While, for Gissing, loneliness caused a terrible waste of time due to the distraction of self-fragmentation, companionship and coupledom, in his idealising view, would make him whole, healthy and focused.

Although Gissing’s diary cannot be considered as a balance-sheet with which he managed his emotional states in the fashion of Eliot, his strategies of emotional management nevertheless transpire. Because he forced himself to privilege work over introspective contemplation, most of his diary entries appear as a sequence of monosyllabic progress reports. These tepid, factual and very professional accounts are, however, punctuated by occasional, brutally frank revelations of emotional depletion, such as the one of 8 May 1888: “Paced my rooms in agony of loneliness. This becomes intolerable; in absolute truth, I am now and then on the verge of madness. Thought of Mrs. Curtis, and longed, longed that she too might have thought of me. This life I *cannot* live much longer; it is hideous.” In this crescendo of despair, Gissing voices his craving for reciprocity and stability and announces that his emotional resilience, conceptualised in temporal terms—“on the verge” and “not much longer”—is almost exhausted.

Unfortunately, romantic and social relations tended to further the fragmentation of the self that Gissing detested. During his stay in Italy, he is terribly irritated by his travel companion Plitt, whose demanding nature reveals the deficiencies of Gissing’s character. On 14 October 1888, he utters his indignation at the gap between his legitimate self and his actual self:

Strange that I, all whose joys and sorrows come from excess of individuality, should be remarkable among men for my yieldingness to everyone and anyone in daily affairs. No man I ever met habitually sacrifices his own pleasure, habits, intentions to those of his companion, purely out of fear to annoy the latter [,] for fear of offending him, or causing a misunderstanding. And this has so often been the case in the course of my life.—Therefore it is that I am never at peace save when alone.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Although Gissing hoped for enriching social interactions, in reality these encounters ended up shaking the emotional balance that he had created through “excess of individuality,” and in fact subtracted from the contentment he had been able to procure himself. Gissing sincerely hoped for a partner to complement him, but he felt the social obligation to adjust to others’ needs to be extremely oppressive and destructive. He longed to receive, but he was mostly forced to give; a dynamic that characterised both of his marriages. While he desperately hoped for a change in his domestic situation, he did not portray himself as willing or able to change his emotional make-up. Rather than to enjoy the excitement of social encounters, Gissing experiences them as great upheaval, as can be seen in this entry from 29 March 1889: “In afternoon went to visit Ella Gaussen. Of course it put me out of gear, as every social obligation always does.”[[135]](#footnote-135) The factual, slightly regretful, tone of this entry evidences Gissing’s fatalistic attitude to his personality. David Grylls is correct when he calls Gissing “a pessimist who believed in will power,” as indeed his fiction “asserts the futility of hope while commending strenuous endeavour.”[[136]](#footnote-136) When it came to work, Gissing’s will to survive in dignity certainly pushed him to produce compelling fiction at record speed, but he was extremely reluctant to conduct the emotional work necessary to accommodate other human beings in his life. Despite the urgently felt need for a balancing presence in his emotional economy, Gissing does not seem to have actively tried to overcome his social awkwardness, preferring to wait for a patient and supportive Gabrielle Fleury, who, he thought, complemented him naturally.

For Gissing, professional success and personal life were directly interlinked. On 8 March 1889 in Italy, for example, he writes “As yet, doing nothing and beginning to feel the oppression of loneliness.”[[137]](#footnote-137) Loneliness becomes the “familiar block of thought and fancy” (6 April 1890) that keeps him from getting work done: “I know I shall never do any more good work until I am married (16 September 1890)!”[[138]](#footnote-138) This same equation of emotional stability and professional productivity had already appeared in one of his accounts from Italy, dated 28 April 1889: “In afternoon came Plitt who is just back from Rome. By telling me of an Italian girl who lived with him there he made me so wretched in my loneliness that work was impossible.”[[139]](#footnote-139) While a psychological or psychoanalytical analysis of Gissing’s romantic choices clearly goes beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to highlight that Gissing established the emotional stability provided by a nourishing home as the prerequisite of effortless creativity. Conversely, he blamed his challenging circumstances for his romantic difficulties, as his letter to Gabrielle Fleury of 11 September 1898, in which he looks back on his life, evidences: “I was made solitary by hard circumstances and the necessity of ceaseless work.”[[140]](#footnote-140) The spiralling circularity of the mutually exclusive factors that composed Gissing’s emotional economy helps to explain Fleury’s assessment of Gissing’s personality: “He can’t be unreservedly happy; it is not in his nature.”[[141]](#footnote-141)

