

### George Eliot (1819-1880)

The most learned and respected novelist of the later Victorian period, George Eliot suffered a decline in reputation after her death and into the early twentieth century because the biography stitched together by her widower, John Walter Cross, left out the most interesting parts of her life. "It is not a Life at all," said Gladstone. "It is a Reticence in three volumes." Although her contemporaries Anthony Trollope and Henry James saw her as the first psychological realist in the English tradition, readers of *George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals* (1885) saw her as the sibyl of a dying age. A revival of interest in George Eliot's novels began on the centenary of her birth with an essay in the *Times Literary Supplement* by Virginia Woolf, and crystallized with the publication of F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* in 1949. Since then she has been at the center of literary study, and *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) is now regarded as one of the outstanding masterpieces of nineteenth-century fiction.

George Eliot was born Mary Ann Evans at five o'clock in the morning of St. Cecilia's Day, 22 November 1819, at South Farm, Arbury, Warwickshire. Her father was Robert Evans (b. 1773) and her mother was his second wife, Christiana Pearson (b. ca. 1788), whom he had married in 1813. Mary Ann had a half brother, Robert (b. 1802); a half sister, Frances (b. 1805), called Fanny; a sister, Christiana (b. 1814), called Chrissey; and a brother, Isaac (b. 1816), who was to be the most important sibling in her life. George Eliot described her father as a man who "raised himself from being an artisan to be a man whose extensive knowledge in very varied practical departments made his services valued through several counties. He had a large knowledge of buildings, of mines, of plantations, of various branches of valuation and measurement--of all that is essential to the management of large estates." These varied activities are telescoped in the word "business" which Caleb Garth, an idealized version of Robert Evans, uses to describe his work in *Middlemarch*.

The Pearson family was considered socially superior to the Evans family, and Robert was thought to have done well in marrying Christiana four years after the death of his first wife, Harriet Poynton, in 1809. After the birth of Mary Ann, however, Christiana--the sharptongued model of the invalid Mrs. Poyser of *Adam Bede* (1859)--was not in good health; indeed, she lost sickly ten-day-old twin boys in 1818. Consequently she sent her children to school when they were quite young. When Mary Ann was four months old, the family moved to "a charming redbrick ivy-covered house on the Arbury estate" of Sir Francis Parker-Newdigate, which Robert Evans managed. Griff House was the place George Eliot was most attached to: "my old, old home," she later affectionately called it. There Mary Ann saw her father manage the Newdigate property much in the manner that Adam Bede did the Donnithorne woods. There she came to hear the clucking of the relentlessly respectable Pearson sisters, her maternal aunts, whom she later immortalized as the rich and righteous Dodson sisters of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). The neat and trim Chrissey was the apple of their aunts' eye and the disheveled Mary Ann the bane of their existence. Mary Ann was, however, her father's favorite child, while her mother preferred Isaac to her daughters. It was Robert Evans who gave Mary Ann *The Linnet's Life*, her first book, which she kept until her death.

When she was sent to join Chrissey as a boarder at Miss Lathom's school at Attleborough, Mary Ann was separated from Isaac, who had hitherto been her constant companion. Perforce she turned from fishing, marbles, and top spinning to reading and was deeply immersed in the imaginative world of Scott's *Waverley* (1814) by the time she was eight years old. In 1828, the sisters transferred to Miss Wallington's school in Nuneaton, where Maria Lewis, the chief governess, became Mary Ann's intimate friend. It was under Miss Lewis's tutelage that the child became an ardent Evangelical, although her parents were traditional Anglicans. Having learned French and become adept at music, Mary Ann, age thirteen,

exhausted the accomplishments offered by Miss Wallington's school and transferred to the Misses Franklin's school in Coventry. Daughters of a Baptist minister, the Misses Franklin sharpened the dogmatic tendencies of Mary Ann's mind, giving a Calvinist tint to its Evangelical shade. The girl dressed so severely that one visitor mistook her for a schoolmistress. At Nuneaton, nonetheless, Mary Ann learned to excel as a pianist under the guidance of a local church organist. With a year of Parisian experience, Rebecca Franklin--a prototype of Esther Lyon in *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866)--brought Mary Ann to proficiency in French, and she won Pascal's *Pensees* (1844) as a prize for excellence in the language during her first year at school. Under Miss Franklin's guidance she also lost her provincial pronunciation and learned to speak English faultlessly in a strikingly modulated voice that was to become a marked characteristic of George Eliot as well as of her principle heroine, Dorothea Brooke, whose voice was like that "of a soul that had once lived in an Aeolian harp." Immersion in historical romances combined with a gift for composition led Mary Ann to write a story in imitation of G. P. R. James: the hero is "an outcast from society, an alien from his family, a deserter, and a regicide." "Edward Neville" is the title [Gordon S. Haight](#) has given to this first extant fragment of fiction from the pen of George Eliot.

Mary Ann left the Coventry school at the end of 1835; her mother died the following February. After Chrissey married in May 1837, Mary Ann became mistress of Griff. In addition to attending to the housekeeping and caring for her father, she continued her intellectual pursuits. She studied German and Italian with a tutor and made progress in Latin and Greek. She published her first poem in the *Christian Observer* in January 1840; untitled, though beginning with a quotation from 2 Peter 1: 16, the poem's first stanzas are indicative of its religious fervor:

As o'er the fields by evening's light I stray,

I hear a still, small whisper--"Come away!

Thou must to this bright, lovely world soon say

Farewell!"

The mandate I'd obey, my lamp prepare,

Gird up my garments, give my soul to pray'r,

And say to earth and all that breathe earth's air

Farewell!

As her religious commitment intensified, she proposed composing a chart of ecclesiastical history from the birth of Christ to the Reformation. She was given unlimited use of the Arbury Hall library and read widely in scriptural commentary, the *Oxford Tracts for the Times*, church history, and the edifying biographies of eminent Christians. When, after her "deconversion," the Birmingham theologian Francis Watts visited her in 1842 with the hope of bringing her back to the faith, he could not. Commenting on her extensive reading on religious subjects, he said quite simply, "She had gone into the question."

Robert Evans retired as manager of the Newdigate estate in 1841 and in March moved with his daughter to Bird Grove, a large house on the Foleshill Road, just outside of Coventry. There, in November, Mary Ann found in Charles and Caroline Bray and Caroline's sister and brother, Sara and Charles Christian Hennell, friendship and an intellectual community far different from any she had known previously. Bray was a ribbon manufacturer by trade but a philanthropist and freethinking philosopher by preference. Hennell was the author of *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838), a copy of which Evans bought and read. Hennell had written the *Inquiry* at Caroline's request to substantiate--contrary to her husband's contention--that Christianity was a divinely revealed religion. After a thorough study of the

gospels, Hennell concluded that truth of feeling, not divine revelation, shows itself in the "beautiful fictions" at the origin of Christianity. He affirmed that the New Testament account of Jesus' life could not pass the test of history and that the gospels were a compilation of myths expressing man's deepest thoughts and feelings. Evans met the Brays and Hennells, as Charles Bray later remarked, at a point in her life when she was "turning towards greater freedom of thought in religious opinion." Consequently Hennell's treatise acted as a catalyst in a mind prepared for change by reading in Wordsworth, Scott, Carlyle, and their contemporaries in literature and science. On 13 November 1841, eleven days after meeting the Brays at their Rosehill home, Evans wrote to Maria Lewis: "My whole soul has been engrossed in the most interesting of all enquiries for the last few days, and to what result my thoughts may lead I know not--possibly to one that will startle you, but my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error."

Shortly thereafter she abandoned her Evangelical faith, denied divine revelation, affirmed the truth of feeling, and cast off taboos associated with fundamentalist belief. For her as for Hennell, Christianity changed from a divinely revealed religion to one of human origin which leads to "the finer thoughts and feelings of mankind" that "find a vent in fiction." In January 1842 Mary Ann refused to attend church, and her outraged father threatened to put her out, sell Bird Grove, and live elsewhere by himself. Only the timely intervention of Fanny, Isaac, Chrissey, and family friends prevented a complete rupture. Mary Ann finally agreed to accompany her father to church as long as she could think as she pleased while she was there: "I have nothing to say this morning, my soul as barren as the desert; but I generally manage to sink some little well at church, by dint of making myself deaf and looking up at the roof and arches." She lived on with her father at Foleshill--"I and father go on living and loving together as usual, and it is my chief source of happiness to know that I form one item of his"--and she came to regret her failure to

tolerate his intolerance during the crisis in their lives, because for her "*truth of feeling*" was, finally, "the only universal bond of union." The large tolerance that would become characteristic of George Eliot's narrative voice first finds expression in those words addressed to Sara Hennell in 1843. The novelist who was later to say that her realistic fiction was meant "to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy" found that she had allowed intellectual conviction to run roughshod over filial feeling. George Eliot found in the "Holy War" with her father the *truth of feeling* that would be the hallmark of her fiction.

