



RECONSTRUCTING W. H. ALLEN'S 'EMINENT WOMEN': THE CULTURAL FORMATION OF A LATE VICTORIAN BIOGRAPHY SERIES

by JOCK MACLEOD

Some years ago Leslie Howsam put together a valuable study of book series in Victorian publishing. Drawing from the lists provided in the six volumes of the *English Catalogue of Books*, Howsam produced tables showing the number of series produced by the major publishers of series and the distribution of series according to genre, between 1835 and 1900. Taking just the 31 largest publishers of series (of whom the top dozen published the bulk), Howsam mapped out the scale of the increase: forty-one series (1836-1862); sixty-two (1863-1871); 133 (1872-1880); 242 (1881-1889); 595 (1890-1897); 349 (1898-1900).¹ Their penetration of the market by the early 1880s was such that a *Pall Mall Gazette* reviewer in 1883 could note in passing that 'in these times...series are the fashion'; by 1887 a more irritated columnist in the *Graphic* was drawn to say that 'in these days...“series” of books on all conceivable subjects have almost exhausted patience'.² Little did either of these writers realize the extent to which book series would multiply further over the next decade or so.

The idea of the series had been a well-established publishing practice since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the sudden take-off in the late Victorian decades is quite astounding. There is no simple or singular explanation for such a phenomenon, but John Spiers is surely right to draw attention to the importance of changing economic strategies:

Monopoly practices, cartels, copyright controls and short runs at high prices were long the preferred means to security. But as markets grew under social pressures for change the series became a major device for feeling a way towards security, step by step. Feedback was crucial. The series (and 'branding', or pattern-recognition) thus helped to build the reputation of an imprint.³

Earlier series characteristically were built on contemporary popular

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- 1 Leslie Howsam, 'Sustained Literary Ventures: The series in Victorian Book Publishing', *Publishing History*, 31 (1992), pp.5-26.
 - 2 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 December 1883; *Graphic*, 9 April 1887.
 - 3 John Spiers, 'Introduction', in John Spiers (ed.), *The Culture of the Publisher's Series. Volume One: Authors, Publishers and the Shaping of Taste* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.19.

novels packaged by publishers looking to establish a strong base (such as George Routledge's one shilling 'Railway Library'). The reliance on narrative fiction series (often called 'libraries') continued, but by the 1860s and into the last quarter of the century, the most common genre outside narrative fiction was the 'standard works', ranging from 13% to 18% of the total. Educational (12-14%) and juvenile (7-10%) series were also very common, but religion, science and biography came next, with biography typically around 4% of the total series published.⁴

The popularity of standard works and educational books should come as no surprise, given the demand by the School Boards for the study of literature, especially after the adoption of Mundella's code in 1883 requiring elementary school students 'to read, parse and memorize selected English classics'.⁵ When other institutional changes, such as the growth of the University Extension Movement, working men's associations, settlements, civil service exams, and also the newly forming University English departments are added to the picture, the need for available editions of literary classics, books about literature and biographies of writers is apparent. This goes a considerable way to explaining the success of the *English Men of Letters* series which, as Laurel Brake has noted, was located 'at the cheap end of the list of a reputable publisher such as Macmillan'.⁶ Edited by John Morley, the first series of thirty-nine volumes ran from 1878 to 1892; a second was begun in 1902, with the series finally ending with seventy-eight volumes. Whether its success was a trigger for more 'non-literary' biography series is a moot point, but it is easy to believe there was an element of 'more of a good thing'. This certainly was a perception held at the time. As a reviewer of W. H. Allen's new *Eminent Women* series noted in 1883, 'it is doubtless correct to believe that the "Eminent Women Series" now being issued by Messrs. W. H. Allen and Co. under the capable editorship of Mr. John H. Ingram was suggested by the success of the "English Men of Letters Series" of Messrs. Macmillan and Co.'. ⁷ *English Men of Letters* was not an originating moment for serial biographies, but its commercial and cultural success was surely an incentive in the context of rapidly expanding publication of biography series in the 1880s and 1890s.

4 See Howsam, 'Sustained Literary Ventures', p.9.

5 Richard Altick, 'From Aldine to Everyman: Cheap Reprint Series of the English Classics, 1830-1906', *Studies in Bibliography*, 11 (1958), pp.3-24, p.5.

6 Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition, 1850-1950: Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.55.

7 *Graphic*, 28 July 1883.

These included, for example, the following: Macmillan's *English Men of Action*, edited by Mowbray Morris, comprising twenty-three biographies published between 1889 and 1895; Macmillan's *Twelve English Statesmen* (1888-1893), edited by Morley; W. H. Allen's *Eminent Women* (1883-1895), edited by John Ingram and comprising twenty-two biographies; Longman's nine volume *English Worthies* (1885-1887), edited by Andrew Lang; and Walter Scott's *Great Writers: Critical Biographies*, edited by Eric Robertson and comprising forty-one volumes published between 1887 and 1892. Given that each of these series, and others like them, comprised anything from a few to a dozen or more volumes, even a conservative estimate points to hundreds of biographies published in series between the late 1870s and the turn of the century.⁸ All at exactly the same time as the publication of the monthly periodical the *Biograph* (sometimes the *Biograph and Review*), the biographical dictionary *Women of the Day* (1885), and Leslie Stephen's and later Sidney Lee's *Dictionary of National Biography*. Biography series, relatively short-lived and circumscribed as they were, thus constituted a major cultural phenomenon in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Surprisingly, they have largely been overlooked in the scholarship on late Victorian biography.⁹

Many late Victorian publishers clearly thought there was money to be made in biography series, particularly as replication of format made for efficiencies in production costs. Brake goes so far as to suggest that:

- 8 A brief list of a few of the others gives us a sense of the ubiquity of biography series in the 1880s and '90s: Fisher Unwin's *Lives Worth Remembering' Series of Popular Biographies*, Hodder & Stoughton's *Men Worth Remembering: Popular Biographies*, Nelson's *Heroes of History*, Hodges's *Heroes of the Cross*, Putnam's *Heroes of the Nations*, Routledge's *Great French Writers* (later taken over by Unwin), Partridge's *New Popular Biographies*, the Religious Tract Society's *Short Biographies for the People*, Methuen's *English Leaders of Religion* series, and a series published by that great Victorian literary raconteur, Henry Vizetelly, whose title is irresistible: *People Who Have Made a Noise in the World*.
- 9 There are several exceptions, primarily from the 1990s. In *Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), David Amigoni developed a detailed argument on *English Men of Letters* (pp.109-20) and *Twelve English Statesmen* (pp.132-37) in the context of a liberal-Comtean effort to construct history as a foundational 'discipline' against the heterogeneity of 'literariness'; John L. Kijinsky, 'John Morley's "English Men of Letters" Series and the Politics of Reading', *Victorian Studies*, (1991), pp.205-25, and Jock Macleod, 'Action Man: Englishness in Macmillan's "English Men of Action" series', *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*, 3 (1997), pp.38-50 were concerned with the production of different forms of Englishness; and Laurel Brake, in *Print in Transition* (pp.52-66) offers a passing commentary on *English Men of Letters* in the context of the late Victorian market.

