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I. *Diary 1854–1861*

Signing off from this volume in 1861, GE described it as ‘my old book in which I wrote for the first time at Geneva, in 1849.’ Although pages covering the period from 1849 to July 1854, when the extant text begins, have been lost, the volume remains the earliest and most extensive of George Eliot’s journals. She never again writes with such amplitude and animation in her journals as during the years recorded here.

Because of its length, this diary has been presented in three sections: the first covers GE and GHL’s journey to and stay in Weimar, 20 July – 3 November 1854; the second, 4 November 1854 – 13 March 1855, deals principally with their time in Berlin; and the third runs from their return to England from Germany, 13 March 1855, to 19 June 1861. GE rewrote the first of these sections as ‘Recollections of Weimar’ and the second as ‘Recollections of Berlin’; while sequences in the third section correspond to the ‘Recollections’ of Ilfracombe, the Scilly Isles, and Jersey, and to the essays on authorship, ‘How I came to write Fiction’ and ‘History of Adam Bede’. In addition, the journals ‘Germany, 1858’ and ‘Recollections of Italy, 1860’ were interpolated in the chronological span of this diary, when GE used a separate notebook to record a particular expedition.

1. *Weimar, 20 July–3 November 1854*

The diary begins with an elopement. On 20 July 1854, Marian Evans, journalist and translator, left her London lodgings to embark on the ‘Ravensbourne’ to cross the Channel to Antwerp en route to Germany. She was embarking also on a union with George Lewes, journalist and man of letters, husband and father, that endured to his death in 1878. The opening, then, is literally an account of what her widower, John Walter Cross, declared to be ‘the most important event in George Eliot’s life – her union with Mr George Henry Lewes’¹, although Cross excluded from his pious biography her amusingly self-deprecatory description of the rendezvous. This section – from the description of the Scheldt in the first

¹ *George Eliot’s Life as related in her letters and journals, arranged and edited by her husband J. W. Cross*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1885), vol. 1, pp. 325–6.

paragraph to the idyllic rambles and picnics in Weimar – is the diary of a honeymoon, and the joyousness of GE's account of the months they spent in Germany in 1854–5 recurs only occasionally later in her journals.

The marriage of George Lewes and Agnes Jervis, contracted in 1841, had been fruitful and harmonious for some years. Agnes entertained, undertook some literary tasks on her own account, and bore five children, two of whom died in infancy. In the early 1850s, Agnes took up with their friend and Lewes's partner in publishing ventures, Thornton Hunt, and though the Leweses continued to live together until 1852, Agnes had a son and three daughters to Hunt between 1850 and 1857. Because Lewes allowed these children to be registered as his, he was held to have condoned his wife's adultery, and divorce was impossible. After the breakdown of the marriage, GHJ continued to take financial and eventually custodial responsibility for the three surviving sons, whose presence and prospects figure increasingly in GE's journal from the late 1850s.

GE and GHJ had become acquainted in the radical intellectual circles in which they both moved in London in the early 1850s. Just when acquaintance became intimacy is not clear – perhaps as early as the winter of 1852–3. Certainly by October 1853 when GE moved into the lodgings in Cambridge Street to which she 'said a last farewell' in the first surviving sentence of her journal, their relationship had progressed to the point where GE was helping GHJ with proofs, and when he fell ill in April 1854, she took over his *Leader* reviewing. This interaction in their working lives was to be an important feature of their relationship, chronicled in the journals. At this stage GE's work took second place to GHJ's, but with the success of *Adam Bede* and then *The Mill on the Floss*, the balance in the partnership shifted and there developed an explicit recognition that the demands of GE's career had priority. Lewes's role as manager and minder is even more fully documented in letters than in the journals, as the involvement of each in the work the other had in train continued to the last.

The relationship was one of sustaining devotion and great happiness (as GE frequently reiterated in her journals), though especially in the early years her consciousness of its unhallowed status made her anxious to avoid scandal. She never disavowed the relationship, but held back from announcing it even to close friends, and took pains to avoid offence, for instance by refusing invitations, and not extending them either, especially to women. From Weimar, she forthrightly asserted 'I have done nothing with which any