The hasty marriage to Edith Underwood on 25 February 1891 was the result (and the cause) of years of unhappiness and loneliness, which led Gissing to ignore the signs that Edith might not be a suitable partner. As is well-known, the union ended in disaster, as Edith fought for but failed to get attention from hard-working Gissing, which created many a domestic row. Pierre Coustillas has claimed that “a certain masochism” and a desire to end his “sexual frustration” drove Gissing to marry Edith and Paul Delany has argued that she was a project that he had taken on.[[142]](#footnote-142) However, Gissing’s conviction that professional success and domestic stability were interpenetrated indicates that he imagined the spousal union as an intellectually nourishing and mutually supportive relationship of equals. It is significant that the episodes of debilitating loneliness that motivated this romantic choice always coincided with professional unproductiveness, because this shows that, beyond the obvious human comfort, Gissing considered emotional contentment to be an elementary factor of his authorship.

With poverty forcing him to work constantly, he had neither the time nor the means to associate with the people he felt were worthy of him, and this was partly because Edith belonged to the “low-class Londoners,” whom Gissing despised.[[143]](#footnote-143) By marrying Edith, Gissing increased rather than cured his loneliness, as his entry of 21 April 1891, composed two months after his marriage, shows: “Wrote to Mrs. Harrison, telling her of my marriage, and that henceforth I am shut off from educated people.”[[144]](#footnote-144) The discontent triggered by Edith’s intellectual inequality and her temper tantrums frequently made work impossible. The “wrangling and uproar down in the kitchen,” which Gissing described on 4 October 1892, obliged him to separate the spheres of home and work: “Things going so badly in the house that I had to go and engage a sitting-room, at 7 Eaton Place, Heavitree Road, to use daily as a study.”[[145]](#footnote-145) In order to concentrate, Gissing had to invest money in renting an office to buy his own time, repeating the circular economic of “money is time.”

The inability to find the perfect companion to complement him was greatly frustrating to Gissing because he felt doomed to subsist in an intellectual vacuum. Edith could not match his intelligence and though she probably felt overwhelmed by matrimony, motherhood and illness, Gissing does not display a compassionate attitude in his diary, but only his dismay at the inconvenience she caused to his work: “Begin to fear that I shall never get to work again until the child is out of his first year. E. constantly groaning with neuralgia, and discontent at our loneliness” (6 May 1892).[[146]](#footnote-146) Rather than removing his loneliness, Gissing’s union with Edith aggravated it, so that “our loneliness” became an obstacle that seemed even more insuperable. Eliot portrayed herself as part of the lucky few whose lonely youth was compensated by the fulfilling companionship she experienced in middle age, but Gissing positions himself at the bottom of an imagined scale of happiness, which is evident in his entry of 4 November 1892: “solitude weighing upon me as usual. How few men there must be who have spent as much time as I have in absolute loneliness.”[[147]](#footnote-147) While Eliot tends to gauge the extent of her despair in terms of empirical occurrence, estimating its severity by comparing the states of mind of former selves, Gissing, as I have indicated, equated feeling lonely with wasting time. Assessing the acuteness of his loneliness by its duration, Gissing compares the content of his days to that of a multitude of imagined others. The uniqueness of his suffering is mere speculation, but it solidifies into a stern conviction of his extreme underprivilege that reappears in his entry of 24 January 1893:

On way home, at night, an anguish of suffering in the thought that I can never hope to have an intellectual companion at home. Condemned forever to associate with inferiors—and so crassly unintelligent. Never a word exchanged or anything but the paltry everyday life of the household. Never a word to me, from anyone, of understanding sympathy—or of encouragement. Few men, I am sure, have led so bitter a life—Read half Bk III St Augustine, and some pages of [Cicero’s] “De Oratore.”[[148]](#footnote-148)

Gissing here constructs a climactic description of his desperate situation by turning the acute hopelessness of a specific night into an expectation of the future, implying that the “never”s of the past are going to be the “never” of the future. He expresses his pessimism over the forced intellectual stagnation imposed by his domestic circumstances and insists that the “hope” for improvement is barred and that he is forever deprived from enriching interactions. His communication with others tends to subtract from his intellectual capital, rather than to add to it, as their inferiority lowers his inspiration, ambition and respectability. Because the imagined connections with the great minds of the past cannot be realised in his immediate domestic space, Gissing does not consider himself complete. His attempts to compensate for their absence, creating comfort in an environment of substitutive satisfaction through his readings and by decorating his living space with portraits of the geniuses he admires, must therefore be seen as acts of emotional management.