The notion of an ordered library, in which the ‘collected’ series rests, masks an equal scurry, fostered by the publishing industry, to keep up, in a market cleverly predicated on the assumption that it will *never* end: there is always the next number to consume, to collect. It is an optimistic, saturation model of an expanding market of readers and potential purchasers.¹⁰

This makes good sense, though one wonders why such an ‘optimistic’ model should disintegrate so rapidly in the early years of the twentieth century, even though the fiction industry kept expanding.¹¹ It was a model supported by extensive advertising, not only within any given series, but also in cognate series by the same publishers and—in the case of Macmillan, Allen, and Longmans—in the monthly magazines owned and published by them. Reviewers, too, contributed to the importance of the series when they reviewed individual volumes. Typically, a biography would be introduced as ‘the most recent of the XXX series’, but on occasions the primacy of the series over the volume was made very clear, both in format and content. Thus the 1886 *Liverpool Mercury* review of David Hannay’s *Admiral Blake* in the *English Worthies* series has as its heading ‘*English Worthies*, edited by Andrew Lang.’, with ‘*Admiral Blake*, by David Hannay. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.’ as the sub-heading before the review proper. Even more pronounced is the 1884 *Derby Mercury* review of Mrs Pitman’s *Elizabeth Fry* in the *Eminent Women* series. The heading for the review is ‘Elizabeth Fry’, with no author, title or publication details, and the review begins with the following:

This famous philanthropist [sic]...forms the subject of the new volume of the “Eminent Women” series, which, under the skilful editorship of Mr. J.H. Ingram, has become so widely and so deservedly popular. The book will no doubt attract a different section of the public from that which has perused with pleasure the accounts given in this series of George Eliot, Emily Bronte, George Sand...

10 Brake, *Print in Transition*, p.31.

11 One possible explanation has to do with the decline and changing functions of institutions such as the University Extension Movement, the Settlement Movement and the Home Readers Union, and the growth of redbrick universities with new curricula in English and the Humanities generally.

It is not until well into the piece that the reviewer tells us that ‘of the state of the prisons of England during the girlhood of her heroine, Mrs Pitman—the author of this volume—supplies the following harrowing description’.¹²

There is little doubt biography series were popular with consumers, and the reviewing apparatus of the regional press suggests that their popularity was not confined to the metropolis. The number of reprints, too, indicates steady consumption over a relatively extended period of time. Many of the volumes in the *English Men of Action* series, for example, were reprinted up to seven and eight times between first publication and 1914, with Sir William Butler’s *Charles George Gordon* (1889) being reprinted in 1889, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901, 1907, 1911, 1913 (twice), and again in 1919 and 1920. Multiple editions, especially in the absence of detailed print runs, do not constitute direct evidence about popular taste or contemporary interests: in the *English Men of Letters* series, for example, T. H. Huxley’s *Hume* ran through ten editions between 1878 and 1910, *Chaucer* and *Spenser* both ran through six editions over the same time with five editions of *Scott* and *Wordsworth*; yet over the same time there were only two editions of Adolphus Ward’s *Dickens*.¹³

As the titles indicate, the organizing principle for any given biography series was typically a circumscribed aspect of public life—statecraft, the military, religion, literature—and, given such a focus, typically written by and about men. In this context, the appearance of *Eminent Women* is especially noteworthy. Published by W. H. Allen between 1883 and 1889 with a late addition in 1895 by the feminist novelist and journalist Millicent Fawcett on Queen Victoria, it was a series not just about women, but written by women.¹⁴ This article offers an initial account of the institutional conditions and authorial networks that enabled the formation of the *Eminent Women* series. However, the task presents a major challenge because the firm’s archive was destroyed during World

12 *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 August 1886; *Derby Mercury*, 4 June 1884.

13 Though this might have something to do with Ward’s approach to the subject. See, for instance, the brief review of A. T. Batholomew’s *A Bibliography of Sir A. W. Ward, 1837-1924* in the *Saturday Review*, 5 March 1927, p.362: ‘His literary sympathies were catholic; he even wrote the *Dickens* book for the “English Men of Letters” series, the last kind of person he could be expected to like.’

14 There was one exception: the biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1888) was written by the general editor of the series, John Henry Ingram.

War Two.¹⁵ In its absence, the account of the formation of the series is reconstructed from newspaper sources, letters, autobiographies and biographies. While this approach leaves gaps in our knowledge about how the series came about, how it functioned within the firm's list, how successful it was and why it finished when it did, and about the relationships between the contributors and the firm and the series editor, it nonetheless provides partial answers to some of these questions. In so doing, it aims to stimulate further interest in the publishing history of biography series in the late nineteenth century.

1.

The origin of the series is unclear. The first announcements of its impending publication have it coming out with David Bogue, not Allen. The focus on women writing about women is made clear in the announcement in the 'Literary Notes' column in the *Daily News* for October 1882:

Mr David Bogue will shortly commence the publication of a series of original biographical handbooks entitled "Eminent Women." This series, to be edited by John H. Ingram, will be written entirely by women, and is to be devoted to short but comprehensive biographies of women eminent for their genius, virtues, actions, or associations. The works which have already been arranged for are not compiled from existing publications, but are chiefly based upon original unpublished material, and are therefore likely to prove of permanent and more than ordinary interest.¹⁶

There is little information on David Bogue. He was the son of David Bogue (1807-56), also a publisher, whose list consisted primarily of popular non-fictional works, and who started the *Illustrated Times* in 1855 with Henry Vizetelly. The choice of biography as a genre would have been especially appealing for Bogue junior. His father had been the publisher of *The Men of the Time* (1852), a 500 page collection of brief biographies that by

15 The W. H. Allen imprint was revived several years ago by Virgin Publishing. Following correspondence with Virgin, it appears that the Allen archive was bought by an English academic in the 1930s, but was subsequently destroyed during World War 2. An American imprint of the *Eminent Women* series, called *Famous Women*, was published by Roberts Brothers, of Boston.

16 *Daily News*, Saturday, 14 October 1882. The report was reproduced from the *Athenaeum*, a practice widespread at the time: the same report was reproduced in the 'Art and Literary Gossip' column in the *Manchester Times* on the same day.

the mid-1850s had developed into *Men of the Time: Biographical Sketches of Eminent Living Characters; also Biographical Sketches of Celebrated Women of the Time* (1856). The fact his father was an early exponent of the 'series' might also have played a part in the younger Bogue's decision to run with the *Eminent Women* series. Robert Patten's entry on Bogue senior in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes that he initiated a European Library of classics reprinted in an inexpensive format and sold for 3s 6d a volume; in it he published historical biographies as well as other works. After the father's death, the Bogue imprint (published from Fleet Street) went to W. Kent, and from him to H. G. Bohn; *Men of the Time* was republished in 1857 but by 1862 had become *Men of the Time: a biographical dictionary of eminent living characters (including women)*, edited by Edward Walford and published by Routledge, Warne and Routledge, soon to be re-worked as a new 926 page edition re-titled *Men and Women of the Time* (1862).

