“My name is the right one”

LADY ELIZABETH (RIGBY) EASTLAKE AND THE STORY OF PROFESSIONAL ART CRITICISM

Writing in her 1876 essay “The Letters and Works of Michael Angelo,” Elizabeth (Rigby) Eastlake (1809–93) argues that Michelangelo’s letters help us to see the artist and the Renaissance without the “highly coloured glasses” used by prior art historians, who superficially “obscure the faults of the period” (124). Eastlake aims to see beyond the legends promulgated by Giorgio Vasari and his Victorian followers, considering the actual challenges faced by famous Renaissance artists. Michelangelo’s preoccupation with money—his constant struggles to be paid by Italy’s rulers—is in Eastlake’s analysis indicative of a culture that failed to provide financial independence to even its best artists. As we will see, Eastlake’s criticisms of the Italian Renaissance betray an anti-Catholic bias. However, she was primarily motivated by a desire to establish herself as an art historian focused on expertise and carefully researched facts about artists and artworks.

Eastlake’s emphasis on the art historical fact was central to her strategy of establishing herself as a professional essayist. Eastlake began her career in the 1830s and early 1840s as a travel writer and translator, two common ways in which women entered the publishing world. Women, with their supposedly more keen observational skills, were thought to be especially
suitable for travel writing, a genre that often referenced local artworks and that was important to the later development of art criticism. But as art writing became increasingly masculinized, beginning with the emergence of John Ruskin in 1843, women critics sought to differentiate themselves. As she began to focus on art writing in the 1840s, Eastlake claimed to be more committed to the art historical fact than such canonical male critics as Ruskin and Vasari. This factualism included the precise attribution of artworks as well as the analysis of the material conditions under which artworks were produced. This art historical expertise, pioneered by Anna Jameson and significantly formulated by Eastlake and Emilia Dilke, threatened male art critics (Ruskin belittled the contributions of all three) and exacerbated at least one Victorian fear about professionalization: that women would lose their feminine qualities by catering to the culture’s growing need for scholarly expertise. As a result, women critics were often both sexualized by their male counterparts and criticized for their factual approaches.

While distinguishing herself from Vasari and Ruskin, Eastlake helped shape two developments in professional Victorian art criticism: the analysis of artistic form and an art critical writing style that could rival even the most famous artworks for the attention of readers and viewers. Eastlake argued that she was both a more precise writer and more concerned with formal analysis than Ruskin, the figure often considered the first professional art critic in Britain. Beginning her career as an essayist on a variety of subjects, Eastlake gradually gained expertise in specific art historical fields, especially German culture. In doing so, Eastlake marks a key change in the nineteenth-century essay: from a focus on the reporting of observations to the conveyance of specialized knowledge in prose accessible to a broad audience. Despite her status as one of the earliest professional art critics in Britain, Eastlake has rarely been studied in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. My aim in this chapter, however, is not simply to recover Eastlake as a neglected woman writer but to show her larger importance to Victorian art commentary. While we usually imagine professional Victorian art criticism as dominated by Ruskin, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and their male followers, Eastlake demonstrates both the early influence of women critics and an alternative aesthetic approach centered on the history of art.

Elizabeth Eastlake (fig. 2) was born in 1809 to Dr. Edward Rigby, an obstetrician, and his second wife, Anne (Palgrave) Rigby. Beginning in 1827, Elizabeth spent two years in Heidelberg, learning the German language and culture. She traveled to Reval, Russia, in 1841 to visit her sister, a journey that formed the basis of her well-received first book, *A Residence on the Shores of the Baltic Told in Letters* (1841). The book gained the attention
of John Lockhart, who convinced her to begin writing for the *Quarterly* ("Eastlake, Elizabeth," *DNB* 598). Eastlake published twenty-one articles, reviews, and books on a variety of topics, including art, prior to marrying in 1849 the painter and first director of the National Gallery, Sir Charles Eastlake (Sheldon, *Letters* 643). Eastlake’s partnership with Sir Charles furthered some of her already established interests in the arts. Roughly one-third of the approximately seventy-five books and articles that she produced during her career addressed art, and many of these were written during her marriage. This focus on art is striking given the variety of subjects—including literary criticism, children’s literature, biography, and general cultural topics—that Eastlake addressed. Eastlake was in fact one of only a handful of Victorian women writers who were both highly published and specialists in something other than novel writing. Writing in her essay "The Hero as Man of Letters,” Carol T. Christ notes that many of the some fifteen hundred women included in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* wrote just a single entry: “Only eleven women in the entire index have more than fifty entries to their name, and four of them are novelists” (Christ 21). Of the seven remaining prolific women writers who were not novelists, Christ lists Elizabeth Eastlake as the only specialist in art history.1

As was common for women growing up in early nineteenth-century Britain, Eastlake did not attend any kind of formal school, art or otherwise. Because of growing national interest in improving the arts and design, the situation soon changed for women. To take the most prominent midcentury example, Emilia Dilke (who became the foremost French art historian in Britain) graduated from the South Kensington Art School in 1861, where she received an education in the arts almost on par with that enjoyed by male students. Eastlake, by contrast, was educated by a governess, though “largely self-taught” (Lochhead 2). On her own, Eastlake began drawing at the age of eight (Lochhead 3). Like her predecessor Anna Jameson, Eastlake gained her knowledge about the arts through wide travels that were unusual for a middle-class family at that time. During these travels, she developed her “habit of sketching and painting which she retained throughout her adult life” (Nunn 112). Indeed, though Eastlake had no formal training in the arts, her sketches attest to her skill.

