

MUCH MORE THAN AN ANTIFEMINIST: ELIZA LYNN LINTON'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE RISE OF VICTORIAN POPULAR JOURNALISM

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IT IS DIFFICULT TO DISCUSS the Victorian women's rights movement and the antifeminist backlash which ensued without mentioning Eliza Lynn Linton's contribution. Known primarily as the author of the notorious *Saturday Review* essay, "The Girl of the Period" (1868), Linton was and has been viewed primarily as an essayist who verbally lashed middle-class, progressive women. As late as the 1880s and 1890s, she maintained an active role in the woman-question debate, publishing her "Wild Women" essays, writing a New Woman novel, *The New Woman in Haste and At Leisure*, and reissuing her Girl of the Period (G.O.P) essays in volume form. Linton scholars have been particularly intrigued by the discrepancies between Linton's emancipated lifestyle and the restricted one she advocated for other women. How could the first salaried woman journalist in England maintain such a hostile attitude towards her professionally inclined cohorts? More significantly, how could a woman who wrote one of the most radical, profeminist novels of her time, *Realities* (1851), suddenly shift to promoting women's subjection? Various, compelling answers have been offered to such questions. Vineta Colby, in *The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century*, and Elizabeth Helsinger, Robin Sheets, and William Veeder in *The Woman Question. Society and Literature in Britain and America, 1837–1883* contend that the contradictions between Linton's lifestyle and her antifeminist essays mirror Victorian England's own contradictory attitudes regarding gender relations.¹ Nancy Fix Anderson suggests that Linton's misogyny emanated in part from her self-hatred, and that her masculine identification gave her leeway to condemn other women (86–90). Deborah Meem, after examining three of Linton's most popular novels, argues that her creation of protolesbian characters contributes to the development of lesbian community and identity, and that "despite the reactionary antifeminist moral which concludes each" work, the author draws her characters sympathetically (559).

As valuable as such theories have been in explaining Linton's conflicted personality and career, all of them assume that her importance rests exclusively with her sexual orientation and/or her antifeminism. Confinement of Linton to this one paradigm unfor-

tunately obscures the importance of the role she played in the development of popular journalism at mid-century. After the failure of *Realities* to catapult Linton to fame, she abandoned writing novels for thirteen years and instead practiced and perfected the art of punditry. From 1851 through 1868, the year that “The Girl of the Period” was published, Linton worked hard to establish herself as the most formidable critic of Victorian womanhood, because she was determined to make the journalism profession work to her benefit — regardless of her sex, inexperience, and lack of influential connections. At mid-century, journalism was attracting enterprising authors who learned how to profit from its fluid, dynamic nature. Antifeminism was a particularly salient theme which in Linton’s creative hands generated the audience demand and editorial respect that she needed in order to remain a viable author. Not only was she one of the *Saturday Review*’s most valuable contributors, but she became an influential role model for other women journalists. By exploring her rise to prominence in conjunction with the changes shaking up journalism during the Victorian era, we arrive at a more complicated understanding of both the author and the profession itself.

I

WHEN LINTON LEFT for Paris in spring, 1853, she had sunk back into virtual obscurity. Having been fired from her job at the *Morning Chronicle* in 1851, unable to find steady work, and becoming resigned to seeing her short stories and articles rejected by various magazines, Linton found it difficult to keep writing at all. In 1852, her life was further complicated by an intense, most likely romantic, encounter with a wealthy society woman twenty years her senior (Anderson 64). Perhaps this unfruitful relationship, coupled with her inability to gain a steady income, prompted Linton to leave the country to work as a newspaper correspondent.

Freed from the stigma of being a second-rate novelist who had written a scandalous work, freed from the tangles of personal relations and family problems, Linton was able in Paris to devote her attention to learning the unwritten rules of her chosen field. She first had to swallow her pride and disregard her earlier, idealistic perceptions of the literary marketplace. In an 1870 letter to one of her nieces, Linton gave her some of the wisdom that she herself had accepted years earlier: “It is of no use only wishing to do things well — one must *try*; and it is of no use trying for a time — we must persevere” (qtd. in Layard 159). In an 1878 letter to another relative, Linton continued reflecting on her own past and the experience she had gained: “True success comes only by hard work, great courage in self-correction, and the most earnest and intense determination to succeed, not thinking that every endeavour is already success” (qtd. in Layard 212).

These observations indicate how difficult it had been for Linton to accept her own limitations as a writer. While her first two novels, *Azeth, the Egyptian* (1847) and *Amy-mone* (1848) had received moderate praise from reviewers, she had been unable to reach the level of fame that her rival, Charlotte Brontë, had achieved. *Realities*, however, was to be “*strong*”: “I confidently expect a success equal to *Jane Eyre*. This may sound vain, but I feel *sure* of it —”, Linton confided to her prospective publisher, Richard Bentley (B.C. MSS., n.d.).² Linton wanted *Realities* to educate her audience about women’s oppression, but both the reviewers and the audience resoundingly dismissed her novel by claiming its author “raves like a Pythoness” (*Athenaeum* 627). Linton was thus compelled to try a

different approach or to abandon her writing career altogether. Hence, her emphasis on “intense determination to succeed” suggests that she decided to write what would sell, rather than produce unprofitable, progressive novels.

