Prodigiously learned, alive to the massive social changes of her time,
defiant of many Victorian orthodoxies, George Eliot has always chal-
lenged her readers. She is at once chronicler and analyst, novelist of
nostalgia and monumental thinker. In her great novel *Middlemarch*
she writes of ‘that tempting range of relevancies called the universe’.
This volume identifies a range of ‘relevancies’ that inform both her
fictional and her non-fictional writings. The range and scale of her
achievement are brought into focus by cogent essays on the many
contexts – historical, intellectual, political, social, cultural – to her
work. In addition there are discussions of her critical history and leg-
acy, as well as of the material conditions of production and distri-
bution of her novels and her journalism. The volume enables fuller
understanding and appreciation, from a twenty-first-century stand-
point, of the life and work of one of the nineteenth century’s major
writers.

MARGARET HARRIS is Professor of English Literature and Director
of Research Development in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Sydney. She has published widely on nineteenth- and
twentieth-century English and Australian literature.
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1 An 1858 photograph by John Edwin Mayall, of which George Eliot’s friend Mme Belloc (Bessie Rayner Parkes) commented that it gave ‘the only real indication left to us of the true shape of the head, and of George Eliot’s smile and general bearing’. © National Portrait Gallery, London.


3 The first (anonymous) publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1857.

4 George Eliot’s revisions of the opening of chapter 17 of *Adam Bede* for the eighth edition. By permission of Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.


6 Gordon S. Haight (1901–85), Professor of English at Yale from 1933, photographed in 1938. His work on George Eliot, especially his edition of her letters in nine volumes (1954–78), is indispensable. Reproduced by permission of Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University Library. Office of Public Affairs, Yale University. Photographs of Individuals (RU686).

7 Still from the set in Florence for *Romola*, directed by Henry King (1924), with (left to right) Dorothy Gish (Tessa), Ronald Colman (Carlo Bucellini), Henry King, unknown, Lillian Gish (Romola). Courtesy of www.doctormacro.com.

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<td>10 The Fair Toxophilites depicts one of the archery contests fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century, at which young elite women like Gwendolen Harleth were able to display their persons and their dress to best advantage. Dress and headgear could be elaborate as archery was an essentially static affair. The Fair Toxophilites, 1872, by William Powell Frith (1819–1909). Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, Devon, UK/The Bridgeman Art Library. Nationality/copyright status: English/out of copyright.</td>
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<td>11 As chief architect for the School Board of London, E. R. Robson was responsible for the design of hundreds of schools in London after the Elementary Education Act of 1870. ‘Double Class-Room, shewing dual arrangement of desks’ is from his School Architecture; Being Practical Remarks on the Planning, Designing, Building and Furnishing of School-Houses (1874), which encapsulated the principles he espoused.</td>
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<td>15 George Eliot heard the baritone George Henschel (1850–1934) on a number of occasions, sometimes accompanying himself as in this portrait. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Portrait of the singer George Henschel playing Alma-Tadema’s piano, Townsend House 1879 (oil on panel). Private collection. Photo © Christie’s Images. Reproduced by permission of The Bridgeman Art Library.</td>
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<td>16 John Tenniel, ‘A leap in the dark’, Punch (3 August 1867). Masquerading as a thoroughbred, Disraeli (who piloted the 1867 Bill through the Commons) gallops at a forbidding hedge labelled...</td>
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<td>Soon after the publication of <em>Scenes of Clerical Life</em>, ‘Shepperton Church’ was identified with that at Chilvers Coton, and the town of Milby with Nuneaton. ‘Reminiscences of “George Eliot”’ (<em>Graphic</em>, 8 January 1881) illustrates several of the places depicted in <em>Scenes</em>, including a ribbon weaver at a handloom (mentioned in ‘Amos Barton’: Silas Marner is not George Eliot’s only weaver).</td>
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<td>“‘You may run away from my words, Sir,” continued Mrs Poyser.’ Illustration by William Small, engraved by James D. Cooper, for <em>Adam Bede</em>, chapter 32, ‘Mrs Poyser “has her say out”’, in Blackwood’s Illustrated Edition (1867).</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>George Eliot’s grave in Highgate Cemetery, with Jacob Holyoake’s nearby (at the left of the image). By permission of Mustapha Oussellam.</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Like many travellers, George Eliot initially found Rome overpowering and gained relief by driving into the countryside—an experience shared with Dorothea Casaubon in chapter 20 of <em>Middlemarch</em>. Corot’s painting of the Campagna c. 1830–1 depicts the area as Dorothea might have seen it. Jean Baptiste Camille Corot (French, 1796–1875), <em>La Cervara, the Roman Campagna</em> (c. 1830–1). Oil on fabric, 97.6 x 135.8 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art. Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund 1963.91.</td>
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24 George Eliot shared the opinion common in her day that Raphael was the greatest of all painters. The Sistine Madonna (‘this sublimest picture’ – J, 325) especially moved her during her stay in Dresden in 1858, when she and Lewes frequently visited the Old Masters Gallery.
**Contributors**

