

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



GEORGE
ELIOT

Edited by George Levine

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GEORGE LEVINE

*Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture
Rutgers University*



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THE CAMBRIDGE
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GEORGE ELIOT

This volume of specially commissioned essays provides accessible introductions to all aspects of George Eliot's writing by some of the most distinguished new and established scholars and critics of Victorian literature. The essays are comprehensive, scholarly and lucidly written, and at the same time offer original insights into the work of one of the most important Victorian novelists, and into her complex and often scandalous career. Discussions of her life, the social, political, and intellectual grounding of her work, and her relation to Victorian feminism provide valuable criticism of everything from her early journalism to her poetry. Each essay contributes to a new understanding of the great fiction, from *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* to *Daniel Deronda*. With its supplementary material, including a chronology and a guide to further reading, this Companion is an invaluable tool for scholars and students alike.

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TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Since “George Eliot” was a pseudonym, this volume adopts the traditional style of never referring to her with a separable surname, “Eliot,” but always as “George Eliot.” Because, however, she was “a woman of many names,” as Rosemarie Bodenheimer describes her in this volume, the contributors to this volume will occasionally refer to her, when appropriate, as Mary Anne Evans, Mary Ann Evans, Marian Evans, Marian Evans Lewes, or Mary Anne Cross. For a convenient summary of the way George Eliot used these various names, see chapter 2, below.

All references to George Eliot’s novels and stories, except where specifically indicated otherwise, will be to the Oxford World Classics editions. The novels will be abbreviated in the following way:

<i>AB</i>	<i>Adam Bede</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>Daniel Deronda</i>
<i>FH</i>	<i>Felix Holt</i>
<i>JR</i>	“Janet’s Repentance”
<i>M</i>	<i>Middlemarch</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>The Mill on the Floss</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>Romola</i>
<i>SCL</i>	<i>Scenes of Clerical Life</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Silas Marner</i>

Other writings of George Eliot will be noted as follows:

<i>GEL</i>	<i>The George Eliot Letters</i> , 9 vols., ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954–78)
<i>ITS</i>	<i>Impressions of Theophrastus Such</i> , ed. Nancy Henry (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994)
<i>Journals</i>	<i>The Journals of George Eliot</i> , ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

- Pinney *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963)
- SEPW *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990)

Unless otherwise noted, all reviews of George Eliot's works will be cited from:

- CH *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971)

Annotations in the text take the following form: volume or book:chapter:page. Thus, a citation from *The Mill on the Floss* might read (MF, IV:6:354). This would mean that the quotation can be found in book 4, chapter 6, page 354. Most citations will have only two numbers, chapter and page. Where a single number appears, it refers to a page number unless otherwise indicated.

References within chapters are all keyed to the bibliography of works cited at the end of the book. Some of the works cited will also be listed in the section on further reading, which is arranged according to chronological periods of criticism of George Eliot.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1819 Born in South Farm, Warwickshire, on November 22 to Robert Evans, a land agent, and Christiana Pearson (Evans's second wife). Baptized Mary Anne Evans at the parish church of Chilvers Coton, she is the couple's third child, joining Isaac (born 1816) and Christiana (called "Chrissey," born 1814).
- 1820 The family moves to Griff House – a farmhouse near the Coventry Road. Here Robert Evans continues work for the landowner, Francis Newdigate, and Mrs. Evans runs the farm's dairy.
- 1824 GE joins her sister Chrissey at Miss Lathom's boarding school in Attleborough.
- 1828 Moves with Chrissey to Mrs. Wallington's school, the Elms, in Nuneaton; she is befriended by Maria Lewis, an Irish governess and evangelical, with whom she corresponds and exchanges religious ideas for the next ten years.
- 1832–5 Goes to a school in Coventry run by Rebecca and Mary Franklin, daughters of a Baptist minister; she excels at classes and gives piano recitals.
- 1836 Her mother dies of cancer in February; Robert Evans falls ill as a result and GE (now spelling her name, Mary Ann, without the "e") takes on the role of caring for him and the house.
- 1837–40 Her sister Chrissey marries Dr. Edward Clarke. Mary Ann studies German and Italian and reads religious and evangelical writings; corresponds frequently about these with Maria Lewis. In January 1840, she publishes, for the first time, in the *Christian Observer* – the piece is a religious poem entitled "As o'er the Fields."
- 1841 Moves with her father to Foleshill, on the outskirts of Coventry, after her brother Isaac marries and takes over Griff House. Encounters Charles Hennell's *An Inquiry into the Origins of*

