The scandal caused by Marian Evans’s elopement with George Henry Lewes, and the couple’s romantic working tour across Germany in 1854, is by now a familiar story. Perhaps less familiar is the extent to which the writing produced by the couple during their time abroad, particularly Lewes’s *The Life and Works of Goethe* (1855), but also Evans’s periodical articles “Three Months in Weimar” (1855) and “Liszt, Wagner and Weimar” (1855), offer insights into the couple’s relationship as partners and writers. I suggest that these texts are significant to understanding the couple’s responses to the controversy about their elopement, and their engagement with contemporary conceptions of literary work according to domestic ideology. I suggest that Lewes and Evans used their time in Germany to consider their positions as unmarried partners and authors through available models of the ideology of respectability, the ideal of the companionate marriage, and concepts of collaborative literary production. Most specifically, I argue that Lewes’s and Evans’s writings from this period articulate and enact a model of collaborative literary work that depends upon and enables emotional contentment, mutually compatible patterns of labour and joint intellectual insights: all which might contribute to domestic respectability.

Keywords: Marian Evans, George Henry Lewes, George Eliot, Goethe, domestic ideology, respectability, literary collaboration, gender, marriage, authorship.

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The scandal caused by Marian Evans’s elopement with George Henry Lewes, and the couple’s romantic working tour across Germany, is by now a familiar story. Perhaps less familiar is the extent to which the writing produced by the couple during their time abroad, particularly Lewes’s *The Life and Works of Goethe* (1855), but also Evans’s anonymously-published periodical articles “Three Months in Weimar”(1855) and “Liszt, Wagner and Weimar” (1855), offer insights into the couple’s relationship as partners and writers. Rosemary Ashton rightly points out that *The Life* was deeply influenced by discussions Lewes had with Evans in the course of their journey (George Eliot 132), and Gerlinde Röder Bolton has elaborated considerably upon the couple’s tour itinerary and the romantic and intellectual fulfilment that Evans experienced with Lewes. This essay builds upon these critics’ observations by suggesting that Lewes’s and Evans’s writing from this period is significant to understanding their responses to the controversy about their elopement, and their engagement with contemporary conceptions of literary work according to domestic ideology.

Lewes’s *The Life* examines whether Goethe’s sexual conduct (his refusal to marry early or commit to domestic life) can be justified because of his status as a Romantic genius and writer, and Lewes uses this opportunity to discuss the relations between male sexual conduct and the ideal of the companionate marriage, which places importance upon mutual contentment and domestic harmony. Lewes stresses that legal marriage does not necessarily result in emotional fulfilment for either spouse but also argues that companionship and domestic life should be valued by all men. This viewpoint can be partly seen as a response to news received by Lewes and Evans that a scandal was emerging back home about their decision to elope. However, the couple’s work as writers also informs the emphasis that *The Life* places upon the importance of domesticity to men. While the social and professional status of the mid-century author was not settled, some contributions to debates about literary work in the periodical press, including Lewes’s own intervention, “The Condition of Authors” (1847), encouraged authors to “publically construct” and “conduct themselves” in ways which emulated middle-class respectability, including making a commitment to familial love and domestic responsibilities (Peterson 40-41). Yet, as Mike Huggins argues, these aspects of respectability were not easy for authors to achieve as their patterns of work (sometimes at home, at other times away from home, irregular hours, and financial instability) were often perceived to be incompatible with respectable domestic life. Male authors were especially likely to be suspected of disrespectful behaviour – if, for example, a married writer made regular research trips away from home then his absence could be seen as an opportunity for sexual misconduct, or as a reason to neglect his domestic duties and the emotional dimension of his marriage (591-2). Nonetheless, travel also enabled Victorian men to reflect upon or contest the ideology of respectability precisely because the experience took them away from domestic routine (591). Huggins’s analysis is useful in understanding the context in which Lewes and Evans wrote, for the act of travelling away from their own routines helped them to consider how to respond to and possibly reconcile the tensions between their positions as unmarried partners and writers in relation to domestic respectability. I argue that Lewes’s *The Life* and Evans’s periodical articles illustrate how the writers engaged with the personal, domestic and authorial aspects of their
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lives. In particular, Lewes and Evans articulate and enact a model of collaborative
literary work that depends upon and enables emotional contentment, mutually
compatible patterns of labour and joint intellectual insights: all which might
contribute to domestic respectability.