Bogue junior also published as 'David Bogue', potentially making for some confusion with his father's publications, though the two firms can be differentiated by time of publication (Bogue senior was dead before Bogue junior started his own firm) and by place of publication (St Martin's Place in the latter's case). Patten's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Bogue senior indicates the younger Bogue 'did not thrive, took bankruptcy in 1885, and was found dead on the beach at Folkestone in 1897'. It is highly likely, then, that the *Eminent Women* series was sold to W. H. Allen at the end of 1882 or early 1883 as part of Bogue's attempt to stave off bankruptcy, an announcement in the *Publishers' Circular* of 1 February 1883 noting that 'the following books formerly issued by Mr David Bogue are now published by W. H. Allen', with the list of publications following. Certainly by March 1883, the 'Art and Literary Gossip' column in the *Manchester Times* was able to announce that 'the first instalment of the "Eminent Women Series," edited by John H. Ingram, the monograph on George Eliot by Miss Mathilde Blind, will contain several unpublished letters of George Eliot. It will be followed in April by Miss Mary Robinson's biographical sketch of Emily Brontë. The series is to be published by Messrs. W. H. Allen and Co., instead of Mr. Bogue, as previously announced'.¹⁷

The brief account of the facts as we have them does not answer whether Ingram suggested the series to Bogue or vice versa. It is likely though, that Ingram, who was something of a literary entrepreneur and

17 *Manchester Times*, 17 March 1883.

had already published *Claimants to Royalty* (1882) with Bogue, was the initiator. Born in 1842, he was a very well-known man of letters by the late 1870s, though he does not have an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. His reputation was made through his four volume *Works of Edgar Allan Poe* published by A. & C. Black in Edinburgh, in 1874, which included a biographical essay in the first volume. Ingram's essay resurrected Poe's value and significance for an English readership convinced that Poe was 'a beacon of immorality, a helot to our Spartan youth of genius, a shining example of the bad end loose poets come to', as a reviewer in the *Examiner* noted in 1874; against this, 'Mr. Ingram knocks it all about our ears like a house of cards, and calls upon us to form an entirely new estimate of the poet's private career...Of course the literary world has been taken by surprise'.¹⁸ This was followed by a biography of Poe published 'in two thick volumes' by John Hogg in 1880.

What information we do have about Ingram comes primarily from a brief 1882 entry in the *Biograph* (a monthly published by E. W. Allen) and a more substantial piece written by John Carl Miller as an introduction to his 1954 doctoral dissertation, 'Poe's English Biographer, John Henry Ingram: A Biographical Account and a Study of his Contributions to Poe Scholarship'. Miller's dissertation was based on a huge collection of materials that Ingram had accumulated in the course of over sixty years writing about and championing Poe. These included extensive correspondence with a number of Poe's surviving friends, as well as correspondence and other artefacts exchanged between those people and Poe. Following Ingram's death in 1916, the collection, which also included extensive materials relating to Elizabeth Barrett Browning (his 1888 entry in the *Eminent Women* series), Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Chatterton (both of whom were the subjects of his contributions to Harrap's 'Poetry and Life' series in the years before his death) and Oliver Madox Brown (about whom he also wrote a biography),¹⁹ was offered up for sale by his sister, Laura Ingham. Not all of the collection was eventually sold, but after a number of stops and starts, with interest from several American universities, the Poe materials and some other documents from the collection were sold to the University of Virginia in 1921. Miller's essay, his own materials, together with a calendar and

18 *Examiner*, 19 December 1874.

19 John H. Ingram, *Oliver Madox Brown: A Biographical Sketch, 1855-1874* (Elliot Stock, 1883), *Marlowe and His Poetry* (Harrap, 1914), *Chatterton and His Poetry* (Harrap, 1916). Ingram had also published *Christopher Marlowe and His Associates* (Grant Richards, 1904) and *The True Chatterton: A New Study from Original Documents* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1910).

index of Ingram's letters and other manuscripts and materials relating to Poe, are now held as a special collection in the Manuscripts Division of the University of Virginia Library. Unfortunately, only a few of Ingram's letters relating to *Eminent Women* survive in this collection, and none of these is correspondence between Ingram and Bogue or Ingram and Allen.

Ingram, who worked for the General Post Office from 1868, 'was determined to be the author of important books...that would, he hoped, be financially profitable and at the same time bring to him lasting literary fame', and assiduously spent Saturday afternoons in the Reading Room of the British Museum Library. Miller traces his interest in Poe back to the early 1860s, when he wrote a poem in imitation of the American poet, but it developed rapidly in the early 1870s. It was at this point he began 'to examine everything, both favourable and unfavourable, that had been written about Poe, to search for new material, and to learn so much about Poe that he could reconstruct, as it were, the true character of the man and the writer, as he felt it to be'. This project primarily had in its sights the highly critical 1850 memoir of Poe written by Rufus Griswold, whom Ingram wanted to prove was 'a liar and a forger'.²⁰

In 1874, the year his *Works of Edgar Allan Poe* appeared, Ingram's self-projection as a defender of Poe was further enhanced when he took steps to raise a fund in England for the benefit of Miss Rosalie Poe, Poe's elderly sister. Unfortunately he became sick and before he recovered, Poe's sister died.²¹ Tennyson, Swinburne and William Michael Rossetti all pledged their support. The last of these was to become a significant conduit between Ingram and several of the female contributors to the *Eminent Women* series. The extent of his relationship with Ingram is unclear, but the two were certainly in correspondence in 1880 regarding Petöfi, the Hungarian poet whose biography Ingram was preparing, and the tone of the correspondence indicates a relative familiarity.²² The relationship developed further in the early 1880s when Ingram was writing his biography of Oliver Madox Brown (1882), for which both William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote sonnets. By 1883—and probably before this—Ingram was dining with William and his wife

20 John Carl Miller, 'John Henry Ingram: Editor, Biographer, and Collector of Poe Materials', Ingram-Poe collection, University of Virginia Library Special Collections, Accession Number 5218-g, hereafter cited as Ingram-Poe papers. I am grateful to Jeremy Evans at the University of Virginia for locating some of Ingram's 'non-Poe' letters in the collection.

21 *Biograph*, No. 1, new series (January 1880), p.40.

22 Letter from W. M. Rossetti to Ingram, 25 February, 1880, Ingram-Poe papers.

Lucy (née Madox Brown), a dinner in April that year also including Mathilde Blind.²³ Rossetti was later to comment in his reminiscences that 'my wife and I saw a good deal of Mr. Ingram, and both of us entertained a sincere liking and esteem for him'.²⁴ Swinburne, too, corresponded regularly with him about Poe, as did Stéphane Mallarmé, with whom he was in correspondence from mid-1875.²⁵ A Poe enthusiast, Mallarmé even went so far as to personally give Ingram Edouard Monet's drawing of Poe that the painter had originally presented to him.²⁶ Networking of this kind was characteristic of Ingram in the second half of the 1870s after the publication of his first big work on Poe. In addition, his capacity to research and publish seems to have been nurtured through his place of work. As Rossetti recalls, 'the atmosphere of the Inland Revenue in my time does not appear to have been at all conducive to literary production (that of the Post Office was much more so)...I could only specify four persons who were partially concerned with the *belles lettres*'.²⁷ Rossetti's observation suggests that Ingram's tenure at the Post Office enabled rather than hindered his literary work, and it would be intriguing to know whether this was merely a matter of liberal flexibility of time or whether the Post Office also employed other writers with whom he networked. Anthony Trollope, who had started there in 1834 and had reached the position of Surveyor when he retired in 1867, just before Ingram started, had been instrumental in setting up the Post Office Library and Literary Association, which opened in in January 1859 'with some 2,000 books and 367 subscribers', and in 1861 'organized a series by literary men for postal employees—G. H. Lewes, Edmund Yates, Thomas Hughes, and Trollope himself'.²⁸ Yates, of course, also worked there, his 'first essay in dramatic writing [being] in collaboration with a Post Office friend named Harrington' in 1857; so too did F. I. Scudamore, a 'fellow clerk'

23 Roger W. Peattie (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Michael Rossetti* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p.446.

24 William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences. Volume 1* (London: Brown Langham & Co, 1906), p.433. Hereafter cited as *Reminiscences*.

25 Twenty copies of the thirty-five page collection of Swinburne's letters were printed privately for Thomas J. Wise in 1910 and are held in the British Library. On the Mallarmé connection, see Rosemary Lloyd, *Mallarmé: the poet and his circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p.101.