**Juliette Atkinson** is a lecturer in nineteenth-century literature at University College London, currently preparing a monograph on Anglo-French literary relations in the nineteenth century. Her publications include *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century ‘Hidden’ Lives* (2010), and an edition of criticism on George Eliot. In 2012, she was awarded a New Scholars Award by the Bibliographical Society of America.

**Josie Billington** is a Victorian literature specialist in the School of English, and Deputy Director of the Centre for Reading Research, University of Liverpool. Publications include *Faithful Realism* (2002), *Eliot’s Middlemarch* (2008) and *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Shakespeare* (2012).

**Alicia Carroll**, Associate Professor of English at Auburn University, is the author of *Dark Smiles: Race and Desire in George Eliot* (2003). She is currently pursuing a new project entitled ‘New Woman Ecologies: From Arts and Crafts to the Great War’.

**Dermot Coleman** was awarded his doctorate by the University of Exeter in 2011 for a thesis entitled ‘Being Good with Money: Economic Bearings in George Eliot’s Ethical and Social Thought’. He remains a partner in the investment management firm he co-founded in 1998.

Notes on contributors

ROBERT DINGLEY was formerly a senior lecturer in English at the University of New England, New South Wales. He has written extensively on nineteenth-century British and Australian literature and his publications include essays and articles on Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot and Anna Sewell.

KIERAN DOLIN is Chair of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of Fiction and the Law: Legal Discourse in Victorian and Modernist Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

JUDITH FLANDERS is the author of a number of works on the Victorian period, including Consuming Passions: Leisure and Pleasure in Victorian England (2006) and The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens’ London (2012). She is Senior Research Fellow, Humanities Research Institute, University of Buckingham.

ELIZABETH GARGANO is the author of Reading Victorian Schoolrooms: Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (2008). She teaches English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

MOIRA GATENS is Challis Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. Her many publications include Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality (1996), Collective Imaginings: Spinoza Past and Present (with Genevieve Lloyd, 1999) and as editor, Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza (2009). Her current major project is on Spinoza, Feuerbach and George Eliot.

KYRIAKI HADJIAFXENDI is Senior Lecturer at Bath Spa University, currently completing a monograph entitled ‘George Eliot, the Literary Market-Place and Sympathy’. Her publications include Authorship in Context: From the Theoretical to the Material, edited with Polina Mackay (2007) and, as guest editor, a special issue of George Eliot–George Henry Lewes Studies, ‘The Cultural Place of George Eliot’s Poetry’ (2011).

MARGARET HARRIS is Director of Research Development in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney, where she was previously Challis Professor of English Literature. She edited The Journals of George Eliot (with Judith Johnston, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Clair Hughes, formerly Professor of English and American Literature at the International Christian University, Tokyo, is the author of *Dressed in Fiction* (2006) and *Henry James and the Art of Dress* (2001).