Despite her lack of formal schooling, Eastlake quickly established herself as a respected specialist on the arts. John Steegman remarks that in the 1840s and 1850s, “[John] Ruskin had by no means reached the position of revered authority that he attained later, while the position of Lady Eastlake, though of quite a different kind, was a remarkably strong one” (7). Steegman’s *Victorian Taste*, a reissue of his 1950 *Consort of Taste*, was
Figure 2
published in 1970. There has since been no sustained consideration of Eastlake’s influence on British taste. The only book entirely devoted to Eastlake is Marion Lochhead’s 1961 biography. Studies of Eastlake for the past thirty years or so have either considered only her literary criticism (and that usually excerpted and out of context) or have briefly listed her among other art historians.\(^2\) Neither approach accounts for her full cultural influence. Despite this particular neglect of Eastlake, recent scholarship in art history and literary studies demonstrates a growing interest in Victorian women’s art criticism.\(^3\) Meaghan Clarke’s *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880–1905* studies the late-Victorian critics Alice Meynell, Florence Fenwick-Miller, and Elizabeth Robins Pennell. Judith Johnston and Kali Israel have written book-length studies of the earlier critics Anna Jameson and Emilia Dilke, respectively. Recently, there has been renewed interest in Eastlake as well.\(^4\) However, a more comprehensive account of the contributions of early-Victorian women art critics remains to be written.

Although Eastlake remained influential up until her death in 1893, she failed to achieve the notoriety enjoyed by well-known male critics in the late-Victorian period, and she was rarely studied during the first half of the twentieth century. This oversight is in part due to the self-promotional strategies of some male critics, including Ruskin himself. Most Victorian art critics were, by the 1870s, celebrating Ruskin and other male critics at the expense of women’s contributions. Sidney Colvin, Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge, representatively wrote in 1879, “It has come to pass from a variety of causes, and not least from the stimulating power exercised by a master of letters, Mr. Ruskin, that a greater amount of intelligent interest is now directed to the works of art in England than was ever directed before; and this interest naturally reflects itself in current criticism” (211). It was certainly in Colvin’s interests to claim that Ruskin, a man who held a corresponding institutional role (the first Slade Professorship at Oxford) and whose art critical style he consciously followed, was primarily responsible for the improvement in Victorian art criticism.

For the most part, we continue to think of professional Victorian art criticism as begun by Ruskin and then consolidated by male writers in the 1870s. In *Professions of Taste*, for example, Jonathan Freedman charts a masculine trajectory that begins with Ruskinian moralism, proceeds to a Paterian “aesthetic consciousness,” and ends with “Oscar Wilde’s mastery of the mass market” (202). Writing in his 1985 *Paintings from Books*, Richard Altick states (in words that closely echo Colvin’s previously cited quotation) what remains the standard gloss: “By the 1870s . . . the quality of English art criticism was beginning to improve. . . . The *new men* were better equipped
for their job and so were more effective in cultivating intelligent public interest in art” (237, emphasis mine). Altick attributes the rise of art criticism to William Thackeray, F. G. Stephens, Colvin, and that figure whom Altick calls the “magisterial Ruskin” (237). In other studies, when women are mentioned as professionals, they are discussed only briefly. Elizabeth Prettejohn’s 1997 “Aesthetic Value and the Professionalization of Victorian Art Criticism 1837–78” cogently delineates different modes of criticism, but says little about women critics, except for half a sentence devoted to Emilia Dilke, whom Prettejohn calls “the leading expert on French eighteenth-century art” (79). Likewise, Kate Flint reserves only a paragraph for women writers in her two chapters on art criticism in The Victorians and The Visual Imagination (2000), though she usefully notes “the depth and extent of their knowledge, despite the fact that they lacked the formal educational background which was assumed to underpin the authority of their male counterparts” (194). Most early women writers, including Eastlake, gained their expertise from private study and firsthand experience—not from the kind of university education enjoyed by Ruskin and others. A few scholars have nevertheless recognized the early professionalization of women critics. In particular, Katharine Walke Gillespie asserts that “Eastlake’s writings are first-rate examples of modern art criticism—a discipline that was then [in the 1850s] being codified” (79). However, Gillespie is still in the minority in dating professional Victorian art criticism as early as the 1840s and 1850s.5

The tendency to define women writers as amateurs or to leave them almost wholly out of narratives about the specialization of art criticism exposes a central problem in our understanding of Victorian professionalization. While the Victorians used the term professionalization “loosely and with changing emphasis” (Gourvish 18), we more narrowly define the movement as one marked by increasingly systematic education, specific credentials, and professional associations. These criteria are suitable for those professionals usually studied: lawyers, doctors, and clergymen. But, as women writers illustrate, the professional practices of Victorian art critics varied widely. In addition to their diverse educations and claims for expertise, art critics did not—unlike professionals in the more well-known fields—form associations until late in the nineteenth century.6 More useful than specific criteria is the kind of sociological definition advanced by Magali Sarfatti Larson, for whom professionalism is “an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources—special knowledge and skills—into another—social and economic rewards” (xvii). Though some women critics such as Jameson relied on art criticism to provide her with an income,
my name is the right one

As Harold Perkin has demonstrated, social acceptance of the professions was by no means “natural” or uncontested despite the conditions that favored their development—increases in wealth, urbanization, population, and industrialization. Professionals had to persuade the public that they were providing expert and useful advice, not merely catering to their own needs (Perkin 260). Perkin has famously termed professionals the “forgotten middle class” because of their supposed focus on public welfare over financial rewards. Making their services seem necessary was perhaps more difficult for Victorian art critics than for professionals in other fields because they had enjoyed little respect in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and because they purported to teach something that people fancied they already knew. However, as specialized art knowledge became a necessity for both a broader public and for gallery directors, art critics were viewed as fulfilling a vital social role. Directors of emergent art institutions such as the National Gallery were increasingly expected to determine the correct attributions of their holdings, not only to be sure that they were labeled appropriately, but also to rule out copies or forgeries. While these directors were often experts in their own fields, they also relied on art critics for information. As an accomplished painter, president of the Royal Academy, and keeper of the National Gallery, Sir Charles Eastlake was already highly knowledgeable when he took over the first directorship of the National Gallery. Yet, as he sought to expand the gallery’s then-meager collection, Charles surely relied on his wife’s expertise in art history. John Steegman, Adele (Holcomb) Ernstrom, and early historians of the National Gallery portray Elizabeth Eastlake as an equal partner with her husband in the purchase of art. By contrast, in her recent introduction to Elizabeth Eastlake’s letters, Julie Sheldon argues that this “partnership” model may be “overstated” (11). However, Elizabeth’s art historical expertise in German and early-Italian painting was no doubt useful to Sir Charles as he acquired some 164 paintings for the gallery during his tenure. To be sure, Charles rarely mentions his wife’s role in his letters and travel diaries. But this omission seems more a function of Victorian gender codes that discouraged men in such high positions of authority from admitting that they were indebted to a woman’s judgment than evidence that Elizabeth played a smaller role than scholars have previously imagined.