Through the Brays, Evans met Rufa Brabant, who, when she became Charles Hennell's fiancée, abandoned the project of translating David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1835), having completed only two chapters. Evans assumed the task. Strauss's book argued that Christian myth represented the truth of feelings and aspirations which were an expression of the *idea*, in the Hegelian sense of the word, that divinity and humanity are eventually to be reunited. "Proved to be an idea of reason, the unity of divine and human nature must also have an historical existence." The Jesus of the Gospels is seen as the product of his disciples' idea that he was the heaven-sent Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Jesus, however, was only the *symbolic* anticipation of a Divine Humanity, which is the *real* goal toward which all creation actually strives. Evans was immersed in the translation of this relentlessly analytical book from January 1844 to June 1846. Toward the end of her task, she told Caroline Bray that she was "Strauss-sick" because "it made her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion, and only the sight of her Christ-image and picture made her endure it." While this work of translation sapped her energy, she also cared for her aging father, whose health began to fail in 1846. He died after a prolonged illness on 1 May 1849. "What shall I be without my Father?" she asked the Brays. "It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining

influence." Something of that fear was undoubtedly grounded in the attraction she had felt to Rufa's father, Dr. Robert Brabant, who had toyed with her affections to the extent that his wife, though blind, had seen enough to order Mary Ann out of her house in November 1843. A similar lack of emotional stability had manifested itself in what she called "my unfortunate 'affaire.'" Having accepted the suit of an engaging young picture-restorer in March 1845, she had changed her mind and sent him away: "I did meditate an engagement," she wrote Martha Jackson, "but I have determined, whether wisely or not I cannot tell, to defer it, at least for the present." Shortly she was to become involved more compromisingly with the publisher John Chapman, and more desperately with the philosopher Herbert Spencer.

In her last years in Robert Evans's house, Mary Ann had worked on a translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) at the suggestion of Chapman, who had published the *Life of Jesus*. Although her admiration for Spinoza amounted to adulation--Spinoza "says from his own soul what all the world is saying by rote"--she did not complete the translation. From December 1846 to February 1847 she published five essays under the rubric "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of an Eccentric" in the *Coventry Herald and Observer*, a newspaper which Charles Bray had bought in June 1846. The most notable of three known reviews from that period was one she wrote of James Anthony Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849) for the *Herald*. Froude's novel had been publicly burned at Exeter College, Oxford, where he was a fellow; nevertheless, Evans praised his book as one that makes us feel "in companionship with a spirit who is transfusing himself into our souls and so vitalizing them by his superior energy, that life, both outward and inward, presents itself to us in higher relief, in colours brightened and deepened." Exhausted by her father's illness and devastated by his death, she could, however, do no further intellectual work. With a legacy of £100 in her pocket and an annuity of approximately

£90 to support her, she set out with the Brays for the Continent, taking the route of the grand tour.

When they arrived in Geneva in July 1849, Evans decided on a protracted stay in the city of Rousseau, whose *Confessions* (1781, 1788), she had told Ralph Waldo Emerson at Rosehill in July 1848, "first wakened her to deep reflection." She lived for a time in a pension, the Compagne Plongeon, where a Piedmontese noblewoman insisted that she change her hairstyle: "The Marquise ... has abolished all my curls and made two things stick out on each side of my head like those on the head of the Sphinx." She moved in October to the house of the Francois D'Albert-Durades: "I like these dear people better and better--everything is so in harmony with one's moral feeling that I really can almost say I never enjoyed a more complete bien-être in my life than during the last fortnight." She came quickly to call Madame "Maman," and she loved Monsieur "as if he were father and brother both." He was "not more than 4 feet high with a deformed spine," but he was an accomplished painter. With an excellent singing voice as well, D'Albert-Durade was the model of Philip Wakem, the hunchbacked musician-painter of *The Mill on the Floss*. Whether--like Philip--he loved a Maggie in "Minnie," as he called Evans, remains an unanswered question. A salon was held each Monday evening, and Evans mixed with a cultivated Genevese society that admired the plain-looking young lady from England. She sat for a portrait by D'Albert-Durade which she carried back to England, where he escorted her in March 1850. Finding her family uncongenial companions, Marian, as she now called herself, settled with the Brays at Rosehill until January 1851, when she went to London to make her career in journalism and took up residence at John Chapman's house.

The ground floor of 142 Strand housed the offices of Chapman's bookselling and publishing business, and the rest of the building was home for his wife; his two children; and his mistress, Elizabeth Tilley, who was ostensibly the children's governess. The house was large enough to

accommodate boarders. Having first met Chapman in 1846, Evans had seen him again at Rosehill in October 1850, when he discussed with Charles Bray his intention to buy the *Westminster Review*. She had just written an excellent notice of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect* (1850) for that periodical when she arrived in London. It was not long before she aroused the ire of Elizabeth Tilley, who saw Chapman trying to ensnare Evans in his far-flung amorous net. Evans left London in late March and stayed at Rosehill until May, when Chapman, soon to purchase the *Westminster Review*, invited Evans to edit it; she returned to 142 Strand on 29 September 1851, Chapman having convinced his wife and mistress that her presence was required for business reasons. She served as editor of the *Westminster Review* from January 1852 to July 1854, living at Chapman's until 17 October 1853.

During her years at the Chapman house, Marian Evans met many of the eminent intellectuals of the day who passed through the offices of the *Westminster Review*. The two who became most important to her were Herbert Spencer, to whom she proposed marriage; and George Henry Lewes, who made her his lifelong companion. Evans and Spencer enjoyed each other's companionship in conversation, on walks, and at the theater and opera until she fell very much in love with this handsome confirmed bachelor: "I want to know if you can assure me that you will not forsake me, that you will always be with me as much as you can and share your thoughts and feelings with me. If you become attached to someone else, then I must die, but until then I could gather courage to work and make life valuable, if only I had you near me. I do not ask you to sacrifice anything--I would be very good and cheerful and never annoy you. But I find it impossible to contemplate life under any other conditions," Evans wrote Spencer in July 1852. Although, as she said, "all the world is setting us down as engaged," Spencer found it impossible to return her affection: "Physical beauty is a *sine qua non* with me," Spencer wrote in his *Autobiography* (1904), "as was once unhappily proved where the intellectual

traits and the emotional traits were of the highest." George Henry Lewes was a friend of Spencer's, and Evans had been introduced to him by John Chapman at Jeff's bookshop in the Burlington Arcade on 6 October 1851. At first Evans did not like Lewes's manner and thought him very ugly as well. But he became a regular visitor at 142 Strand; and one day, visiting there with Spencer, he stayed behind with Evans after his friend left. By 28 March 1853, she found Lewes "as always, genial and amusing. He has won my liking, in spite of myself." As the dramatic critic of the *Leader*--Lewes wrote his column under the name of Vivian--he had entree to the theaters and began taking Evans there with him. In addition, one contribution or another of Lewes's appeared in almost every edition of the *Westminster Review* that she edited. They were frequently together; and on 17 October 1853, when Marian moved from the Strand to 21 Cambridge Street, Hyde Park, they may have begun to live together as well. Their intimacy almost certainly dates from this time.