- Christianity* and becomes close friends with his sister, Cara Bray, and her religiously skeptical husband, Charles – philanthropist, author, and leading figure in a Unitarian circle; Mary Ann begins to question her faith.
- 1842 On January 2, GE refuses to go to church. What she would later call a “Holy War” ensues between her and her father; she lives with Isaac and his wife Sarah at Griff for several weeks and then returns home, and to church, in May – on the condition that her father leave her to her own beliefs; befriends Sara Hennell, Charles’s other sister.
- 1844 Takes over a translation of Strauss’s *Leben Jesu* (“The Life of Jesus”) from her friend, Rufa Hennell, Charles Hennell’s new wife.
- 1845–46 Meets Harriet Martineau, then writing for a variety of publications, including the *Westminster Review*; inspired by her example, GE begins writing for the *Coventry Herald*, a radical newspaper owned by Charles Bray. In June of 1846 *The Life of Jesus* is published in three volumes.
- 1848–49 Nurses her ailing father; Robert Evans dies May 31, 1849. GE and the Brays leave for the Continent and then GE stays on in Geneva by herself for several months.
- 1850 Returns to England and stays with her brother at Griff, then with Chrissey; after attending a soirée at the house of the publisher John Chapman, who had asked her to write a review, she plans to return to London in the new year as one of his lodgers.
- 1851 Moves to Chapman’s residence at 142 Strand and changes her name to Marian Evans. Becomes very close to him, thereby alienating his wife and mistress; to ease tensions, she moves out temporarily and stays with the Brays. On her return, she begins what she and Chapman termed a “professional relationship” as editor of his recent acquisition, the *Westminster Review*.
- 1852–53 Among many other literary and intellectual figures, she becomes acquainted with Herbert Spencer; although Marian falls in love and the two are inaccurately rumored to be engaged, Spencer rejects her as anything but a friend. Spencer introduces her to George Henry Lewes, novelist, drama critic, student of science, and editor of a radical weekly magazine, the *Leader*; in 1853 GE becomes seriously involved with the married Lewes; Lewes is separated from his wife but is legally prohibited from divorcing her because he had condoned her adultery in the past.

- 1854-5 GE translates Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, published by Chapman; it is the only book she publishes under the name "Marian Evans." GE and Lewes begin to live together openly, traveling to Weimar, Germany, where Lewes researches a biography of Goethe; at the end of 1854 they move on to Berlin. In March of the next year, the couple return to England, where GE works on a translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*.
- 1855-56 GE and Lewes, their unmarried relationship now notorious in London circles, live in Richmond and contend with social ostracism; GE writes several articles and reviews for the *Leader* and the *Westminster Review*; Lewes's literary reputation is secured by the publication of *The Life of Goethe*.
- 1856-57 GE publishes "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" in the *Westminster Review*; in 1856 she begins work on "Amos Barton," the first of the *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Lewes mediates with the publisher John Blackwood and the first part of the story appears in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* under the name "George Eliot." The pseudonym protects Marian Evans from the likely consequences of the scandal, and from the condescension with which women writers were usually greeted, and disassociates her fiction from her translations of Strauss and Feuerbach.
- 1858 All three of the *Scenes of Clerical Life* are published as a two-volume book in January to favorable reviews; GE works on *Adam Bede*; in the spring, she and Lewes travel to Munich and Dresden.
- 1859 GE and Lewes move to larger quarters at Holly Lodge, south of the Thames. In February, *Adam Bede* is published in three volumes; it sells well (going through eight printings within the year) and receives good reviews: Queen Victoria is one of its fans. GE begins researching *The Mill on the Floss*, but interrupts her work to publish the fantasy tale, "The Lifted Veil," in *Blackwood's*.
- 1860 George Eliot is forced to reveal her identity. *The Mill on the Floss* is published by Blackwood; GE and Lewes leave for Italy to avoid publicity. They visit Rome, Venice, and Florence, where GE develops an interest in Saverio Savonarola as a subject for a new novel (later to become *Romola*). On their return to England, they live in London and take on the supervision of Lewes's sons; GE sets aside *Romola* to work on *Silas Marner*, her third novel set in the Midlands. Publishes in *Cornhill Magazine* a short story, "Brother Jacob."