In fact, Elizabeth could be quite direct in asserting her particular contributions to her collaborations with Sir Charles. In 1874, almost a decade
after the death of her husband in 1865, an increasingly annoyed Elizabeth Eastlake wrote to her publisher John Murray about the revised version of Franz Kugler’s *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*. This was a book that Elizabeth and her husband translated together in 1850, but which she now claimed was almost solely her own work because “not a tenth part remains as in his edition” (*Letters* 396). Elizabeth was not unwilling to acknowledge that her husband had played a role in an earlier version of the book; she remarks that readers will find such a notice in her preface. However, she believed that naming her husband in the preface precluded the necessity of identifying him as the current editor: “The desire, therefore, to insert Sir Chas’ name on the title page or advertisement of the work can be of no further tribute to him” (*Letters* 396). Eastlake’s letters consistently demonstrate a desire for recognition of her scholarly achievements. In a savvy move that suggests that she was also attentive to market realities, Eastlake writes Murray, “There can be no doubt that my name is, in every sense, the right one for this work [Kugler’s *Handbook*], and that it also would increase its mercantile value” (*Letters* 396). Though Sir Charles was famous as a painter and the first director of the National Gallery, he was not, as Elizabeth realized, the most well-known writer in the family. Murray compromised by maintaining Charles Eastlake as primary editor, but adding “revised and remodeled from the latest researches, by Lady Eastlake,” a solution that did not satisfy Elizabeth (Ernstrom 471). Elizabeth makes a further argument for primary editorial credit by emphasizing her hard work in revising the *Handbook*: “The labour I have bestowed on it... has been very arduous” (*Letters* 396). Eastlake here and elsewhere challenges the stereotype of intellectual work as somehow different from physical labor. Again, Murray attempted to placate Eastlake, offering an additional £50 (*Letters* 396). Although Elizabeth accepted the money, she was surely disappointed to gain a rather small monetary reward instead of her name alone on the title page.

Further underscoring her commitment to intellectual labor, Eastlake viewed careful, firsthand study of artworks as important to the success of her writing. Due to her own stature as a critic and because of her friendship with Jameson, Eastlake was asked to complete *The History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art* (1864), which was left unfinished at the time of Jameson’s death in 1860. Eastlake seems to have been motivated to complete the work both by a genuine regard for Jameson and by a desire to further her own take on the subject. In researching the book, Eastlake wrote, “I have been working very hard in the Gallery here (Munich): I am so constantly taking notes now for my particular object that I see no chance
of getting any sketches, unless I could have time to draw for my own purposes” (Journals and Correspondence 2:141, emphasis mine). Eastlake’s drawing “for my own purposes” suggests that she views the project in large part as her own, even though it was begun by Jameson. The time pressures that Eastlake mentions were a result of her ambitious research agenda coupled with her social position as the wife of the then—most prominent arts administrator in Britain. While her marriage to Sir Charles provided her with an insider’s access to art, Elizabeth found that being his social companion took “far too much time” away from her laborious research (Journals and Correspondence 2:111). The Eastlakes knew many of the most prominent artists and art critics in Britain and abroad, a fact that certainly furthered Elizabeth’s career but that also required her to correspond frequently and to attend numerous social functions. Further, Elizabeth traveled abroad to assist her husband in acquiring art for the National Gallery. While these trips surely added to Elizabeth’s knowledge, they must also have made difficult her ability to focus on particular research projects.

In addition to interfering with her work schedule, Elizabeth’s marriage impeded her career by sometimes convincing others that her essays were wholly indebted to her husband. The London Quarterly Review representatively claimed in 1864 that “Sir Charles is not only a distinguished artist, but . . . a distinguished writer on art . . . To this knowledge Lady Eastlake has of course had access” (“The History of Our Lord” 417).8 Some recent commentators have repeated this derivative view of her art criticism. For Pamela Gerrish Nunn, “It was only with her marriage in 1849 . . . that art took on a certain prominence in her writings” (112). However, it is important to note Elizabeth’s earlier interest in art, as evidenced by her 1846 article on “Modern German Painting” and her 1836 translation of J. D. Passavant’s Tour of a German Artist in England with Notices of Private Galleries, and Remarks upon the State of Art. At times, Eastlake seems to confirm her dependence on Sir Charles. In her preface to Five Great Painters, a collection of her earlier essays on Renaissance artists, she “founds her claims to the indulgence of the reader on no study or thought of her own, but solely on the advantages enjoyed by her for long years at the side of the late Sir Charles L. Eastlake” (n.p.). However, despite her frequent citation and critical use of source materials in these essays, she rarely refers to her husband’s writings. Nor does she apologize for any lack of knowledge in the actual essays that make up Five Great Painters. Eastlake’s prefatory apologies for her supposed lack of knowledge thus seem less factual than strategic, allowing her early on to mollify readers who might fear an independent and overtly scholarly woman but then to demonstrate her expertise in the
body of her works. To take an important example of another woman critic employing a similar strategy, Jameson apologizes in her preface to *Sacred and Legendary Art* that she needed six years to write the book. However, her admission turns out to highlight her scholarly diligence and the resulting specialization of the book, as no other critic had managed to cover “the particular ground that I had chosen” (viii). Both Jameson and Eastlake in fact viewed themselves as producing original scholarship in the field of art history.

