GEORGE ELIOT'S *Serial Fiction*

CAROL A. MARTIN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

George Eliot's Novels:

AB	*Adam Bede*
DD	*Daniel Deronda*
FH	*Felix Holt*
M	*Middlemarch*
MF	*The Mill on the Floss*
SCL	*Scenes of Clerical Life*
SM	*Silas Marner*

Other Abbreviations:

BL	British Library
GE	George Eliot
GHL	George Henry Lewes
Maga	*Blackwood's Magazine*
NLS	National Library of Scotland

PRINCIPAL ARCHIVAL RESOURCES

British Library	Manuscripts for all of George Eliot's novels except for *Scenes of Clerical Life*
British Newspaper Library	Original newspapers from the nineteenth century
Beinecke Library, Yale	George Eliot and George Henry Lewes journals and diaries
National Library of Scotland	Manuscript letters in the Blackwood collection
Pierpoint Morgan Library	Manuscript of *Scenes of Clerical Life*

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Introduction

George Eliot's is not the first name that Victorian scholars think of to head a list of serial novelists, and many general readers in the twentieth century are not even aware that she wrote installment fiction. Charles Dickens is more famous as a serializer and as the "inventor"—for the Victorians, at least—of publication in parts; he is known for writing up to his deadlines and paying close attention to public taste. Many readers are aware that he altered his ending for *Great Expectations* to anticipate audience response, and that the publication of *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* was interrupted because he was too afflicted to write in the month following the death of Mary Hogarth. Thackeray and Trollope might come next on the general reader's list of installment writers, and some might also think of Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell, perhaps for their contributions to Dickens's *Household Words* and *All the Year Round.* Collins's sensation novels and mysteries seem especially suited to the Victorian equivalent of the soap opera. Thomas Hardy's serial writing has received attention of a different kind, focusing on the differences between the volume editions of his later novels and the expurgated versions that appeared in late Victorian "family" periodicals. But George Eliot's slowly developing plots and strong emphasis on characterization make her seem an unlikely writer to have elected the serial route.

Even to her contemporaries George Eliot was different. She was the "philosophical novelist," the portrayer of character rather than plot, the author whose works contained numerous wise sayings. Simultaneously with the appearance of *Middlemarch*, Alexander Main compiled Eliot's sayings as *The Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings of George Eliot.*[1] Yet, as her contemporaries also knew, George Eliot did write installment fiction. One-half of her full-length works were first published serially, including her first work and her two longest novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda.*

Like many Victorian fiction writers, Eliot got her start by serializing her first work in a popular, well-established periodical. "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton" appeared in two installments of *Blackwood's Magazine* in January and February 1857. Magazine publication gave her the chance to "start small," and it also provided the anonymity Eliot needed, given two facts from her personal life likely to cause reviewers to prejudge her work: her gender and her status as an unmarried woman living with a married man, George Henry Lewes. This brief first story was greeted enthusiastically by her publisher, John Blackwood, and by other readers as the work of a new and original writer. "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" followed immediately, from March through June 1857, with "Janet's Repentance" closing the series, from July to November. From the start these stories had been advertised as part of a single work, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, which Eliot had expected to continue in a fourth story. However, Blackwood's difficulties with the third story's frank treatment of alcoholism and abuse prompted her to turn instead to *Adam Bede*. Despite reservations, she planned this too as a serial, but disagreements with Blackwood and the challenges involved in writing to deadlines led Eliot to choose instead the traditional three-volume format for *Adam Bede* and for *The Mill on the Floss*. Consequently, her next serial work did not appear until July 1862, when she began *Romola* in the *Cornhill* magazine. By then, Eliot had had the experience of serializing *Scenes of Clerical Life,* with constant feedback from publisher and public, and of designing her next two novels with serialization in mind, even though they were not, finally, published in parts. This apprenticeship meant that by *Romola,* Eliot had acquired many of the devices and techniques essential to successful serialization. Nevertheless, *Romola* was not an unequivocal success as a serial; while serialization gave Eliot's public the leisure to "read slowly and deliberately," as Lewes told friends (*Letters* 8: 304), perhaps nothing in the way of technique could have made it entirely suited for division into small parts. Even reviewers who regarded it as her best work to date were not enthusiastic about the format in which it first appeared.

For her next novel, *Felix Holt,* she returned to the prevailing non-serial, three-volume format. This format, however, did not suit either of her last two works, and for them, Lewes proposed eight half-volume installments. *Middlemarch* was published in five bimonthly and then three monthly installments from December 1871 to December 1872, and *Daniel Deronda* in monthly installments from February to September 1876.