26 On the Monet painting, see Miller, 'John Henry Ingham', Ingram-Poe papers.

27 Rossetti, *Reminiscences*, p.417.

28 N. John Hall, *Trollope: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.171, 222.

and contributor to *Punch*.²⁹ All this was before Ingram's time, and his one letter to Trollope in 1879 received a brief, relatively abrupt, and formal ('Dear Sir') reply.³⁰ Nevertheless, the existence of the Literary Association and the example of Trollope, Yates and others would no doubt have been conducive to balancing Post Office clerical duties with a commitment to writing.

Ingram remains a shadowy figure but his emerging place in 1870s aestheticism can be seen in the favourable reception of his book, especially by English critics of an aesthetic bent. In effect, the 1874 collection, the various essays on Poe that followed, and the 1880 biography located Ingram in a certain kind of cultural position, where he was promulgating what might loosely be termed a high-cultural aesthetic in a popular cultural marketplace. This marketplace included the numerous periodicals, including the *Mirror*, the *London Magazine: A Monthly of Light Literature*, the *Oddfellows*, and *St. James's*, in which he published throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Moreover, he seems to have had a particular affinity with women: a semi-invalid for much of his life and a bachelor until he died, he engaged in long epistolary exchanges with a number of Poe's female friends in the 1870s,³¹ and was a strong supporter of the enfranchisement of women (as well as supporting a number of other progressive causes such as compulsory education, the abolition of capital punishment and the disestablishment of the Irish Church).³²

Given this kind of cultural positioning crossing popular and serious literature, and particularly given his championing of Poe, the idea of a literary entrepreneur like Ingram editing a series on eminent women would have seemed attractive to a publisher struggling to make an impact in the market. If advertisements in the daily press are anything to go by, Bogue's lists in the early 1880s were a real miscellany. The list advertised

29 Edmund Yates, *Recollections and Experiences*, 2 vols, vol.1 (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1884), pp.289, 306.

30 For Trollope's reply to Ingram's letter, see N. John Hall (ed.), *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, 2 vols, vol.2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p.830. In his commentary on the letter, Hall notes that Ingram worked in the Savings Department of the Post Office and we can infer from it that Ingram's original letter must also have been in the Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists in the Princeton University Library, along with Trollope's reply (Parrish Collection SB 749).

31 These included Sarah Helen Whitman, Annie Richmond, Marie Louise Shew Houghton and Stella Lewis. See Miller, 'John Henry Ingham', Ingram-Poe papers.

32 *Biograph*, No 1, new series (January 1880), p.42.

in the *Times* for Monday 15 November 1880, for instance, ranged from *British Painters of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, through Samuel Butler's *Unconscious Memory*, through to *Letters from a Cat*, an illustrated children's book. Moreover, like Ingram, Bogue appears to have had some sympathy towards the 'aesthetic' end of the market. As the publisher of Oscar Wilde's first volume of poetry in 1881, for example, he asked Wilde to underwrite the printing costs (a common practice), but as Ian Small notes from the handwritten emendations to the printed contract, 'what he [Wilde] was required to pay Bogue was certainly less than what Bogue routinely asked'.³³ Regardless of whether the initial idea came from Ingram or Bogue, the confluence of editor and publisher was right for a series of biographies about women, especially given the success achieved by Macmillan's *English Men of Letters* by the early 1880s.

That W. H. Allen would take on such a series following Bogue's bankruptcy is, however, curious, and in the absence of the firm's archival records we can only speculate on the reasons. It is probable that Allen simply bought the whole of Bogue's list, but the idea of a series of biographies of eminent women would not have been a natural fit for its own list. The official publisher for the East India Company, W. H. Allen was originally Black, Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, which in the 1820s was printing and publishing maps of India by John Walker, the Geographer to the East India Company. Black and Kingsbury seem to have disappeared by the 1830s, and on 20 September 1837, the *Times* announced the dissolution of Parbury, Allen and Co.³⁴ As W. H. Allen and Co., the firm continued as a bookseller and publisher, publishing books on a wide range of colonial matters, from maps, charts and statistics, through policies, reminiscences and papers (for example, the Wellesley papers), colonial histories and Asian and Arabic dictionaries and grammars. In addition, it published the *Asiatic Journal*, the *Illustrated Naval and Military Magazine*, and from 1883 the *National Review*. This is an odd publisher for a series whose first author, Mathilde Blind (b.1841), came from a Jewish family that emigrated to England as refugees after the suppression of the revolutionary Baden uprisings of 1848-9, and was close to Garibaldi and Mazzini. In the absence of the Allen archives, we can only assume

33 Ian Small, 'Introduction', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.xiv.

34 Though the *British Book Trade Index Record* has W. H. Allen (1837-1846) being succeeded by Parbury, Allen & Co in 1846. If the *Times* announcement is to be believed, and there is no reason to doubt it, W. H. Allen succeeded Parbury, Allen and Co., rather than being succeeded by it.

the decision was made to go ahead because of Ingram's reputation and the likelihood that the first books were already in production. Indeed, as early as 1884 the firm brought out Ingram's *The Haunted Homes and Family Traditions of Great Britain* (with new editions in 1886 and 1890) and published *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters, and Opinions* in 1886 and again in 1891, suggesting they were confident of his selling power.

2.

Blind's position as the first author in the series (*George Eliot*, 1883; she also contributed *Madame Roland*, 1886) was due to her friendship with Ingram. There is no evidence to show when the friendship began, but Richard Garnett makes the connection unequivocally in his memoir of Blind, where he remarks that 'it was a passion with her to celebrate illustrious women, which the publication of the "Eminent Women" Series edited by her friend Mr J H Ingram, enabled her to gratify. For this she wrote the lives of George Eliot and Madame Roland with abundant enthusiasm but not without effort.'³⁵ It is most likely they met through William and Lucy Rossetti. In his reminiscences, William recalls that he met her 'in July 1869, in the house of Madox Brown; soon afterwards I saw her in her own home, and later on I was continually in her company, in the society of my wife or the Browns, up to the close of 1892'.³⁶ The initial connection came through their mutual work on Shelley, on whom Blind, Rossetti and Garnett were all working. Their interest in Shelley, Whitman and Mazzini, together with a commitment to higher education for women amongst other radical causes, led to a developing friendship, and by 1871

35 Richard Garnett, 'Memoir of Mathilde Blind', pp.31-2, in MSS 61929, in 'Mathilde Blind: correspondence and papers'. Add. MSS 61927-61930, British Library. Hereafter cited as 'Blind papers'.

36 Rossetti, *Reminiscences*, p.389. Swinburne, who had known Rossetti since 1860 through his brother Dante Gabriel with whom he had been at Oxford, already knew the Blinds early in 1869 and acted as something of an intermediary for William Michael in March that year in his Shelley research. In a letter to William Allingham, 12 March 1869, Rossetti writes: 'Did you ever hear of a Miss Rumley in connexion with Shelley? Swinburne (who hears of it through the family of Karl Blind) tells me that a lady of some such name (Garnett says she lives in Plymouth) has a quantity of Shelley writings and items'. Peattie, *Selected Letters*, 206. Rossetti had the name wrong: Miss Rumley was actually Miss Rumble: on 14 March, he wrote to Swinburne thanking him for 'sending on my note to Miss Rumble through Miss Blind'. Peattie, *Selected Letters*, p.207.

she is referred to as a 'personal friend' and a fellow republican,³⁷ with Lucy painting her portrait in 1872. By the second half of the 1870s, Blind and Ingram were thus both in the Rossetti and Madox Brown circles. It is likely Ingram was more a peripheral connection at this stage—there is no hard evidence of close connections with Rossetti, as there is in the case of Blind—but by the early 1880s he had become close enough to be able to write the biography of Oliver Madox Brown and to dine with Blind at the Rossettis.