Eastlake’s success as a professional writer was in part due to the advice of male editors, publishers, and collaborators. But there is also in these exchanges an apparent power imbalance due to Elizabeth’s gender, and Elizabeth sometimes belittles herself when writing to these figures. Upon publication of her first travel book, *A Residence on the Shores of the Baltic* (1841), Eastlake valued the comments provided by her publisher John Murray, admitting that she was prone to attending only to positive reviews of her work, “for which arrogance I deserve the severest of animadversions in my eyes, namely a reproof from yourself” (*Letters* 57). Eastlake seems here a child in need of scolding from a parent. In a similar vein, Eastlake informed Murray, “I can only wish that all novices like myself might fall into such kind and encouraging hands” (qtd. in Lochhead 31). Although Eastlake was indeed relatively new to the publishing world, she had five years earlier translated Passavant’s book and placed her first essay, “Letters to John Henry Merck, from Goethe, Herder, Wieland & C.” in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (Sheldon, *Letters* 44–45). Eastlake’s epistolary comments on this essay to Dawson Turner indicate her earlier conception of herself as an emerging professional writer: “I am anxious for many reasons to persevere in such attempts, the chief of which is the hope of improving in information and style” (*Letters* 44). It is thus very possible that Eastlake was flattering her publisher in 1841 rather than professing her great need for advice.

Eastlake became more overtly independent later in her career; her disagreement with Murray over the revised Kugler book provides just one example. In February 1876, fewer than two years after the Kugler controversy, Eastlake rejected a book Murray had sent her for review: “As I imagine it may have been sent with a view to some notice in the Quarterly R.; I may venture to say that I am now engaged in reviewing M:Angelo’s Letters for the Edinburgh R. . . . & fearing that it might be difficult for me to remunerate you for this copy, I prefer to return it, & have ordered a copy from a bookseller” (*Letters* 413). Eastlake emphasizes her reputation as a writer by letting Murray know that she is already in demand with another
publisher. Murray would not receive another letter from Eastlake for more than four years when, in March 1880, she wrote proposing a biography of another well-known woman of letters, Harriet Grote. Although Eastlake’s letter is conciliatory, she reminds Murray that she is not reliant on him to publish her work: “Should you feel inclined to publish this it would make only a small, rather large printed vol: If not I think I should offer it to Macmillan, but of course I should prefer your name attached to a work on her” (Letters 485).

While she quickly became well-known in the Victorian publishing world, Eastlake did not primarily base her professional reputation on either her popularity or on her productivity as an author. Indeed, she often contrasted her art historical approach with that taken by supposedly less scientific writers. New developments such as photography and the amassing of artworks in public exhibitions and galleries made the correct attributions of paintings much easier, though far from foolproof, in the mid-nineteenth century. However, canonical Victorian art critics, including Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde, shunned this kind of historical research in favor of legends about artists. As I discuss in chapter 5, women critics were not the only figures to reject such legends in favor of correct attribution. However, Jameson and Eastlake were some of the first writers in Britain to challenge long-standing assumptions about who painted which artworks. In her 1848 Sacred and Legendary Art, Jameson corrects many of Vasari’s biographies and attributions, reasoning, for example, that Giotto could not have painted the marriage represented in one of the frescoes: “Giotto died in 1336, and these famous espousals took place in 1347; a dry date will sometimes confound a very pretty theory” (23). Likewise, writing in her 1854 review of Gustav F. Waagen’s Treasures of Art in Great Britain, Eastlake challenges Vasari’s assertion that a painting inscribed as a Raphael is in reality a Perugino (490). On the contrary, claims Eastlake, the painting is undoubtedly Raphael’s first altarpiece and his only crucifixion. Eastlake also critiques Waagen himself (the well-respected director of the Berlin Gallery and professor of art history at Berlin University) by correcting his attributions and qualifying his enthusiasm for expanding the canon of great masters by arguing for “caution” (“Treasures of Art” 484). However, she also agrees with Waagen that some paintings attributed to other Italian masters are in fact by Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo (488). Jonah Siegel has described the nineteenth-century fascination with attribution as one that sought “to reduce the number of works ascribed to a celebrated author of the past” (“Leonardo” 169). But this critical exchange between Waagen and Eastlake demonstrates the very different approaches that art
critics could take. While Waagen sought to increase the number of works ascribed to masters, Eastlake cautiously judges each work based on its own qualities. Not merely a translator, admirer, or summarizer of Waagen's work, or a follower of any particular trend in art criticism, Eastlake views careful and correct attribution as central to her factual approach.

Eastlake's attributive practice underscores the centrality of the carefully researched fact in her art historicism. This factualism was key to the most prominent aim of her writing: positioning her historical method as superior to art criticism—both Renaissance and nineteenth century—that reproduces legends. Despite the large gap in time between these two periods, art writing had changed little. Like Vasari in the sixteenth century, writers on art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were usually artists themselves in the William Blake or Sir Joshua Reynolds mold. Art writing tended to be either technical advice for artists (for example, Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*) or legendary stories about artists in the Vasari vein. The independent, specialized art writer was a mid-nineteenth century development.

Seeking to highlight her own expertise, Eastlake writes in her 1875 essay on “Leonardo da Vinci” that a central problem in Renaissance Italy was that art writing was “not calculated to enlighten or encourage the man of acutely sensitive calibre” (10). By contrast, Eastlake suggests the value of her own work to educate her audience through her historical research. She implicitly appeals to her readers by including them in such a select, “sensitive” group. As in her discussions of attribution, Eastlake was critical of Vasari, noting his “puerile gossip, which throws a doubt on many of his statements” (“Leonardo” 22). She admits that *Vasari’s Lives* “have sometimes the value of genuinely professional criticism,” but claims that the book is “inaccurate” (11). Eastlake finds Vasari's contemporaries even less historically believable and accuses Michelangelo’s early biographers of “careless inaccuracy” (“Michelangelo” 161). In these essays on Renaissance artists, Eastlake thus consistently contrasts the “inaccuracy” and “gossip” of early modern art criticism with her supposedly more factual historical method. Similarly, in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, Jameson notes that she has corrected events in the life of Giotto “in accordance with more exact chroniclers than Vasari” (24). While Jameson and Eastlake were far from alone in hoping to raise the status and quality of Victorian art criticism, they were distinctive in doing so through researched historical facts that often contradicted Vasari and other canonical critics.