During this period Evans was translating Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*) (1841). Her love for Lewes and Feuerbach's deification of love intersected at precisely the right moment for her. Lewes was a married man whose wife had been notoriously unfaithful to him by the time he met Evans. Agnes Jervis Lewes had borne Thornton Leigh Hunt two children by then, would bear another before Evans and Lewes left for Germany, and yet another after that. Lewes had registered the first child as his own, thus legally condoning the adultery and making it practically impossible to get a divorce under English law. When the second bastard was born, Lewes considered his marriage terminated morally, if not legally. Marian Evans endorsed this interpretation, and Feuerbach gave her the theoretical ground for doing so. He argued that Christian dogma was the symbolic expression of man's conscious and unconscious needs; thus man has "no other definition of God than this; God is pure, unlimited, free Feeling." Man must become conscious of God as "a loving,

tender, even subjective human being." Only love enables him to attain that consciousness. "Love is the middle term, the substantial bond, the principle of reconciliation between the perfect and the imperfect, the sinless and the sinful being, the universal and individual, the divine and the human. Love is God himself, and apart from it there is no God." Consequently, "that alone is a religious marriage which is a true marriage, which corresponds to the essence of marriage--of love." In April 1854, Evans wrote Sara Hennell--who was proofreading this translation as she had the Strauss--"With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree"; in June she corrected the last proof and inserted her name, Marian Evans, on the title page; and in July she left for the Continent with Lewes, representing herself as his wife. In marked contrast to Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, she did not turn back.

The Leweses, as they became known, went to Weimar to follow the tracks of Goethe, whose biography Lewes was writing. Evans wrote the first of a series of articles for the *Westminster Review*. She also wrote to Chapman telling him of the joy she had found in her union with Lewes: "Affection, respect, and intellectual sympathy deepen, and for the first time in my life I can say to the moments, 'Verweilen sie, sie sind so schön.'" Meanwhile Charles Bray was defending her character back in England, where spicy gossip garnished delicious rumor: "She must be allowed to satisfy her own conscience.... I have known her for years and should always feel that she was better by far than 99/100 of the people I have ever known." Very few felt that way, and the Lewes-Evans liaison was roundly condemned. After a sojourn in Berlin, where Evans worked on a translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) while Lewes continued with *The Life and Works of Goethe* (1855), they returned to England in March 1855, eventually taking up residence in Richmond. From July 1855 to January 1857 Evans wrote the "Belles Lettres" section of the *Westminster Review* in addition to a series of often brilliant essays that marked her path to fiction. Her article "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming" convinced

Lewes of her genius, and her review "The Natural History of German Life" outlined her theory of realism in art: "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experiences and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life.... The thing for mankind to know is, not what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks *ought* to act on the labourer or the artisan, but what are the motives and influences which *do* act on him." This is the beginning of a credo on art that is enacted in George Eliot's fiction beginning with "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," which she started to write on 23 September 1856.

In "How I Came To Write Fiction" (1857), Marian Evans says that Lewes urged her to try her hand at a novel, certain of her ability in every way but the writing of dialogue and dramatic scenes. Once he had read what she had written, his enthusiasm and encouragement never waned. He sent the manuscript of "Amos Barton" to William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, saying only that the author, whose work was unsigned, was a friend of his. John Blackwood accepted the story and sent fifty guineas as payment. *Scenes of Clerical Life* was now established, with "Amos Barton" making its way into print and "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" being written. "Janet's Repentance" was meant to be the penultimate story, but Blackwood's dislike of the first two parts of it discouraged the author, and the series was concluded. The first installment of "Amos Barton" appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January 1857 and the last part in the February issue. Responding to John Blackwood's cover letter for the second installment, Marian Evans signed her name "George Eliot" as "a tub to throw to the whale in case of curious inquiries." She later said that she took this name because "George was Mr. Lewes's Christian name, and Eliot was a good mouth-filling, easily pronounced word." Since Marian Evans was a name held in scorn because

of her liaison with Lewes, she was forced to find a pen name that would give her fiction a fair hearing. "George Eliot" was born of scandal to live in honor. The last two stories of *Scenes of Clerical Life* appeared in the next nine issues of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and all three were published as a book in two volumes under the pseudonym "George Eliot" on 5 January 1858.

*Scenes of Clerical Life* is written out of George Eliot's recollections of the Midlands. People in Warwickshire began immediately to relate fact to fiction: the Reverend John Gwyther of Chilvers Coton Parish Church to the Reverend Amos Barton of Shepperton, his wife Emma to Milly Barton, Christiana Evans to the sharp-tongued Mrs. Hackit, and the Newdigate family to the Oldinports. Further identifications were made not only in "Amos Barton" but in each of the stories to follow. George Eliot was forced to protest that "no portrait was intended" and that "the details have been filled in from my imagination." But these first stories showed how close to the quick her imagination cut. They were also evidence of a realism that transcended local color to express the tragedy, pathos, and humor of life generally.

The sad fortunes of Amos Barton stem from selfishness and misunderstanding, and George Eliot is keen on purging her readers of such faults by letting them see these qualities in others. The two most misunderstood people in the town of Milby are Amos and the Countess Czerlaski. They are both persons whom their neighbors want to misunderstand: Amos is so commonplace that they do not want to believe that anyone could possibly be so dull; the countess is so beautiful that they do not want to believe that she could possibly be good. When Amos gives a home to the uncommonplace countess, Milby makes her his mistress. Two unlikely lovebirds are thus killed with one unpleasant fiction. And so is Amos's loving wife Milly, who, isolated from her friends and worn out by children and childbirth, dies--redeeming her husband in his parishoners' eyes: could anyone who grieved as deeply as Amos

have ever loved anyone but his lovely, lamented wife?

George Eliot shows her readers how the town's dislike of Amos and the countess has led it to invent reasons for its scorn by creating damaging fictions about them. The townspeople enjoy their own fiction more than the truth they refuse to admit: "the simple truth ... would have seemed extremely flat to the gossips of Milby, who had made up their minds to something much more exciting." George Eliot is hinting here that readers of her story who object to its being about commonplace people--"But my dear madam, it is so very large a majority of your fellow-countrymen that are of this insignificant stamp"--are like the gossips of Milby who would rather have excitement than truth. If the reader recognizes his own lack of sympathy with the truth in Milby's lack of sympathy with it, he has a better chance to accept the truth the next time either life or art presents it to him. "Amos Barton" stands forth as a story about the dangers of failing to apprehend the truth of life and about the need for sympathetic understanding to get at that truth.

George Eliot defends her choice of an old ginsipping parson as the hero of a romance in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story": "Dear ladies, allow me to plead that gin-and-water, like obesity, or baldness, or the gout, does not exclude a vast amount of antecedent romance." Just as in "Amos Barton," an unlikely hero is here justified in terms of life as the reader knows it. Gilfil is the remnant of a highly intelligent and sensitive man who, through the lack of these qualities in others, has lost the one woman he passionately loved. Maynard Gilfil, who loves Caterina Sarti, can marry her only after she has been physically and emotionally weakened by her passion for Captain Anthony Wybrow. Sir Christopher Cheverel (whose beautifully restored manor house George Eliot modeled on the Newdigates' Arbury Hall) knows nothing of his nephew Anthony's flirtation and tries to force him into the arms of an heiress and Maynard into the arms of Caterina. All this eventually proves too much for Caterina, who

dies in childbirth as Gilfil's wife: "the delicate plant had been too deeply bruised, and in the struggle to put forth a blossom it died." Something in the sensitive and stalwart Gilfil dies with Caterina: "Tina died, and Maynard Gilfil's love went with her into deep silence for evermore." The gin-sipping parson survives into old age--just, generous, sympathetic as well as loved and respected--but only as the gnarled trunk of what had promised to be a splendid tree. "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" is a study of the effect of the loss of love on human growth at the same time that it is a study of the selfishness that surrounds Gilfil and Tina and takes life and love from them. In the dramatization of Anthony Wybrow as a Narcissus who lets his lover turn into an Echo and finally loves himself to death, and in the presentation of Maynard Gilfil as an Orpheus who cannot bring his Eurydice back from death, George Eliot tells her story of selfishness and selflessness, giving mythical resonance to the love story of an ordinary-looking clergyman who likes his dogs and his drink. In this second of the *Scenes of Clerical Life* George Eliot begins to give extraordinary dimension to ordinary lives.