Of her eight full-length works of fiction, one-half were published in installments—two in periodicals and two in separately issued parts. This is a far smaller proportion than the ratio of serial to non-serial for writers like Dickens or Trollope. The former issued only a few full-length works in volumes without serializing them first; the most famous of these is probably *A Christmas Carol,* and it is barely "full-length" compared to his twenty-part novels or even those serialized in periodicals. Trollope experimented with several modes of serialization in thirty-four different novels from *Framley Parsonage,* in the *Cornhill* in 1860–61,[2] to the posthumously published *Landleaguers,* in *Life* from November 1882 to October 1883.[3]

But, as contemporary reviewers often noted, George Eliot was another kind of novelist. In their view, she was a writer who refused to pander to the press or public. Yet her journals and correspondence show that, while she did often adhere to her artistic vision despite pressure from Blackwood and others, she also made numerous alterations and adjustments to fit the demands of serialization. Eliot was aware of these special demands and wrote to produce the most effective installments she could. Reviewers, who from the start distinguished her from the "ordinary run of novelists," still assumed that her four serial works would read like good serial fiction. They commented on her serial technique and expected her to follow the established conventions to keep them and other readers returning for the next part.

This study of George Eliot's serial novels begins with a chapter on serialization: its history, its conventions, and its benefits and drawbacks for writers and for readers. I then examine the four serialized works of George Eliot as well as her temptations to engage in what she called "the nightmare" of the serial for *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss.* I discuss her reasons for choosing serialization, her use of serial techniques, the context in which she wrote, and the responses of her contemporaries, particularly those who represent the ordinary readers of the daily and weekly newspapers. These newspapers published hundreds of unindexed reviews, particularly of Eliot's last two novels. Many reviews are quoted here to establish the popular context for, expectations from, and responses to her serial fiction. George Eliot, like Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, and others, was influenced by the commercial publishing climate that helped the Victorian novel become a preeminent form of entertainment in an era in which popular and intellectual fiction were two faces of the same thing.

I

"Vulgar, and below the Dignity of Literature": Part Publication in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

In the first chapter of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, Captain Brown, a devoted reader of Dickens's Mr. Pickwick, and Miss Jenkyns, a disciple of Dr. Johnson, debate the merits of their favorite authors. After some initial skirmishing, Miss Jenkyns thinks to administer the final blow to Captain Brown's favorite:

> "I consider it vulgar, and below the dignity of literature, to publish in numbers."
>
> "How was the Rambler published, ma'am?" asked Captain Brown in a low voice. (48)

Captain Brown's response reminded Victorian readers[1] that the experiment in serial publication, either in independent parts or in magazine installments, was not new in the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, serialization of literature began two generations before Dr. Johnson wrote his essays for the *Rambler* in 1750. As R. M. Wiles observes in his study of serial publication before 1750, books were published in installments during the last part of the seventeenth century, "but it was not until a few works advertised in the *Tatler* (1709–1711) had proved successful that the possibilities of developing the piecemeal publishing of books into a thriving business began to be recognized" (4).

Although nineteenth-century serial publication is especially identified with fiction, eighteenth-century publishers first used part publication for other kinds of works. One of these was the continuing series, i.e., individ-

ual works published separately but as part of a larger generic grouping, such as a series of playbooks published before 1700. Wiles points out that people very early must have accepted "the principle of the continuing series" because there are extant "composite volumes made up of separate quarto editions of individual plays" by Otway, Shadwell, and Dryden, all from the 1690s (15–16). These early serials appeared at irregular intervals, but by the 1730s, regularity became key to the successful serial as plays "began to appear at *regular* intervals, once a month or once a week" (Wiles 16). Robert Walker, who published "more number books than any other single bookseller before 1750" (19), regarded regular publication as important enough to be stressed in his advertisements: "'One Play compleat, stitch'd in blue Paper, shall be delivered every Monday at the Subscribers Houses, or any Place they shall appoint'" and "'The first Play will be published and delivered on Monday next, being the 27th of this Instant January, and on every Monday following till the whole is compleated'" (20).

Complete individual plays to be bound later in volumes were not the only type of serial publication popular before 1750. Newgate pamphlets appeared in series intended for binding in volume form. The *Grub-Street Journal* for March 12, 1730, advertising *A Compleat History of Executions*, announced that the parts "would 'at the Year's end . . . make a handsome Volume; for which Purpose a compleat Index will be given with the concluding Number'" (Wiles 22). Other less sensational series publications included sermons, political works, and grammar treatises. These early experiments in part publication encouraged readers to form a "habit of purchasing successive units of the series at regular intervals, much as they were becoming used to receiving successive issues of newspapers and periodicals" (25). Once the pattern of regularity was established, prompt delivery to subscribers "was of the greatest importance. . . . When delays were unavoidable, as when an intervening holiday made it impossible to keep to the regular day of publication, the proprietors—at least after 1732—usually were careful to insert a notice in the newspapers" (221).