While in Paris, Linton also learned to endure journalism's unsavory, Darwinistic overtones. She had to master the rules of the game in order to compete with her colleagues — the majority of whom were male, and thus, in a better position to achieve success. In recalling her time working for the newspaper in Paris, she wrote:

[E]ach man wished to be first in the field and to have the practical monopoly of private information. Hence, brotherly kindness, and doing to others as you would be done by, did not obtain among men whose professional loyalty lay in misleading, tripping the heels of, and outstripping their competitors. (qtd. in Layard 77–78)

Linton shrewdly left the men alone and instead concentrated on targeting women who either competed directly with her, or whose aspirations threatened the traditional separate spheres ideology which she had decided it would be profitable to defend. Linton strategized to make professional women and blue stockings vulnerable to her well-aimed journalistic attacks on their “misplaced” priorities, and her first noteworthy success as a critic of women came when Charles Dickens published her 1854 article, “The Rights and Wrongs of Women” in *Household Words*.

On returning to England in 1854, Eliza Lynn was well on her way to establishing herself as a free-lance journalist. At the time of her separation from her husband, William Linton, in 1864, her essays were appearing in *All the Year Round*, *Temple Bar*, *London Society*, *Daily News*, *Athenaeum*, the *London Review*, *North British Review*, and *St. Paul's Magazine*. Long neglected by scholars, these early essays offer insight into the author's evolving persona. Whereas most literary historians assume that the 1868 publication of “The Girl of the Period” marked the beginning of Linton's antifeminism, it is evident that as early as 1862 she had nearly perfected her rhetorical style and message. It is helpful at this stage to assess the journalism market in conjunction with two of Linton's essays that appeared in the *Temple Bar*. Both pieces indicate how deliberately Linton was preparing herself to become the country's most antagonistic critic of women, and they also indicate how successfully she had been adapting to the demands of the profession.

II

WHEN LINTON RETURNED from Paris in the mid 1850s, the British magazine market was in upheaval. After the establishment of the train lines, a demand for cheap magazines “was relatively easy to satisfy and publications such as *The London Journal* and *The Family Herald* . . . sold in large numbers around the major cities” (Reed 99). The repeal of the stamp duty in 1855, followed by the repeal of the paper tax in 1861, resulted in hundreds of other new periodicals that catered to expanding readerships and which offered opportunities to enterprising writers. Many intellectuals bemoaned the inevitable changes occurring; they contended that English culture was jeopardized by a new breed of editor who recognized the profit to be gained from popularizing the press and making it appeal to the expanding middle class. Confrontations occurred regularly as the hegem-

ony of the old elite lost ground to the new ideologies of an emergent electorate — to whom many journalists now catered (Brake 97).

Journalists responded to middle-class readers' demand for information and cultivation by publishing articles on everything from the Corn Laws to Puseyism (Houghton, "Periodical Literature" 4), but women's rights, or the woman question in general, was still largely unexplored by journalists in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Essayist Frances Power Cobbe was the most recognized supporter of women's rights, but few other activists had the time or inclination to write as regularly for the periodical press as she did. Conservative women, such as Anne Mozley, were beginning to write vehemently against women's rights, but few others wrote regularly on the topic or had developed a recognizable style or following. By taking an antifeminist approach and reducing the complicated issues involved in the woman question to an accessible level, Linton was positioning herself to become an authority on women's wrongs.

Also in Linton's favor was the fact that readers' zeal for understanding ideas was accompanied by their anxiety about England's future. Walter Houghton characterizes the Victorian at mid-century as letting out an "agonized cry for reassurance, or for something — anything — one could cling to" (5), and certainly editors heard that cry just as loudly as that which clamored for access to new ideas. Walter Bagehot noted in "The First Edinburgh Reviewers" in 1855:

It is, indeed, a peculiarity of our times, that we must instruct so many persons. . . . We must speak to the many so that they will listen, — that they will like to listen, — that they will understand. It is of no use addressing them with the forms of science, or the rigour of accuracy, or the tedium of exhaustive discussion. The multitude are impatient of system, desirous of brevity, puzzled by formality. (I: 311)

Immediately evident is Bagehot's hesitancy to view popular periodicals as the primary vehicle for publishing debates on complicated topics. Rather, he implies, editors are obligated to control the dissemination of knowledge so that readers will not be unnecessarily intimidated or threatened (or provoked?) by information that has not been sufficiently filtered by "authorities" trained at writing compact, digestible (and hopefully entertaining) reviews that will sell to a large audience. Certainly many readers were also responsible for this journalism transformation. Hamilton Fyfe wryly points out in *Sixty Years of Fleet Street* (1949) that "[g]ood writing in a paper makes nearly all English people resentful; they can't understand it; they think they're being made fun of" (41).

Bagehot's observations would not have been lost on journalists eager to establish themselves as authorities with a vast readership, and Linton, regardless of whether she read Bagehot or not, appeared to understand that the most profitable audience, while not necessarily the best educated or most influential, would be amenable to an antifeminist message. But she needed an editor who also understood the implications of Bagehot's assessment of the middle-class reader. George Augustus Sala, who became the first "conductor" of the *Temple Bar* in 1861, was one such editor. Linton's essays were accepted by Sala, most likely because he gathered from her freelance work that she was aware of the demands and limitations of the readership at which *Temple Bar* was aimed.

Light, entertaining articles which catered to unrefined tastes characterized *Temple Bar's* contents. Although Matthew Arnold publicly criticized Sala's journalism, the flam-

boyant editor willingly admitted: "I was altogether destitute of a particle of that genius without which I could never excel or become famous in pure letters," but he adds, "I was fully cognisant of the fact that I had learned my trade as a journalist and that I could earn a handsome income by it" (qtd. in Straus 164).³ His entertaining, reductive language was deemed innovative by his supporters and full of "vulgarity and bombast" by his critics (Straus 157). Unconcerned with naysayers, Sala championed such language in the *Temple Bar* and the periodical's regular writers used such "journalese" themselves. *Temple Bar's* advertisement in an 1860 *Bookseller* promised that each writer would be a "pleasant talker on the engrossing topics of the day," and that the dominant tone of the magazine, "from headline to imprint, will strive to inculcate thoroughly English sentiments — respect for authority, attachment to the Church, and loyalty to the Queen" (qtd. in *Wellesley* 3: 386). Linton's writing style and subject matter matched Sala's demands for the magazine. Indeed, she had already perfected her own brand of "journalese" while writing for other magazines of the time.