This continues in "Janet's Repentance," where a Christlike clergyman, Edgar Tryan, struggles with a diabolical drunken lawyer, Robert Dempster, for the soul of Dempster's wife Janet, who is herself an alcoholic. Janet is presented as the lost sheep that the Good Shepherd must find and save. Mythically, in Dempster and Tryan, Christ faces Satan; psychologically, the spoiled child faces the self-possessed man. The story centers on Janet, the action being her repentance. It portrays her moving out of an atmosphere of negativity and hate, centered in Dempster, and into one of affirmation and love, centered in Tryan. It shows how her life is changed by substituting the gospel which Tryan preaches, one emphasizing the efficacy of sorrow, for the one she early espouses: "That is the best Gospel that makes everybody happy and comfortable." This change leads to the "recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral

life what ... a great central ganglion is to animal life." The conversion concerns the town, "a dead an' dark place," as well as Janet. Milby turns from the narrow, self-satisfied way which Dempster's bullying drunkenness exemplifies to the way of self-surrender which is Tryan's Christian message. The narrator penetrates the mystique of heroism by entering minutely into the character of Tryan to understand him by feeling with him: "I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road through the crowd of unloving fellow-men." What George Eliot said of Julia Kavanaugh's *Rachel Gray* (1856) can aptly be said of "Janet's Repentance": "It undertakes to impress us with the every-day sorrows of our commonplace fellow-men, and so to widen our sympathies."

Reflecting on *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Mathilde Blind fixed on its realistic portrayal of the commonplace by speaking of George Eliot's "power of rendering the idiom and manners of peasants, artisans, and paupers, of calling up before us the very gestures and phrases of parsons, country practitioners, and other varieties of inhabitants of provincial towns and rural districts." This homely domestic realism, combined with psychological penetration of character, added up to a new kind of fiction. Shortly before the publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot lamented that Dickens could only give "with the utmost power ... the external traits of our town population"; she went on to say, "if he could give us their psychological character--their conceptions of life, and their emotions--with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies." What Dickens could not do George Eliot began doing in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Adapting a program of realism from Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843-1856), George Eliot insisted that art had the moral purpose of widening man's sympathy with his fellowman and that this could only be achieved by presenting a true picture of life. "The truth of infinite value" that Ruskin teaches, she says, "is *realism*--the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble

and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality." By the "thorough acceptance of this doctrine" George Eliot began to remold the English novel.

"There can be no mistake about *Adam Bede*," wrote the reviewer for the *Times*. "It is a first-rate novel, and its author takes rank at once among the masters of the art." George Eliot began writing *Adam Bede* on 22 October 1857 and completed it on 16 November 1858. It was published in three volumes on 1 February 1859. A year later it had gone through four editions with four printings of the last edition; had been translated into French, German, Dutch, and Hungarian; had spawned a sequel; and had brought forward a Warwickshire eccentric named Joseph Liggins who claimed to be George Eliot. *Adam Bede* sold 16,000 copies in a year and earned George Eliot £ 1,705 in 1859. "In its influence," Lewes wrote to his son Charles, "and in obtaining the suffrages of the highest and wisest as well as of the ordinary novel reader, nothing equals *Adam Bede*."

"The germ of 'Adam Bede,'" George Eliot wrote in her journal, "was an anecdote told me by my Methodist Aunt Samuel (the wife of my Father's younger brother): an anecdote from her own experience.... It occurred to her to tell me how she had visited a condemned criminal, a very ignorant girl who had murdered her child and refused to confess--how she had stayed with her praying, through the night and how the poor creature at last broke out into tears, and confessed her crime." George Eliot turned the condemned criminal into Hetty Sorrel, while "the character of Dinah grew out of my recollections of my aunt," and "the character of Adam, and one or two incidents connected with him were suggested by my Father's early life; but Adam is not my father any more than Dinah is my aunt." They are "the suggestions of experience wrought up into new combinations."

*Adam Bede* presents two levels of society as one century gives way to another in 1799. The gentry are represented by Arthur Donnithorne and the workers by Adam Bede. Their lives intersect in various ways, but especially at the Hall Farm on the Donnithorne estate, which is in the capable hands of the Poyser family. Mrs. Poyser's two nieces live with her. Hetty Sorrel catches the attention of both Arthur and Adam, while Dinah Morris is courted ineffectually by Adam's brother Seth. The more Adam finds himself in love with Hetty, the more Hetty finds herself in love with Arthur, who seduces her in a wood that is under Adam's management. She becomes pregnant, runs away, bears a child, and so neglects it that it dies. Imprisoned for murder, Hetty is visited by Dinah, who brings her to confession and repentance. Adam, who has been sorely tried by the death of his father, now finds himself broken by the infidelity of the woman he loved and the friend he admired. Only the very gradual realization of his love for Dinah and her willingness to marry him allows him to grow whole again.

In these bare details of its plot, *Adam Bede* seems not to be realistic or subtly psychological. It is for this very reason that George Eliot refused to give an outline of the story to John Blackwood, who asked for one after reading the first volume of manuscript. "I refused to tell my story before," she wrote, "on the ground that I would not have it judged apart from my *treatment*, which alone determines the moral quality of art." *Adam Bede* develops in a tragicomic pattern. The tragic element is the idea that a man cannot escape the results of his actions: "Consequences are un pitying," says Mr. Irwine, the novel's excellent clergyman. "You can never do what's wrong without breeding sin and trouble more than you can see," Adam tells Arthur, to no avail. The happier side is the gospel of love that Dinah Morris preaches, with Jesus as her model. As for Jesus, so for Adam: the man of sorrows becomes the loving man. The process requires the self-righteous Adam to get his heartstrings bound around erring creatures--his father, Arthur, and

Hetty--all of whom seriously disappoint his expectations. This involves him in suffering and leads him into fellow feeling with these sinners. It also eventually leads him to Dinah, whose attachment to him deepens her own fellow feeling and allows her to accept the common lot of woman as her own.

*Adam Bede* dramatizes the idea that life is a struggle in which a man succeeds by practicing virtue and working hard. Adam's devotion to work is the touchstone of his success, just as Arthur's emancipation from work leads to his ruin. The life of Adam and the Poysers is a struggle against the ignorance, carelessness, vice, and arbitrary ways of their neighbors. The Poysers carry out the struggle against their hired hands, against Hetty, and against old Squire Donnithorne; Adam carries it out against the workmen in the carpenter's shop he manages, against his alcoholic father, and against Arthur. The fistfight he has with Arthur is more than a quarrel between two men over a woman: the new ethic of duty, work, and struggle represented by Adam meets an older ethic of leisure, privilege, and heredity represented by Arthur. The ultimate success of the new over the old is suggested in the return of Arthur in the epilogue, where Dinah likens him to Esau and Adam to Jacob. *Adam Bede* is the mirror of a century that saw the rise of the middle class and the decline in importance of the aristocracy. Set at the turn of the century, it seemed prophetic of things to come. The immediate success of the novel, however, was ascribed to its accurate rendering of country characters and events. Mrs. Poyser was the runaway favorite of readers and critics alike, and her sharp, witty comments on life seemed too true to be the work of a mere novelist--an opinion which led George Eliot to protest: "I have no stock of proverbs in my memory, and there is not one thing put into Mrs. Poyser's mouth that is not fresh from my own mint." Mrs. Poyser's popularity reached its climax when Charles Buxton quoted her in parliamentary debate in the House of Commons on 8 March 1859: dressing down an opponent, he remarked that no doubt

the Earl of Malmesbury "would wish that his conduct, as the farmer's wife said in *Adam Bede*, could be 'hatched over again and hatched different.'" Astute critics, like Henry James, found Hetty Sorrel more completely original: "Mrs. Poyser is *too* epigrammatic; her wisdom smells of the lamp." But Hetty Sorrel "I accept ... with all my heart. Of all George Eliot's female figures she is the least ambitious, and on the whole, I think, the most successful." The discontent of other readers with Hetty, who embodied "the startling horrors of rustic reality," was, however, a prelude to the reception of Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*.

By the time *The Mill on the Floss* was published on 4 April 1860, it was common knowledge that the pseudonym "George Eliot" belonged to Marian Evans Lewes; that the moral novelist was an immoral woman. The claim of Joseph Liggins to be the author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* became too disruptive for George Eliot to ignore, and she was forced to remove the incognito. The price was high. *The Mill on the Floss* was subjected to scathing criticism: Maggie is not of "the smallest importance to anybody in the world" but herself, said Ruskin; Tom is "a clumsy and cruel lout"; and "the rest of the characters are simply the sweepings out of a Pentonville omnibus." The great critic whom George Eliot admired but whose wife divorced him because he was unable to consummate their marriage could not abide a novel whose plot, he said, "hinged mainly on the young people's 'forgetting themselves in a boat.'" Ruskin's reaction was symptomatic of that of most critics of the novel: somehow *The Mill on the Floss* affected them where they were weakest. In reading it they followed Maggie's adventures, not "the interaction of the human organism and its environment." They felt that Maggie's free will was unfairly overcome in a moment of crisis. Their simple categories of right and wrong were undermined by a "complex web of heredity, physiology, and environment." Consequently, as David Carroll remarks, "The Victorian reader's sympathies have been turned against his moral judgment and he feels aggrieved."