Early in the eighteenth century, newspapers and periodicals also began to include serial essays and stories; however, tracing the history of newspaper serials is more difficult than examining series books because the former are less likely to have been bound and consequently preserved. The very nature of newspaper items (daily occurrences, advertisements soon to be obsolete) meant that much of the content would quickly be

useless; any "continued" work that a subscriber might wish to keep by having it bound could not be separated from the ephemeral. Nonetheless, some readers did have their serials bound and thereby ensured their survival in libraries. Thus, "the two most extensive surviving runs of the *Original London Post; or, Heathcote's Intelligence* have been preserved precisely because on the first two pages Heathcote printed consecutive installments of lengthy works evidently of sufficient interest to be kept and bound as volumes" (Wiles 26). One of these works, appearing thrice weekly, was a description of English counties, of which someone wanted the Kent parts bound. The other was a reprinting of the first two parts of *Robinson Crusoe*.

The earliest eighteenth-century novels to be printed in parts in newspapers were works that had already appeared in volume form, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, which continued to be a popular serial and volume reissue into the nineteenth century. In the 1860s, for example, in one year "new *Robinson Crusoes* came in book form from Routledge . . . and Beeton . . . , and in penny numbers . . . from Cassell's . . . [and] Henry Lea" (Nowell-Smith 80–81). Other works were disguised by being given new titles. Heathcote printed an alleged translation from "the French" called "The surprising and fatal Effects of rash and violent Love. Illustrated in the following faithful History of two Noble, but Unfortunate Lovers" from July to September 1724; it was actually a reprinting of a novel by Eliza Haywood, published in May 1724 (Wiles 27–28). Obviously publishers were not always very scrupulous about copyrights.

Pirating of books was widespread. Newspapers and magazines could evade the copyright laws by making even slight abridgments of novels, a practice protected by a parliamentary act of 1710 "so long as they published less than the whole" (Mayo 160). Further complicating the publishing situation were the variations in the stamp acts themselves and in their interpretations. One early loophole in the stamp tax legislation encouraged newspaper publication of fiction to supplement the news and to fill out a number of sheets not specified as taxable by the law:

> When the Stamp Tax was first laid on newspapers in 1712, the amount of the tax on a half-sheet (one folio leaf) and on a whole sheet (two folio leaves) was duly set out; but no provision was made for the amount of tax payable on a sheet and a half, because there had been no papers of such a size published before that time. It soon occurred to some ingenious mind that this was equivalent to a bounty of a penny per copy (the amount of the

> tax) on any paper that came out in three folio leaves: but in times when news of "occurrences, foreign and domestic" was always scarce and expensive to procure, it was a considerable problem to find sufficient matter to fill the paper out to its full three leaves. . . . Among other expedients was the reprinting of a work of fiction in instalments. (Pollard 254–55)

Mayo also credits the stamp act of 1712, which distinguished between the single sheet newspaper and the larger pamphlet, with the rise of the six-page weekly journal. "From this time the weekly journals became in effect both news-sheets and miscellanies for the amusement and instruction of the newspaper-reading audience" (49). When the loophole was closed, newspaper fiction continued, suggesting that installment fiction itself helped sell newspapers. History, biography, memoirs, and letters were also popular subjects for newspaper serials.[2]

Another type of serial publication became popular in the eighteenth century, with a few examples extant as well from the last quarter of the seventeenth century. This was the custom of issuing whole books in fascicles, a practice akin to selling encyclopedias in modern supermarkets week by week to make works available inexpensively. Fascicle issue was the production, in unbound parts, of long, expensive works such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and scientific and religious books. Parts were divided according to the number of pages to be included in each issue; suspense was not a factor, and a part might end mid-sentence. Fascicles were also distinct from magazine and newspaper serials in using continuous pagination throughout the volume. The earliest English example of this type of work is Joseph Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises, or, The Doctrine of Handy-Works*, which began January 1678 (Wiles 79).