Ingram was also to meet a number of the other contributors to the *Eminent Women* series through William and Lucy. Apart from Lucy herself, who wrote the entry on Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1890), others in the circle included Anne Gilchrist (*Mary Lamb*, 1883) and Mary Robinson (*Emily Brontë*, 1883; *Margaret of Angoulême, Queen of Navarre*, 1886), and through Mary Robinson, Vernon Lee (*Countess of Albany*, 1884). Rossetti knew Anne Gilchrist as early as 1862, when he and Dante Gabriel Rossetti helped her complete her husband's *Life of William Blake* (1863) following his death in 1861. In his reminiscences, Rossetti cannot recall 'the precise beginning of our personal knowledge of [Alexander] Gilchrist', but thought it likely that someone mentioned to him that Dante Gabriel had a Blake MS which Gilchrist asked to see. Following this, 'Dante took a more than usual fancy to Gilchrist, thinking very well of him as an art-critic, sympathizing with his enthusiasm for Blake, and enjoying his company and conversation'.³⁸ According to the editor of Rossetti's *Selected Letters*, 'although WMR corresponded with her frequently, Whitman in time taking the place of Blake as their common interest, they did not see much of one another. Their letters are almost without exception reserved and business-like'.³⁹ That is fair comment, with nothing like the intimacy in the relationship with Mathilde Blind; she is always 'Mrs Gilchrist' in his quite voluminous letters to her, and the reserve is reflected in a letter to Whitman soon after her death: 'You and I have both suffered a loss in the death of that admirable woman Mrs Gilchrist—a strong, warm nature, full of strong sympathetic sense and frank cordiality'.⁴⁰ Doubtless Rossetti,

37 Letter to Keningale Robert Cook, 9 July 1871. Peattie, *Selected Letters*, p.275.

38 Rossetti, *Reminiscences*, p.304.

39 Peattie, *Selected Letters*, p.126, fn2.

40 Letter to Walt Whitman, 5 January 1886, in Peattie, *Selected Letters*, p.481. On the Rossetti-Gilchrist correspondence, see Clarence Gohdes and Paull Franklin Baum (eds), *Letters of William Michael Rossetti Concerning Whitman, Blake and Shelley to Anne Gilchrist and her son Herbert Gilchrist* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1934), hereafter cited as *Letters of Rossetti to Gilchrist*.

who kept his own emotions largely in check, found Gilchrist's passion for the dead Blake and the living Whitman somewhat overwhelming. Yet the relationship extended to dinner parties, with both Gilchrist and Blind dining with the Rossettis and Madox Brown in December 1875 to meet an American visitor Joseph Marvin, the co-editor of the *Radical* (1866-67) and a strong Whitman supporter.⁴¹ Rossetti was certainly confident enough in Gilchrist's ability and sufficiently supportive to recommend her to Ingram, as he makes clear in a letter to her in November 1882, when she would have been finalizing her manuscript on Mary Lamb: 'I had the satisfaction of directing Ingram to you for Mary Lamb—& am sure that in so doing I promoted her obtaining the best biographer & biography that were likely to be forthcoming'.⁴² This would have happened early in 1882, because on 13 April that year, Gilchrist wrote to Ingram acknowledging receipt of the contract from Bogue.⁴³

Mary Robinson (b.1857) was significantly younger than Anne Gilchrist (b.1827) and Mathilde Blind (b.1841), and her friendship with Rossetti⁴⁴ was formed initially through his acquaintance with her parents. George Robinson, an architect⁴⁵ and art-critic, hosted a circle of writers and artists in the early 1870s, including Browning, Morris, Wilde and John Singer Sargent. William and Lucy Rossetti first met him and his family in 1876. Rossetti thought Mary, 'then still in her teens, was as bright as could be, and highly sympathetic in matters of art and literature interesting to myself'.⁴⁶ The artistic affinities doubtless extended to the

41 Letter to Walt Whitman, 23 December 1875. Peattie, *Selected Letters*, p.332. Rossetti tells Whitman 'the evening he passed with us and a few friends—good *Whitmanites* most of them' (original emphasis).

42 Letter to Anne Gilchrist, 10 November 1882. Gohdes and Baum, *Letters of Rossetti to Gilchrist*, p.141.

43 'I have received the agreement from David Bogue; and see nothing in it I need object to endorse with my signature except the being tied so rigidly to a date'. Gilchrist to Ingram, 13 April 1882, Ingram-Poe papers.

44 See Sylvanie Marandon's entry on Robinson in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, where she claims they were 'great friends'.

45 Robinson was a Wolverhampton architect responsible for the city's Exchange Building, the Bolton Market, and a number of churches. He and his wife later moved to Leamington where Mary's younger sister Mabel was born, before they moved to London. Peter Gunn, and following him, Vinetta Colby incorrectly have him as a banker. See Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) and Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

46 Rossetti, *Reminiscences*, p.488.

political, because the Robinson circle sympathized strongly with the Irish Home Rule and Republican causes also held by the Rossettis. There is no evidence that Ingram met Mary Robinson at the Rossettis, but it would be surprising if he had not as both were regulars in the same circle.

It was through Mary Robinson that Vernon Lee (*The Countess of Albany*, 1884) and Bella Duffy (*Madame de Staël*, 1887) came to contribute to the series. Vineta Colby, one of Vernon Lee's (Violet Paget's) biographers, notes that in 1880 Robinson toured Italy with her parents, and when they moved on to Florence, 'they were welcomed by the Anglo-Florentine colony of which Violet Paget was by 1880 a prominent member', with Violet inviting Mary to stay on at the Casa Paget.⁴⁷ In her 1907 reminiscence 'In Casa Paget', Robinson also recalled 'dear Miss Duffy, the Irish doctor's daughter, so witty, with her beautiful melancholy brows and eyes'.⁴⁸ Lee visited London the next summer, in 1881, as she was to do for many years, staying with the Robinsons in Gower Street. During her 1883 visit, she spent August working with Robinson in Kent and Sussex. Following the appearance of the latter's biography of Emily Brontë in the *Eminent Women* series, Lee offered a biography of Fanny Burney, *Madame d'Arblay* for the series: 'All these failures have so depressed me", she wrote, "that in despair I have applied to do Mme d'Arblay in the same series for which Mary has done her *Emily*; but this, doubtless, will also prove a failure'.⁴⁹ The offer was not taken up, but instead she was asked to write the biography of the Countess of Albany, which she began in September that year on her return to Florence.⁵⁰ Duffy, with whom she also stayed in her 1883 visit, was far less productive than Robinson or Lee in the early 1880s (she had published only a poorly-received novel by 1883) and was not particularly well known in London at this time. She and Lee were to become close and long-standing friends, though, with Lee dedicating her *Proteus, or the Future of Intelligence* (1925) to Duffy, 'with thanks for a lifetime of intelligent talk, 1880-1925'.⁵¹ In the

47 Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p.47.

48 Quoted in Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, p.77. 'In Casa Paget' was originally published in *Country Life* in 1907.

49 Quoted in Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, p.89.

50 According to Colby, Lee 'dashed off' *The Countess of Albany* between September 1883 and June 1884. See Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p.87.