The Victorian reader who was most aggrieved was undoubtedly Isaac Evans. He was to Marian what Tom Tulliver was to Maggie--a brother whom she loved from her childhood, who early became estranged from her, and who only lately had rejected her altogether. Marian had not told her family of her life with Lewes until nearly three years after she boarded the Channel steamer *Ravensbourne* to go abroad with him. In May 1857 she had written to Isaac to inform him that she now had "someone to take care of me in the world." She had referred to Lewes as "my husband," and Isaac had asked for more details. When she supplied them, he broke off all communication with her except by way of his lawyer. (He was not personally to write to his sister until her marriage in 1880.) The childhood love of sister for brother that had been strained by their different ways of thinking and acting seemed to Marian Evans in 1857 to be irreparably ended. Past and present then came together powerfully in the story of Maggie and Tom in *The Mill on the Floss*.

The novel's long beginning recounts the fortunes of the Dodson sisters and their families. The Tullivers stand apart from the Gleggs and the Pulletts and are the center of the story. They have two children whose temperaments reflect Tulliver impetuosity and Dodson respectability. Maggie, like her father, is affectionate, headstrong, and rebellious. Tom, like his mother and aunts, is self-righteous and self-satisfied. More intelligent than her brother, Maggie is interested in many things that mean nothing to him. She is befriended by Philip Wakem, whose father has exacerbated Mr. Tulliver's ruin; but Tom banishes Philip from Maggie's life. Along with Philip goes an interest in art, music, and literature that she shared with the one soul that had been completely sympathetic with her own. Maggie turns to religion in an attempt to stupefy her faculties and to banish all wishing from her life, while Tom works off the debts that have resulted from his father's bankruptcy and death. When Maggie realizes, as Philip says, that "we can never give up longing and wishing while we are

thoroughly alive," her conduct takes another turn in opening itself up to life. She becomes attached to Stephen Guest, her cousin's fiancé, and, caught up in the tide of her emotions, she drifts away with him in a boat until it becomes too late for them to return home the same day. When, against his pleas, she returns as soon as she can, Tom, now the model of a successful St. Ogg's businessman, repudiates her as a lost woman: "You shall find no home with me.... You have disgraced us all." Only in the end does Tom have a change of heart, but by then it is too late to be effectual. When the river Floss floods and Tom is trapped at the mill, Maggie rows out to save him. In the boat with his sister, Tom in the moment before his death revalues her life: "They sat mutely gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face--Tom with a certain awe and humiliation." In an instant their boat is swamped: "brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted."

The power of the book lies in an evocation of childhood that was unequaled when *The Mill on the Floss* was published and in the onrush of the catastrophe toward the novel's end. The flood that kills Tom and Maggie has often been complained of, but it was the ending that George Eliot had intended from the beginning. It enabled her to tie the body of the novel to the history of the place where it is set. St. Ogg's has two legends associated with it: the legend of the flood speaks of a river that grows angry when the Tullivers' Dorlcote Mill changes hands. The legend of St. Ogg tells of a tenderhearted boatman who shows human sympathy in the midst of nature's anger. One legend ties natural effect to human cause and suggests a way to control the river by controlling the working of the mill. The other shows that human kindness enables man to survive nature's ravages. The legend of the flood is one of anger and retribution, and the legend of the patron saint is one of sympathy and love. The flooding of the Floss is closely associated with Tom's anger in the novel, and his attempted rescue is closely associated with Maggie's love. The legends associated with the origin of St. Ogg's are

transformed into the characters and events whose story is told as *The Mill on the Floss*.

Having finished the novel, George Eliot left with Lewes for Italy. In Florence he suggested to her the possibility of writing a novel centered on the life of Savonarola, and she began preliminary research for it. All of George Eliot's novels are the product of research--"Whatever she has done, she has studied for," said Emily Davies--even though the earlier ones are principally indebted to recollections of her Warwickshire days. *Romola* (1863), however, was worked up from scratch, and the reading and note taking it required so entered into the author's life that she said of it, "I began it a young woman,--I finished it an old woman." On their return from Italy the Leweses stopped in Switzerland to see Charles, Thornton, and Herbert, Lewes's sons by Agnes. Charles returned home with them after they stopped in Geneva to see the D'Albert-Durades. George Eliot gave the right of translating *Adam Bede* into French to M. D'Albert, who would eventually also translate *The Mill on the Floss* (1863), *Silas Marner* (1863), *Romola* (1878) and *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1884). They returned in June to a house they had taken the year before in Wandsworth, with George Eliot thinking about her Italian novel. But having just acquired three children herself, she wrote instead a novel about a child who comes suddenly into a man's life. The labors of *Romola* were delayed and *Silas Marner* was written. George Eliot began the novel on 30 September 1860 and finished it on 10 March 1861. It was published by Blackwood on 2 April 1861.

*Silas Marner* is a tale of alienation that is perched on the edge of tragedy but manages to be a comedy of the kind Demetrius called "tragedy in the disguise of mirth." Silas, a weaver, belongs to a Dissenting sect in the northern manufacturing town of Lantern-Yard. He believes in God, is engaged to a woman named Sarah, and trusts his friend William Dane completely. Dane, however, also loves Sarah and betrays Silas's trust by arranging a theft while Silas is incapacitated with catalepsy. The money is cached in Silas's

dwelling, and he is accused of the crime. Silas leaves town, goes south, and settles in Raveloe. He lives there without a friend, without a woman to love, and without a God to believe in. Year in and year out he works at his loom, amassing a hoard of gold that becomes his only love until that too is taken from him by the wastrel scion of Red House, Dunstan Cass. Silas reports the theft at the Rainbow, a tavern, and the worthies who are gathered there seriously discuss the crime over their beer pots. During the Christmas season of Silas's fifteenth year in Raveloe, he awakes from a cataleptic seizure to find that a golden-haired child has crawled to his hearth. Eppie replaces his gold as something to love and live for, and he rears her as his daughter with the help of Dolly Winthrop. Having kept secret his first marriage to an opium addict who is now long dead, Godfrey Cass decides to claim the child after the skeleton of his brother, identified by a whip, is found in a drained pit alongside Silas's gold. To prevent a similarly startling revelation of his own guilt, Godfrey confesses to his wife, and they go together to Silas's house to claim Godfrey's daughter. But Eppie refuses to recognize any father except the one who has loved and cared for her. Eventually she marries Aaron Winthrop, and the couple live with Silas. The Rainbow society looks on in the person of its chief elder, Mr. Macey, and approves the happy outcome.

Silas in the end gets both the child and the gold; he wins at precisely those points where the Cass brothers lose. He wins because he has learned to love and to act responsibly; they lose because they act irresponsibly. Trusting in chance, Dunstan robs Silas; trusting in chance, Godfrey refuses to acknowledge Eppie until it is too late. But their moments of trust in chance are precisely those that release Silas from its grip. Because his money is taken from him, human feeling is stirred in Silas: he is, as Mr. Macey says, "mushed." Because Eppie comes to him, the stirrings of feeling burgeon into love and responsibility. The moral and emotional hardness that has encased Silas from the time Dane betrayed him is chipped away until a human being is revealed. Silas is redeemed

during the Christmas season by the coming of a child for whom he makes himself responsible and whom he learns to love. A father replaces a miser when a child replaces a gold hoard. Eppie then leads *Silas* back to the community of his fellow men. The novel that began so darkly thus ends brightly. *Silas Marner* finally declares itself a comedy that does not avoid tragedies but contains them: Silas loses all to find all and dies that he might live.

George Eliot had for a third time written a novel about ordinary people. She had once again done for fiction what Wordsworth had done for poetry by showing what was extraordinary in the lives of ordinary men and women. Appropriately, *Silas Marner* begins with lines from Wordsworth--George Eliot's favorite poet:

A child, more than all other gifts

That earth can offer to declining man,

Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.