"Domestic Life" (February 1862) and "Fuss and Feathers" (March 1866) demonstrate how effectively Linton exploited popular journalism, including its tendency towards sensationalism and reductivism, for her own purposes. By 1862, she had developed a catalog of memorable caricatures and a sparkling rhetoric that was later to make "The Girl of the Period" so famous. She made worn-out themes and clichéd phrases fresh and provocative, she stripped the woman question debate of its more pedantic, tedious issues (including discussion of its philosophical and legal underpinnings), and she redesigned the debate so that it would stoke middle-class anxiety about the future, while at the same time indulging the readers in a nostalgic love of the "ideal" past.

"Domestic Life" scans the history of marital and family relations from classical times up through the nineteenth century. While Linton does not focus exclusively on women, her most entertaining sections describe their bad habits and their moral lapses. Her scope ensures that all European women come under her scrutiny, beginning with the Turks. When discussing the foibles of Turkish husbands and their numerous wives and concubines, she observes that even the most "sensual and most unspiritual Leila gets weary of the eternal monotony of her gilded cage":

Perfumes and hubble-bubbles, soft cushions, embroidery, fine dresses, plaiting of hair with golden sequins intermingled, painting of cheeks till they look like some hideous plaster-work daubed and ruddled out of all likeness to humanity, blackening of eyelids, and fattening of plump bodies, are all very well for a time; but even Eastern materialism has its limits. (404–05)

Linton's portrait of "Leila" strikingly resembles her later one of *la femme passée* — a grotesque English society woman who appears in Linton's July 11, 1868, *Saturday Review* article of that title. *La femme passée* is

[d]ressed in the extreme of youthful fashion, her thinning hair dyed and crimped and fired till it is more like red-brown tow than hair, *her flaccid cheeks ruddled*, her throat whitened, her bust displayed with unflinching generosity, . . . her *lustreless eyes blackened round the lids, to give the semblance of limpidity to the tarnished whites*, perhaps the pupil dilated by belladonna, or perhaps a false and fatal brilliancy for the moment given by opium, or by eau de cologne,

of which she has a store in her carriage, and drinks as she passes from ball to ball. (50; emphasis mine)

Pleased with her creative depiction of the “typical” Turkish woman, Linton could not resist reinventing her as the British washed-out society lady when she began her G.O.P. series for the *Saturday Review*.

Not only did Linton develop some of her most infamous caricatures while writing for the *Temple Bar*, she also peppered her writing with a sarcastic humor that became one of her trademarks. When describing the domestic life of Spanish middle-class families, Linton makes the “morally upright” English reader laugh out loud at the Spaniards’ expense:

With [the husband and wife] it is either household wretchedness or social finery, without an attempt at home comfort or consideration. In the morning there is only dirt — confusion, and slatternliness, Delores in rags, unkempt, unwashed, — a really ugly specimen of beautiful womanhood defaced by carelessness and dirt, whom Don José leaves in full possession of the family kennel, while he wanders off to his amusements elsewhere. (405–06)

Such stereotypes might offend critical readers, but Linton catered to an audience who would find such descriptions amusing. The alliteration of Delores and Don José, the image of Delores in rags (similar to that of the slatternly, nagging, American “hillbilly” wife from television comedies of the 1950s and 1960s), the depiction of Spanish homes as “kennels,” and Don José wandering off like a stray mongrel, are not designed to reflect reality, but rather to generate laughter from insular English readers.

By 1866, Linton had further honed her style and established her persona. Indeed, “Fuss and Feathers” reads like one of her *Saturday Review* essays. Her reductive argument, humor, and stock caricatures, as well as her treatment of social extremes as if they were norms, characterize the essay; more so than “Domestic Life,” “Fuss and Feathers” shows Linton’s mastery of technique and effect at the expense of serious content, let alone meaningful contribution to social debate.

In this essay, Linton states that when stripped of finery, or feathers, a so-called great person is seldom more than a skeleton. Kings and queens, she asserts, are mere drapery and bombast. Women in particular should be criticized for their love of exaggeration at the expense of truth, and for their obsession with fashion at the expense of genuine good taste and breeding. Offering a catalog of offending types of women that rivals the epic catalogs of Homer, Virgil, and Milton, she first castigates the “pretty church-going maiden, enthusiastic for rigid Anglicanism and choral services” who would be “no Christian at all among those who reprobate church music as an irreverent and decidedly profane amusement” (196). In other words, the maiden goes to church for its showy but stately rituals, not out of any spiritual depth. But rather than praise the pious, low-church worshipper, Linton criticizes her too, because even though she might not love ritual, she is as shallow as the high-church maiden and would “absolutely refuse to believe in the vital faith of those who did *not* shriek and scream hysterically, and cry out that they had ‘got religion,’ and tear their hair, and hug their neighbours” — as she does (196; emphasis mine). When the “vital religion of many, belonging to either school of fuss” is stripped “to its veritable germ, reduced to its real residuum,” what is found is “a small and meagre thing enough,” Linton concludes (196).