Judith Johnston formerly taught at the University of Western Australia, and is now an Honorary Associate at the University of Sydney. Her extensive publications on Victorian women's writing include *George Eliot and the Discourses of Medievalism* (2005), *Victorian Women and the Economies of Travel, Translation and Culture, 1830–1870* (2013) and *The Journals of George Eliot* (with Margaret Harris, Cambridge University Press, 1998).


Notes on contributors

Richard Menke, Associate Professor of English at the University of Georgia, is the author of *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (2008).


Leonée Ormond is Professor Emerita of Victorian Studies at King’s College London. She has published articles, editions and monographs on many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists and writers, including Dickens, George Eliot, George Du Maurier, Frederic Leighton (with Richard Ormond), Tennyson, Thackeray, Barrie, Kipling and Linley Sambourne.

Melissa Raines is the author of *George Eliot’s Grammar of Being* (2011), a study of George Eliot’s manuscripts, syntax and writing process. She has published several articles on George Eliot, and her current work is on the narrative and syntax of Thomas Hardy and Anthony Trollope. She teaches at the University of Liverpool.

Michael Rectenwald teaches liberal studies at New York University. He is co-author of *Academic Writing, Real World Topics* (with Lisa Carl, 2012) and has also published on science and *Middlemarch*, nineteenth-century secularism, and pre-Darwinian evolutionary thought. He is currently working on a book on secularism in connection with literature, science and religion.


Notes on contributors

LYNN VOSKUIL teaches Victorian literature and Women’s Studies at the University of Houston. She is the author of Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity (2004) and is currently working on ‘Horticulture and Imperialism: The Garden Spaces of the British Empire, 1789–1914’, a book project that explores nineteenth-century Britain’s fascination with exotic horticulture and plants.

JOANNE WILKES, Professor of English at the University of Auckland, has published Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot (2010) and the award-winning Lord Byron and Madame de Staël: Born for Opposition (1999). She has also edited Gaskell’s Mary Barton (2005) and periodical criticism by Margaret Oliphant (2011).
Preface

G. A. Sala, in his obituary in the *Illustrated London News*, commented that George Eliot for all her greatness remained ‘an abstraction, an impalpability’.¹ Leslie Stephen, in his lengthy and measured tribute in the *Cornhill Magazine*, spoke of the way her work ‘set before us a fine sense of its wider relations’.² This volume attempts to make ‘George Eliot’ less abstract by attending to some of the ‘wider relations’ that establish co-ordinates on her life and work.

George Eliot is notoriously elusive. From its first appearance as the name of the author of the two volumes of *Scenes of Clerical Life* published by William Blackwood and Sons in January 1858, there has been conjecture about the identity of ‘George Eliot’. Even before she adopted the pseudonym, the woman baptised Mary Anne Evans had more than once modified the name by which she wanted to be known, becoming Mary Ann and then Marian Evans. When she took up with George Henry Lewes she insisted on being called Marian Lewes. She assumed other names in particular contexts: thus to Lewes she was Polly, Pollian and Madonna, and Mutter to his sons. In correspondence she sometimes chose a whimsical signature (‘Medusa’, ‘Clematis’), and she jokingly assumed another pseudonym, ‘Saccharissa’, for her essays in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1865. Finally, in the last year of her life she became Mrs John Cross.

