

## Introduction: Performing to Strangers

In the opening lines of 'Book the Fourth' of Wilkie Collins's novel *Armadale*, the fictional female diarist Lydia Gwilt returns to the diary she closed on her marriage and asks herself: 'Why have I gone back to this secret friend of my wretchedest and wickedest hours?' She answers her own question immediately: 'My misery is a woman's misery and it *will* speak – here rather than nowhere; to my second self, in this book, if I have no one else to hear me.'<sup>1</sup> Gwilt is a consummate actress who has convinced a young man called Ozias Midwinter to marry her in his real name of Allan Armadale, the name he shares with his best friend whose father was murdered by Midwinter's father. The two men have 'second selves' in each other; the woman's 'second self' is in her diary.

The concept of a second self is frequently explored in Collins's fiction.<sup>2</sup> He also uses documents as narrative in many of his novels and one of those documents is a woman's diary which he uses in *Armadale* to give direct access to Lydia's thoughts. The fictional diary operates as a second self, acting as both internal personal narrative and a separate, secretly performed life. Lydia Gwilt and other female fictional diarists are in their turn operating within the ideological climate of the nineteenth century which created for middle class women a life dependant on household management and codes of domesticity. The existence of these diaries creates a fear that the diary may be the life and the domesticity a performance.

This book examines the appearance of the fictional diaries of women in the nineteenth-century novel considering the effect of the diary as a literary device and the impact of the gender of the diarist. These are areas which have received some critical attention but a number of new developments are proposed. Firstly, this study takes its departure from the date of the first woman's diary to be published, that of Frances Burney, between 1842 and 1846. The influence of this publication on the fictional diary is specifically explored. A model of women's diary writing is derived from Burney's *Diary* and other non-fictional examples and applied to a range of novels of the mid to late nineteenth century. Secondly, the life-writing 'second self' is assessed in conjunction with the diary's specific role as a document which is on show or performing a life. This conflicts with nineteenth-century concerns with self-representation by women. In terms of narrative, a theory of

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, ed. Catherine Peters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 532.

<sup>2</sup> This is the opening discussion of Catherine Peters's biography of Collins, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Minerva Press, 1991), pp. 1–4.

diary narrativity is presented in Chapter 9 and finally, at the level of the assembly of the overall novel, a new derivation, a narrative of inclusion is proposed.

The book thus constructs a model of nineteenth-century diary-writing by women and uses it to examine a group of novels which employ the device as narrative. It considers the interaction of the fictional diary with its non-fictional counterpart and the acts of editing which put women's private writing into the marketplace. By considering the emergence of the non-fictional diary in print and the other forms of literary production which become narrative, it posits a fictional diary chronology for the later nineteenth century.

The method of the book is dependent on a number of overarching concepts both in the terms used – 'diary', 'journal' and 'performance' – and in the choice of structure. The word 'journal' is of Middle English origin from Old French 'jurnal' and late Latin 'diurnalis'. 'Diary' is a more recent coinage of the sixteenth century from the Latin 'diarium' originating in 'dies'. Both terms clearly arise from a concept of daily recording or 'dailiness'. A journal originally signified a more public financial or administrative record or else an allusion to a travel itinerary. The two terms appear to become applicable to a personal record around the beginning of the seventeenth century at the recommendation of Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605) which nonetheless suggests that the diary should concern itself with great events. The term is, however, used in the sense of a more trivial record in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* in the same year. William Cowper makes a distinction between the overall text and the entries in his long poem *Conversation* (1781) when he suggests the need for cultivation in the art of communication and not 'An extract of his diary - no more, / A tasteless journal of the day before'. Nineteenth-century usage, however, aligns the two terms and the analysis which follows uses them interchangeably.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of performance is also a theme throughout the book. The discussion addresses the discrepancy between the nineteenth-century woman in the private sphere and the public narrative of the self which the published diary, fictional or non-fictional, represents. In Chapter 31 of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet teases Mr Darcy about his being 'ill qualified to recommend himself to strangers' drawing a parallel between her lack of practice on the piano and his disinclination to make conversation. He replies, 'We neither of us perform to strangers.'<sup>4</sup>

