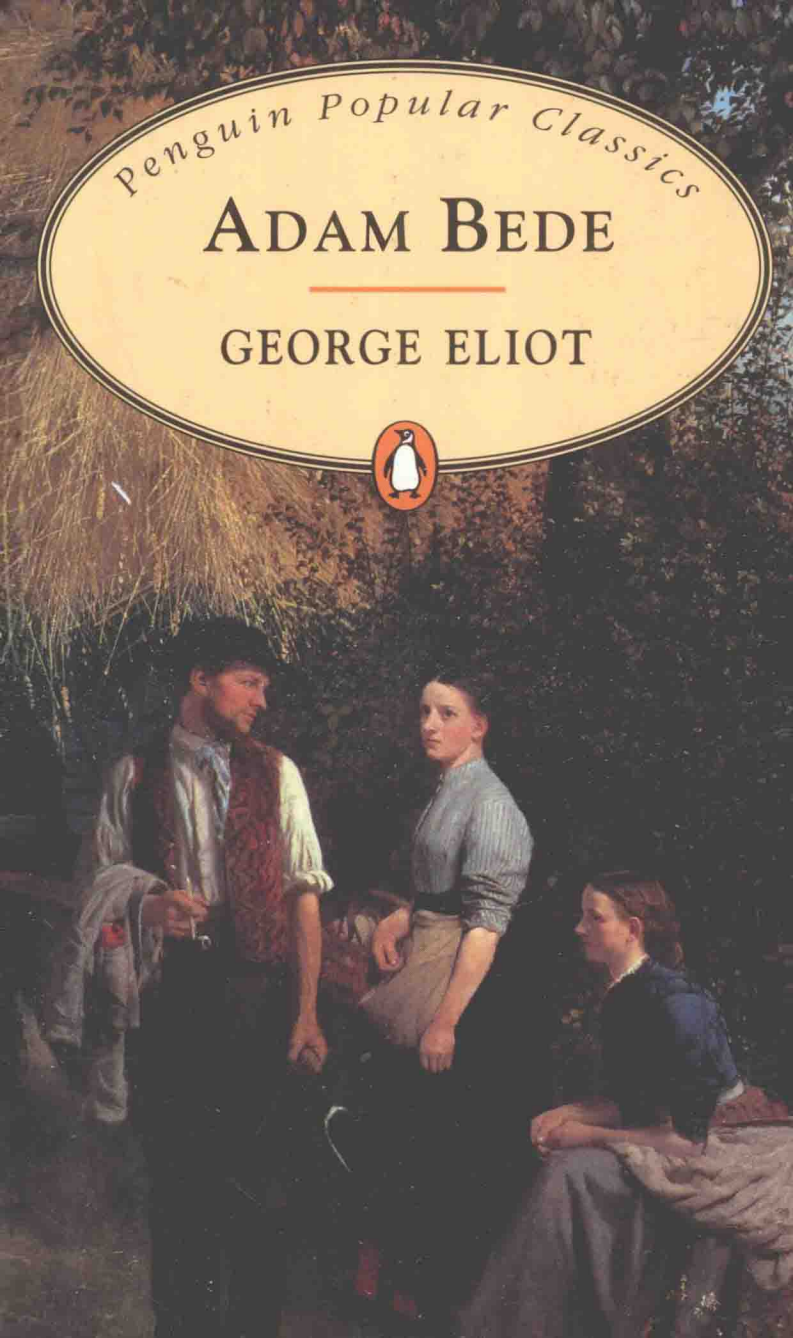


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ADAM BEDE

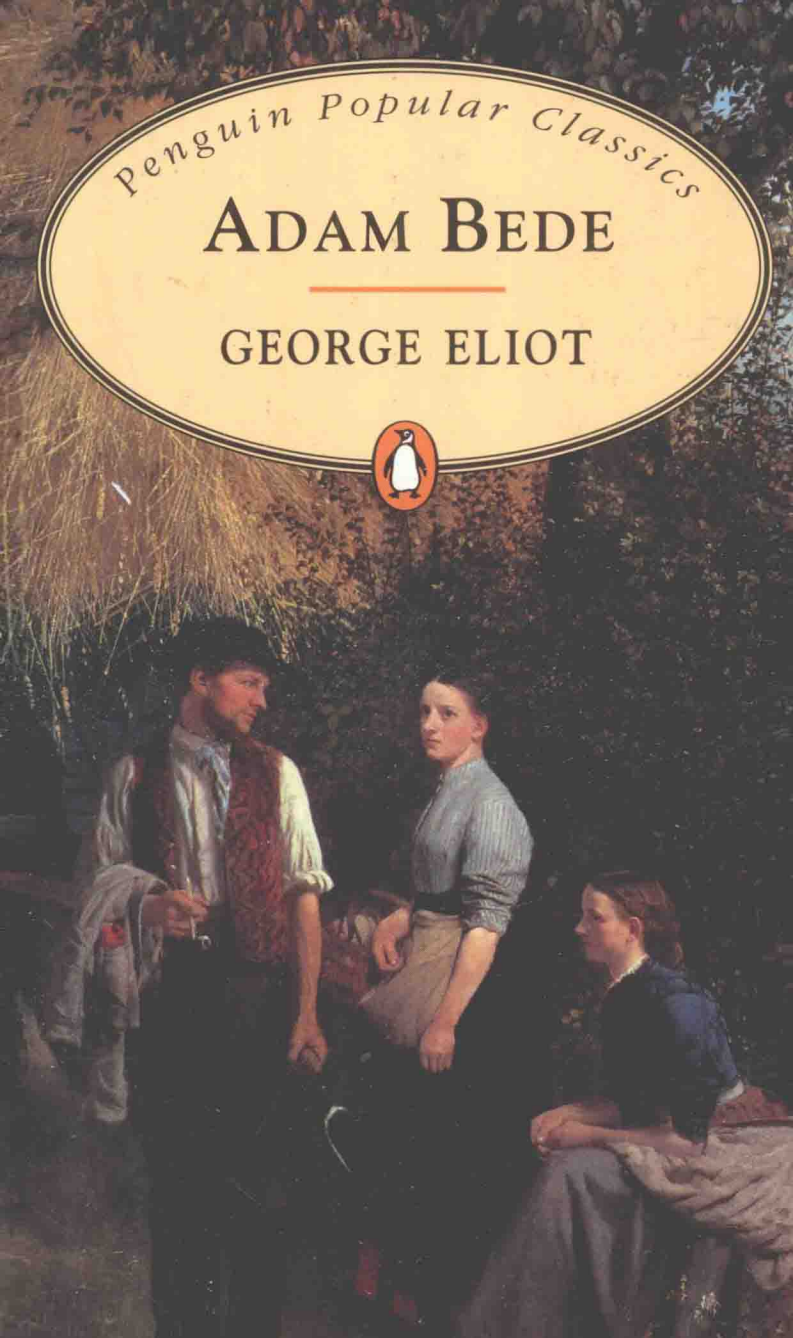
GEORGE ELIOT



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ADAM BEDE

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ADAM BEDE

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

'I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind.'

George Eliot admirably achieves this aim in *Adam Bede*, her first novel, as she subtly but realistically weaves together the lives of four inhabitants in the close-knit community of Hayslope: She creates a simple pastoral, which tells of the seduction of the beautiful Hetty Sorrel – a vain, self-seeking country girl – and the shattered hopes and illusions of Adam Bede, her unacknowledged lover. The tone is one of such bitter-sweet melancholy that their tragedy will deeply touch the reader, and even lead us to sympathize with the candid but over-proud Captain Donnithorne, Hetty's seducer, and to feel the severity of his self-inflicted punishment.

Yet there is a powerful shining light in the novel, embodied in the form of the Methodist preacher Dinah Morris. Her loving affection and devout sense of what is right breathes a peaceful warmth into all lives involved in *Adam Bede*.