51 Quoted in Dunn, *Vernon Lee*, p.221.

absence of evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that the opportunity to write *Madame de Staël* (1887) came through Lee's good auspices, or possibly those of Robinson.⁵²

On her 1881 visit Lee met Mathilde Blind, the Rossettis (where she dined during her 1882 visit) and Helen Zimmern, who also was to contribute to the *Eminent Women* series (*Maria Edgeworth*, 1883). Zimmern, like Robinson (until her marriage) and Duffy, became a long-standing friend of Lee. However, Ingram would already have been aware of her before then and *Maria Edgeworth*, which came out at the very end of 1883, would have been started well before Lee commenced work on *The Countess of Albany* in September of that year. Born in 1845, more than a decade earlier than Lee, she had published 'Life and Works' books on Schopenhauer (1876) and Lessing (1878), as well as contributing many articles on European art, thought, and literature to a wide range of periodicals throughout the 1870s and 1880s, including the *Examiner*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and the *Magazine of Art*. As a prolific contributor to these magazines, Zimmern—who also had broadly progressive political views—had a similar cultural location to that of Ingram, writing anti-Philistine and 'high Art' pieces for relatively popular magazines.

What emerges here is a picture of a network of politically progressive female writers with links to the Rossettis and, at least partly through them, to Ingram. Like Ingram and the Rossettis, many of them were republicans, supporters of Irish Home Rule and of the enfranchisement of women. They also comprised part of a cultural formation of 'female aesthetes', to use Talia Schaffer's term,⁵³ who were writing poetry as well as articles on artistic, literary and especially women's issues for a range of late Victorian periodicals. In some cases (such as Gilchrist, for whom the

52 Bertha Thomas, who contributed *George Sand* (1883) to the series, was also a friend of Lee. However, the date of publication of her biography indicates she had already been contracted to write it well before Lee was contracted to write *The Countess of Albany* (1884), so her participation would not have been due to Lee.

53 See Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

Mary Lamb biography 'was a task that came to me unsought'),⁵⁴ Rossetti suggested the name of a contributor to Ingram; in some (such as Lee), the contributor contacted Ingram through her connections with the network; and in some cases, Ingram asked Rossetti for his advice (which happened in relation to *Mary Shelley*, where Michael proposed his wife Lucy).⁵⁵ Ingram himself proposed subjects directly to members of the network. Robinson was asked to write the biography of Charlotte Brontë, but instead proposed Emily Brontë who at that time was her 'patron saint'.⁵⁶ And Rossetti recalls that Ingram 'wished Christina [Rossetti] to undertake some other volume in the series, proposing to her more especially Mrs Browning, and afterwards Mrs Radcliffe'.⁵⁷ Christina was unable to take up the offer, and given Ingram himself wrote the Browning biography (1888), he must have been unable to find a suitable female alternative in the time available. The Radcliffe biography never appeared so at this stage in the later 1880s Ingram might well have been running out of what he considered to be suitable female biographers.

The contributors' networks extended beyond the Rossetti circle. Florence Fenwick Miller (*Harriet Martineau*, 1884), for instance, was a regular visitor to George and Louisa Sims in the early 1870s. As their son George recalled in his autobiography:

Among our frequent guests were Augusta Webster, the poetess, Karl and Mathilde Blind, Dr Anna Kingsford, Mrs Fenwick Miller—she was Miss Fenwick Miller then—Emily Faithfull, Ella

54 Letter to John Burroughs, 3 December 1882, quoted in Herbert Gilchrist (ed.), *Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p.269. A few pages later Herbert (Gilchrist's son) notes: 'And to William Rossetti she says:—"I think I must have owed it to a suggestion from you, that Mr. Ingram came to me to write the Life of Mary Lamb." Rossetti did propose his friend's name for the *Eminent Women Series*, though not specially in connection with Mary Lamb' (p.271).

55 See Angela Thirlwell, *William and Lucy: The Other Rossettis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p.261: 'When John Ingram, editor of the *Eminent Women* series, asked William in January 1886 if he knew anyone qualified to write the life of Mary Shelley, William proposed Lucy'. Thirlwell is referring to a letter from John Ingram to Rossetti on 11 January 1886. University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Angeli-Dennis Collection, 22-4.

56 Mary Duclaux (Robinson) to Cunninghame Graham, 25 September. No year is given, but it must be after 1901 because she is using her new married surname of 'Duclaux'. Blackie papers, National Library of Scotland. I am grateful to Professor Patricia Rigg, Arcadia University, Canada, for bringing this letter to my attention.

57 Rossetti, *Reminiscences*, p.433.

Dietz, Dr. Zerffi, Professor Plumtree, Samuel Butler, the author of 'Erewhon', Frances Power Cobbe and occasionally Lydia Becker.⁵⁸

In Miller's case, the connection with Blind and Webster had less to do with their being poets and much more to do with their shared interest in women's suffrage, an issue strongly supported by Ingram. Louisa Sims had funded a local group of the Women's Suffrage Society, for whom Miller began her lectures. By the early 1880s she was lecturing for organizations such as the Sunday Lecture Society and the London Dialectical Society on topics ranging from suffrage through women's work, the health and education of women, and the Contagious Diseases Acts. One of these topics was Harriet Martineau, on whom she first spoke for the Sunday Lecture Society in 1877, a year after Martineau's death. In 1881 she was a guest of Martineau's relatives in Edgbaston and, according to her biographer, 'began to entertain thoughts of writing Harriet's biography',⁵⁹ with the family providing introductions to Martineau's friends and relatives holding correspondence and other material. Whether Blind suggested the *Eminent Women* series as an appropriate vehicle, whether she acted as a conduit to Ingram, or whether Ingram was aware of Miller's knowledge of Martineau and commissioned the biography independently of their mutual friendship with Blind is unknown; but by late 1883 when she would have begun the project she was widely known: her weekly 'Filomena's Letter' column was syndicated to over half a dozen provincial papers in 1883 and in the previous few years she had published a novel and had appeared in a number of well-respected magazines, including *Fraser's*, *Belgravia*, *Oddfellow's* and the *Modern Review*. Her reputation extensive, her selling power was thus assured, and with friends in common she would have been a logical choice for Ingram as a potential contributor.

In the absence of hard evidence it is impossible to know with certainty, but the firm itself probably acted as a conduit for further contributors to the series. Allen published the *National Review* from March 1883 to February 1891 and again from March 1892 to February 1894,

58 George R. Sims, *My Life: Sixty Years' Recollections of Bohemian London* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1917), p.53.

59 Rosemary T. Van Arsdel, *Florence Fenwick Miller: Victorian feminist, journalist, and educator* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p.118.

largely under the editorship of Alfred Austin.⁶⁰ In 1884 Nina Kennard (*Rachel*, 1885 and *Mrs Siddons*, 1887) published on women's issues, as did Millicent Garrett Fawcett (*Her Majesty Queen Victoria*, 1895) in 1887. We can only speculate, but given Ingram's close ties with Allen, it is possible that Kennard and Fawcett came to his attention either through Austin or the publisher himself.

Although the evidence upon which the formation of the series can be reconstructed is limited, it does reveal at least one significant cultural network and other smaller networks of female writers with whom Ingram was connected. In the majority of instances the contributors were relatively radical, with republican sympathies, largely feminists, and frequently aesthetes. It is not surprising that the biographies, praised though they were for qualities such as balance, clarity and the use of archival materials, were also on occasions exercises in consciousness-raising. Ingram was clearly looking for contributors who shared his broad tastes and interests, and the effect was to give the series a sense of consistency and a tone that was due to the cultural and political 'positions' of the majority of authors as much as to the format, price and other publisher accoutrements that characterised *Eminent Women* as a series.

3.