In *The Life*, Lewes reflects upon the benefits of travelling, arguing that:

> Foreign travel, even to unintelligent, uninquiring minds, is always of
great influence, not merely by the presentation of new objects, but also
and mainly by severing the mind from all the intricate connections of
habit and familiarity which mask the real relations of life. This
severance is important because it gives us a new standing-point from
which we can judge ourselves and others, and it shows how routinary
is much that we have been wont to regard as essential. (2: 62)

While this passage is an account of Goethe’s tour to Italy, Lewes may well have seen
his own journey as a period in which to find a “new standing point” away from
“habit” and “familiarity,” given the developing scandal about his relationship with
Evans. However unconventional Lewes’s domestic arrangements had been with his
wife, Agnes, his elopement with Marian Evans still caused a fuss among associates
and friends. Within two months of their arrival in Germany, rumours began to surface
back home about Evans and Lewes. Evans had confided in a family friend, Charles
Bray, about her decision to travel with Lewes, and Bray initially suggested to others
that she had accompanied Lewes as his literary assistant. On October 8, he wrote to
George Combe, Edinburgh phrenologist and supporter of the *Westminster Review,*
saying that Lewes had simply “offered to introduce” Evans to “friends of his in
Germany” (Eliot, *Letters* 8: 122). Combe’s wife contacted Bray’s wife, Cara, for
more information and she replied by insisting that Lewes was sick and that Evans was
his “escort” (Eliot, *Letters* 8: 119). Combe would not let the matter rest and, having
finally found out the true nature of their circumstances, he wrote to Charles Bray
claiming that, “We are deeply mortified and distressed; and I should like to know if
there is insanity in Miss Evans’ family; for her conduct, with her brain, seems to me
like mental aberration,” and added the following postscript: “I think that Mr. Lewes
was perfectly justified in leaving his wife, but not in making Miss Evans his mistress”
(Eliot, *Letters* 8: 129). As Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, Combe’s postscript acted as
a further springboard in a controversy “which flourished on the question of whether
the man or the woman was most at fault in the Evans-Lewes matter” (91).

Lewes’s and Evans’s correspondence shows an increasing frustration with the
shape of the scandal. Lewes told Thomas Carlyle that his decision to leave Agnes was
not Evans’s responsibility. “On my word of honour,” he wrote, “there is no
foundation in the scandal as it runs. My separation was in no wise caused by the lady.
It has always been imminent, always threatened” (Eliot, *Letters*, 2: 177). Evans,
meanwhile, wrote to Charles Bray saying that “circumstances” which arose after
Lewes had left England led him to “determine a separation from Mrs Lewes” (Eliot,
*Letters* 2: 179). Nevertheless, Lewes and Evans’s tour gave them enough emotional
and physical space to gain some distance from the controversy. In turn, this distance
enabled Lewes to use *The Life* to discuss Goethe’s sexual conduct in relation to the
The poet’s status as Romantic genius, and, further, according to Victorian concepts of respectable masculine behaviour; the latter that had implications, of course, for Lewes’s own conduct.