With her entertaining descriptions, Linton draws readers' attention away from her fallacious either/or reasoning. To uncritical readers, it appears that a church-going lady must belong to either one of these two schools of fuss; they can never have depth. As I will demonstrate shortly, almost all of Linton's G.O.P. essays use this same strategy of treating extremes as if they were norms. Linton's authoritative voice, wit, and fast-paced arguments discourage readers from thinking carefully about her logic; instead, they become mesmerized by her dazzling verbal displays.

"Fuss and Feathers" smoothly moves from one example of puffery to the next with few transitions. Obviously loving the feel of the pen flying beneath her fingers as it creates caricature after caricature, Linton turns to lampooning the "strong-minded class" of women "who wear spectacles and carry alpaca umbrellas — who have big knuckles and bony shoulders, and a costume defiant of millinery laws, and a shibboleth defiant of ordinary prohibitions" (197–98). As disgusting as they are, Linton opines, they are *nothing* "compared to the irrepressible little hen-women — those small, cackling, voluble, energetic lumps of fuss and feathers, [who are] always running about the farmyard with heckles up and wings spread, putting the whole world to rights from the mastiff in his kennel to the sparrow on the tree-top" (198). Women are either strong-minded or they are hens; they are bossy or they are wimpish; they explicitly dominate men, or they do so by subterfuge. Linton does not stop there. She moves smoothly on to the "larger, and softer, and fleshier kind" of woman who is "slower in movement, and of a downier growth of plumage," but whose "inner nucleus" of sincerity is just as meagre as the rest (198). These women do nothing; they simply exist. Rather than seeking to "set the world to rights on any subject whatever," they "sail out of their nests sunning their plumage as they go, and turning round on all sides to show an admiring multitude the gorgeous colours of their outside coverings" (198). Hence, by the essay's conclusion, we have seen a fledgling "girl of the period," an "epicene woman," a "shrieking woman," and a "fashionable woman," all of whom will appear later in Linton's *Saturday Review* middles.

As acidic and audacious as Linton's wit is, it is directed both in "Domestic Life" and "Fuss and Feathers" at women whose threat is minimal. Why, one might wonder, would Linton spend so much energy chastising women who shriek in church, or who dress up like magpies? Linton's attack on the most marginal of women's transgressions is at first perplexing. After all, the women who posed serious threats to society were those with the intelligence and motivation to change laws, institute reforms in education, suffrage, and a host of other areas, and who also demanded that men reform their attitudes and prejudices regarding women's potential. In her *Temple Bar* articles, Linton only shot venom at women who were no more than "types," and harmless types at that. Her decision to focus on marginal threats might be explained in at least a couple of ways. First, aware of Sala's determination to keep the *Temple Bar* free of contentious political and social debate, Linton would have ensured that her attacks were little more than bombast. A legitimate attack against women — who were a large component of the *Temple Bar* readership — would be too offensive and could turn away potential subscribers. Furthermore, Sala insisted that the magazine simply entertain. While keenly interested in reformed marriage laws (she did not present herself in print as a monolithic antifeminist, but openly supported more rights for married women), Linton recognized that such a weighty topic was hardly engrossing to many readers, while gossip, fashion, and parties would no doubt hold their attention. When writing for the *Saturday Review*, Linton continued to focus some-

what on women's more marginal transgressions, but in keeping with that particular journal's tactics, she did heat up her rhetoric and focused her attacks more sharply on women who initiated threatening reform proposals.

While still writing primarily for *Temple Bar* and other such magazines, Linton's essays were anonymous, and while entertaining, their location in lightweight periodicals ensured that most would read them, laugh, and then pass on to other equally entertaining essays and fiction, without giving much regard to the author who penned them. Linton's "break" came when her old employer at the *Morning Chronicle*, John Douglas Cook, hired her to write book reviews and middles for his and Anthony Beresford-Hope's new venture, the *Saturday Review*, a weekly devoted to discussion of politics, literature, and the arts. As one of the weekly's regularly appearing authors, Linton not only gained an opportunity to test her antifeminist approach on a more politically charged readership, but more importantly, she participated firsthand in creating a periodical whose influence on journalism itself would prove significant.

III

THE *SATURDAY REVIEW* has traditionally been described by critics (including Matthew Arnold in his more generous moments) as "an organ of reason" (Arnold, "Barbarians" 147). M. M. Bevington, Christopher Dahl, Alvar Ellegård, John Gross, Walter Houghton, George Layard, and John Woolford all concur that in spite of its occasional disingenuousness or editorial tyranny, the *Saturday Review* was one of the period's most influential, intellectual publications, that its readership was composed primarily of gentlemen, and that its writers were almost all Oxbridge graduates who had taken first-place honors. A much-quoted opinion of the *Saturday Review*'s importance comes from historian F.H. Maitland, who stated that "anyone who never wrote for the Saturday Review was no one" (qtd. in Smith 11). The *Saturday Review* positioned itself to receive such accolades in part by proclaiming in its November 3, 1855 Advertisement to be concerned with addressing "the educated mind of the country, and to serious, thoughtful men of all schools, classes and principles" (Advertisement 13).

As influential as the *Saturday Review* was, many of the middle section's essays are similar in subject matter, tone, and length to those appearing in the more pedestrian, non-elite magazines of the time. Certainly Linton's *Temple Bar* essays are virtually identical to those she published in the *Saturday Review*. That an essayist could publish almost the same sort of essay in a "low-brow" periodical and in a "high-brow" one raises intriguing questions about the actual nature of the *Saturday Review* and about the nature of journalism during the late 1860s and early 1870s. How is it that the *Saturday Review*, which has gone down in literary history as an organ of intellectual rigor and high journalism, could print so many middle essays (not just Linton's) whose argument, tone, and content differ little from what was appearing in middle-class magazines that never had the presumptions that the *Saturday Review* had? How were Linton's essays in this periodical integral to maintaining — even increasing — the periodical's popularity and influence?