There is a sense within Judith Butler's definition of gender as 'a stylized repetition of acts' that the diary functions as a reinforcing record, 'a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame'.<sup>5</sup> In a later essay, Butler adds that a 'performative

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<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (12 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 'Diary', vol. 4, p. 612 and 'Journal', vol. 7, pp. 279–80.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Tony Tanner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; reprinted 1980), p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 139.

act' is the 'coincidence of signifying and enacting'.<sup>6</sup> The diary is performative for the nineteenth century because it is an element in gender signification within the 'regulatory frame' of femininity. The diary is stylized in its repetition and the non-fictional model discussed identifies codes which allow women to access life-writing through their daily record. The diary is also performative in the sense of being a physical text which is shown within the narrative. Whilst acting as diagetic narrative it is also mimetic, a showing as well as a telling.<sup>7</sup> This is reinforced in the novels under discussion by the internal dramatization of the acts of writing and of reading which introduce the diary into the marketplace through a level of fictional strategy to be termed the narrative of inclusion.

There is a wider discussion of the fictional diary in narrative terms in Part 3. This is informed in part by Shlomoth Rimmon-Kenan's distinctions between classical and postclassical structuralist narratology which form the coda to her discussion of theory in *Narrative Fiction*. She suggests that structuralism should turn to interpretation in a context wider than linguistic analysis.<sup>8</sup> *Women's Diaries as Narrative* is in turn prompted to consider the cultural and historical context of diary narrative using an interpretative paradigm derived from women's non-fictional diaries. Rather than proposing a comprehensive narratology, it takes a view of the narrativity of the fictional diary.

When he discusses the use of diary narrative in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *The Woman in White*, Bernard Duyfhuizen uses the idea of a competitive narrative matrix.<sup>9</sup> This is a concept which can be usefully opened up to accommodate the non-fictional diary, women's fictional writing and a wider range of nineteenth-century texts and approaches which flourished in the cultural context of the period under examination. In Part 2, the model of nineteenth-century diaries is examined as a fictional vehicle for narrative within the novel.

In terms of the book's structure, Part 2 comprises a series of essays which analyse the fictional diary against other competing narratives. This approach, as opposed to a series of chronological chapters organized by text or author, presents material in a form suitable for readers interested in specific genres as well as those researching the novels themselves. This thematic approach also allows the diary to be explored in the broader context of nineteenth-century culture and reading practices. This, in turn, opens up the number of possible readings of the chosen

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<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, 'Burning Acts: Injurious Speech', in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds), *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 197–227.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Parker concludes that 'performativity concerns the set of conditions in which saying is itself a kind of doing' (Andrew Parker, 'Praxis and Performativity', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 8/2 (1996): 268).

<sup>8</sup> See Shlomoth Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (first published 1983; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Routledge, 2002; reprinted, 2003), p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Duyfhuizen, *Narratives of Transmission* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 123.

texts and allows the meaning of the diary as a narrative device to interact with a range of literary productions.

Part 1, therefore, traces the tradition of diary-writing in the nineteenth century with specific reference to women's life writing and the publication of diaries. Chapter 1 discusses the traditions of diary-writing in the nineteenth century by analysing the non-fictional diary and assessing the role of real women in producing diaries as household and personal narrative. It then reviews the diary as life writing for women and defines the concept of diary fiction by reviewing the work of recent critics.

In Chapter 2 these non-fictional diaries are represented by Frances Burney's *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay* (1842–1846; written 1768–1839), *The Journal of Emily Shore* (1891; written 1831–1839), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Diary* (1923; written 1835–1838) and the diary of Anne Lister (partially serialized 1887–1892; written 1806–1840). These examples illustrate the specifically nineteenth-century deployment of the diary model at the moment when women's diaries became vehicles for fiction. The diaries of Burney, Shore, Gaskell and Lister demonstrate that there was an approved and evolving form for the diary written in private which was part of female culture.