*The Life* shares some similarities with other contemporary constructions of the Romantic “genius and hero” whose creative powers appeared to be dependent upon sexual freedom and opportunities to travel away from domestic routine (Sandy and Radcliffe 2). Lewes argues that Goethe had a choice “between a quiet domestic life, and the career which ambition opened,” and marriage was a “phantom from which” the poet “shrunk” because “domestic duties seldom have the power to shape the career of genius” (1: 145). Goethe’s rejection of one of his early lovers, Frederika, is considered in similar terms. Lewes explains that Goethe’s contemporaries were possibly instrumental in persuading the poet to break off relations with Frederika:

> Pfeiffer believes Merck played the part assigned to Carlos in Clavigo, who exclaims: - ‘Marry! What marry just at the time when life opens up to you! To coop yourself at home before you have gone over half your wanderings or accomplished half your conquests! That you love the girl is natural; that you promised her marriage was the act of a fool; but to keep your promise would be the act of a madman.’ (1: 144)

Goethe was unable to adapt to domestic life in any one place where, as the poet’s friend, Karl August, put it, “all the men have lived through their youth and all the women are married” (2: 47). Goethe took care of Fritz von Stein, the son of his lover, Frau Von Stein, due to his “instinctive delight in children” (2: 43). However, giving the ten year old boy a home added to Goethe’s burden of trying to balance domestic duties with literary work, so he left for Italy for it seemed that only the leisure-time of touring would relieve him of those tasks (2: 49-51). Lewes describes how Goethe, once away from the pressures of German society, enjoyed numerous sexual liaisons, and while “never free from the fascinations of women” he did not “lose himself entirely to a woman” (2: 31). Furthermore, Lewes argues that Goethe’s cultural and sexual experiences abroad helped to produce “thoroughly original” poetry, his *Roman Elegies*, which are “typical of the whole story of Goethe’s love: Passion fed, it never stifled the flame of his genius. He enjoyed; but in the brief pauses of enjoyment the presence of high aims was felt.” (2: 90). In some respects, the biography reproduces early nineteenth-century ideas that the development of male genius relies upon a variety of sexual encounters, in which women are muses and lovers, but not intellectual partners (Wurst). Unsurprisingly, though, given changing conceptions of the male genius during the early to mid-Victorian period, Lewes is inconsistent in his construction of Goethe.

From the 1830s onwards, commentators and critics argued that the idea of genius might be used to excuse men’s misconduct – particularly if it enabled men to eschew a commitment to domestic harmony (Higgins). Furthermore, the suspicions some Victorian observers had about the constitution of genius were connected to social and cultural expectations placed upon husbands. The role of the mid-Victorian husband had competing imperatives: he was expected to manage the affairs of the household, be affectionate within the terms of companionate marriage, and yet be a
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worker and independent participant in the public sphere (Tosh). The neglect of domestic responsibilities, such as absence from the home or the inability to rule the household with wisdom and care, threatened to undermine culturally valued notions of mutuality and conjugal love. Emotional cruelty (which might include neglect of domestic duties), while not specified in law, was deliberated as a potential element of husbandly misconduct in debates leading up to the 1857 Divorce Act (Foyster 234-50). A. James Hammerton notes that such considerations led to increasing criticism of husbands who “exercised a harsh tyranny” over the wives and children that they should cherish (153). As such, respectable husbands needed to fulfil their family’s material needs and contribute to the emotional side of marriage.

The idea of male genius, then, was shaped and reshaped by these wider contexts. In turn, this enabled some early-Victorian women writers an opportunity to enter and influence these debates. In her biographical parable about the sixteenth-century artist Albert Dürer (a translation of Leopold Schefer’s original text), Mrs J. R. Stodart constructs a version of marriage that depicts this male genius as neglectful of his wife’s intellectual needs. Stodart comments that there was “scarcely anything she [his wife] understood, or to which she could take an interest in her husband, otherwise than as a gentle, caring wife. Yet she wished to do so; for in her concealed Love for her husband, nothing was indifferent to her which moved his soul or filled his heart” (45). Albert Dürer fails to recognise how his absences from home and the pursuit of his artistic ambitions increase his wife’s suffering. After his wife’s death, Dürer’s artistic powers diminish and he is unable to finish his intended masterpiece. “To know how to live,” declares Stodart, “requires perpetual genius - for life is the highest of all Arts” (173). If Stodart emphasises the importance of domestic companionship for the male genius, then another writer, Mary Ann Stodart, argues that while female writers should not forget that “home is the true sphere for women” (9) unmarried men of letters may not be capable of forming trustworthy opinions about female authors:

Boileau was an unmarried man; how could he for one moment be imagined to comprehend the mind of women, who from his very situation, was debarred from their friendship? We refer not merely to conjugal friendship, but to the obvious fact that a married man has far superior opportunities of forming friendships with the high-minded of the opposite sex. (2-3)

Such writers sought to debunk the myth that women hindered the development of male genius, or they emphasised the importance of respectable married life for male writers. Victorian critical discussions about Romantic male artists and authors could not, then, easily justify sexual or domestic misconduct, whether these men were regarded as geniuses or not.

At times, Lewes considers the relations between genius and respectability with care. He writes, “one only needs to read the biographies of great men to perceive that domestic duties seldom have power to shape the career of genius,” adding that “Shakespeare, Milton, Dante [and] Byron are not easily to be surpassed as poets, but as husbands it would require a race of Griseldas to accept them with any favour” (1: 147). But while Lewes suggests that these writers were likely intolerable husbands,
when he discusses the possible influence that early marriage might have had upon the development of Goethe’s genius, he wonders if it is a “mere assumption to say ‘marriage would have crippled his genius.’” It is perhaps that the problem is the “egoism of genius” which believes an “infidelity” to it is a “greater crime” than “infidelity” to conjugal harmony (1: 146-7). Indeed, Lewes suggests that the “egoism of genius” causes husbands to conduct themselves in ways which disrupt or damage domestic life:

What is called the egoism of genius is but another name for the tyranny of Ideas. It is this tyranny which lights the stake, which towers into inquisitions, decimates families, embitters nations, makes the kindest natures cruel, the softest pitiless. Thus, Howard could neglect his only child, leaving him in a mad-house, while his ‘mission’ carried thoughtful benevolence into the prisons of distant lands. Bernard Palissy could see his wife and children perishing, while, with the obstinacy of genius, he pursued his passionate efforts, tearing up the very boards of his cottage to feed the furnace for his experiments. (1: 146)

This passage not only responds to changing conceptions of male genius, but also accommodates the importance of husbands’ domestic roles that were becoming subject to greater public and legal enquiry. Lewes’s account of what potentially amounts to cruel behaviour by a prison reformer (Howard) and a potter (Palissy) acknowledges the influence that conventions of domestic respectability had upon middle-class men.

Furthermore, The Life stresses that romantic and intellectual companionship, along with a commitment to domestic responsibilities, ensures long-lasting partnerships. Lewes argues that Goethe did not experience bonds of deep affection with any of his lovers until he met his future wife, Christiane Vulpius:

He knew little and that not until late in life, of the subtle interweaving of habits with affection, which makes life saturated with love, and love itself become more dignified through the serious aims of life. He knew little of the exquisite companionship of two souls striving in emulous spirit of loving rivalry to become better, to become wiser, teaching each other to soar. (1: 147)

Goethe’s relationship with Christiane exemplified exactly this kind of companionate love – both outside and inside of the marriage contract. Lewes notes the scandal caused by the birth of Goethe and Christiane’s child outside of marriage, but insists that this gave Goethe the “joys of paternity, devoted affection” and a “domestic existence” that were more important than his contemporaries’ attitudes towards his circumstances (2: 88). Although Lewes does not depict Christiane as a full intellectual partner in Goethe’s work, and while she partly figures as a muse, The Life articulates the importance of mutual interests and shared pursuits in the poet’s relationship with her. Lewes writes:
It is usually said that Christiane was utterly uneducated, and the epigrammatic pen glibly records that “Goethe married his servant.” She was never his servant. Nor was she uneducated [... for her were written the *Roman Elegies* and the *Metamorphoses of Plants*; and [...] in her company Goethe pursued his optical and botanical research. (2: 86)