An assessment of Linton's G.O.P. essays in conjunction with other representative *Saturday Review* middles indicates that this weekly was less intellectual in its tone and content than many critics have assumed, and that it was surreptitiously practicing precisely

the type of popular journalism that it publicly, and frequently, deplored. Ultimately, the journal's success lay in its ability to generate a constant stream of scandalous or audacious opinions, and in its writers' and editor's ability to construct a largely symbolic readership composed of well-educated, intellectual gentlemen that appeared to be much larger and powerful than it actually was. Both of these tactics later manifest themselves in a plethora of "New Journalism" publications that, humorously enough, the *Saturday Review* also publicly denigrated. I am not suggesting that the *Saturday Review* was ignored by educated readers (Coventry Patmore, Thomas Hardy, Matthew Arnold, and Edmund Yates are only a handful of well-known Victorians who read the *Saturday Review* and commented on its contents) or that it was not an influential periodical, but I do suggest that a content analysis of its middles indicates that it would have been equally popular among readers who were insecure in their intellectual, financial, and social aspirations, and who needed the aura of prestige that possession of such a review might lend them. Not only was Linton crucial to the periodical's ability to generate scandal, but her essays were particularly valuable because they reassured a male readership anxious, among other things, about its masculinity. Linton ingeniously flatters the male ego and reinforces men's prejudices about "the Sex." Truly intellectual periodicals, I would argue, challenged attitudes, rather than merely defended the status quo.

According to the nineteenth-century drama critic Clement Scott, J. D. Cook hired Linton and a small number of other women to review books of rival women authors. "The result was admirable. The paper became brilliant. . . . [T]he Douglas Cook policy was to set woman against woman, and to see who would make the best fight of it" (1:421–22). Cook's policy reveals how shrewdly he was able to generate scandal solely to generate sales; after all, men would surely enjoy the spectacle of women cat-fighting and they would then be more eager than ever to buy the periodical.⁴ Cook encouraged all of his reviewers — not just women — to castigate popular authors, prominent intellectuals, new trends, and politicians. James Grant points out in his 1873 monograph that the "stereotyped instructions given by Mr. Cook to his subordinates on the literary staff, were to detect all the faults they could in the works to be reviewed, and then to attack . . . in the most unsparing manner" (12).

While encouraging his writers to see all idols as targets for attack, Cook also ensured that his periodical's opinions would be sensational enough to provoke discussion among society at large — not simply among *Saturday Review* subscribers; hence, the periodical did become highly influential. Hamilton Fyfe curtly pointed out in 1949 that the *Saturday Review* was a power in politics and literature simply because of "its hard hitting and cynical distaste for anything new" (40–41). While it is true, as John Woolford has argued, that the *Saturday Review* set a new, higher standard of literary criticism, and that the reading classes benefited because the periodical challenged the *Time*'s monopoly on political commentary, the periodical's middle section was clearly geared towards fomenting conversation and gossip (130–32).

Cook's policies for ensuring his journal's success were readily accepted by Linton, who apparently saw the profit to be made and the reputation to be gained by attacking women solely for the sake of attack. Furthermore, the stylistic standards which governed the periodical's middle section reflected Linton's own rhetorical strategies. Created by T. C. Sanders, the middle essays dealt often with social topics and were no more than three columns, or 3,000 words in length (Stebbing 90). They followed lead articles on politics

and current events, and in the 1860s and 1870s, when Linton was at the peak of her success, the most distinctive middles often dealt with (im)morality or social transgression.

Socially and politically conservative and homiletic in an admonitory fashion, middles *appeared* to offer readers instruction for improving the quality of their lives and society overall. The titles themselves often reflect such didactic overtones; “Respectability,” “Contempt,” “Vanity,” “Shirking,” “Popular Preachers,” “Skeptical Humility,” “False Shame,” “Social Truth,” “Moral Controversies,” “The Virtue of Truth,” “Our Noble Selves,” are representative. Given the middle’s restrictive length, writers had to state opinions concisely. If writing “instructional” essays, they would also offer numerous examples of “inappropriate” and “appropriate” behaviors. Most of a middle’s verve depended on how effectively the author described inappropriate behaviors with provocative, striking adjectives that would be memorable enough to elicit comment in all sorts of social contexts, from the family dining room to the society balls.

What often made a *Saturday Review* middle particularly maddening or amusing (depending on whether one was a critic or an admirer) was the author’s habit of stating his or her opinion on an issue (women’s education, trade unions) as if he or she were stating fact. Authors who dealt with social morality or manners rarely complicated their arguments by acknowledging other viewpoints, and they would always employ a brash, confrontational tone or one full of wit and sarcasm. By writing about extremes within a restricted framework, the author was unable (and most likely unwilling) to develop his argument at any length.⁵ And yet, the *Saturday Review* always insisted that it wished to appeal to the “earnestness, sincerity, and independence” of its audience’s thought, that it wanted to engage “serious, thoughtful men” with commentary on social, moral, and political topics (Advertisement 13).

Certainly these stylistic and argumentative principles should seem familiar if we think back to Linton’s employment of them in “Domestic Life” and “Fuss and Feathers.” Linton’s talent at concentrating only on extremes and of lampooning all types of behavior were already her most memorable trademarks, even before she began writing her G.O.P. series. Certainly Linton recognized the profitability of her own writing style, and by marrying her intentions with Cook’s, she was poised to become the most recognized critic of women of her time, as well as one of the *Saturday Review*’s most valuable journalists.