Chapter 3 acts as a springboard for the concepts which are further explored in the essays of Part 2. It investigates the terms on which a woman's diary, that of Burney, becomes part of the print culture of the period. This leads into an introductory consideration of the fictional female diarist who is the subject for Part 2. The nineteenth-century woman's diary interpreted as a feminine form, as a type of life writing and as a public document is contextualized within a core group of six nineteenth-century novels: Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Life for a Life* (1859), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859–1860), *Armada* (1864–6) and *The Legacy of Cain* (1888) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).<sup>10</sup> These novels variously maintain, challenge and resolve an ideology of nineteenth-century womanhood through their exploitation of the real diary in a published form. They demonstrate elements of the diary fiction model devised by later critics and they all use a hybrid narrative form which creates competition within the text for control of both the narrative and the evidence presented within it. They bear the imprint of the real diary and recreate the way in which a daily record is constructed through the need for a narrative occasion. They exploit the lack of a language which the choice of a woman's viewpoint offers. In this way the events of the plot are endowed with the power of elliptical suggestion authorized by the act of writing (or failing to write) which is itself recorded by the

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<sup>10</sup> *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *A Life for a Life* were both quickly reprinted with additional material by their authors. All three of the novels by Collins were serialized and *The Woman in White* was revised for its second edition because of chronological errors identified by the critic E.S. Dallas. (See 'Appendix C' to Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; reissued 1998), pp. 662–8.)

diarist. Against Linda Anderson's definition of 'interiority',<sup>11</sup> these novels also dramatize the 'exteriority' and machinery of diary publication demonstrated by the editing process which puts them onto the printed page. The fictional diary's progress to publication is contextualized by the story-telling process and as David Seed observes of *Dracula*, the physical text narrates its own assembly.<sup>12</sup>

Part 2 uses the 'competitive matrix' and narratives of inclusion to explore the use of the diary as a narrative device. Chapter 4 asks how women writers utilized their own heritage in adapting the diary for narrative and considers the response of critics to the diary as a device. This introduces the two earliest of the six core texts and considers the reaction of contemporary critics to diary fiction within the matrix of approved writing for women.

Chapters 5 to 8 explore the competitive interaction of diary narrative with other forms of literary production. These essays refract the fictional diary against a range of published material which circulated in the marketplace of the later nineteenth century namely: the epistolary narrative, the periodical, the factual document and the fiction of sensation. In these discussions a range of other representative texts are also introduced including Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), Burney's *Evelina* (1778), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and other works by Craik and Collins.

Chapter 5 traces the development of the epistolary format of daily correspondence with an addressee which became part of print culture in the mid eighteenth century and considers how the diary evolved as a similar story-telling medium by the nineteenth century.

Chapter 6 attempts to reconstruct a reading experience of the diary in print as part of the miscellany consumption of the serialized novel within a periodical. The woman reader and the reception of the printed word in periodical form gives a further nuance to the diary as a serial record interacting with the narrative as a serial story.

Chapter 7 considers the role of the printed word circulating more widely in the bureaucracy of nineteenth-century life. The novel format questions the documents which can tell the truth. This in turn links with a particular development in the documentary role of personal record where the diary and letter forms can be considered as categories of documents given in evidence. As a result, the evidence of texts like diaries, letters and even death certificates can be exploited within fiction.

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 17. Anderson discusses the diary as a text which 'allows the woman to remain hidden while providing her with a place to actualise her interiority' (Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of Self: Women and Autobiography', in Moira Monteith (ed.), *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 60).

<sup>12</sup> David Seed, 'The Narrative Method of *Dracula*', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 40/1 (June 1985): 73.

Chapter 8 explores the context for sensation which the diary helps to create and demonstrates how the particular impact of sensation fiction reflects the use of the diary as evidence, document and woman's autobiography.

Part 3 (Chapter 9) draws together the evidence from the core texts. It considers the literary and cultural significance of the female diarist within the novel; the role of the text as a physical artefact in competition with other documents and the fictional diary within the narrative structure of the novels as a whole. Across a fifty-year time span, there is an identifiable continuity in the treatment of the diarist and her text.

This book assesses the treatment of women's diaries as commodities in fiction; it examines their role in telling a story and in telling women's stories. The diary is an ideological tool which can be seen to operate in conflict with its received place in the home. Its authority as a life-writing opportunity for the nineteenth-century woman comes into conflict with its concept as a site for domestic and spiritual record. The act of a diary being read or transmitted within an edited and shaped framework allows a story to be both validated by dailliness and shown in public. It is in this sense that the diary is 'performing to strangers'.