*Being at Home in England: Gissing’s Emotional Management*

Because Gissing was convinced that his misery was undeserved, his assessment of his own value did not coincide with his place in society. In England, Delany has noted, the contrast between him and his upper-class students accentuated the gaping gap between the ideal life he envisaged for himself and the pain of its actual drudgery: “[Gissing’s] sense of poverty came from his relative position and what he considered due to a man of his education and talents.”[[149]](#footnote-149) In order to resolve this clash, he eclectically surrounded himself with images, texts and territories he knew would conjure up an ideal semi-imaginary world. Through these tactics of emotional management, he was, with varying success, able to create emotional contentment and escape the frustrations of his reality by delving into a self-created world in which the frequent discord between his financial situation and his intellectual potential was non-existent. By drawing pleasure from the classics and imagining himself among the great thinkers of the past, Gissing sought to re-create the healing change of identity he had undergone during his 1888 trip to Italy and Greece.

In an attempt to substantiate his imagined relationship with the masters of the past, Gissing sought to incorporate them into the fabric of his material life by decorating his domestic environment with the portraits of his favourites. These visual representations became important factors in bonding with his son, as the entries that trace the educational and developmental progress of his first-born Walter show. As if to weave his son into a spiritual network, Gissing introduces him to the literary figures that inhabit his mind at a young age: “The boy is beginning to name the names of the portraits and pictures hanging round the room: Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, Kant, Turner, Daudet, George Sand, etc.” (6 April 1894). By surrounding himself and the child with his intellectual, semi-imaginary companions, he conjures up their presence and they become part of the domestic sphere, like family members. Gissing is profoundly moved when he notes: “Little boy amusing us much by having learnt to call the portrait of Shakespeare ‘Shik-pear.’ Tennyson he calls ‘Good na,’ with a funny pipe on the ‘good’” (21 December 1893). [[150]](#footnote-150) Shakespeare’s name and appearance are evidently part of Walter’s consciousness and the portraits are thus ‘part of the family,’ which is obvious in this next entry: “He [Walter] insists on spoonfuls being offered to his favourite pictures, which happen to be lying by; or even to those on the walls” (27 September 1893).[[151]](#footnote-151) As the portraits in question are objects that are specifically chosen and loved, they come to represent the material embodiment of identity-building ideas.

In light of his attempts at emotional self-sufficiency, Gissing’s interest in art can be seen as an effort towards true companionship of minds. Rather than evasively avoiding social annoyances, Gissing actively engages with the ideas and values propagated by these artists. A similar reliance on art as a means to ensure emotional fulfilment was common in the Victorian literature of decadence, which portrayed solitude as a conscious choice; as a deliberate abdication from social life for the satisfactions of ‘artificial’ life. Oscar Wilde’s “The Critic as Artist,” for instance, advocates art’s ability to give humans complete control over their lives: “There is no mood of passion that Art cannot give us, and those of us who have discovered her secret can settle beforehand what our experiences are going to be. We can choose our day and select our hour.”[[152]](#footnote-152) By engaging with art, the individual receives the satisfaction of controlling his or her life, eradicating the future by transforming it into expectation. Gaston Bachelard has theorised the subjectification of space as a mental “shell,” which the “retreats” of art indeed represent for Gissing: “All the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the space in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so.”[[153]](#footnote-153) Conversely to Bachelard’s theory, Gissing is attached to the ideas and “illusions of stability” he got from art rather than to actual places. Art, with its known scenarios is the place he returns to, and although not physically, he is mentally “within limits that protect:”[[154]](#footnote-154)

Objects that are cherished in this way really are born of an intimate light and they attain to a higher degree of reality than indifferent objects, or those that are defined by geometric reality. For they produce a new reality of being and they take their place not only in an order but in a community of order.[[155]](#footnote-155)

The paintings that decorate the interior of Gissing’s house both reflect and construct his identity and serve as a message to the world. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood consider “all goods as operative parts of a system of communication. […] Objects, including decorative objects displayed in the home, do say something about those who possess and display them.”[[156]](#footnote-156) The message the paintings communicate is that Gissing, having chosen this group of artists to be his intellectual and visual company, sees himself as part of this group of artists, which confirms his status as an intellectual and excludes all others from this microcosm. On 7 September 1898, Gissing invites Gabrielle Fleury to visit his library, thus offering knowledge about himself: “To know a man’s chosen books, is, in some degree, to know the man himself. You shall examine my shelves, and no doubt you will find many things to interest you. The volumes have been slowly collected—often at the cost of dinner. Some of the best come from my father.”[[157]](#footnote-157) Gissing thus believed that his chosen means of self-complementation gave insight into his inner workings, which affirms James Clifford’s idea that a collection of artwork is a “‘gathering’ around the self and the group—the assemblage of a material ‘world’, the marking off of a subjective domain which is not ‘other.’”[[158]](#footnote-158) Gissing’s choices of paintings, philosophy and literature not only embody the essence of his personhood, as it were, but they are also the record of his lived life, purchased through the renunciation of physical nourishment.