The previous section reconstructed the networking that enabled Ingram as editor to identify a number of the potential contributors for the series. This section addresses the negotiations and conditions surrounding those contributions. What emerges from the available evidence is that contributors received a set payment of £50 for a monograph in the series, and that their contracts stipulated set time frames and approximate word lengths which at least some found galling. In short, power lay almost entirely with the publisher and his editor. This is not surprising when we remember that serious biography, like history writing, was considered principally a masculine genre.⁶¹ The following comment in the *Saturday Review*—a particularly virulent opponent of women as professional writers—was not untypical: 'In a word, the biography of a prominent

60 See Carol de Saint Victor, 'The National Review (1883)', pp.242-250 in Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines, Volume 3. The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984).

61 See, for example, Trev Lynn Broughton, *Men of Letters, Writing Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography in the Late Victorian Period* (London: Routledge, 1999).

man in any age of English history is part of the history of England, and the history of England is a subject a great deal too important and a great deal too difficult to be left to the mercy of half-learned ladies'.⁶² Bogue, then, and following him Allen, would have been concerned they were taking something of a financial risk with a series by women about women. The rigidity of the payment, word length and composition time would have been geared as much towards this concern as to questions of consistency across the series.

These conditions had been established when Bogue was still to publish *Eminent Women* and remained in place when Allen took over the series in early 1883. The time constraints were particularly galling to the writers. In a letter of April 1882 to Ingram quoted earlier, Gilchrist comments that she does not want to be 'tied so rigidly to a date—and that a comparatively near one', but is happy with the word length ('as near as possible to 200 pp.').⁶³ Had Bogue remained solvent, the book was originally planned to be published by the end of 1882 (see note 16 above), so this was a fairly tight schedule. Mathilde Blind, too, writing to Ingram in July 1883 about whether she would take up his offer to write *Madame Roland*, complains that 'I should not like to tie myself down to any precise date as I did before, for I found it very injurious to my health, but you might rely upon my keeping pretty closely to the date mentioned above [early next year]'.⁶⁴ Vernon Lee, too, felt aggrieved by the process. In her typically brusque fashion she wrote to Ingram on 22 June 1884 complaining that she had 'returned the last batch of the proofsheets, which, by the way, [crossed out] far surpass my wildest imagination in the way of disgraceful printing, to Mssrs [sic] Allen.... With regard to my delaying the publication, pray bear in mind that I let you have the MS. several days before the appointed date, and that two months delay in going to press cannot always be compensated by overloading an author with more proofsheets than can be corrected at a [sitting?]' The book, she went on to say, 'won't be a bit quicker for bothering me about it'.⁶⁵

Ingram also kept a reasonably tight editorial rein over word length, working closely with the publisher to ensure a consistent book size across the series. In a letter to Mathilde Blind in January 1885, he writes that he is 'informed by Mss [sic] Allen & Co that [the] MS of Mme Roland is too long' and requests that it be cut to 70-100,000 words. 'I fear you won't be

62 *Saturday Review*, 12 September 1857, p.242.

63 Gilchrist to Ingram 13 April 1883, Ingram-Poe papers.

64 Blind to Ingram, 5 June 1883, Ingram-Poe papers.

65 Paget to Ingram, 22 June [1884]. Ingram-Poe papers.

happy', he remarks in relation to his intention to edit it, but 'you appear to find it difficult to gauge the requisite length. It will be better for me to take the work in hand and personally reduce to the proper quantum. Do you see any objections? Of course it will increase my work in connection with the book—in a manner not likely to satisfy you I fear'.⁶⁶ Ingram's suggestion clearly did meet with objections. At some point after this letter, Blind again wrote to him:

I was surprised on receipt of your note asking me to curtail Mme Roland, more especially as in a letter (which I have kept) dated 20 July 1883 you especially requested me to make the life longer than that of George Eliot. However I should say that if the MS. of Mme Roland is too long as it stands it can be reduced by twenty or thirty pages if quotations from letters, speeches etc are printed in much smaller type. This would probably bring it to the same size as *Mary Lamb* which is over 230pps; for a page of my MS. is equivalent to a printed page of the Series.

It is truly incredible for any one to expect the life of Mme Roland to take up no more room than that of *Mary Lamb*! But by the method I suggest I hardly think that it will do so. As I have already compressed the subject-matter of my book to the utmost in my power I feel incapable to do more in that direction.

As I understand you to be solely responsible for literary arrangements, (and being an author yourself you must feel that a book cannot be cut about like a piece of cloth) I address myself to you rather than to Mssrs [?] Allens & shall feel obliged if you will kindly acquaint them with my answer.⁶⁷

If, as Blind's letter indicates, Ingram was 'solely responsible for literary arrangements', then much of the pressure felt by contributors came from the expectations he placed on them. A skilful researcher and rapid writer himself, he was regarded by some as self-seeking and untrustworthy once he had what he wanted. But Rossetti's letter to Anne Gilchrist, just after the publication of *Mary Lamb* in 1883, suggests that at least from Ingram's perspective, the contributors themselves posed editorial challenges: 'speaking to Ingram the other day, I found him likewise more than pleased with your book. He says too that you gave him no trouble—being

66 Ingram to Blind, 6 January 1885, Blind papers.

67 Blind to Ingram [nd], Ingram-Poe papers.

herein exceptional among his lady-contributors'.⁶⁸ Although a 200 page non-fiction monograph was a new form of writing for a number of these women, it appears that Ingram's editorial policies did not necessarily extend to providing advice and support; once commissioned, the writers were expected to get on with it and get it done in the appointed time.

Contributors received £50 for a biography, and the contractual power lay with the publisher. Mary Robinson, for example, recalled in a letter to Cunninghame Graham that 'when I wrote that book I was young, and Emily Brontë was my patron saint...So when a publisher asked me to write a life of Charlotte Brontë for a series, I answered: "Emily, please!" He took ten pounds, I remember, off my modest honorarium, for in those days Emily did not command a public.'⁶⁹ Authors, too, were hopeful that commercial success might engender a more favourable contract. Writing to Ingram in June 1883 about the proposed book on Madame Roland, Mathilde Blind remarked that

I presume that you could afford [now?] to give me an increased honorarium. I would not mention this did I not find that to do a book of this kind well takes up about eight months of the year. I hear on all [hands?] that George Eliot is a success; David [Stoll?], the bookseller in Oxford Street told me that it was the book of the hour, & that he alone got 100 copies.

Hoping that we shall come to a satisfactory arrangement in this matter.⁷⁰

There is no evidence that Ingram, or Allen on Ingram's recommendation, was willing to change the £50 contract, and it remained at that level both for Vernon Lee's book on the Countess of Albany the following year and Lucy Rossetti's biography of Mary Shelley in 1886.⁷¹ This was a mere half of the £100 males received for their contributions to Macmillan's coeval *English Men of Action* series (1889-95). Putting to one side the broader issue of women's payments compared to those of men for non-fictional works, Allen's contracts reflect a hard-nosed business approach also manifest in

68 Letter to Gilchrist, 15 September 1883. Gohdes and Baum, *Letters of Rossetti to Gilchrist*, p.143.

69 Mary Duclaux (Robinson) to Cunninghame Graham, 25 September. No year. See footnote 53 above.

70 Blind to Ingram, 5 June, 1883, Ingram-Poe papers.

71 On Lee, see Gunn, *Vernon Lee*, p.89; on Lucy Rossetti, see Thirlwell, *William and Lucy*, p.261.

their pricing: the *Eminent Women* volumes sold at 3s 6d, compared with Macmillan's 2s 6d (which was also the price for their *English Men of Letters* and *Twelve English Statesmen* series). It is likely the Allen print runs were smaller than those in Macmillan's series, suggesting the need for a higher margin on any one run; but the impact on the female contributors—several of whom supported themselves by their writing—undermined the putative pro-female agenda of a series written by women about eminent women.

