THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
GEORGE ELIOT

Second Edition

This second edition of The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot includes several new chapters, providing an essential introduction to all aspects of Eliot’s life and writing. Accessible essays by some of the most distinguished scholars of Victorian literature provide lucid and often original insights into the work of one of the most important writers of the nineteenth century, author most famously of Middlemarch, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Daniel Deronda. From an introduction that traces her originality as a realist novelist, the book moves on to extensive considerations of each of Eliot’s novels, her life, and her publishing history. Chapters address the problems of money, philosophy, religion, politics, gender, and science, as they are developed in her novels. With its supplementary materials, including a chronology and an extensive section of suggested readings, this Companion is an invaluable tool for scholars and students alike.

George Levine is Professor Emeritus at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. His previous publications include Reading Thomas Hardy (Cambridge, 2017); Darwin the Writer (2011); Lifebirds (1997); and, as editor, The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot, first edition (Cambridge, 2001).

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A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

GEORGE ELIOT

Second Edition

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For Alexander Welsh, exemplary scholar (1933–2018),
with the deepest respect.
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Notes on Contributors

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BARRY V. QUALLS, University Professor Emeritus at Rutgers, is the author of The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction: The Novel as Book of Life (1982), and of articles and reviews on nineteenth-century English Literature and on the Bible and its literary impact. During his Rutgers years, he served as Chair of English, Dean of Humanities, and Vice President for Undergraduate Education. In 2006 he was named New Jersey Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

ALEXANDER WELSH (1933–2018) was Emily Sanford Professor Emeritus at Yale University, and the author of many books on nineteenth-century literature and culture, with three books on Dickens and others on Scott, Freud, humanism, honor, law, and literature, as well as on works derived from Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Cervantes’s Don Quixote. His George Eliot and Blackmail (1985) affords a comprehensive study of the later novels.
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  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.

1832–1835 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 Mary Ann (now spelling her name without the “e”) takes on the role of caring for him and the house.

1837–1840 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, 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 – ribbon manufacturer, author, and leading figure in a Unitarian circle; Mary Ann begins to question her faith.

1842

On January 2, Mary Ann refuses to go to church. What she would later call a “Holy War” ensues with 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 David Friedrich Strauss’s *Leben Jesu* (*The Life of Jesus*) from her friend, Rufa Hennell, Charles Hennell’s new wife.

1845–1846

Meets Harriet Martineau, then writing for a variety of publications, including the *Westminster Review*; inspired by her example, Mary Ann 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.

1848–1849

Nurses her ailing father; Robert Evans dies May 31, 1849. Mary Ann and the Brays leave for the Continent, and she then 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.*

1852–1853

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 Marian becomes seriously involved with the married Lewes, who is estranged from his wife.

1854–1855

Translates Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity,* published by Chapman; it is the only book she publishes under the name Marian Evans. She 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 Marian works on a translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics.*

1855–1856

Marian and Lewes, their unmarried relationship now notorious in London circles, live in Richmond and contend with social ostracism; she 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.*

1856–1857

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 GE 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 Savonorola 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 rival of *Blackwood’s* – a short story, “Brother Jacob.”

1861 *Silas Marner* published in the spring; GE and Lewes visit Italy again to continue research on *Romola*.

1862–1863 *Romola* serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine*, 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, GE gradually wins respectability. Holds weekly Sunday afternoon receptions to which the most distinguished writers and thinkers come regularly.

1864–1865 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*.
**Chronology**

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, GE begins work on *Middlemarch*; Thornton, Lewes’s second son, returns from the colony of Natal 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.

1870–1872   
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*.

1875–1876   
Lewes, at work on what he hopes will be his magnum opus, *Problems of Life and Mind*, is continuously ill from 1875 onward; 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 her financial advisor John Cross 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.
TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

All chapters appearing in the first edition of this Companion continue to be available and accessible on Cambridge University Press’s website, Cambridge Core.

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

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>AB</td>
<td>Adam Bede</td>
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<td>DD</td>
<td>Daniel Deronda</td>
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<td>FH</td>
<td>Felix Holt</td>
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<td>JR</td>
<td>“Janet’s Repentance”</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Middlemarch</td>
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<td>MF</td>
<td>The Mill on the Floss</td>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Romola</td>
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<td>SCL</td>
<td>Scenes of Clerical Life</td>
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<td>SM</td>
<td>Silas Marner</td>
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Other writings of George Eliot will be noted as follows:

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<tr>
<td>ITS</td>
<td>Impressions of Theophrastus Such, ed. Nancy Henry (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994)</td>
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TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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


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 iv, Chapter 6, p. 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.