The efforts inherent in Gissing’s decorative gesture, both in relation to the house and to the mind, simultaneously obliterate and attract the other. While for years, Gissing’s interest in art was of a substitutive nature, reducing communication to mere interactions with the self by “transforming an open-ended objective discontinuity into a closed subjective one,” he seeks to connect to Gabrielle Fleury through his collection. Having met her, Gissing interrupts the self-directed circle of narcissistic projection that was fundamental to his act of collecting, breaking the “mirror” of art, which “sends back not real images, but desired ones” and which allows “you” to “look at an object without it looking back at you. That is why everything that cannot be invested in human relationships is invested in objects.”[[159]](#footnote-159) Human relationships being unsatisfying, Gissing had been looking for fulfilment in art, consciously diverting his attention from a frustrating reality to an imaginary world. Meeting Gabrielle marks an important turning point, because Gissing no longer had to invest his energies into this process of diversion, as becomes clear in his letters to her in which he declares that “Henceforth I have no *ideal*. It has become an existing fact,” assuring her that “it is quite certain that in you I have met the woman who corresponds most wonderfully to my ideal.”[[160]](#footnote-160) Through the effortless communication of minds that connects Gissing and Fleury, he finds himself in a state of perfect balance thanks to which art is no longer a substitution to compensate for intellectual and emotional deprivation, but resembles the exchange Gissing had with his father.

Nevertheless, even after having moved to France with Fleury in 1899, Gissing maintains the patterns of emotional management he had displayed throughout his diaries. On 21 May 1902, he moves from the immediacy of diarising to retrospective autobiography, commemorating his life and revealing the self-knowledge he has gained:

Having nothing to read, and nothing to do, passed the day in utter idleness—heaven knows, indeed, how the hours have gone by. And how often in my life have I spent such a day as this,—blank, wearisome, wasted! A sort of destiny of idleness and wasted time seems to oppress a great part of my life. Each time a day as this comes, I make a resolve that it shall never happen again. But circumstances are too strong for me. Indeed, the only way in which I could avoid this miserable folly of barren hours would be to live always in reach of a large library—the impossible thing for me, now and ever.[[161]](#footnote-161)

Several temporalities are at work in this entry Gissing reports on his present state of involuntary inaction, considers it in the grand scheme of his life and establishes it as a “destiny of idleness,” to which, despite countless efforts to counteract it, he finally resigns himself. The library epitomises the only possible remedial recourse to this enforced infertility, but due to the circumstances, his destiny prevails. Although this entry is one of the last that Gissing was to write, it cannot of course be seen to represent a conscious conclusion to the diary. It is, however, imbued by a resigned sadness over the lack of progress he has made and over the fact that, even at this stage, he is not able to provide himself the intellectual and spiritual nourishment he needs. While he still believes in the theoretical efficiency of his emotional management, he reveals and accepts it as fundamentally impracticable.

**Conclusion**

The diaries of Eliot and Gissing both present the self as limited but improvable, conceptualising it as an incomplete but completable whole and devoting a considerable amount of time and energy to perfecting it through complementation. The diary is instrumental in reflecting, developing and implementing the strategies of substitution that help diarists compensate their lack of inspiration, support and strength. Both the strategy of self-signification and that of relying on a human signifier present manifold problems. Wishing to signify themselves through their work, Eliot and Gissing record recent success and remember that of former selves in their diaries, which, on the one hand, can serve as a means of emotional management, kindling motivation and inspiration. The downside of self-signification is that with rising success, Eliot and Gissing create ever-higher standards for defining success, meaning that the present self has to supersede the achievements of the past selves, which the future self may not be able to outdo. Through thus gauging personal value through internal comparison, the self becomes a depletable resource—a conceptualisation that entails an immense fear of the future. While Eliot and Gissing’s diaries primarily function as a kind of ledger for professional accomplishments or failures, they only occasionally manifest the diarists’ desire to capture and captivate the immediacy of a fleeting visual moment. John Ruskin, in contrast to these economically-minded diarists, conceptualises himself as an observer, using his diary to perfect his observational skills. Eliot and Gissing’s diaries are divorced from the work they helped to generate, while Ruskin’s texts stage and trace the process of experience, capturing his emotional labour of enjoying beautiful sights. Despite this fundamental difference, in all three cases, diaries allowed the diarists to auto-condition their emotional reactivity and stability and to consequently monitor and maximise their professional output.

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