Goethe’s eventual marriage to Christiane is celebrated as a legal seal upon his long relationship with the “companion of his life,” and her death some years later is a “heavy blow” for Goethe to bear, for she “had been to him what no other woman was” (2:88, 403). Goethe’s final years are dramatised as a period of hard work, yet a time when his familial duties were “punctiliously performed” until his death when he peacefully “glided from the world” (2: 404; 450). In short, according to Lewes, Goethe died both as a great poet and respectable family man.

In constructing Goethe’s relationship with Christiane as one resting upon mutual personal fulfilment, Lewes is also able to suggest that marital bonds alone do not necessarily result in companionate love. Of Goethe’s rejection of Fredricka, Lewes claims:

> It seems to me that he acted a more moral part in relinquishing her, than if he had swamped this lesser in a greater wrong, and escaped the wrong breach of faith by that still greater breach of faith—a reluctant, because unloving, marriage. The thoughtlessness of youth, and the headlong impetus of passion, frequently throw people into rash engagements; and in these cases the formal morality of the world, more careful of externals than of truth, declares it to be nobler for such rash engagements to be kept, even when the rashness is felt by the engaged, than that a man’s honour should be stained by a withdrawal. (1: 144)

To an extent, Lewes’s defence of Goethe perhaps helps to illuminate his own feelings about the charges against him for eloping with Evans. Lewes’s separation from Agnes ended a relationship which offered neither husband nor wife a fulfilled marriage, and certainly some reviewers of *The Life* were quick to hint that Lewes’s discussion of Goethe’s sexual conduct might be due to the biographer’s own life history and moral outlook. An anonymous critic for the *Christian Review* noted that Lewes’s “ethics are like those of his hero” (413), while Robert Vaughn commented that *The Life* showed there was a shared “direction” between the “hero” and his biographer (469). Further, Lewes’s assessment of the difference between “externals” and the “truth” might be read in relation to his new partner’s own developing views on marriage. As Phyllis Rose argues, Marian Evans’s decision to commit herself to Lewes rested upon a moral judgment that their relationship should be “validated by personal commitment” regardless of the lack of formal, martial vows (213).
If this episode in *The Life* can be read as a response to Lewes’s and Evan’s personal circumstances, then travel is central to how the importance of their love and commitment is expressed. Lewes writes:

To love we must render up body and soul, heart and mind, all interests and desires, all prudences and all ambitions, identifying our being with that of another, in union to become elevated. To love is for the Soul to choose a companion, and travel with it along the perilous defiles and winding ways of life; mutually sustaining, when the path is terrible with abysses, mutually exhorting, when it is rugged with obstacles and mutually rejoicing, when rich broad plains and sunny slopes make journeying delight, showing in the quiet distance the resting-place we all seek in the world. (1: 296)

Thus, Lewes adduces travel motifs to describe conjugality, using the freedom of leisurely spaces to accommodate the expectations of marital ideals. The experience of travelling for both pleasure and work particularly enabled Lewes and Evans, then, to explore their partnership as lovers, companions and writers.

Rosemary Ashton notes that once in Germany the couple “settled into a domestic pattern which would vary little for the rest of their lives” (*Life of George Eliot* 131). Evans’s diary entries and sketches record the various walks, visits and ideas that the couple shared, and the articles that Evans worked up out of these writings show the published exchanges between her and Lewes. In “Liszt, Wagner and Weimer,” Evans describes Belvedere as a “glorious avenue of chestnut trees” that “leads all the way from town to the entrance of the grounds” where “a sort of pavilion stands on a spot commanding a lovely view of Weimar” to which the “Weimarians constantly come on summer and autumn evenings to smoke a cigar, or drink a cup of coffee” (60). In *The Life*, Lewes writes that Belvedere is “a magnificent avenue of chestnut trees, two miles long [that] terminates in the gardens of Belvedere” and here “the Weimarians resort, to enjoy the air after their fashion, namely with the accompaniments of bad beer, questionable coffee, and detestable tobacco” (1: 93). The almost humorous differences here between what Lewes and Evans found agreeable and disagreeable about the resort - the attractiveness of the chestnut trees, yet Lewes’s dislike of available refreshments – show how shared, private experiences found public expression.

