

GEORGE ELIOT AND RELATIONSHIPS

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GRESHAM COLLEGE
LECTURES



George Eliot

By Sir Frederic William Burton, 1865



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Family likeness has often a deep sadness in it. Nature, that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains; blends yearning and repulsion; and ties us by our heartstrings to the beings that jar us at every movement.

Adam Bede, chapter 4, 'Home and its Sorrows'

‘Ay, ay!’ said Mrs Poyser; ‘one ’ud think an’ hear some folks talk, as the men war ’cute enough to count the corns in a bag o’ wheat wi’ only smelling at it. They can see through a barn-door, *they* can. Perhaps that’s the reason they can see so little o’ this side on’t.’

Bartle tries again with an attack on wives; if a man has ‘a mind for hot meat’, he says, ‘his wife’ll match it with cold bacon’. To which Mrs Poyser replies:

‘Yes... I know what the men like – a poor soft, as ’ud simper at ’em like the pictur o’ the sun, whether they did right or wrong, an’ say thank you for a kick, an’ pretend she didna know which end she stood uppermost, till her husband told her. That’s what a man wants in a wife, mostly: he wants to make sure o’ one fool as’ll tell him he’s wise. But there’s some men can do wi’out that – they think so much o’ themselves a’ready; an’ that’s how it is there’s old bachelors.’

Adam Bede, chapter 53, ‘The Harvest Supper’

ROSEMARY ASHTON



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STRAND

A Radical Address in
Victorian London

'Rivetingly entertaining'

A.N. Wilson, Books of the Year, *Observer*

JOHN CHAPMAN
BOOKSELLER
AND
PUBLISHER
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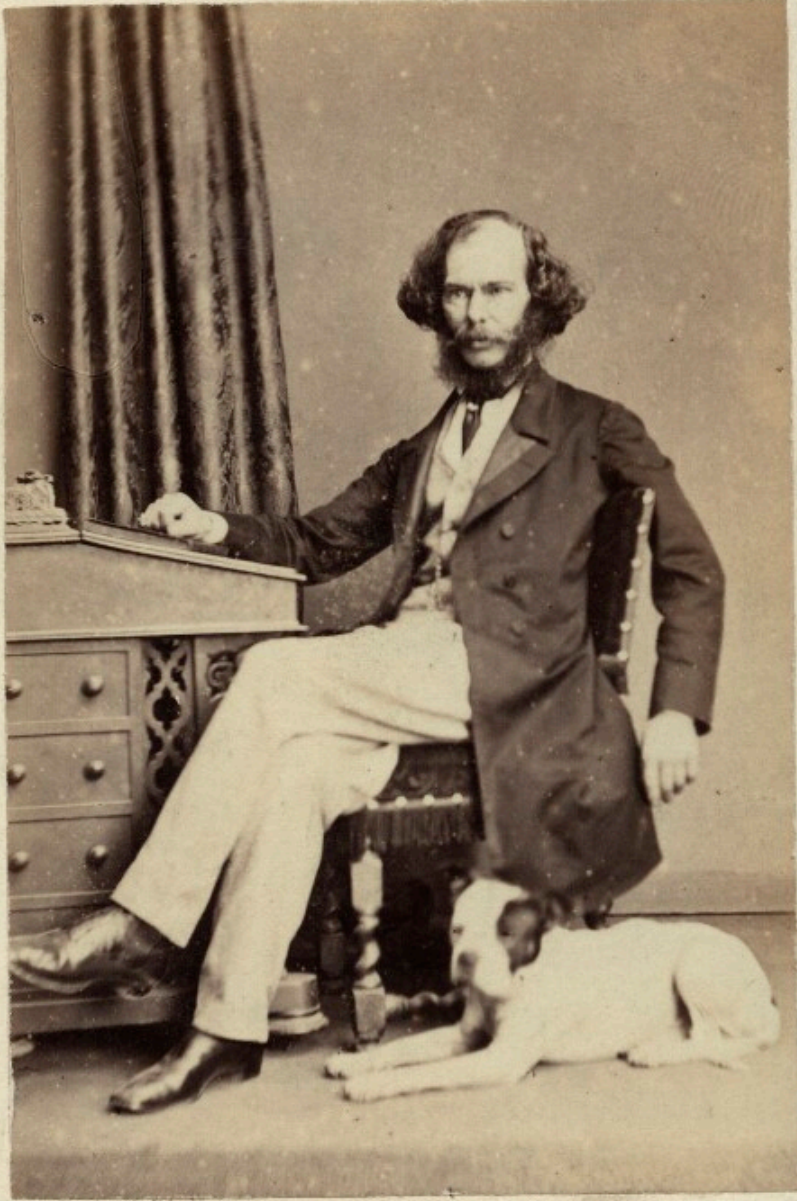


John Chapman



George Henry Lewes

By John & Charles Watkins, c.1865



JOHN & CHARLES WATKINS, PHOT.