4.

John Spiers's claim that 'any series is a niche' and that competing publishers 'sought to occupy greatly varied niche-spaces, in response to changing opportunities'⁷² holds true for David Bogue's original commitment to the *Eminent Women* series. Bogue's sense of an opportunity would have been piqued by a number of factors. As we have seen, the regular publication of *Men and Women of the Time* in its various forms suggests an available market for biographies about women. However, while the number of books that were biographical collections about women had been growing steadily since the mid-century,⁷³ the market for them was complex. Thus Juliette Atkinson, quoting Samuel Smiles to the effect that 'we do not often hear of great women, as we do of great men. It is of good women that we mostly hear', notes that 'female biography generally took the form either of simple, pious sketches or of collective (and often didactic) biography'.⁷⁴ While biographies of women were dominated by the former, there were increasing instances of the latter after mid-century as women biographers in particular attempted to negotiate the tensions between gender assumptions and the relations between private and public spheres. As Alison Booth has argued, 'with

72 Spiers, 'Introduction', p.3.

73 Sybil Oldfield's *Collective Biography of Women in Britain, 1550-1900: A Selected Annotated Bibliography* (London: Mansell, 1999) identifies, for example, three collections in 1850, one in 1851, one in 1852 and two in 1853, whereas by 1875 there were five collections, with two in 1876, four in 1877, four in 1878, three in 1879 and seven in 1880. Cf also Alison Booth, who, concerned with a wider selection that also includes American collective biographies of women, calculates 'from 1845, at least a dozen per year; by 1850, between twenty and thirty annually; in some years (1854, 1900) forty or more'. Alison Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.7.

74 Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.146.

the increasing value placed on Tsecular self-development and individual rights came a broadening range of biographical recognition, which circulated in collections targeted at disenfranchised groups'.⁷⁵ This was the market Bogue and Ingram were looking to attract through the particular approach to woman's biography in the *Eminent Women* series.

There were other antecedents, too, to serial biographies by and about women. The monthly *English Woman's Journal*, noted earlier, deliberately set out to produce 'a series of biographies' in its pages, beginning with the Methodist evangelist Mary Bosanquet in its first issue (March 1858).⁷⁶ With subjects ranging from Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to take a medical degree, through the American writer Margaret Fuller Ossoli to European duchesses, these biographies attempted to 'trace as it were a chain of female talent,—or perhaps to express it more happily, a line of light stretching along the murky sky of ignorance', as the author of the piece on Maria Edgeworth put it.⁷⁷ In 1860 the journal was able to reflect on the importance of its biographical efforts with a reference to Lord Brougham's preface to a recently reviewed book, *Our Exemplars*, a collection of exemplary lives including those of ten women:

Lord Brougham, mentioning two biographical works, 'The Pursuit of Knowledge under difficulties,' by Professor Craik, and 'Self-Help,' by Dr Smiles, observes of the latter—'Notices of self-made women, however, are rare in his book—an omission which is disappointing, and which assuredly does not arise from any scarcity of materials. Professor Craik added a supplementary volume to his work, consisting entirely of female examples. For some reason unknown to me his last edition is deprived of this volume—a void which makes the "Lives of Distinguished Women," appearing from month to month in the ENGLISH WOMAN'S JOURNAL, all the more acceptable'.⁷⁸

Although the commitment to biography waned when the journal was merged with the *Alexandra Magazine* (also started by Parkes) in 1864 and

75 Booth, *How to Make It*, p.14.

76 *English Woman's Journal*, 1 March 1858, p.28.

77 *English Woman's Journal*, 1 September 1858, p.10.

78 *English Woman's Journal*, 1 June 1860, p.269. Brougham's support for the woman's movement was strong (among other activities he introduced reforms to the Married Women's Property Act in 1856, in which the journal's editors Bessie Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith had been key players).

completely disappeared when it was replaced by the *Englishwoman's Review* in 1866, its account of women's lives established parameters for readers to consider them in terms of 'female talent' and 'self-made women', rather than primarily as exemplars of domestic duty. In this, the *English Woman's Journal* picks up on issues raised by Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), now widely regarded as a key text in the development of biography about women writers. In Linda H. Peterson's words:

Gaskell enters into a mid-century debate about the role of the woman writer and the grounds of her authority...Gaskell does not present Brontë's authorship as an extension of a woman's maternal or domestic duties; in her subject's experience, home and work, domestic and professional, are not intertwined but separate: 'two parallel currents'.⁷⁹

Such parameters came increasingly to the fore over the next twenty years as a range of discourses about women's identity and agency, women's rights and suffrage, intersected with multiple social and private forms of consciousness-raising from within the women's movement and with support from a growing number of advanced males. John Ingram, along with others in the Rossetti circle, was one of those males. There was, in short, recognition within segments of both the male and female profession of letters, that women's biographies of the latter kind were not only possible but also needed. Bogue's proposed *Eminent Women* series thus responds to the opportunity provided by these cultural and political shifts as much as it reflects an awareness of the emerging success of biography series represented by Macmillan's *English Men of Letters*. The tone and thrust of the individual volumes, as well as the biographical apparatus underpinning them, reveal quite clearly the 'positioning' of the series in this larger cultural history.

That W. H. Allen took on publication of the series and continued with it for the best part of a decade raises more questions than the available evidence is able to answer. As suggested earlier, it is likely the firm simply took over Bogue's list lock, stock and barrel when he was facing bankruptcy. But given their pre-existing distinctiveness as a publisher of conservative and Imperial materials, there would have been no reason or commitment to maintain the series as long as they did unless it had been profitable. Even so, *Eminent Women* simply does not fit with the tone

⁷⁹ Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2009), p.142.

of the house. John Spiers's argument that 'as markets grew under social pressures for change the series became a major device for feeling a way towards security, step by step. Feedback was crucial. The series (and "branding", or pattern-recognition) thus helped to build the reputation of an imprint',⁸⁰ might well apply to publishers seeking to build a reputation and an ethos, but it does not apply to a firm such as Allen in the case of *Eminent Women*. One can only assume that Ingram was a persuasive salesman or that the early volumes in the series sold sufficiently well (or indeed that both of these conditions applied). In the absence of sales figures or even the number of reprints of any volume, some evidence for the latter comes from the generally positive reviews published in the metropolitan and provincial press, both daily and periodical. Further evidence that the series must have had some success—or at least, must have been thought it would be successful—comes from the existence of the American imprint, *Famous Women*, published by Roberts Brothers. I have not been able to trace all the first edition dates of the Roberts publications, but it does seem that both English and American editions were published simultaneously; that is, in the same year of publication. Whether these were pirated editions or whether there was a contractual relationship between Allen and Roberts is another missing piece in the puzzle; but in either case, the continued publication of the series on both sides of the Atlantic is a strong indicator of commercial success, especially given the hard-nosed approach to its contributors taken by the English firm. While it did not fit particularly well with the Allen name, it would have brought new readers to the firm at a time when it was trying to reach out through publication of the *National Review*, a conservative journal that nevertheless addressed women's issues and had, in its editor Alfred Austin, someone who supported many aspiring women writers. Although the firm would have relished the upsurge in Imperial sentiment in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, in the end, the opportunity to create new niches would have been irresistible. That one such niche was built around women writers and readers would have been especially irresistible.

80 Spiers, 'Introduction', p.19.