George Eliot, then, was conscious of herself as a text, managing the ways her names were used. (In this volume, while contributors at times employ various of her names in referring to her, the pseudonym ‘George Eliot’ is used in full, and not treated as if ‘Eliot’ is a separable surname.) In these protean manifestations her awareness of the importance of context is demonstrable. Her writing too is insistent on the ways the meaning of a situation or event is conditioned by the circumstances that surround it. Her masterpiece *Middlemarch* provides telling images for the relativity both of individual perception (in the pier glass image in chapter 27) and of knowledge broadly conceived (‘that tempting range of relevancies called

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Preface

the universe’ – ch. 15). Moreover, as so often in her fiction *Middlemarch* makes play with the double time of the novel, that of the action, and of the time of narration, exhibiting the author’s awareness that interpretation and understanding modify with changing historical, economic and social circumstances. More than most writers, George Eliot was conscious of the intellectual and material milieux in which she operated. The essays in this volume discuss both concepts and contexts contemporary with her, and later ones, contemporary with us, to provide as full a range of lenses as possible through which to illuminate her achievement.

The first section of the book offers perspectives on George Eliot’s life, particularly her career as an author, and her afterlife. The second section expands an aspect of ‘afterlife’, and surveys her critical fortunes, providing another set of contexts in which to address her. The third and longest section encompasses ‘Cultural and social contexts’. These essays are arranged alphabetically by topic, and do not pretend to be exhaustive. There are also suggestions for further reading: these too are inevitably selective.

I am pleased to acknowledge the support of an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant, ‘The Lives of George Eliot’ (DP0559432), for work on this volume. Particular assistance at different times has been provided by Rowanne Couch, Jennifer Moore, and Olivia Murphy, and by administrative staff in the School of Letters, Art and Media at the University of Sydney, and I thank them all. Special thanks too to staff of Fisher Library, University of Sydney, especially Michele Parker for her assistance in preparing images. I am grateful to Linda Bree, and laterly Maartje Scheltens, at Cambridge University Press for their encouragement and patient advice during the protracted assembly of the volume. Above all, thanks to the contributors, without whose commitment and enthusiasm *George Eliot in Context* could not have happened at all.

Margaret Harris

University of Sydney

NOTES

1 8 January 1881, 27.
Chronology

Margaret Harris

This chronology refers to ‘George Eliot’ as ‘GE’ throughout, without attempting to track the various names by which she was known at different times.

1819
- 24 May: Princess Alexandrina Victoria of Kent, the future Queen Victoria, born.
- 22 November: Mary Anne Evans (GE) born at South Farm, Arbury, near Nuneaton, Warwickshire, to Christiana, née Pearson, second wife of Robert Evans, estate manager – the youngest of her father's five surviving children, and closest in age to brother Isaac (1813–93) and sister Christiana (1816–59).
- Scott, Ivanhoe; Byron, Don Juan (first two cantos).

1820
- 29 January: George III dies, succeeded by George IV.
- March: The Evans family moves to Griff House, Arbury. Shelley, Prometheus Unbound; Keats, Hyperion.

1821
- 23 February: John Keats dies.

1822
- 8 July: Percy Bysshe Shelley dies.

1824–35
- GE is educated at a boarding school in Attleborough, then at Miss Wallington’s boarding school in Nuneaton, and finally at the Misses Franklin’s school in Coventry.

1824
- 19 April: Lord Byron dies.
Chronology

Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795), translated into English by Thomas Carlyle as *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*.

1829
Publication of Balzac’s *Les Chouans*, the first of the series of seventeen novels entitled *La Comédie Humaine*.

1830
26 June
George IV dies, succeeded by William IV.

26–29 July
The July Revolution in France deposes the Bourbon Charles X in favour of his cousin, Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans.

15 September
Liverpool and Manchester Railway opens.


1830–3
Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*.

1832
22 March
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe dies.

7 June
Royal Assent to the First Reform Bill.

21 September
Sir Walter Scott dies.

December
GE witnesses polling day scuffles in Nuneaton between supporters of Conservative and pro-Reform candidates.

Pandemic cholera outbreak reaches London and Paris.

George Sand, *Indiana*.

1834
25 July
Samuel Coleridge dies.

1836
3 February
Christiana Evans dies.

March
Publication of the first of twenty monthly instalments of Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers*.