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Agnes Lewes, G.H. Lewes, and Thornton Hunt

By William Makepeace Thackeray, c. 1848

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...in the sense in which every great artist is a teacher – namely, by giving us his higher sensibility as a medium, a delicate acoustic or optical instrument, bringing home to our coarser senses what would otherwise be unperceived by us.

‘Westward Ho! and Constance Herbert’, Westminster Review, July 1855

The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies... Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience 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... We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant...

‘The Natural History of German Life’, *Westminster Review*, July 1856

The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own right, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond. Her eyes and her wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb *contralto* and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues.

‘Silly Novels by Lady Novelists’, *Westminster Review*, October 1856

Like crystalline masses, it may take any form, and yet be beautiful; we have only to pour in the right elements – genuine observation, humour, and passion.

‘Silly Novels by Lady Novelists’

Mrs Glegg chose to wear her bonnet in the house to-day – untied and tilted slightly, of course – a frequent practice of hers when she was on a visit and happened to be in a severe humour: she didn't know what drafts there might be in strange houses... One would need to be learned in the fashions of those times to know how far in the rear of them Mrs Glegg's slate-coloured silk gown must have been, but from certain small constellations of small yellow spots upon it, and a mouldy odour about it suggestive of a damp clothes-chest, it was probable that it belonged to a stratum of garments just old enough to have come recently into wear.

The Mill on the Floss, Book 1, chapter 7, 'Enter the Aunts and Uncles'

It's the wonderful'st thing... as I picked the mother because she wasn't o-er cute – bein' a good-looking woman too, an' come of a rare family for managing – but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose 'cause she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn't a-goin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. But, you see, when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy.

The Mill on the Floss, book 1, chapter 3,
'Mr Riley Gives His Advice Concerning a School for Tom'

The Development theory and all explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes.

letter to Barbara Bodichon, 5 December 1859

The pride and obstinacy of millers and other insignificant people, whom you pass unnoticingly on the road every day, have their tragedy too, but it is of that unwept, hidden sort, that goes on from generation to generation and leaves no record – such tragedy, perhaps, as lies in the conflicts of young souls, hungry for joy, under a lot made suddenly hard to them, under the dreariness of a home where the morning brings no promise with it, and where the unexpectant discord of worn and disappointed parents weighs on the children like a damp, thick air in which all the functions of life are depressed; or such tragedy as lies in the slow or sudden death that follows on a bruised passion, though it may be a death that finds only a parish funeral.

The Mill on the Floss, Book 3, chapter 1, What Had Happened at Home'

‘You’ve got it’, said Tom, in rather a bitter tone.

‘What, the bit with the jam run out?’

‘No: here, take it’, said Tom firmly, handing decidedly the best piece to Maggie.

‘O, please, Tom, have it: I don’t mind – I like the other: please take this.’

‘No, I shan’t’, said Tom almost crossly, beginning on his own inferior piece.

Maggie, thinking it was no use to contend further, began too, and ate up her half-puff with considerable relish as well as rapidity...

‘O, you greedy thing!’ said Tom, when she had swallowed the last morsel. He was conscious of having acted very fairly, and thought she ought to have considered this and made up to him for it. He would have refused a bit of hers beforehand, but one is naturally at a different point of view before and after one’s own share of puff is swallowed.

The Mill on the Floss, Book 1, chapter 6, ‘The Aunts and Uncles Are Coming’

Some slipped a little downward, some got higher footing; people[,] denied aspirates, gained wealth, and fastidious gentlemen stood for boroughs; some were caught in political currents, some in ecclesiastical, and perhaps found themselves surprisingly grouped in consequence...

Middlemarch, chapter 11

The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven.

Middlemarch, chapter 11

‘We must think together about it, and you must help me.’

‘What can I do, Tertius?’ said Rosamond, turning her eyes on him again. That little speech of four words... is capable by varied vocal inflexions of expressing all states of mind from helpless dimness to exhaustive argumentative perception, from the completest self-devoting fellowship to the most neutral aloofness. Rosamond’s thin utterance threw into the words ‘What can I do!’ as much neutrality as they could hold. They fell like a mortal chill on Lydgate’s roused tenderness...

Meanwhile Rosamond quietly went out of the room, leaving Lydgate helpless and wondering. Was she not coming back? It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests.

Middlemarch, chapter 58

Never to beat and bruise one's wings against the inevitable but to throw the whole force of one's soul towards the achievement of some possible better, is the brief heading that need never be changed, however often the chapter of more special rules may have to be re-written.

letter to Clifford Allbutt, 30 December 1868

Her finely-touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature... spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

Middlemarch, Finale

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