The novel was received as a relief from the moral complexities of *The Mill on the Floss*, though some reviewers complained again of its low-life realism, like that of the Dutch painters George Eliot had extolled in chapter seventeen of *Adam Bede*. The novel gradually gained wide popularity, surviving in schoolrooms when George Eliot's other novels went unread. *Silas Marner* was mistaken for a simple moral fable that had a "tender religious charm" to it, when in fact it was a version of secular redemption through human love. Its disappearance from reading lists in secondary schools allowed it to find a more critical readership on its own and thereby regain its place as a classic for mature readers.

When *Silas Marner* was reprinted in the Cabinet Edition of *The Works of George Eliot* (1878-1885), it appeared with two stories that had been

previously published anonymously. "The Lifted Veil" had appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in July 1859, and "Brother Jacob," which was written in August 1860, had appeared in the *Cornhill* magazine in July 1864. These two stories round out the early fiction of George Eliot. "The Lifted Veil," the more important of the two, inverts the action of *Silas Marner*: its protagonist portrays what Silas would have become if he had kept his gold and not found Eppie. Silas dramatizes Carlyle's "Everlasting Yea" and Latimer his "Everlasting No." Latimer can form no bond of fellow feeling with anyone he meets because he cannot accept the mixture of good and evil in human nature. He is blessed with an artist's sensibility but cursed by his inability to create. He is the projection of what George Eliot could have become if she had not sympathetically accepted man as he is: "the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is," she says, "that those who read them should be able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures." Latimer cannot create because he cannot feel with his fellow man. He is the opposite then of both George Eliot and the best readers of her fiction.

The early phase of George Eliot's career ends with *Silas Marner*, a novel that is generally considered to be the most rounded and balanced of her works. From "Amos Barton" to *Silas Marner*, she gathers together her powers to explore the tragedy and comedy of life as it is lived in carefully delimited rural communities. Beginning with *Romola*, her perspective widens, and she deals with the complexities of human nature as men find themselves living through turning points in the history of Western civilization. She focuses on a period of reformation in Florence in the 1490s in *Romola*; she brings alive the era of Reform in England from 1829 to 1833 in *Felix Holt*, *The Radical* and *Middlemarch*; and she projects an 1860s Zionist vision of a new Israel in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). George Eliot's last four novels engaged her in a great deal of historical research. "When you see her," Lewes wrote to John

Blackwood concerning *Romola*, "mind your care is to discountenance the idea of a Romance being the product of an Encyclopaedia." *Romola* is so filled with learning that Henry James called it "a splendid mausoleum" in which George Eliot's "simplicity ... lies buried." There was certainly nothing simple about the conception and writing of it. The idea for a novel about Savonarola had been presented to George Eliot in Florence in May 1860. After writing *Silas Marner*, she went again to Florence in May 1861 for further research. When she returned to England, reading and note taking continued. On 7 October 1861 she began writing *Romola* but by the end of the month was "utterly desponding" about it. On 1 January 1862 she began writing again and finished it on 9 June 1863, having deserted Blackwood as her publisher--which she later admitted may have been a mistake--to be paid £7,000 by Smith, Elder to publish it in fourteen installments in the *Cornhill* magazine before its appearance as a three-volume novel. The encyclopedic research, the delay caused by *Silas Marner*, the false start, the change of publisher, and the serial publication altogether wore George Eliot out and made her, as she said, "an old woman."

*Romola* is the story of a faithful woman who marries a faithless man. Romola is faithful to her blind, scholarly father, Bardo; to her beloved godfather, Bernardo, a Medicean politician; to Savonarola, the democratic reformer of Florence; and to Florence itself. Her husband, Tito, is unfaithful to these men, to their city, and to Romola. His treachery costs the men their lives, and with nothing to live for, Romola herself wants to die. But she does not: seeking death she finds life. *Romola* is consequently a novel about renaissance. It asks how a woman can be born again once those whom she loves are dead and once personal love itself dies within her. The question is asked in a tragic form that gives universal meaning to a unique period of history, and it is answered in a coda that points away from future tragedy. *Romola* takes up where *The Mill on the Floss* left off: *The Mill on the Floss* ends with a flood, a modern deluge that wrecks a

civilization; *Romola* begins in the Renaissance, the rebirth of civilization. The historical time of *Romola* coordinates perfectly with its theme of rebirth. It suggests the intimate relationship between the individual and his civilization while both are in the process of renewing themselves. Thus Savonarola presents to Romola the same ideal that he presents to Florence. Because she is less compromising than he in living out that ideal, she is renewed and Florence is not; she lives and he dies. Romola is reborn from water when her boat is washed ashore, and Savonarola dies by fire when he is burned at the stake. But in his death he is purified, and his principles live on for others to follow. Renaissance is made personal; only when a sufficient number of people embrace it personally can there be a public renewal.

If the Renaissance meant the cultural rebirth of a civilization and the liberation of the individual, it did not necessarily mean the spiritual rebirth of either. A completely liberated Renaissance man like Tito therefore dies because of selfishness, and late quattrocento Florence falls into anarchy and succumbs to tyranny because it repudiates Savonarola's reform. *Romola* is consequently centrally concerned with the birth of a spiritual ideal in one woman who endures the loss of everyone and everything she loves and survives the license of a civilization that executes the man who gave it an ideal.

At the end of *Romola*--in the coda that George Eliot said belonged to her "earliest vision of the story"--her moral belief in fellow feeling as man's chief saving virtue achieves a new status. Bereft, betrayed, unloved, Romola wants to die, but she must live; others need her. Neither personal pleasure nor personal pain is allowed to be an adequate guide for moral action. Each man, though unique, shares with other men a common humanity that binds him to life when for personal reasons he might choose not to live. Fellow feeling is therefore a universal ethical principle that governs both life and death, and *Romola* puts it to the test. Humanity in the novel is very often deplorable, showing itself in pedantic and

vengeful learned men, in faithless and treacherous lovers, in fanatical zealots, and in the bestial rich and the depraved poor. George Eliot shows in the novel that life is painful because of other human beings, but that Romola must affirm life at just that point because the very pain others cause her shows their dire need for her.

When the critics protested against the erotic attraction between Maggie and Stephen in *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot replied: "If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of character ... *then*, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened!" When the critics set up "a universal howl of discontent" over her departure in *Romola* from "the breath of cows and the scent of hay" that made *Adam Bede* so popular, George Eliot anticipated them in a letter to Sara Hennell: "If one is to have freedom to write out one's own varying unfolding self, and not be a machine always grinding out the same material or spinning the same sort of web, one cannot always write for the same public." In acting like an artist, George Eliot lost some of her audience. The complaint was that the setting was too remote, the evocation of time and place too learned, the "instructive antiquarianism" too lifeless. Whereas Robert Browning called *Romola* "the noblest and most heroic prose poem" that he had ever read and a small coterie came to refer to George Eliot as "the author of *Romola*," the more general reaction to the novel was given in the *Saturday Review*: "No reader of *Romola* will lay it down without admiration, and few without regret."

The publication of *Romola* changed the way that George Eliot was generally viewed by the Victorian public. Although she was still an outsider because of her irregular union with Lewes, she came to be looked upon as a great moral teacher all the same. A new permanent residence (The Priory, 21 North Bank, Regent's Park) and Sunday afternoon receptions added a sense of ritual to her life that enhanced her image as a Victorian sage. The Leweses had The Priory entirely to themselves because Lewes's sons had

begun to strike out on their own: Charles, who had a position at the post office, married; Thornton and Herbert went to South Africa to farm a three-thousand acre tract of land on the Orange River (both, however, were to die young, Thornie in 1869 and Bertie in 1875). After another trip to Italy George Eliot settled at The Priory to attempt something altogether new for her in a drama called "The Spanish Gypsy." The first try at writing was a failure, and Lewes took the manuscript away from her when physical and emotional afflictions over her inability to write became gravely debilitating. A month later, on 29 March 1865, she began work on *Felix Holt, The Radical*, which was finished on 31 May 1866. Lewes offered the manuscript to Smith, Elder for £5,000; his price was not met because the firm had lost a considerable sum of money on *Romola*. *Felix Holt* was then offered to John Blackwood, who, finding it "a perfect marvel," paid what was asked, and the novel was published on 15 June 1866.