These narrative conversations also illuminate the developing mutuality that emerged during a journey that was, as Joanne Shattock notes, “part honeymoon, part working holiday” (<17>). Helena Michie has persuasively argued that the Victorian honeymoon was a time of “conjugal identification,” where the move from a past life towards a new one involved a “reorientation.” That is, it saw a developing identification between partners, not always without difficulties, and one in which geographical landmarks informed personal responses to the beginnings of married life. Lewes and Evans’s “re-orientation,” to adopt Michie’s term, is evident in *The Life* and Evans's articles. Landscape informs the representation of emotional intimacy, for example, in Lewes’s recollections of a moonlit outing in Belvedere: “Southwards from the palace it begins, with no obstacle or iron gate, servant or sentinel, to seem to
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shut us out. In the dew of the morning, and in the silence of moonlight, we may wander undisturbed as if in our own grounds” (The Life 1: 315). The couple's responses to Weimar also seem to be negotiations of their identification with each other. In “Three Months in Weimer,” Evans writes:

It was between three and four o'clock on a fine morning in August that, after a ten hours' journey from Frankfort, I awoke at the Weimar station [...]. The ride to the town thoroughly roused me, all the more because the glimpses I caught from the carriage window were in startling contrast with my preconceptions. [...] A walk in the morning in search of lodgings confirmed the impression that Weimar was more like a market town than the precinct of a court. ‘And this is the Athens of the North!’ we said. Materially speaking, it is more like Sparta. (699)

Lewes avoids the more blunter appraisals of the city made by his partner, simply noting that while Weimar is “small” like “Athens, which it is the pride of Weimar to claim as its patronymic, and we in England have proud reason to know how great a place in the world can be filled by a nation whose place is trivial on the map” (1: 310).

Differences of opinion are matched, however, by like-minded responses to Weimar. Evans notes that “we found our way to the Belvedere chaussee, a splendid avenue of chesnut trees, two miles in length [...] and discovered the labyrinthine beauties of the park; indeed, every day opened to us fresh” (“Three Months” 700). Likewise, Lewes describes how Belvedere Park opens up “walks” which are so “numerous” as to be “perplexing,” yet all lead through “noble trees” to “picturesque” scenes (1: 315-6). The experience of seeing the landscape is depicted as one which provides romantic pleasure and quietude. Evans writes that her walk with Lewes along the Ilm, a river “overarched by tall trees with patches of dark moss on their trunks,” brought the couple “every now and then” to “openings” that broke the “shade” and at “every such opening a seat is placed under the rock, where you may sit and chat away the sunny hours” (“Three Months” 701). In The Life, Lewes observes that this walk’s pathway leads to Goethe’s Garden House (1: 316), whose “solitude is absolute, broken only by the occasional sound of the church clock” or the “screaming of the peacock spreading their superb beauty in the park” (1: 364). For Lewes, the house is testimony to the “happy hours of love” Goethe spent with lover, Frau von Stein (1: 364), while Evans recalls that the house’s outside “aspect became to us like that of a dear friend whose irregular features and rusty clothes have a peculiar charm” (“Three Months” 702). Scenes of landscapes in Evans’s and Lewes’s writings accentuate both the unfamiliar (the first sights of Weimar) and the familiar (the house became their “dear friend” once they had made regular visits), reflecting the couple’s newly established relationship and their growing commitment to each other. Such episodes show too, perhaps, the “quiet domestic happiness” Lewes experienced in Germany (Lewes, letter to William Parker, Letters 1: 157), and reflect Evans’s remarks to John Chapman: “I am happier every day and find my domesticity more
and more delightful to me. Affection, respect and intellectual sympathy deepen.”