Eastlake further distinguishes herself even from Jameson in describing the material conditions under which Renaissance artists worked. I note in
my opening to this chapter Eastlake’s analysis of Michelangelo’s preoccupation with money as indicative of his culture (as one that failed to support artists) rather than as a personal failing. By contrast, Pater’s artists tend to occupy his Renaissance without regard for everyday concerns. Pater writes of Leonardo, “We see him in his boyhood fascinating all men by his beauty, improvising music and songs, buying the caged birds and setting them free, as he walked the streets of Florence, fond of odd bright dresses and spirited horses” (80). Eastlake’s Leonardo is, on the other hand, often at the mercy of the Italian aristocracy, dependent on meeting their extravagant demands for payment. Of most concern to Eastlake, government corruption in the High Renaissance caused the exploitation of artists by the ruling classes and their treatment as mere tradesmen, “little differing in rigorous matter-of-fact stipulations from those we nowadays conclude with carpenter or mason” (“Leonardo” 10). By extension, Eastlake makes a progressive and nationalistic argument in suggesting that British Victorian artists encounter better treatment than their Italian Renaissance counterparts. However, despite the neglect of artists in the Renaissance, art flourished, “too healthy in her instincts and certain in her processes to be affected by conditions, however unsympathetic, tyrannical, and even prohibitory” (“Leonardo” 11). Eastlake here argues for a separate aesthetic sphere that is to some extent immune from material conditions; unlike Ruskin, she does not believe that art is necessarily a reflection of the culture in which it is produced. This Kantian framework allows Eastlake to explain why Renaissance Italy managed to produce such great artists despite corruption and the mistreatment of artists.

Eastlake’s historical method also provides insight into her most studied essay: “Vanity Fair, Jane Eyre and the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution Report for 1847” (1848). Scholars have focused most on Eastlake’s scathing comments on Jane Eyre as a book written by an author who “combines a total ignorance of the habits of society, a great coarseness of taste, and a heathenish doctrine of religion” (94). Far less attention has been paid to her contrasting approval of the factualism of both the Governesses’ Report and Vanity Fair, sections which are often omitted in anthologized versions of the essay. In terms remarkably similar to her essay on Michelangelo, Eastlake describes William Thackeray’s successful realism: “The personages are too like our every-day selves and neighbors to draw any distinct moral. . . . For it is only in fictitious characters which are highly coloured for one definite object . . . that the course of the true moral can be seen to run straight” (83). The “highly coloured” achieves a superficial effect rather than the insight into real people and events that Eastlake
sought—and which she believes Thackeray manages with his character interactions.

In a move that further parallels her own work, Eastlake celebrates the stories included in the Governesses’ Report for their factualism. For Eastlake, these stories correct what she sees as the impossible and destabilizing romanticism of *Jane Eyre*, allowing us to sympathize with the plight of governesses, but only enough to provide financial support for those who are out of work. Eastlake does not allow for upward class mobility or even a different career for these women. In an effort to keep the governess in her place and to emphasize reason over emotion, Eastlake claims that the English governess is “a bore to almost any gentleman, as a tabooed woman” (95). Despite her conservative ideology in matters of class, Eastlake’s factual method allowed her to analyze the material conditions of the governess. According to Mary Poovey, “Lady Eastlake’s formulation of the governess’s plight is as explicit as anything written in the 1840s about the class and moral concerns that dovetail in the governess” (148). Eastlake understood the economics of the governess problem well: because of the oversupply of governesses, the market system itself would not motivate employers to pay more. This low salary and the frequent need of governesses to support other family members prevented most of them from saving for their retirement, a fact that Eastlake reinforces in the eight case studies she cites. Eastlake realizes as well that the economic conditions that prevented governesses from making a comfortable living were the same ones that allowed the middle class to employ less-fortunate women from their own class: “The real definition of a governess, in the English sense, is a being who is our equal at birth, manners, and education, but our inferior in worldly wealth. . . . There is nothing upon the face of the thing to stamp her as having been called to a different state of life from that in which it has pleased God to place you” (94–95). On the one hand, Eastlake betrays a conservative, organic conception of society in her reference to God’s pleasure. However, her comment is also subversive in calling attention to what has become a theoretical commonplace, but was much less openly discussed in Victorian times: the difficulty of distinguishing the middle-class governess from her middle-class employer.

Based almost solely on this one excerpted review of *Jane Eyre*, Elizabeth Eastlake is often stereotyped as simply conservative in matters of class and gender, a bias that has prevented her recognition as a key woman of letters. Julie Sheldon astutely remarks, “Elizabeth’s now rather obscure status appears to me to stem from the perception that she was a woman writer without being a woman’s writer” (“Introduction” 2). Eastlake’s comments
on *Jane Eyre*, coupled with her refusal to join publicly with feminist causes (unlike Jameson and Dilke), have led some commentators to label her as antifeminist (Sheldon, “Introduction” 2). However, as my analysis of the Governesses’ Report makes clear, Eastlake was an astute and sympathetic observer of the particular challenges facing middle-class women, even as she sought to prevent class mobility. She also promoted women’s independence in less public but no less significant ways. Allying herself with other, more overtly feminist art critics such as Jameson and Dilke, Eastlake empowers women within her art criticism, especially in her placement of Eve as a central figure with a direct relationship with God (Ernstrom 473). Regarding women’s educations and careers, Eastlake wrote to Sir A. H. Layard in January 1878, “I think they have a right to break through that ideal of feminine helplessness which gentlemen deem so attractive, and prepare for the possibility of helping themselves” (*Journals and Correspondence* 2: 255). Supporting this goal of career independence, Eastlake helped establish in 1857 the Society of Female Artists.