Linton’s *Saturday Review* essays are designed to entertain men, to reinforce their sense of superiority over women, and to reassure them that their misogyny is not only socially acceptable, but sanctioned by God. But to appear as a legitimate critic and not a mere entertainer, Linton seems to address a female audience in need of her instruction. Yet if one reads all the G.O.P. essays in succession, it becomes evident from the number of inconsistencies in her mandates that the essays could hardly be offering any serious “instruction,” and that Linton’s actual audience is composed of men who are eager to laugh at women’s expense.

Linton most often contradicts herself when “instructing” women how to act in their relationships with men. While demanding that the English matron be a selfless, devoted mother and wife in “La Femme Passée,” she berates women who cannot stand up for themselves and their rights in “Weak Sisters” (October 10, 1868). While chastising women who exploit the myth of female morality in “Affronted Womanhood” (May 30, 1868), she criticizes women who do not live up to their angelic natures in “La Femme Passée” and “The Girl of the Period.” The more vitriolic Linton became, the more prone she was to

inconsistencies and contradictions, inconsistencies which apparently did not disturb regular *Saturday Review* readers.

Linton's continued reliance on caricatures and satire, and on reductive, fallacious arguments, assisted her in reinforcing male readers' attitudes and prejudices about women, while also flattering their egos. Readers often turn to their favored periodicals with a need to "protect themselves, to insulate themselves from 'outrageous fortune', rather than confront it" (Reed 10). Using Leon Festinger's *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* to discuss the rise of the popular magazine in Britain and the United States, David Reed concludes that there is an "extensively documented human need to avoid contradiction, with either the self or others. . . . By adulthood, and probably a lot earlier, our curiosity is circumscribed by the need to avoid mental discomfort" (Reed 10–11). Hence, a periodical such as the *Saturday Review* maintained its market edge by employing what theorists Waples, Berelson, and Bradshaw call a reinforcement effect, where content "expresses the reader's own attitudes better than he could express them himself" (76–77). To appeal to its readers, the *Saturday Review* middles never directly attack or insult readers, but instead encourage them to think of themselves as in the writers' "camp." This tactic then allows them to revel in *Saturday Review* scandal and vitriol; the periodical was brash enough to say what the audience privately thought but what it did not want to say publicly for fear of seeming uncouth (Bevington 47).

Linton's middles endorse a rigid separate-spheres ideology and they lash women who transgress. "The Girl of the Period" in particular reaffirms the correctness of the "old passing ways," regardless of legitimate challenges to the status quo waged by progressive women. In "Girl of the Period," Linton depicts the "ideal" English young lady and champions her willingness to fulfill her traditional duties, while she simultaneously compares her to the "girl of the period" — her catchy term for what had before been known as "the fast young girl." The girl of the period demands increased liberties, including the right to entertain without chaperones, to wear cosmetics, and to dress in stylish fashions. In contrast, the "fair young English girl" is generous, modest, sincere, refined, domestic, dignified, and feminine. She is her husband's friend — not his intellectual rival or equal. She is a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, and most importantly, she is "content to be what God and nature had made" her (339–40). Linton laments that decent young English women are being replaced by bold, inconsiderate and insensitive ones who are useless at home and worst of all, marry only for money — not for love and children.

"The Girl of the Period" implies that men have good reason to be frightened of women's demands for increased social independence, and it encourages them to demand that women return to their submissive, meek roles. While the essay is superficially about cosmetics and fashion, it actually argues that young ladies' desire to act on their own will result in a collapse of social order. Linton is particularly effective when she praises the "ideal" girl for acting as her husband's friend — not his rival or equal. By doing so, she reinforces the prejudice that women are not only unfit biologically or mentally to compete with men, but that by attempting to outdo them, they destroy the fundamental, God-mandated distinction between the sexes. The quality of girls' education in the 1850s and 1860s had begun improving, and this fact threatened many conservative Victorians. Not only did the founding of Queen's College and Bedford College in the late 1840s make it possible for girls to attend rigorous secondary schools instead of being brainwashed at frivolous finishing schools, but Emily Davies was near achieving her goal to open a women's college

at Hitchin when “The Girl of the Period” was published. Linton reinforces the *Saturday Review* reader’s belief in his masculine superiority in spite of such educational breakthroughs, while at the same time implicitly instructing him not to marry a “competitive” woman. Refusal to marry, she implies, will force women back to their senses. Until then, she writes, “all we can do is wait patiently until . . . our women have come back again to the old English ideal” (340).

As a result of its rhetorical effectiveness, “The Girl of the Period” became the most (in)famous essay that Linton ever wrote. It was quickly reissued as a pamphlet with her name on it, and the phrase became part of the popular vocabulary (Anderson 120). Not only did the essay achieve popularity due to Linton’s catchy phrase and her ability to reaffirm the conservative man’s understanding of a woman’s role, but also because, like the *Saturday Review* as a whole, Linton’s essay and those that followed stoked male readers’ self-confidence and sense of superiority. The G.O.P. essays would have been particularly attractive to the reader who had a strong desire for self-respect. “Self-respect and the deference from others, upon which it is generally based, are more satisfying to most people than personal security or other comparable social values” (Waples, et. al. 75). G.O.P. essays flatter the male ego by insisting that women defer to men. They also assuage men’s guilt that they are somehow to blame for the Sex’s increasingly vocal dissatisfaction with patriarchal systems. Linton’s essays uncategorically insist that men have no business feeling guilty for their demands on women, unless they are physically abusive, desert their wives and children, or neglect to maintain the household financially.