1837
GE takes over household management for her father following the marriage in May of her sister Chrsissey to Edward Clarke, a medical practitioner.

26 June
William IV dies, accession of Victoria.

Carlyle, *The French Revolution*. 
1839  GE is learning Italian, Latin and Greek.
1840  January
GE’s first published work, a poem, ‘As o’er the fields’, appears in the *Christian Observer*, signed ‘M.A.E.’
10 February
Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.
GE begins German lessons.
1841  17 March
GE moves to Foleshill, Coventry, with her father in anticipation of brother Isaac’s marriage on June 8.
November
GE becomes acquainted with the Coventry manufacturer and author Charles Bray, his wife Cara and her sister Sara Hennell. Her religious belief is challenged, especially when she reads Charles Hennell’s *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838).
1842  January
GE’s refusal to accompany her father to church instigates a ‘Holy War’ which marks her break with orthodox Christianity. She goes to church again 15 May.
August – September
Chartist riots in support of an extension of the suffrage and parliamentary reform.
1843  Alfred Tennyson becomes Poet Laureate. First volume of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* appears (vol. 5, 1860).
1845  The Great Famine in Ireland consequent on the failure of the potato crop.
1846  15 June
25 June
The House of Lords votes to repeal the Corn Laws, abolishing protective tariffs on the import of grain into Britain.
Chronology

4 December
GE publishes anonymously the first of five instalments of her ‘Poetry and Prose, from the Notebook of an Eccentric’ in the Coventry Herald, owned by Charles Bray.
G. H. Lewes, Biographical History of Philosophy.

1847
January
Serialisation of Thackeray’s Vanity Fair begins.
1 July
Implementation of a Factory Act which restricts hours worked by women and children.
Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre; Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights.

1848
February
Revolution in France and the establishment of the French Second Republic under Louis Napoleon, setting off the ‘year of revolution’ in Germany, Poland, Italy and the Austrian Empire.
28 February
Publication of Marx and Engels, ‘The Communist Manifesto’ (in German in London; English translation by Helen Macfarlane 1850).
Founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.
Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton.

1849
GE begins to translate Spinoza, Tractatus theologico-politicus.
31 May
GE’s father, Robert Evans, dies.
12 June
In company with the Brays, GE travels abroad for the first time. She winters in Geneva, lodging with the D’Albert-Durade family.
Cholera epidemic in England.

1850
March
GE returns to Coventry, where she lives with the Brays at Rosehill.
23 April
William Wordsworth dies.
Alfred Tennyson appointed Poet Laureate.
Chronology

18 August
Honore de Balzac dies.

1851
8 January

24 March
GE returns to Rosehill, apparently because of friction in the household at 142 Strand arising from her intimacy with John Chapman.

1 May
Opening of the Great Exhibition held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park.

September 29
GE goes to London again, and meets Herbert Spencer and George Henry Lewes (GHL), among others.
First volume of Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* published (the third and final volume appears in 1853); Melville, *Moby Dick*.

1852
January
First number of the Westminster Review for which GE has principal responsibility.
In the course of the year she sees a good deal of Westminster contributor and social scientist Herbert Spencer, who makes plain in the summer that he cannot reciprocate her ardent feelings.

1853
17 October
GE moves from Chapman’s establishment to 21 Cambridge Street as her relationship with GHL intensifies. She gives up the editorship of the Westminster, though still contributing to it and other journals.

October 1853 – February 1856
Crimean War, in which Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia resisted Russian attempts to expand eastwards into Europe.
Chronology

Comte’s *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–42) translated by Harriet Martineau as *Positive Philosophy*.

1854  July

20 July
GE leaves London for Germany with GHL, who plans to carry out research on Goethe.

August – October
GE and GHL are based in Weimar. Among other outings they hear Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (1850), conducted by Liszt; also *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) and *Tannhäuser* (1845). GE writes ‘Woman in France: Madame de Sable’, published in the October number of the *Westminster Review*.