person has a right to interfere . . . But I do not wish to take the ground of ignoring what is unconventional in my position.’² Concern about reactions to their union is muffled in the diary, but in these early weeks can be tracked in GE’s references to letters received and written (particularly where letters survive, such as those to John Chapman of 15 October, and to Charles Bray, 16 October).³ Her first correspondents included women: her widowed sister Chrissey Clarke, who was not aware of GE’s relationship with GHL, and the energetic young reformer Bessie Parkes, who was and wrote despite her parents’ remonstrances.⁴ On 11 October 1854, GE noted ‘A painful letter from London caused us both a bad night’. This letter was from Thomas Carlyle, whose good opinion and influence were of particular importance to Lewes’s work on Goethe which occasioned the visit to Weimar. A flurry of correspondence ensued, culminating in a fervid letter from GHL to Carlyle on 19 October, thanking him for accepting GHL’s account of his liaison with GE as one which succeeded the breakdown of his marriage rather than being the cause of it.⁵

GE’s diary exposes the marked difference in social mores between the Continent, where she went quite freely into society, and England, where she could not. Her meeting in Weimar with the Princess Wittgenstein, openly living out of wedlock with Liszt, was timely. A letter to her Coventry friend and mentor Charles Bray describes their journey and experiences since arriving in Weimar in terms similar to those in the diary, with a particular inflection in the remark ‘Above all Liszt is here. He

² *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols. (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1954–78), vol. 8, p. 124. The most subtle – and persuasive – account of GE’s choice of GHL and her methods of justifying it is that of Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot Her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994), chapter 4, ‘The Labor of Choice’.

³ *Letters*, vol. 8, pp. 123–5, and vol. 2, pp. 178–9 (the date given is that established by Gordon S. Haight in *George Eliot* (Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 164n.).

⁴ Rosemary Ashton, *G. H. Lewes: A Life* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 158–9. See also Ashton’s discussion in *George Eliot: A Life* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1996), chapter 5, ‘Life with Lewes: Weimar and Berlin 1854–5’.

⁵ *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 176–8. Carlyle endorsed this letter in terms which indicate residual reservations (177n.). The intensity of gossip about the relationship may be gauged from letters between the Brays and the Combes (vol. 8, pp. 119–31, *passim*). GE’s fullest documented self-justification was to Cara Bray, later (4 September 1855, vol. 2, pp. 213–5), a letter of which much is made by Cross, vol. 1, pp. 325–6, and much more by Bodenheimer, *Real Life*, pp. 96–9.

lives with a Russian Princess, who is in fact his wife, and he is a Grand Seigneur in this place' (*Letters*, vol. 2, p. 171).

Bray was one of the very few people GE told of her intention to go off to Germany together with Lewes: indeed, he undertook practical arrangements about payment of her allowance. The Coventry manufacturer, his wife Cara, and her sister Sara Hennell, provided GE with intellectual and emotional sympathy from the beginning of their acquaintance in 1841, when she moved into Coventry with her father. Despite GE's failure in frankness with the women about her relationship with GHL, these friendships continued to be close. Attempts to orchestrate a gradual revelation of the liaison were not very successful. In some cases reactions were hostile, or the process of acceptance was painful. If GE and GHL had decided how to comport themselves when they met acquaintances, they probably did not expect to be put to that test at the very beginning of their new shared life. But on the cross-Channel steamer, they ran into Robert Noel who had introduced the work of the German philosopher Feuerbach to the Bray-Hennell circle, and more recently quibbled about details of GE's translation of *Das Wesen des Christentums*: criticism which GE had shrugged off, since 'Mr Noel is not a reading man and, I know, has no clear idea of the contents of Feuerbach's works' (*Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 144, 164). However, in telling Bray of this encounter, GE declared 'Mr. R. Noel was a very pleasant companion in the steamboat to Antwerp' (p. 171).

Curiously, another chance meeting was with Dr R. H. Brabant, who had been responsible for GE's undertaking the first of her two major translations from the German. He had also been responsible for involving her in sexual impropriety. GE had met Brabant, a medical man practising in Devizes, through the Brays: his daughter Rufa married Charles Hennell, Cara Bray's brother, in 1843. During GE's visit to the Brabants after the wedding, a relationship developed between the 62 year-old physician and the guest, barely 24, which led the blind Mrs Brabant to terminate the visit. What combination of flattery and fascination was at work in GE can only be conjectured. Brabant is a well-supported contender for the position of prototype of the dessicated scholar Edward Casaubon in *Middlemarch*: though unlike Casaubon he had good German and was well informed about the Higher Criticism. In his zeal to inform others, he persuaded Rufa to undertake the translation of D. F. Strauss's momentous work of critical theology, *Das Leben Jesu*, published in German in 1835–6. When Rufa had to give up in 1844, GE took over the transla-

Weimar, 20 July–3 November 1854

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tion, which was published as *The Life of Jesus* by Chapman Brothers on 15 June 1846. GE, none of whose names appears on the titlepage, was paid £20.