These narrative conversations see Evans and Lewes as intellectual as well as romantic partners. The couple remind each other what they have seen and experienced, while articulating how companionate relations are at the heart of their work as writers. And such responses make cultural sense in the context of familial and collaborative types of literary production preceding or prominent by the time of Evans and Lewes’s elopement. Collaborative writing and editorial practices between spouses such as Anna and Samuel Carter Hall, or within families such as the Chorleys of Liverpool, who published “Winter Wreath,” or the Strickland sisters and historians, Agnes and Elizabeth, drew on an early nineteenth-century model of authorship, in which literary work was a shared, communal endeavour (Peterson 97-8). For example, husband and wife, Mary and William Howitt, began writing together in 1823 with The Forest Minstrel, and Other Poems. From mid century, Mary Howitt began to transform this collaborative practice into an even wider, family affair. Her own model of authorship was one that constructed literary work as an extension of women’s domestic labour, and thus her collaboration with her husband reinforced this ideological position. Yet by expanding this model and practice to include her children, training them to consider and create their own work in view of the expanding and changing literary marketplace – emphasising, for example, the importance of paid labour - Mary was able to respond to emergent conceptions of authorial labour as a professional work while sustaining the role of the family as an economic and communal site of production. (Peterson 114-5). That such forms and practices existed meant that Evans and Lewes had available contexts through which to explore the relations between domestic companionship and intellectual collaboration. More precisely, they were able to consider how their work as writers might help nurture and sustain a companionate relationship, even without a legal marriage contract. As respectability was difficult for married authors to establish, then Lewes’s and Evan’s writings also respond to that very problem by reflecting upon the possible advantages of a romantic partnership between authors.

While Lewes and Evans’s return to London did not, of course, result in a social acceptance of their living arrangements, both partners continued to support and encourage each other to pursue their literary ambitions. The couple shared intellectual interests throughout their time together, and if their personal relationship was troubled by the unconventional nature of their situation, their commitment to each other nevertheless continued to grow. In the 1864 edition of Lewes's biography of Goethe, The Life of Goethe, it is telling that he moves his discussion of Christiane Vulpius into a new chapter entitled “Goethe’s Wife.” And Lewes now comments that even before Goethe’s legal marriage to Christiane it was right that the poet lived with her: “I must emphatically declare my belief that the redeeming point in it is precisely that which has created the scandal. [...] The nearer it approached a real marriage, and the farther it was removed from a fugitive indulgence, the more moral and healthy it become” (460). By 1864 George Eliot was established as an author and by then she insisted on signing her private correspondence Mrs. Lewes. The Life of Goethe’s re-emphasis upon the difference between conventional understandings of the relations between marriage, gender and respectable codes of conduct illuminates a continued
commitment Lewes had to his partner and to a model of literary work that, in unsettling contemporary ideas about the relations between legal marriage and domestic respectability, perhaps also strengthened the couple’s relationship as lovers and authors.

Endnotes

i Lewes was already estranged from his wife, Agnes, yet had adopted her son whom she had born to Thornton Hunt. Lewes and Evans met through their mutual acquaintances in London literary circles and began to live together when they travelled to Germany. Lewes was unable to divorce his wife due to his adoption of her son. For a detailed account see Rosemary Ashton, G.H. Lewes, especially chapters seven and eight.

ii Apart from Lawrence Stone’s seminal work on companionate relations and the companionate marriage see also Helena Michie’s more recent appraisal of this latter term’s usefulness and its limitations in Victorian Honeymoons (19-22).

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