3 November
They move on to Berlin, where GE begins to translate Spinoza’s *Ethics*.

1855  11 March
GE and GHL return to England, taking various lodgings before setting up house at 8 Park Shot, Richmond. GE publishes articles in *Westminster Review* and other journals.

31 March
Charlotte Brontë dies.

October
GHL’s *Life of Goethe* is published by David Nutt, and reviewed by GE in the *Leader*.

1856  April
GE’s review of the third volume of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* appears in the *Westminster Review*, followed by the major essays ‘The Natural History of German Life’ in July and ‘Silly Novels by Lady Novelists’ in October.
6 May
Sigmund Freud born.

8 May
GE and GHL visit Ilfracombe and Tenby from May to August, mainly because of GHL’s fascination with marine biology.

August

September
GE starts to write ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, which publisher John Blackwood accepts in November.

1857
1 January

‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, the first of the ‘Scenes of Clerical Life’, appears anonymously in the January number of Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine. During the year, ‘Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story’ (beginning in March) and ‘Janet’s Repentance’ (beginning in July) are also serialised in Blackwood’s.

15 March
GE and GHL leave for a visit to the Scilly Isles and Jersey that extends until July, again in the interests of GHL’s ‘Sea-Side Studies’.

Flaubert, Madame Bovary; Baudelaire, Les fleurs du mal; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh; Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë; Trollope, Barchester Towers.

1858
5 January
Scenes of Clerical Life, by George Eliot, published in two volumes by William Blackwood and Sons.

April
GE and GHL travel to Munich and Dresden.

Lewes’s Sea-Side Studies is published in book form by Blackwood.
Chronology

*The English Woman's Journal* is launched by GE’s friends Bessie Parkes and Barbara Bodichon.

**1859**

- 1 February
  - Blackwood publishes *Adam Bede* in three volumes: it sells 16,000 copies in the first year.
  - GE and GHL move to Holly Lodge, Wandsworth. When Joseph Liggins, the son of a Nuneaton baker, claims to have written *Adam Bede*, GE acknowledges to friends the secret of her authorship.
- July
  - ‘The Lifted Veil’ is published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*.

**1860**

- January
  - First number of the *Cornhill Magazine*.
- 24 March
  - GE and GHL visit Italy, returning to England in July. During this sojourn, GHL suggests Savonarola to GE as the subject for a novel, but she sets work on it aside in favour of *Silas Marner*. GHL’s eldest son, Charles, leaves Hofwyl School in Switzerland and comes to live with GE and GHL in central London. A consequence is that their attendance at theatre and concerts becomes easier and more frequent.
- 4 April

**1861**

- 2 April
  - Publication of *Silas Marner* in one volume by William Blackwood and Sons.
  - GE and GHL undertake a second journey to Italy, mainly to do research for *Romola*, a novel which caused her immense difficulty.
  - Outbreak of the American Civil War, which continues until May 1865.
Chronology

29 June
Elizabeth Barrett Browning dies.

14 December
Prince Albert dies.

1862
27 February
Publisher George Smith offers £10,000 for Romola. After considerable discussion, GE agrees to accept £7,000 in return for a less punishing schedule for serialisation, and the novel begins publication in the Cornhill in July. Turgenev, Fathers and Sons (translated into English by Eugene Schuyler 1867).

1863
6 July
Romola published in three volumes by Smith, Elder.

5 November
GE and GHL move to ‘The Priory’, Regent’s Park, and begin to hold Sunday afternoon receptions.

16 October
GHL’s second son, Thornton, goes to seek his fortune in Natal.

24 December
Death of Thackeray. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Lady Audley’s Secret.

1864
4 May
GE and GHL leave for another visit to Italy, returning on June 20, during which GE has the inspiration for The Spanish Gypsy.