Brabant arranged a meeting with Strauss in Cologne, which GE described as ‘rather melancholy. Strauss looks so strange and cast-down, and my deficient German prevented us from learning more of each other than our exterior which in the case of both would have been better left to imagination’ (*Letters*, vol. 2, p. 171). They met again in Munich in 1858, when GE ‘was very agreeably impressed by him’ compared to ‘when I saw him in that dumb way at Cologne’ (p. 472). Though uncomfortable in itself, the meeting with Strauss secured additional introductions to people in Weimar, and just as the encounter with Brabant picks up a thread of perceived sexual scandal in the histories of both GE and GHJ, so the meeting with Strauss reinforces the importance of their respective roles in making German literature and thought accessible in Britain.

GE’s study of German began in 1840: she read Heine and Schiller particularly. The Strauss translation had been followed by a second translation from the German. Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Das Wesen des Christentums*, like Strauss’s a work of radical theology, was published as *The Essence of Christianity* by Chapman in early July 1854, on the eve of GE’s departure for Germany. The title-page declared this translation to have been done ‘By Marian Evans, Translator of “Strauss’s Life of Jesus”’: the only occasion on which her given name appeared on a titlepage. Strangely, ‘Marian Evans’ was announced as the translator of one work, and acknowledged as the translator of another, at the point at which she was about to relinquish that name in favour of ‘Marian Lewes’. None of her published work carries the name Lewes, though she insisted on being addressed by it. After their arrival in Weimar, GE continued to work at translation, often for GHJ’s Goethe biography, as well as at periodical essays and reviews.

This was GE’s second journey out of the British Isles: after her father’s death in May 1849, she had been taken off to the Continent by Charles and Cara Bray. They went first to Paris, then to the south of France and northern Italy, and so to Geneva, where GE decided to spend the winter. She was escorted back to England by her Swiss host, D’Albert Durade, in March 1850; and based herself with the Brays at their home Rosehill in Coventry until early 1851, when she moved to London. This move was decisive in the process of developing the provincial bluestocking into a powerful intellectual presence

in the metropolis, and subsequently into a major English novelist. Before long GE was involved in a passionate relationship with John Chapman, the nominal editor of the *Westminster Review*, of which she was effectively editor from mid-1851 to 1854. Such an initiation into the London literary world made her a thoroughly professional woman of letters, though her major articles for the *Westminster Review* were written after her editorship.

GHL was more widely travelled, especially in Germany and France. His childhood had been spent partly in France and Jersey; he had divided most of the year 1838–9 between Berlin and Vienna; and during the 1840s he had made lengthy visits both to Paris and Berlin. Lewes's interest in German literature, stimulated by Thomas Carlyle's enthusiastic advocacy, had been manifested in articles on German and French literature and thought in various journals, together with his *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845–6), particularly designed to win approval for the philosophies of Auguste Comte, but treating also Hegel, Kant, Lessing, Herder, Schelling, and Goethe among others.

GHL's versatility was already a legend by 1854. His achievements were extraordinary, even within the sphere of journalism. Carlyle called him 'the Prince of Journalists',⁶ an epithet earned not only by the volume and range of his periodical contributions, but by his work as editor and advisor (some of which can be followed in later phases of GE's journals). In 1850 he had founded a weekly newspaper, the *Leader*, jointly with Thornton Hunt, which raised a strong radical voice on such issues as parliamentary reform and international republicanism. GHL despatched a number of pieces to the *Leader* from Germany though his involvement with the paper was to lessen from this time on.

His career had not been confined to journalism: he had published books of biography and dramatic criticism, novels, and plays. He was now returning to a study mooted as early as 1846, published as *Life and Works of Goethe* in 1855, dedicated to Carlyle, and the work for which he is best known. But his other interests, particularly in the theatre, were kept alive: GE refers in this section of the journal to his adaptation of a French farce. In the late 1840s Lewes had entertained thoughts of going on the stage professionally, after performing with Dickens's amateur company and also with a professional company in which he had played Shylock – experiences to be borne in

⁶ Quoted by Ashton, *G. H. Lewes*, p. 4.

mind when GE records his Shakespearean readings in her journal.