The cover shows a detail from *The End of the Day*, by William Edward Millner reproduced by courtesy of, Christie's, London (photo: Bridgeman Art Library)

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ADAM BEDE

BY GEORGE ELIOT

GEORGE ELIOT (1819–80). One of the most influential of all English novelists, she is admired as much for her acute powers of observation and in-depth characterization as for her novels.

George Eliot, the pen name of Mary Ann (Marian) Evans, was born in 1819 near Nuneaton in Warwickshire, the youngest surviving daughter of Robert Evans, a respected land agent. During her childhood she was particularly close to her elder brother Isaac, and their relationship is echoed in that of Maggie Tulliver and her beloved brother Tom in *The Mill on the Floss*. Much of her childhood was spent cut off from cultural activity but she became heavily influenced by a pious and evangelical preacher, Rev. John Edmund Jones, from an early age. It was not until later, when she met the progressive intellectuals Charles and Caroline Bray, that she questioned her orthodox beliefs, a development which upset and distanced her father for a time. After the death of her mother in 1836 Marian became her father's housekeeper but still found time to continue her education, reading widely and learning German and Italian. Her friendship with the Brays, after moving to Coventry in 1841, resulted in her being offered a commission to translate Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, the only publication to bear her real name. This in turn led to her meeting the publisher John Chapman who, when he purchased the *Westminster Review* in 1851, made her his managing editor. After her father's death in 1849 she moved to London, lodging for a while at Chapman's house. Here she met many of London's intelligentsia, among them the philosopher Herbert Spencer and the versatile man of letters G. H. Lewes. She developed strong feelings for Spencer, who she might have married save for the fact that he found her too 'morbidly intellectual'. Growing closer to G. H. Lewes, she made the difficult decision to set up home with him in 1854 (marriage being out of the question as he already had an estranged wife). It proved to be a strong and loving union which

lasted until Lewes's death in 1878. A strong influence on Marian, he persuaded her to abandon philosophy in favour of fiction, resulting in her first stories in 1858. Collected as *Scenes of Clerical Life*, they were published under her adopted pen name of George Eliot, a pseudonym which caused great speculation at the time. She was immediately recognized as a writer of some significant talent and followed this success with *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), in which she strays from her usual Midlands setting, *Felix Holt: The Radical* (1867), *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). She was also the author of a great many essays, reviews and articles. Seven months before her death in 1880 she married John W. Cross, an old friend and admirer, who was to become her first biographer. She is buried in Highgate cemetery next to Lewes. George Eliot has been highly praised by Virginia Woolf and also by F. R. Leavis, who thought her 'not as transcendently great as Tolstoy, but great, and great in the same way'.

Serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the first part of *Adam Bede* appeared in the February edition of 1859 and was soon a great success. Among the many reviews which flocked in as the story unfolded, *The Westminster Review* claimed, 'The gift which perhaps most of all distinguishes genius from ordinary mortals, is the power of seeing realities where the latter sees only appearances. The author of *Adam Bede* has this power . . .'

Readers may also find the following books of interest: Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983), and *George Eliot* (1986); David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (1971); Gordon Haight, *A Century of George Eliot Criticism* (1965), and *George Eliot: A Biography* (1968); Barbara Hardy, *Particularities: Readings in George Eliot* (1983), and *The Novels of George Eliot* (1959); Barbara Hardy (ed.), *Critical Essays on George Eliot* (1970); W. J. Harvey, *The Art of George Eliot* (1961); F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (1948); and Jane Purkiss, *A Preface to George Eliot* (1985).

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ADAM BEDE

GEORGE ELIOT



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“So that ye may have
Clear images before your gladdened eyes
Of nature’s unambitious underwood
And flowers that prosper in the shade. And when
I speak of such among the flock as swerved
Or fell, those only shall be singled out
Upon whose lapse, or error, something more
Than brotherly forgiveness may attend.”

—*Wordsworth*