CHRONOLOGY

- 1861 *Silas Marner* published in the spring; GE and Lewes visit Italy again to continue research on *Romola*.
- 1862-63 *Romola* serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, rival of *Blackwood's*, after unsuccessful negotiations with John Blackwood. In 1863, Lewes and GE buy a house, the Priory, on the edge of Regent's Park. Established, except perhaps for Dickens, as the most successful novelist in England, she gradually wins respectability. Holds weekly Sunday afternoons to which the most distinguished writers and thinkers come regularly.
- 1864-65 In 1864, Lewes takes on the editorship of the progressive periodical, the *Fortnightly Review*; GE begins work on a dramatic poem, *The Spanish Gypsy*. By March 1865, she has put it aside to work on *Felix Holt, The Radical*.
- 1866 Relations restored with Blackwood; he publishes *Felix Holt* and asks GE, in response to pending new legislation for electoral reform, to write "An Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt" for *Blackwood's*. GE and Lewes travel to Germany and France, then proceed to Spain, where GE researches *The Spanish Gypsy*.
- 1868 *The Spanish Gypsy* is published by Blackwood and sells well, despite mixed reviews.
- 1869 In a spring visit to Italy, GE and Lewes meet the banker John Cross; he later becomes their financial advisor. Back in England, she begins work on *Middlemarch*; Thornton, Lewes's second son, returns from the colonies gravely ill. GE temporarily abandons *Middlemarch* and begins a second long poem, "The Legend of Jubal"; "Thornie" dies a painful death at the Priory a few months after his arrival, of spinal tuberculosis.
- 1870-72 Begins a story, "Miss Brooke," which she later decides to connect to the story of Lydgate in *Middlemarch*. GE allows the publication of her *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings* in 1871, suggested and collected by a devoted fan, Alexander Main. Her reputation as novelist and sage is strengthened by this volume and by the eight-month serialization of the hugely successful *Middlemarch* (beginning December 1871).
- 1874 *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems* is published; a one-volume edition of *Middlemarch* comes out to very large sales; GE begins work on *Daniel Deronda*.
- 1875-76 Lewes, at work on what he hopes will be his magnum opus, *Problems of Life and Mind*, is continuously ill from 1875

onwards; he and GE divide their time between London and the countryside, eventually buying a country home, The Heights at Witley in Surrey, at the end of 1876. Following on the publishing success of *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda* is published in eight monthly installments (beginning February 1876).

- 1878 Lewes dies on November 30, after the progressive worsening of his illness; GE spends her mourning preparing *Problems of Life and Mind* for publication; she also sets up a scholarship at Cambridge in his name.
- 1879 *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, a collection of essays by the fictional "Theophrastus," is published; John Blackwood dies. After deep mourning for Lewes, GE accepts John Cross, who would become her financial advisor, as the first friend to be allowed to visit her. Evidence in the letters of increasing affection for Cross, twenty years her junior.
- 1880 On May 6, GE and Cross marry. They honeymoon in France and Italy; in Venice, Cross leaps from their hotel balcony into the canal in an apparent suicide attempt; after a visit from his brother, the couple travel back to England and the house at Witley. In December they move into a new London home at Cheyne Walk; shortly thereafter GE falls ill suddenly and dies on December 22; she is denied burial in Westminster Abbey and is buried instead next to Lewes at Highgate Cemetery.

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