*Felix Holt* divides its interest between the working class as represented by Felix and the gentry of Transome Court, especially Harold Transome and his aging mother. They are linked together by Esther Lyon, who is courted by both Harold and Felix and who, though reared by the Dissenting clergyman Rufus Lyon, turns out to be the heiress to Transome Court. Felix figures in the novel as a moral catalyst for Esther. Through him she learns what she really wants to do with her life. Set in 1833 at the time of the first election following the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, the novel presents Felix as a political Radical who accidentally kills a man in the midst of a rioting mob. From the courtroom and the jail he wins Esther's conscience and then her heart; at the same time, the elegant Mrs. Transome tries to win Esther as her daughter because Harold had repudiated his mother when he discovered that he is illegitimate. Torn between Felix and poverty on the one side and Harold and wealth on the other, Esther chooses the former, having briefly experienced the emptiness and sorrow of the latter in a stay at Transome Court.

*Felix Holt* is not so much Felix's novel as it is Esther's: it is the drama of her moral development. Felix leads Esther to examine the meaning of the goals that she has set for herself: riches, finery, and leisure. Felix forces Esther to confront her erotic impulses and to ask herself whether life is better with love or luxury if one must choose between the two. Felix is indispensable to Esther's ethical and erotic life insofar as she comes to realize that without loving him she cannot be moral: "the man she loved was her hero," and "her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current." Because of Felix she realizes that Transome Court is a "silken bondage" and "nothing better than a well-cushioned despair."

One of the problems that critics have found with the novel is that there is so much in it that Esther's moving back and forth between two levels of society is not a sufficient dramatic action to unify it. This is especially the case because the characterization of Mrs. Transome is so splendid an achievement that the reader tends to forget the eponymous hero, while the speech and movements of this pathetically tragic old woman linger powerfully in the memory. Mrs. Transome is so poignantly drawn that it seems inadequate to think of her as simply an instance of what Esther could become if she turned her back on Felix and took Harold's hand in marriage. The felt life in the novel comes together in Mrs. Transome while its moral intention is focused on the more forgettable Felix. As in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), which anticipates a great deal that is in *Felix Holt*, Mrs. Transome, like Miss Havisham before her, draws out her creator's imaginative genius so completely that no other character is her equal.

With *Felix Holt* finished, George Eliot took up *The Spanish Gypsy* again, but she no longer thought of it as a drama to be staged; it would be a narrative poem with significant dramatic sequences in it. After a trip to Spain in the winter of 1866-1867, she was able to work more comfortably at the poem, and it was completed on 29 April 1868.

After its publication, she wrote a series of poems--"Agatha," "How Lisa Loved the King," and the "Brother and Sister" sonnets--before turning her mind once more to a novel. In August 1869 she began work on a novel called "Middlemarch," which in its original conception was only part of the novel that is known by that name today. It was to have focused on Lydgate and the Vincys and to have been set in the middle-class society of the town. Work on this novel was interrupted at the end of 1870 by the writing of two more poems--"The Legend of Jubal" and "Armgart"--and by a peremptory idea for another novel called "Miss Brooke," which would focus on Dorothea and the life of the gentry surrounding a town like Middlemarch. Early in 1871 George Eliot began to amalgamate the Lydgate and Dorothea stories into the one novel under the title *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, which Lewes persuaded Blackwood to publish in eight parts, the first part appearing in December 1871 and the last in December 1872. *Middlemarch* was also issued as a four-volume novel in late 1872. "It treats marriage, medical progress, religious idealism, the abstruse researches of mythological Biblical scholarship, recalling Strauss and his peers, the coming of railways into agricultural communities, Reform, conservation, sex, changing fashions in art, and the eternal themes of painful discovery of truth as opposed to romantic, or conventional fantasy," says A. S. Byatt. "It is a novel, above all, about *intelligence* and its triumphs, failures, distractions, fallings-short, compromises and doggedness." The greatness of *Middlemarch* was immediately acknowledged; the novel was a classic in its own time. Not that it did not raise complaints similar to those that greeted *The Mill on the Floss* where complexity compounded perplexed the critics: it caused confusion because it was even more complex morally and aesthetically than its predecessor. In *The Mill on the Floss* George Eliot had written a tragedy; in *Middlemarch* she wrote an epic. "If we write novels so," asked Henry James, "how shall we write History?"--a question that he answered tellingly in the same review: *Middlemarch* "sets a limit ... to the development of the old-fashioned English novel." After it, fiction must dare to be difficult. *Middlemarch* could be

given too much praise, said Geoffrey Tollotson, only "by saying that it was easily the best of the half-dozen best novels in the world."

*Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* spreads so wide a canvas that it is frequently compared with *War and Peace*. In it George Eliot weaves together four stories to make one novel. That of Dorothea Brooke shows her making a marriage on idealistic grounds to a scholarly clergyman, Edward Casaubon, who is at least twice her age. She marries him to be his helpmate but turns out to be his critic. Their marriage is a purgatory to each until Casaubon's timely death. A second story, that of Lydgate, is similar to the first. As a gentleman he seems an ideal catch to the daughter of the mayor of Middlemarch, Rosamond Vincy, whose middleclass upbringing requires her to marry into gentility. Her respectability destroys his scientific vocation and leads him to an undistinguished career and an early grave. A third story is that of Nicholas Bulstrode, a banker with a passion for preaching religion and making his favor in God's eyes felt by all--until his past reveals him to have done a dire deed of a kind that he repeats in the present. Linking these three stories together is Will Ladislaw, who learns that Bulstrode is his stepgrandfather, who is mistakenly thought to be Rosamond's lover, and who actually becomes Dorothea's second husband. Ladislaw's love for Dorothea is paralleled by Fred Vincy's for Mary Garth in a fourth story that also introduces the figures of Caleb Garth and Peter Featherstone as original instances of integrity and indulgence, respectively.

A singular note in this novel is the intelligence of the narrator and his sympathy with the human condition. There are no caricatures among the major characters. Each is known so thoroughly that whatever is reprehensible, or indeed even at times criminal, in him is understood in terms of a complex of human desires not very different from those of the reader himself. "With George Eliot, to understand is to pity," says Gordon S. Haight, "--as far as possible, to forgive." In a novel that has

no epigraph of its own, one that could serve for the whole novel comes at the head of chapter forty-two, in which the reader is made thoroughly to understand the character of Edward Casaubon: "How much methinks, I could despise this man, / Were I not bound in charity against it!"

*Middlemarch* begins with a sixteenth-century prelude that presents the life of St. Theresa of Avila as an exemplum of the meeting of individual aspiration and epical opportunity: the time was right for her to become a heroine because Spain had just come to national unity by joining the kingdoms of Aragon and Castille, had just emancipated itself from the Moors at the battle of Granada, and had just begun to produce a literature that would issue in a Golden Age. The one thing it lacked was a spiritual ideal and that was what Theresa gave it by reforming the Carmelite order, founding twentysix convents and sixteen monasteries. She gave Spain spiritual direction by renewing its religious life. *Middlemarch* goes on to present a series of stories in which individual aspiration does not find an era of epos but only a time of confusion. England in the Reform era is separated into factions either to support or to oppose a new organization of society. This is a period characterized more by pettiness than by magnanimity. The individual aspiring to greatness in such a society finds no sure guidelines and becomes a victim of his lofty aspirations. *Middlemarch*, then, is a novel about individual aspiration coming face to face with social limitation and the unhappy consequences of their meeting. In *Middlemarch* men and women undergo the "varying experiments of Time" from 1829 to 1832; those who emerge as heroes and heroines become in some small way part of the larger historical movement for reform. Caleb Garth insists on reform in the management of estates; Will Ladislaw enters politics on the side of the Reform Bill and becomes a member of Parliament; and Dorothea Brooke promotes the work and ideals of each. Characterized by personal integrity, fellow feeling, and a sense of their place in history, these three characters become instances of the muted heroism open to

men and women in a complex world. The novel's most notable failures, Bulstrode and Casaubon, lack all the qualities that allot man a modicum of greatness. Lydgate, a compassionate man with a sense of historical progress, is the novel's great tragic character because his heroic temper is geared to science alone; in other things, like the judgment of women, his mind is common and uncritical. His "spots of commonness" destroy the aims of his life, which were "to do good small work for Middlemarch" and "great work for the world." The failure of this noble man, understood in its every detail, is the most heartrending drama in all of George Eliot's fiction.