Another early fascicle book closer in type to Victorian serials is the *London Spy*, published in eighteen parts beginning November 1698. The author, Edward Ward, "proposed to keep his readers both edified and diverted with his 'compleat Survey of the most remarkable Places, as well as the common Vanities and Follies of Mankind, both by Day and Night.'" Its first-person narrator concludes individual parts self-consciously in ways similar to *Pickwick Papers*, with which Wiles compares it, and *Great Expectations;* part V of the *Spy* ends: "' . . . an account of which, for want of Room, I shall defer till my next'" (Wiles 81). Similarly, *Great Expectations* concludes four of its thirty-six numbers with explicit reference to Pip's act of storytelling (Nelson 82). Installment 10 (Feb. 2, 1861) ends with "[my time] never did run out, however, but was brought to a

premature end, as I proceed to relate" (160). At the end of installment 22 (April 20, 1861), Pip interrupts his story, "But, before I proceed to narrate it . . . I must give one chapter to Estella" (318), and at the end of installment 23 he returns his readers to the important event being held in abeyance.[3] And in the penultimate installment (35; July 27, 1861), Pip acknowledges coming to the end: "After three days more of recovery, I went down to the old place, to put it in execution; and how I sped in it, is all I have left to tell" (482). Like *Pickwick Papers* and other Dickens works, the *London Spy* also frequently incorporated "within the narrative framework . . . several short stories . . . used for didactic and entertainment reasons" (Kay 19).

Despite occasional earlier examples, part publication did not begin to flourish until 1732, when its economic advantages became apparent. Publishers started to realize the profits to be made not only from monthly but, even more, from weekly serials, which meant the consumer could make a smaller individual outlay for—of course—a smaller part. Lively competition ensued, and rival publications of translated works or works on similar subjects began to crowd the booksellers' shops. That they were both publishing *A History of the Bible* did not prevent the Reverend Thomas Stackhouse and the publisher Thomas Edlin from engaging in a vituperative published exchange in which each attacked the "vile Trash" (Stackhouse's phrase) that the other was peddling. For the consumer, the battle over this pious work must have seemed indecorous. Too, it must have been confusing to ask a "bookseller for the current number of *The History of the Bible* and [get] the wrong one" (Wiles 113). The competition demonstrates the enormous profits that could be realized by publishing fascicles.

An advantage for eighteenth-century publishers of serial parts was that they began to receive profits immediately upon publication of the first part, so that sales from early parts could finance the printing of later ones—an attractive feature of Victorian serial publication as well. Robert Patten notes, for example, that with *Pickwick Papers* "each part had more or less financed the next, [so that] when the final part was published and sold, the book was virtually paid for. Thereafter, any sales were almost pure profit" (71). Eighteenth-century serials, like those of Dickens and his imitators, could add to their commercial appeal by including illustrations. Smollett's *Sir Launcelot Greaves*, in 1760, was "the first illustrated serial novel" (Price 199).

Fascicle issue also had advantages for eighteenth-century consumers.

Wealthy buyers who wanted their library bound uniformly with a particular color and type of leather and embossed with a family coat of arms could have the parts bound to order just as they did with individual, nonserial volumes issued in sheets or in wrappers or boards (Sadleir 12–13). Fascicle issue allowed less wealthy purchasers to buy in small units, and if they decided partway that they were not interested, they could save the rest of the purchase price. Furthermore, the total cost was sometimes less than the cost of the same work in volume form. This was true in the nineteenth century as well. A standard three-volume novel cost a guinea and a half (31*s.* 6*d.*), but readers could buy all twenty installments of *Vanity Fair* or *Nicholas Nickleby* for 20*s.*: eighteen numbers at 1*s.* each and the final installment, number 19–20, for which the consumer received forty-eight pages, for 2*s.* If serial buyers desired to have their installments bound, the cost for the cheapest binding was very small. The final issue of *Nickleby*, Sept. 30, 1839, listed in the advertising papers the price of various bindings, including a paper cover for 1*s.* 6*d.*[4] (Sept. 30, 1839; U of Pennsylvania P facsimile).

Among the non-monetary advantages of serial publication was another that eighteenth-century and Victorian readers shared: installment buyers received new works earlier than those who chose to await the complete volume publication. This was a mixed blessing. Reviewers of George Eliot's last two novels noted the impossibility of waiting for the complete volume, given the popular interest her novels aroused. A *Manchester Examiner and Times* review of *Daniel Deronda* complains that part 1 does not even take the reader to the chronological point at which it began. The reviewer would prefer to wait until the whole is published, but that is difficult:

> We might be told that no reader is compelled to read 'Daniel Deronda' before its completion; but is that really so? Let anyone who made a like experiment when 'Middlemarch' was in course of publication recall his experience. Was it possible to meet one's friends during that long winter without hearing the infatuation of Dorothy [*sic*], and her subsequent awakening, with its consequences, the subject of general conversation? (Jan. 29, 1876; 5)

Undoubtedly serial readers' ambivalent response—receiving a part before volume readers, but having to endure the suspense of waiting weeks and months for future installments—was greater for fiction than for