July
‘Brother Jacob’ (written 1860) is published in Cornhill. Newman, Apologia pro vita sua; Trollope, Can You Forgive Her?, the first of the Palliser novels. Tolstoy’s War and Peace begins publication (completed 1869; first translation into English 1885–6, made by Clara Bell, working from a French translation).

1865
GE writes poetry, together with articles for the newly founded Pall Mall Gazette and Fortnightly Review, the latter edited by GHL. She begins Felix Holt.

10 August
GE and GHL leave for a month’s visit to Normandy and Brittany.
Chronology


1866
- 15 June
  GE returns to Blackwood for the publication of *Felix Holt, the Radical* (3 vols.).
- 9 September
  GHL's third son Herbert sets out to join Thornton in Natal.

1867
- August
  Second Reform Bill.
  GE and GHL travel in Spain from December to March 1868.
  Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (final novel of the Barsetshire Chronicles); Marx, *Das Kapital*; Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*.

1868
- January
  'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt' published in *Blackwood's*.
- 25 May
  *The Spanish Gypsy* published.
  Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* begins publication (completed in four volumes in 1869).
  L. M. Alcott, *Little Women*.

1869
- 3 March
  GE and GHL travel to Italy again, returning in May.
- 18 April
  In Rome GE meets John Walter Cross for the first time.
  GE is working on poetry, and the beginning of *Middlemarch*.
- 8 May
  Thornton Lewes returns ill from Natal; dies 19 October.
  Inception of Hitchin College for women, which becomes Girton College in 1873. GE contributes £50, 'From the Author of *Romola*'.

1870
- First Married Women's Property Act; Elementary Education Act.
- 9 June
  Charles Dickens dies.
  D. G. Rossetti, *Poems*. 
Chronology

July 19
Outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War: concluded by the Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May, 1871.

1871
December
*Middlemarch* begins part publication. The four-volume edition comes out in December 1872, from Blackwood.

1874
April
The first Impressionist exhibition opens in Paris.

May
*The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems* is published by Blackwood.

Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

1875
June 29
Herbert Lewes dies in Natal.

Political instability in the Balkans: the ‘Eastern Question’ is live through to the Congress of Berlin in 1878 which attempts to balance the competing claims of Britain, Russia and Austro-Hungary in the face of the reduced power of the Ottoman Empire.


1876
February
*Daniel Deronda* begins publication in monthly parts; the four-volume edition follows from Blackwood in December.

May 1
Queen Victoria is proclaimed Empress of India.

December 6
GE and GHL purchase ‘The Heights’, Witley, Surrey, as a summer residence.

Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone.

1877
GE concludes an agreement with Blackwood for the Cabinet Edition of her works: the first titles are published in 1878.

GHL publishes *Problems of Life and Mind* (Second Series: *The Physical Basis of Mind*).

Chronology

1878  November 30
GHL dies.
London University becomes the first to offer degrees to women.
Hardy, *The Return of the Native*; Gilbert and Sullivan, *HMS Pinafore*.

1879  May
Blackwood brings out *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*.
GE prepares the final volume of GHL’s *Problems of Life and Mind* (Third Series: *Mind as a Function of Organism*) for publication.
October 29
John Blackwood dies.
Meredith, *The Egoist*; Ibsen, *A Doll’s House*.

1880  May 6
GE marries John Cross, and her brother Isaac sends congratulations after years of estrangement. On the wedding journey, for reasons unknown, Cross falls into the Grand Canal in Venice but soon recovers. The married couple moves to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, on 3 December.
May 8
Flaubert dies.

1881
Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*.

1882  January 25
Virginia Woolf is born.
February 2
James Joyce is born.

1884
Publication of GE’s *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, prepared by Charles Lewes (Blackwood).

1885
Publication of George Eliot’s *Life as related in her letters and journals*, arranged and edited by her husband J. W. Cross in three volumes (Blackwood).

1924  3 November
John Cross dies.