The journey of GE and GHL to Weimar was dictated by the needs of GHL's work, as other of their expeditions both in Britain and abroad were to be. His health was another consideration. Although GE's journals chronicle many of their travels, they are not in the full sense travel writing, designed to bring home the exotic and unfamiliar to an English audience. Her observations do not build up to a comprehensive survey or analysis of the foreign scene, although this section of the diary, and its companion piece 'Recollections of Weimar', intermittently depict it in pen and at times also pencil sketches (here, of items of women's dress) to an implied English reader. Now and then traces of prejudice are discernible, for GE apparently expected dirt, smells, and boorish behaviour to be prevalent on the Continent. But she is far from the traveller admonished by successive editions of Murray's *Handbook* to 'divest himself, as soon as possible, of his prejudices, and especially of the idea of the amazing superiority of England above all other countries, in all respects.'⁷

Their route to Weimar was fairly direct though they proceeded in a leisurely fashion, taking nearly two weeks to reach their destination. GE's description of dawn on the Scheldt may not have the finesse of later nature descriptions in the journals and in the novels, but it is imbued with the euphoria of the dawning of their life together. When they reached Antwerp, their schedule approximated the conventional tourist itinerary enunciated by Thackeray's *Lady Kicklebury*: 'We propose to rest here; to do the Rubens's; and to proceed to Cologne tomorrow.'⁸ The pattern of inspecting the main features of the town, with an emphasis on studying works of art, becomes very familiar through the journals. GE's knowledge of painting and sculpture at this time was limited, and her ability to offer comment on works of art fairly rudimentary. She read the Rubens paintings she saw in Antwerp in terms of the situations and characters depicted, rather than in terms of composition, colour and so on (the difference from the

⁷ *A Handbook for Travellers on the Continent: being a Guide to Holland, Belgium, Prussia, Northern Germany, and the Rhine from Holland to Switzerland* (10th edn., London, John Murray, 1854), pp. xv–xvi.

⁸ William Thackeray, *The Kickleburys on the Rhine* (2nd edn., London, Smith Elder, 1866), p. 25. The most comprehensive discussion of GE's taste and education in the visual arts is Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1979).

professional and technical observations of Sir Joshua Reynolds, quoted in Murray's *Handbook*, is marked). The extension of her knowledge of the visual arts, and her increasing sophistication in discussion of them, can be followed through the span of the journals.

On they went to Brussels. Though she had announced to Sara Hennell on 10 July 'I am preparing to go to "Labassecour"' (*Letters*, vol. 2, p. 165), Charlotte Brontë's version of Brussels in *Villette* is nowhere alluded to in the diary. They saw the main sights in their three days, but did not attempt the almost obligatory excursion to Waterloo perhaps because of the heat. When they visited Brussels again in 1866, on their post-*Felix Holt* tour, they went 'to see our favorite spots (13 [actually 12] years ago! You may imagine the memories!)'.⁹

From Brussels they went via Namur and Liège to Cologne, and then by boat down the Rhine to Mainz, and by train to Frankfurt. The description of this leg of the journey includes one of the few intrusions of current events into the diary, in the form of discussion of the escalating hostility between Turkey and Russia which has gone down in history as the Crimean War (GE and GHL joined in celebrations of the peace with Russia during a seaside holiday in 1856, described in 'Recollections of Ilfracombe').

At last, in the early hours of Thursday 3 August, the travellers reached Weimar, the capital of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, perhaps best known in England at this time through Thackeray's parody of it as Pumpernickel in *Vanity Fair* (1848). At the death of Goethe in 1832 its days of glory under the patronage of Duke Karl August were already receding, but in 1854 it was still home to a distinguished group of artists and intellectuals, of whom Franz Liszt was the most notable. GE and GHL explored a town essentially created by Goethe for his patrons, the ducal family. He had landscaped the park and was responsible for various elements of the design of public buildings as well as of his own residences. Some of the places GE and GHL went, and some of their new acquaintances, are more fully described in 'Recollections of Weimar'. At times, especially in accounts of expeditions to particular Goethe shrines, there are parallels between GE's diary and GHL's *Life of Goethe*, which are more pronounced in the extended descriptions of the 'Recollections'.

GHL had letters of introduction to a number of people in Weimar, such as Adolf Schöll, Director of the Free Art Insti-

⁹ GHL to his mother, quoted by Haight, *George Eliot*, p. 386.