In addition to her historical method, which informed her particular feminist approach, Eastlake was instrumental in developing art criticism as a literary form. Hilary Fraser and Daniel Brown claim that Oscar Wilde’s “‘The Critic as Artist’ [1890] provides an effective summation of what this genre had come to mean by the end of the century,” especially in Wilde’s insistence that criticism had supplanted the art object as the ultimate work of art (298). Gilbert remarks to Ernest in their dialogue,

> Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin’s views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery coloured in its noble eloquence . . . is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England’s gallery. . . . Who, again, cares whether Mr. Pater has put into the portrait of Mona Lisa something that Leonardo never dreamed of? (Wilde 141–42)

Fraser and Brown note that both art and literary criticism began to professionalize in the 1840s, particularly through the work of Jameson and Ruskin (*English Prose* 314–15). However, although pointing to Jameson’s “highly innovative” treatment of Christian iconography, Fraser and Brown do not mention Eastlake’s crucial role in finishing Jameson’s *History of Our Lord* (1864) or Eastlake’s originality as an art critic. Like her predecessor Jameson and also like Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde, Eastlake well understood the importance of prose that could equal the work of art under discussion.
But scholars tend to view these male art critics as almost solely responsible for developing a prose style that led to literary modernism. In this vein, Harold Bloom characterizes Pater as the “hinge upon which turns the single gate” (186–87) between nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary styles. For Bloom, Pater represents the one moment dividing Matthew Arnold’s objectivism from fin de siècle notions of individual sense impressions. Like Gilbert’s comments in “The Critic as Artist,” such a perspective occludes the role of women critics in developing an art critical style attentive to differing impressions of the art object.

Eastlake posits the difficulty of verbalizing visual sights while also suggesting that her words explain art’s power—a move that serves to explain the need for her expertise. To take one example reminiscent of Pater’s Renaissance, Eastlake notes that Michelangelo’s statues in the Medici tombs “defy analysis, and have lain there for centuries without furnishing a hint of their creator’s intention” (188). But Eastlake still puts their effect in words: “When all criticism is exhausted, we only the more reach the estimate of that astounding power which takes our admiration by storm—uninspired by which, these statues would have been simply hideous or ridiculous” (188–89). Significantly, criticism has a role in bringing readers to this point, even if it fails to capture art’s full force. Pater employs a similar technique in remarking that historians have already traced Leonardo’s works and writings, “but a lover of strange souls may still analyse for himself the impression made on him by those works, and try to reach through it a definition of the chief elements of Leonardo’s genius” (64). While remaining committed to art historical facts, Eastlake too emphasizes individual sense impressions. Also like Pater, Eastlake suggests a key role for the specialist, through what Pater calls in his preface to the Renaissance the art critic’s “certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects” (Pater xxx). Eastlake’s identification of the “astounding power” of Michelangelo’s statues allies her with such a disposition. Writing two years after Pater’s first edition of the Renaissance (1873), Eastlake might seem merely to be copying his style and ideas. However, art critical style and the special disposition of the true art expert were early and central preoccupations in her career.

These concerns were especially apparent in Eastlake’s reviews of Ruskin. In an 1856 essay on the first three volumes of Ruskin’s Modern Painters and his 1855 “Academy Notes,” Eastlake characterizes Ruskin’s work as showcasing “active thought, brilliant style, wrong reasoning, false statement, and unmannerly language” (“Modern Painters” 387). By contrast, Eastlake promises to deliver sound conclusions about art couched in the simplest
language. Scholars have failed to account for Eastlake’s attempts to establish an art critical style alert to both careful language and scholarship, reading her critique as instead an ad hominem attack on Ruskin. Employing a binary of objective journalism versus personal essay to categorize Eastlake’s writings, Lochhead characterizes the review of Ruskin as one of “the great prose-hymns of hate” (116). I would contend that Eastlake’s comments on Ruskin seek neither personal revenge nor objective journalism but a carefully reasoned assessment of his work. Ignoring these professional motivations, J. L. Bradley notes in his introduction to *Ruskin: The Critical Heritage* that Eastlake was biased against Ruskin for his unfavorable review of her husband’s painting *Beatrice* in his 1855 “Academy Notes,” as well as for his mistreatment of her friend and Ruskin’s wife, Effie Ruskin. Again demonstrating the tendency for twentieth-century scholars to repeat the opinions of canonical male critics, Bradley’s assessment of Eastlake’s review as a “scurrilous piece of invective posing as criticism” mostly repeats Ruskin’s preface to his 1856 “Academy Notes” (written just after Eastlake’s critique). Ruskin suggests that Eastlake’s supposed anonymity encourages bias that demeans the profession: “A lying critic, discovered, has infected with his own disgrace the men behind whom he stooped, and cast suspicion over the general honour of his race” (*Works* 14: 45). However, most insiders in the Victorian art world knew that Eastlake wrote art criticism for *The Quarterly Review* in these years, even though she did not sign her name to these particular works. Ruskin assumes, as have recent scholars (for, of course, different reasons), that signing was an indication of professionalism. Yet individual women critics such as Eastlake wrote signed, unsigned, and pseudonymous works; the issues of identity for women in signing are too complex to fit neatly into a professional/amateur binary.11

Demonstrating her professional rather than solely personal motives, Eastlake had found fault with Ruskin’s art critical style two years before his unfavorable review of her husband’s paintings (neither Ruskin nor Bradley acknowledges these earlier critiques). In her March 1854 remarks on Waagen’s *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, Eastlake unfavorably compares recent criticism—such as Ruskin’s—with that of Waagen: “His [Waagen’s] opinion is given with a simplicity, distinctness, and temperament of language particularly refreshing after the violence and dogmatism, the flippant and fine writing, with which the criticism and philosophy of art has of late been treated among us” (468). Instead, then, of reading Eastlake’s review of Ruskin as merely an act of revenge, we should consider how she defines her own critical practice and style against those of the now-more-famous author. Significantly, she opposes her career to Ruskin’s “hobby” (“Mod-
ern Painters” 401). Her 1854 review of Waagen had, by contrast, defined professionalism in art criticism: “The education of the professed critic in art is essentially the same as that of the student in the exact sciences. Nothing is left of feeling, predilection, or wish—his stand must be taken upon a slowly gathered accumulation of facts, each one resting securely on that beneath it” (467). Though Eastlake was herself relatively prolific, she viewed much of her writing as the result of laborious study. For Eastlake, Ruskin writes merely to have something to write about rather than to cultivate his expertise: “One great proof, were there no other, of the falseness of Mr. Ruskin’s reasoning, is its quantity” (“Modern Painters” 432). While earlier artist-writers such as William Blake contrasted prolific amateur critics with serious artists (that is, themselves), Eastlake relies upon a new figure: the professional critic (that is, herself).