“Ideal Women” (May 9, 1868) is a memorable treatise on what Englishmen can demand of women. Linton begins by praising ladies who attempt to satisfy their husbands’ desires, and then she berates women who dare to assert their individuality and their own interests over men’s. Instead of producing only two examples of English women — the girl of the period and the ideal girl — Linton instead brings out a whole parade of caricatures to illustrate her main point.

One man’s wife is to be “a good housekeeper and a careful mother, and [the husband] does not care a rush whether his wife, if she is these, is pretty or ugly” (609); another man’s ideal woman is “a tender, adoring, fair-haired seraph, who will worship him as a demigod, and accept him as her best revelation of strength and wisdom” (609); one man wants a wife “able to help him by the contact of bright wit and ready intellect. He believes in the sex of minds, and holds only that work complete which has been created by the one and perfected by the other” (609), and so on. Linton concludes with the following observation: “In all countries, then, the ideal woman changes, chameleon-like, to suit the taste of men; and the great doctrine that her happiness does somewhat depend on his liking is part of the very foundation of her existence” (610). In what would have been the essay’s most offensive passage to progressive Victorians, Linton states:

According to [her husband’s] will, [a wife] is bond or free, educated or ignorant, lax or strict, house-keeping or roving; and though we advocate neither the bondage nor the ignorance, yet we do hold to the principle that, by the laws which regulate all human communities everywhere, she is bound to study the wishes of man, and to mould her life in harmony with his liking. . . . Hence the defiant attitude which women have lately assumed, and their indifference to the wishes and remonstrances of men, cannot lead to any good results whatever. (610)

Linton states that women who revolt by demonstrating an independent spirit are at war with their very nature and are better off locked up or banished from proper society. Her calculated decision to call attention to women's defiance makes her essay topical, and it also insists that men have every right to demand women's submission.

Could Linton have been serious in her mandates? Not likely. Numbers of her contemporaries as well as twentieth-century scholars have already pointed out the glaring discrepancy between Linton's own independent lifestyle and what she advocated for other women. When compelled to defend herself against attacks that she was a hypocrite and mere opportunist, Linton's explanations come across as particularly shallow. Always claiming that her criticism was designed to do women good, she protested in a newspaper (whose name is now unknown): "I would prevent with all my strength young girls from following my mistake, and guard them with my own body from such insults as you and your kind have showered on me when differing from you in opinion" (qtd. in Layard 140). Given that Linton "showered" insults on all types of women — not simply ones whom she believed to be assertive and progressive — it is quite difficult to read sincerity into her reasoning for practicing a lifestyle that was the opposite of what she advocated for others.

Furthermore, Linton gained substantially by attacking women. Not only did numerous editors begin soliciting her essays, but she found her novels and her writing in general more favorably received than before, regardless of those persons who publicly criticized her for her stance on women's issues. She also earned a steady salary (by 1869, three pounds, ten shillings an article was the average rate of pay for a *Saturday Review* middle), and she found herself enthusiastically received in social circles that before had excluded her (Anderson 136). Her skill at attacking wayward women clinched her reputation with influential supporters, including Thomas Hardy and Coventry Patmore — two examples of well-educated men who must have seen the reductions and simplicities of her *Saturday Review* essays, but who evidently appreciated her attempt to turn the tide on advancing women by whatever means necessary.

IV

ELIZA LYNN LINTON became one of Victorian Britain's most influential and powerful journalists because she possessed an uncanny ability to predict that journalism was fast evolving into a profession and an art significantly different from what it had been at the height of the old quarterlies' success. She assisted Cook in exploiting the potential of popular journalism by helping the *Saturday Review* maintain its aura of intellectual prestige while it also catered to the tastes of an increasing mass readership that appreciated the periodical's sensationalist tactics, gossipy tone, and simplistic middle essay section.

While her methods at achieving popularity and influence are just as questionable as those of any enterprising journalist's (both then and now), Linton's ability to ascertain precisely what readers would buy and what editors would publish — and her ability to do so in spite of the significant hurdles that her sex posed in this male-dominated profession and in the openly misogynist atmosphere of the *Saturday Review* — is both remarkable as well as significant. Linton did in one short essay what several women's rights activists had immense trouble doing: she popularized most of the debate's tenets. While Linton's essays for the *Temple Bar* successfully marginalized the movement, her essays for the *Saturday*

Review allowed her greater leeway to deal explicitly with the activists' chief concerns. Essays such as "The Girl of the Period" and "Ideal Women" addressed women's roles and duties, while her more politically minded essays, such as "The Shrieking Sisterhood" (March 12, 1870), "The Epicene Sex" (August 24, 1872), and "Dovecotes" (April 10, 1869), attacked women's demands for suffrage and their desire to enter the workplace. When Linton had several of her *Saturday Review* essays collected and published under the title *Modern Women and What Is Said of Them* (1868), Lucia Gilbert Calhoun admitted in its preface that she was thankful that the *Saturday Review* had introduced the Woman Question "to the good society of English drawing rooms" — in spite of the fact that "the evil is not to be abated by jeremiads, nor by lectures to young women, no, nor even by brilliant editorials" (qtd. in Anderson 123).

After "The Girl of the Period" appeared, several magazines and writers who had before been apathetic to the subject of women's rights (or to any subject pertaining to women, for that matter), began contributing to the debate that this one essay alone incited. *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Punch*, the *Eclectic Review*, *St. Paul's Magazine*, *Tinsley's Magazine*, and *Victoria Magazine* immediately responded with essays that took varied and expansive approaches to the issues Linton raised.