*Daniel Deronda* is a logical continuation of *Middlemarch*, which constantly emphasizes themes of quest: Dorothea seeks a spiritual ideal, Lydgate scientific discovery and medical reform, Casaubon scholarly recognition, Bulstrode divine instrumentality, Ladislaw a purposeful vocation, and English society seeks Reform. Daniel Deronda seeks his roots in those of his people; he seeks to establish a national center for the Jews so that they may have their own identity as a nation. The far-resonant action which presumed an era of epos in the prelude and which was not apparent to George Eliot as a possibility in *Middlemarch* became apparent to her when she wrote *Daniel Deronda*.

The novel opens in the casino at Leubronn where Gwendolen Harleth is playing roulette. This scene is based on George Eliot's experience in the Kursaal at Homburg where in October 1872 she saw Lord Byron's grandniece "completely in the grasp of this mean, money-raking demon." The germ of Gwendolen's story was here. Mordecai's also had a German origin. Born in Silesia and educated in Berlin, Emanuel Deutsch came into George Eliot's life in 1866. He was a cataloguer of books in the British Museum by profession but a radical Jewish nationalist by preference. He taught George Eliot Hebrew and gave her the idea of a Jewish national homeland. She visited him when he was ill with cancer and mourned his death in May 1873. In June she began thinking

about a new book and soon was reading in Jewish sources. Her work on *Daniel Deronda* was delayed by the publication of *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems* (May 1874) but by June she was again at work on the novel. John Blackwood agreed to publish it in eight parts, the first book appearing on 1 February 1876 and the last on 1 September 1876. The novel was then published in a four-volume edition.

After being reared by Sir Hugo Mallinger, Daniel Deronda finds out that his parents were Jews and that his mother, the daughter of a proto-Zionist, is still alive and wishes to see him before she dies. Having already befriended Ezra Cohen (familiarily called Mordecai) and his sister Mirah, Deronda rejoices in an ancestry that gives him a sense of himself, makes possible his marriage to Mirah, and enables him to fulfill Mordecai's prophecy that he will be a leader of his people. *Daniel Deronda* centers on this quest for self that is at the same time a quest for others; but it is anything but a simple romance. It is a story of psychological growth that is achieved by the experience of nearly unbearable pain. It has a counterpoint in another story, that of Gwendolen Harleth, in which Deronda must act as guide for a troubled soul: he must be to Gwendolen what Mordecai is to him. She has made, against her conscience, a hideous marriage to Henleigh Grandcourt--his mistress and the mother of his four children is the woman Gwendolen knows he should have married--and she involves Deronda in her miseries, falling in love with him as well. The story of Gwendolen and Grandcourt--a story of jaded aristocratic England in the 1860s--is far more thoroughly dramatized and consequential than that of Deronda and the Jewish community that surrounds him. The critics, as David Carroll says, were quick to see this: "Just as they had jettisoned the final volume of *The Mill on the Floss*, the historical background of *Romola*, and the tendentious commentary of *Middlemarch*, so now they dismiss the Jewish half of *Daniel Deronda*." Deronda is damned as "the Prince of Prigs" for not marrying Gwendolen and for imbibing too deeply the "bottled moonshine of Mordecai's mysteries."

In 1948 F. R. Leavis went so far as to retitl the novel "Gwendolen Harleth." George Eliot nevertheless held her ground and insisted that she "meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there." For her, *Daniel Deronda* examines man's need to establish a rule within himself before he can effectively establish himself among other men. It treats this need in the context of a yearning for deliverance from individual and racial bondage so that men and women can live fuller and better lives. At the novel's center is the age-old Hebrew myth of the deliverance of Israel from exile to the promised land. George Eliot finds in this myth a transcendent moral impulse that encompasses Jew and Gentile alike and that leads all men to yearn for spiritual as well as political freedom. Thus the mastery over self that Gwendolen and Deronda seek makes Daniel as integral a part of her life as Mordecai is of Daniel's. For many the ideal ending of such mutual quests would be marriage, but George Eliot denies her readers this easy conclusion. In *Daniel Deronda* the psychological development of Gwendolen and Daniel demands the emergence of moral independence for self-realization. For Gwendolen to marry Daniel would be for her to commit herself to continuous dependence on him, which would be a reversion to her childhood and a denial of maturity. Gwendolen has finally to choose for herself in accordance with the standards she has taken from Deronda and from the experience of sorrow in her awful marriage. George Eliot is finally ruthless with Gwendolen so that she may be truly free.

When Deronda learns of his heritage and accepts it, his life opens out not only beyond any future that Gwendolen could share with him but also beyond the limits of Jewishness itself. Deronda cannot be the kind of intolerant man that his grandfather Daniel Charisi was. He tells his mother that "the Christian sympathies in which my mind was reared can never die out of me." He adds his Jewish heritage to his Christian upbringing and reconciles Jew and Christian within himself; his vocation to a Jewish cause enlarges the scope of his Christian principles. Just

as Israel is meant in this novel to figure forth a universal brotherhood--it is to be the "halting-place of enmities"--Daniel Deronda is meant to figure forth a universal man. With him George Eliot's fiction had reached the limit of her moral imagination. She had written her last novel.

If George Eliot's fiction is considered from beginning to end, certain broad patterns can be seen in it. From "Amos Barton" to *Silas Marner* she concentrates on the individual in his community, conceived of as a traditional group; from *Romola* to *Daniel Deronda* she concentrates on the individual in his world, conceived of as a polity in a state of change. In *Adam Bede* a new man is created, in *The Mill on the Floss* an old world is destroyed by flood, and in *Silas Marner* a man is redeemed and a new Eden is created and presided over by Unseen Love. In the later novels these patterns of creation, destruction, and redemption are repeated more complexly. In *Romola* a Renaissance civilization is recreated, in *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* an old world dies and the world of reform is born, and in *Daniel Deronda* Israel, the halting-place of enmities, is the home of fellow feeling itself. Each of the last four novels reworks themes of the first three and sets them at crucial moments for civilization: Florence in the 1490s wavering between democracy and tyranny; England from 1829 to 1833 wavering between the old corruption and reform; and the people of Israel nearing the end of exile from the New Jerusalem. In all the novels constant patterns of human experience are organized into constant patterns of aesthetic experience. George Eliot moves from tragicomedy (*Adam Bede*) through tragedy (*The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola*) to comedy as "tragedy in the disguise of mirth" (*Silas Marner* and *Felix Holt*) to epic (*Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*). She ends her career as a novelist not with man accepted and assimilated into his community or rejected from it, but with man questing for new values and modes of existence.

Her last book, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, a collection of essays, was published in May 1879. It came from the press between the deaths of the

two men who knew her best. George Henry Lewes died on 30 November 1878. Lewes had said of George Eliot, "She is a Mediaeval Saint with a grand genius"; she could not but grieve long and deeply over the death of the man who first called that genius out of the depths of her soul and supported it tirelessly all his life. George Eliot understood that no author could have had a better editor and publisher than John Blackwood. When he died on 29 October 1879, she paid him the tribute he deserved: "He has been bound up with what I most cared for in my life for more than twenty years and his good qualities have made many things easy for me that without him would often have been difficult." Bereft of the two men who were her support in life, she turned to John Walter Cross to help her with many of the things that Lewes or Blackwood would otherwise have done for her. Cross had been an intimate of the Leweses since 1869. A banker, he had handled their investments, and when they sought a country house, it was he who found The Heights at Witley for them. Although the Leweses called him Johnny and referred to him as their nephew, he proposed to George Eliot, who was twenty years his senior, three times. They were married on 6 May 1880 at St. George's Church, Hanover Square. Isaac Evans, who had not written to his sister since 1857, sent his congratulations. George Eliot did not, however, live long enough to enjoy the respectability conferred upon her by a church wedding. She died rather suddenly on 22 December 1880 after an attack of acute laryngitis followed by an attack of kidney stones that together brought on heart failure. She was buried next to Lewes in Highgate Cemetery, a place in Westminster Abbey being denied her as a woman, in Thomas Henry Huxley's words, "whose life and opinions were in notorious antagonism to Christian practice in regard to marriage, and Christian theory in regard to dogma." In the centenary year of her death, nonetheless, George Eliot made her way to the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey when a memorial stone was placed there in her honor.

**Papers:** The principal collections of George Eliot's papers are those of the British Museum and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; there are also important collections in the New York Public Library, the Pforzheimer Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Princeton University Library.

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