Also like Jameson and Pater, Eastlake was adamant that the form of the artwork itself should be analyzed. Few critics have recognized, as do Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell, the importance of Eastlake’s formal analyses: “In her defense of the aesthetic object as meaningful in and of itself, Eastlake may be viewed as working in a line of descent which originated with Immanuel Kant and culminated in the Art-for-Art’s-Sake Movement” (81). This primacy of formal analysis places Eastlake’s criticism as an alternative to that of Ruskin, who tended to emphasize the social and moral dimensions of art. Eastlake chastises Ruskin and other writers for emphasizing stories about artworks, which was in midcentury the most popular form of criticism: “Every exhibition shows that the story is all the uneducated care for” (“Modern Painters” 400). Eastlake’s commitment to form and her critique of narrative are striking for the early date of their expression. While, for example, James McNeill Whistler suggests that his disdain for literary interpretations in the “Ten O’ Clock Lecture” (1888) is new, Eastlake directly attacks this mode as early as 1856 in her critique of Ruskin and thoroughly considers form in her 1846 article on “modern German Painting.” This 1846 article is extremely specific about the technical defects of Germany’s artists: “It is impossible, in the want of unity, breadth and chiaro oscuro, and in the laboured execution of the oil-painters, not to recognise the mechanical joining of detached parts—the heavy opaque shadows—the hatchings and frequent retouchings of the same colour, inseparable from the line of fresco” (“Modern German Painting” 341–42). Eastlake’s use of such terms as “chiaro oscuro” (the commonly Anglicized form of “chiaroscuro”) and “hatchings” highlights her ability to educate readers about form.
In her focus on form, Eastlake’s writings in fact closely fit recent definitions of professional Victorian art criticism, even though she began writing about art some twenty-five years before the date commonly assigned to the consolidation of the discipline. Flint and Prettejohn describe how formalist critics such as F. G. Stephens and Sidney Colvin appealed to society’s elite in the 1860s through formal descriptions, while those who focused on stories about art—the generalist writers—continued to mediate art for the masses. According to Flint and Prettejohn, we thus see beginning at this time and continuing throughout the nineteenth century two separate and distinct strands of art criticism. However, women critics such as Eastlake tend to combine formal analyses with narrative descriptions. For example, Eastlake complains in “Modern German Painting” that Eduard Hildebrandt’s inclusion of too many details ruins the story being told in his *Murder of the Young Princes in the Tower*. The princes are “fast asleep,” writes Eastlake,

while, as if purposely to heighten the effect of their peace and innocence, two figures stealthily approach—“flesht villains—bloody dogs”—their countenances full of those evil passions which give work for the painter in every line—one of them grey in crime. The bed, too, on which the children are lying, is all an artist can wish—bringing a broad mass of light into the middle of the picture, and enabling him to concentrate all attention to the figures lying upon it. (336)

Eastlake’s narrative description in the first part of the quotation heightens the emotional effect of the painting (here, the contrast between the innocence of the children and the “evil passions” of the villains) in an effort to engage and instruct readers. In the second sentence, Eastlake muses about the form of the painting itself—the “broad mass of light” that provides the painting’s focal point. Indeed, form seems Eastlake’s primary concern as she notes that the subject of the painting allows Hildebrandt to showcase “beauty of forms, strength of contrast, and breadth of light” (336). Eastlake’s delicate parallelism in this last quotation demonstrates her attentiveness to her own literary style. In short, Eastlake combines technical details about the painting with a compelling narrative description.

Despite implicitly claiming to focus on literary and painterly form, Eastlake often betrays an anti-Catholic bias, which is particularly apparent in her discussions of Renaissance painters. Like many other Protestant critics, Eastlake sought to separate the general religious inspiration of the Italian Renaissance from its specifically Catholic reference. Thus, Eastlake
writes that Leonardo’s *Last Supper* “produces a really religious impression . . . because it so truly tells the awful tale; but that impression was not the necessary result of Leonardo’s own spiritual aspirations—aspentions not seen in any other work by him” (61). Leonardo happened “to paint Church pictures” because of his time period, “not his own tendencies” (62). While Eastlake’s approach was typical of Protestant writers, her anti-Catholicism is more overt than contemporary critics such as Jameson, who tried to avoid religious connotations altogether. “I hope it will be clearly understood,” writes Jameson in her preface to the first edition of *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848), “that I have taken throughout the aesthetic and not the religious view of Art.” Religious works “may cease to be Religion, but cannot cease to be Poetry; and as poetry only I have considered them” (viii–ix). Middle class and the first writer in Britain to earn a living solely from art criticism, Jameson was necessarily careful in her prefaces and introductions to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Because *Sacred and Legendary Art* considers many works inspired by Catholicism in its survey of Christian symbolism, Jameson was particularly worried about the strong anti-Catholic sentiments in Britain in the 1840s. Jameson’s apparent focus on aesthetics—what she calls “poetry”—instead of religion was thus in part a response to this anxiety. Eastlake, by contrast, is not surprised that the Catholic Church encouraged some good painting during this time, as “Art, respectively ancient and modern, never attained such perfection as under an elaborately organised Idolatry, and a sumptuously supported Superstition” (103). Eastlake’s other essays on this subject suggest that such “Idolatry” and “Superstition” are products of the Catholic Church. Implicitly, Eastlake claims that her own art histories avoid such myths, focusing instead on facts and realistic stories.

Eastlake’s “Modern German Painting” displays a similar anti-Catholic bias. Most strikingly, she attributes the imitative tendencies of German artists to their “going over to the Roman Church” in 1814: “Viewing this step in a moral light we have nothing to say . . . but, viewing it in an aesthetic sense, we believe that it was the worst step they could take” (“Modern German Painting” 326). Through her use of aesthetic instead of religious terms, Eastlake attempts to conceal her Protestant and nationalist biases. Because German artists merely copy Italian painters rather than creating original works inspired from nature, reasons Eastlake, they have sacrificed formal effect: “Enamoured of that religious earnestness and simplicity which they found in the early masters, they became enamoured also of their technical defects” (325). While Eastlake sought to differentiate her art critical method from that of Ruskin, she here seems close to his argument
in “The Nature of Gothic” that social conditions influence the kind of art produced. However, she is primarily motivated by a desire to censure nineteenth-century movements that emulate older Catholic inspirations. For Eastlake, these revivals impossibly try to recreate the “simplicity” of older social conditions, a simplicity that can no longer exist in European painting.