Not only did Linton bring the women's rights debate into the popular sphere, but she also influenced women journalists who followed her. While she might have berated career-minded women in her essays, she actually supported and encouraged the efforts of aspiring women writers by reading their manuscripts, meeting with them, and offering them advice. She wrote to Mrs. Gedge in 1878, claiming that "scarcely a week passes without my receiving letters, and I can judge at once whether there is the true stuff in a person or not, by their willingness to see their own shortcomings and their wish to do well rather than to have praise" (qtd. in Layard 212). Helen Black writes in *Notable Woman Authors* that "a score of young authors . . . owe their success and a deep debt of gratitude to her! In despair, one after another has taken to her an article, a story, a three-volume novel, a play; what not? With patience she would pore over a crabbed manuscript, word by word, suggesting, correcting, improving, advising. She has a large number of young friends . . . and her chief desire is to be of use or help to some one" (9).

What supports Black's assessment of Linton's influence is that several women journalists of the 1880s and 1890s employ many of the same rhetorical strategies that made Linton's writing so memorable. Perhaps this is mere coincidence, but the striking similarities in style between other late-19th-century women writers' essays and Linton's certainly suggests that they had taken note of Linton's methods for inciting public outrage and conversation. Sarah Grand in particular became a famous journalist by promoting a "type" of woman who, in the 1890s, became as controversial and as memorable as the "girl of the period" had been in the 1860s. The "New Woman" debuted in the *Woman's Herald* on August 17, 1893, in "The Social Standing of the New Woman," and shortly after, Sarah Grand used the term in her provocative essay, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" (*North American Review*, March, 1894).⁶ Ouida also immediately saw the profit to be made from such a catchy phrase. As if in direct response to Linton's "Shrieking Sisterhood," Grand created the "Bawling Brotherhood." Suddenly the woman question debate was reignited in the periodical press, in part because of the novelty that the New Woman angle brought to worn-out themes and ideas. In "The Old Woman and the New" (*Lady's Realm* [4] 1898), Grand cleverly reduces women to two caricatures, the "old" and the

“new” (as if no overlap or other types exist), and she then focuses the public imagination on issues that had not received enough attention: men’s dislike of prudish, shrewish “old” women (Eliza Lynn Linton immediately comes to mind), the importance of women exercising their bodies as well as their minds, and the demand that men no longer be allowed to practice a sexual double standard. In fiction, the development of the “New Woman” novel had a sustained impact on the literary imagination, where it generated debate on subjects that before had been treated as taboo, such as venereal disease.

As the first salaried woman journalist in England, Linton did indeed break new ground, but her contribution to the profession goes far beyond her mere gender. As with her most talented peers, including Henry Mayhew, she recognized how to use the periodical press to her own advantage, and in the process she accelerated the revolutions occurring in journalism. Rather than being categorized simply as a virulent antifeminist and then only discussed from this perspective, Linton should also be remembered for helping to establish precedents in social commentary that have endured until now — precedents that influence journalists and pundits who make it their business to incite and perpetuate public debate.

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NOTES

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1. See p. 42 of Colby’s study, and Volume I, xiv of Helsinger’s et. al.
2. Linton offered *Realities* to several publishers who rejected it, including Richard Bentley and John Chapman. Finally, she published it at her own expense with Saunders and Otley. Other negative reviews of the novel appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* (1851) and the *Westminster Review* (1852), among others.
3. At one point in *Friendship’s Garland* Matthew Arnold sarcastically noted that Sala’s “career and genius have given him somehow the secret of a literary mixture novel and fascinating in the last degree: he blends the airy epicureanism of the *salons* of Augustus with the full-bodied gaiety of our English Cider cellar. With our people and country, . . . this mixture, you may rely upon it, is now the very thing to go down; there arises every day a larger public for it; and we, Sala’s disciples, may be trusted not willingly to let it die” (350). Arnold frequently condemned Sala as a leading philistine — a label to which Sala himself took offense. When Sala contributed to the *Daily Telegraph* in 1857, critics at the *Saturday Review* also regarded Sala as setting a tone “of tawdry, turgid, inflated, writing” (quoted in *Culture and Anarchy*, 469).
4. Frances Power Cobbe was also approached by Cook about becoming a contributor to the *Saturday Review*. In an April 1, 1865, letter to Mary Somerville, Cobbe writes: “You ask me if I write for the Saturday [sic] It is very funny that they have invited me to become a contributor (for you know how abominably they abused me about *Italics*) — this week I have answered them I do not care what they said of me but I will only contribute on condition

- they do not attack women any more!" (Somerville Papers, Bodleian Library). Cobbe immediately sensed Cook's goal of "setting woman against woman," and unlike Linton, she indignantly refused to participate in his profit-making schemes. She represents an important contrasting example to how Linton handled Cook's same overtures.
5. Many examples of these characteristics abound in the *Saturday Review* middle section. One representative example of an essay that treats extremes as if they are norms is "Fresh Starts" (29 [January 1] 1870). Here, the author attempts to "instruct" readers on how to start life afresh. In typical middle essay fashion, however, the author ends up berating not only those who, in "the spirit of self-improvement," desire to "begin again" (10), but also those who "allow this natural desire [to start over] to degenerate into a merely idle love of transformation" (11). The author does not suggest that the majority of individuals fit neither of his two categories. "Court Dress" (27 [February 20] 1869) is a representative example of the witty, sarcastic tone employed by most *Saturday Review* essayists. At one point, the author exclaims: "We look forward with horror to the time when every male biped on the planet will be arrayed in chimney-pot hats" (240).
 6. See Tusan.

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