This anti-Catholic bias notwithstanding, Eastlake was one of the first critics in Britain to discuss how artistic form instead of a specifically religious inspiration could convey powerful emotions. As I note earlier, this was an approach influenced by Jameson. In “The House of Titian” (1846)—perhaps her clearest formulation of this balance between aesthetics and spirituality—Jameson writes of church art in Lombardy: “A solemn feeling was upon me . . . because the spirit of devotion which had raised them . . . being in itself a truth, that truth died not—could not die—but seemed to me still inhabiting there, still hovering round, still sanctifying and vivifying the forms it had created” (15). Jameson carefully notes that her sense of presence in viewing these works does not result from “a yearning after those forms of faith which have gone into the past” (15); the historical truth of religious feeling is the point here, not Catholicism itself. Thus, for Jameson, modern revivals of Catholic art are destined to fail: “I felt how vain must be the attempt to reanimate the spirit of Catholicism merely by returning to the forms. . . . Factitious, second-hand exhibitions of modern religious art fall . . . so cold on the imagination” (15–16). Jameson implies here a criticism of such popular nineteenth-century groups as the German Nazarenes, emulators of early-Italian art. Moreover, in Sacred and Legendary Art, Jameson asserts that Protestantism is a certain improvement over ancient Catholicism, a “polytheistic form of Christianity” with “strange excesses of superstition” (7). Avoiding such superstitions is certainly one reason why Jameson objects to modern Catholic revivals. In her progressive view of history, respecting the past is useful for improving the future. But she objects to nostalgia for its own sake—particularly when it looks back to beliefs that are now known to be false. As a Protestant, she suggests that she and her like-minded readers are in an ideal position to reject ancient Catholicism.

Religion may have been a motivating factor in Jameson’s practice, but it is also clear that formal discussions were as fundamental to her self-conception as a professional art critic as they were to Eastlake. In discussing the Campo Santo at Pisa in her essay on “Giotto” (collected in Sacred and Legendary Art), she argues that it “is clear that, to understand the religious significance of these decorations . . . the subject must be considered in the order I have followed” (41). Despite mentioning religion, Jameson’s pre-
dominant focus in this essay is on artistic form. In “Giotto,” Jameson foregrounds the techniques that modern art historians view as central to the development of sculptural figures in High Renaissance works: “For the stiff, wooden limbs, and motionless figures, of the Byzantine school, he substituted life, movement, and the look, at least, of flexibility. . . . His style of coloring and execution was, like all the rest, an innovation in received methods” (25). Giotto’s “feeling for grace and harmony in the airs of his heads and the arrangement of his groups was exquisite; and the longer he practised his art, the more free and flowing became his lines” (25). For Jameson, formal approaches to art enabled her to avoid religious controversy and to establish objective standards of taste.

Judith Johnston and J. B. Bullen have shown that Jameson differentiated herself from her influential predecessor Alexis François Rio, whose book De la poésie chrétienne (1836) canonized works of Catholic art for their ability to express religious feeling (Bullen 275; Johnston 160). Rio’s Catholicism bothered British Protestants, but his focus on spirituality was extremely popular. Jameson hoped that her aesthetic emphasis would capture the spirituality of Catholic artworks while avoiding their specifically religious connotations. While Johnston, Bullen, and Michaela Giebelhausen have recognized Jameson’s role in this movement, they do not trace Eastlake’s use of formal criticism as a response to religious concerns. As I have already suggested, Eastlake differed from Jameson in advancing an even more strident anti-Catholic agenda rather than seeking to avoid religious controversy. Most important, Eastlake hoped to downplay the emotional effect of Catholic art by extending Jameson’s focus on formal techniques.

CONCLUSION

Writing in a June 1874 letter to William Boxall, the retired second director of the National Gallery, Elizabeth Eastlake complains about purchases recently made by the new director, Frederick Burton: “I fear he has bought much that is second rate & much that is irreparably injured, & for enormous prices. That Venus & Amorini by S: Botticelli seems to me to be monstrous in price. . . . I do not envy him, but doubtless his set will approve, & he must learn experience” (Letters 392). Eastlake here claims her professional knowledge and skills in several important ways. She is attentive to the issue of restoration, which was a pervasive problem in Victorian museum culture and in art critical discourse. She judges the value that the National Gallery has gained based on the price and quality of the artwork. Although East-
lake was one of the few mid-Victorian commentators to promote Botticelli, she questions the purchase of the *Venus & Amorini* for £1,627 from the Alexander Barker estate. Tellingly, Eastlake does not critique Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars*, which the National Gallery purchased from the same collection for £1,050. Recent connoisseurship, assisted by twenty-first-century technology, has supported Eastlake’s concerns; though the *Venus and Amorini* (now simply retitled *An Allegory*) is a fifteenth-century Italian painting, it is not by Botticelli, as the *Venus and Mars* almost certainly is. Demonstrating her twenty-first-century relevance, Eastlake’s letter to Boxall was featured in a major summer 2010 exhibition at the National Gallery in London (“Fakes, Mistakes, and Forgeries”), which devoted an entire room to these two fifteenth-century Italian paintings.

Most significantly, Eastlake suggests in her letter that Burton has not yet developed the professional skills necessary to direct the National Gallery, abilities she sought to prove in her own career. Indeed, Eastlake hoped after the death of Sir Charles that she would be named the second director of the National Gallery. Writing to her cousin Hannah Brightwen in 1875, Eastlake remarked, “I feel that I shd have been his best successor in the direction of the Nat: Gallery” (qtd. in Sheldon, *Letters* 13). But, as Eastlake herself recognized, this was hardly a possibility in the mid-1860s in England, when women occupied no such positions of bureaucratic authority. To a certain extent, Eastlake’s career is thus representative of the relative lack of recognition afforded to mid-Victorian women scholars—recognition that might have taken the form of official roles or simply a greater acknowledgement of independent scholarly achievements. But Eastlake’s work also demonstrates the production of knowledge current in twenty-first-century debates among specialists as well as in popular exhibitions about the history of art.