George Eliot, the Queen of Fiction.

By

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This is an age of novelists. Each kind of literature has had its period of greatest prominence. All through history poetry has been the first to reappear after a period in which the literature has been suppressed. The drama, the essay, and religious writing each had their day, and poetry was hardly more prominent then than now. But in the words of a writer: "The novelist can stretch a wider canvas than the poet and on his palette he has a greater variety of segments with which to produce his picture in its lights and glooms."

The year 1740 gave birth to the first novel, Pamela, written by Samuel Richardson. But not even in their dreams did a vision of the novel of to-day ever cross the minds of the people of the early part of the eighteenth century. Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett were writers of the same period, and these three early writers we class as the first great group of novelists.
With the Vicar of Wakefield in 1766, by Goldsmith, we find the novel in a
different guise, for the Vicar of Wakefield was to the novel what Wordsworth's
verse was to the poetry of its day-descriptions of country life and scenes.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century we find the names of Holcroft
and Godwin as the authors of political novels; Mrs. Opie, domestic life; Miss
Edgeworth, Irish stories; Miss Austen, English society. With the close of the
century the ideal novel gave way to one
of different nature, known as the realistic
which soon gained perfection, and increased
in popularity up to the present day. It
would seem that realism acted as an
incentive, from the sudden advance and
great improvement, for it is in this
century that we find the group composing
the greatest of all novelists. Each excelled
in his own way and it can hardly be
said that one was greater than the other.

It seems remarkable that so many excellent
writers were crowded in this short period
of writing. No one writer has given his
Name to this period, for the names of Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, and Eliot are as closely linked as the chapters of a story. Each writing in the same age their works are in many respects similar. The novels of Scott are pictures of the pastoral life of the Scotch. He loved especially to place his characters in positions of danger and then bring them safely out. Thackeray wrote of English society life, though many of his characters were historical, while Dickens' aim was to strike a blow at the degraded system of public institutions then in existence in England. Like Dickens and Thackeray the scenes of George Eliot's novels. With the exception of 'Romola' were laid in England, like Scott's they were pictures of country life. Many readers of George Eliot contend that her success in writing is due to her early surroundings.

Picture to yourself a beautiful old-fashioned parsonage with ivy climbing over the walls, its green leaves giving it the appearance of freshness. Situated some little distance from the road among
many trees that offer an inviting shade from the rays of the scorching sun.

The country surrounding is broken, the level prairie stretching away to the horizon. No railroads mar the beauty of the scene, and its monotony is broken only by the stage coach as twice each day it passes the house. Picturing all this and more and you will see Cliff House where our heroine spent twenty-one years of her early life. Is it wonderful then that with such quiet, beautiful surroundings and living almost in solitude, that an impression should be made on her mind, that would have a lasting influence on the life that was to follow?

Her early education she gained at boarding schools, having been placed at the first one when but five years of age. As her eighth year she was sent to Nuneaton to school. Her teacher Miss Lewis was a very religious woman and her associations with Mary Ann Evans, for we must not forget that George Eliot is but an assumed name—
cast a great influence over her early life. When she was but seventeen years of age her mother died, and for thirteen years we find her keeping house for her father, and at his death she visited the Continent in company with Mr. and Mrs. Bray, with whom she has become fast friends. She remained abroad for some time carrying on her studies. After her return she made her home with the Bray's until 1857 when she accepted the position of assistant editor of the Westminster Review. It is here that we find the beginning of her literary career. The loss of her mother when she was so young threw the entire care of the household on her shoulders and caused her early to feel the responsibilities of life. And perhaps in a great measure accounts for the depth and earnestness of thought as indelibly stamped upon all her writings.

It seems marvelous that this woman who in time became the queen of novelists, was at one time strongly
opposes to all kinds of fiction. She could not conceive how a person could be more interested in a fictitious character than in the deeds and words of a real human being. In her opinion history was in every way superior to the novel.

In 1854 although not legally married she became the wife of George Henry Lewes. He was a man of great literary ability, and aided her much in her work, indeed, it is thought by some that had it not been for this influence her excellent works would never have been written while others who are especially prejudiced against her on account of this marriage, are of the opinion that it cast a shadow over her life that tinged all her works.

Her work is not alone confined to novel writing, as a part of it appears in the form of essays and poetry. But she will always be known, not as George Eliot, the essayist, or the poet, but as George Eliot the novelist.

It was the urgent desire of her husband
that she should write a book, and in 1856 she began her first attempt at fiction, which appeared in Blackwood's Magazine in the form of short stories. They were written of the clergy and entitle "Scenes of Clerical Life." They received such success at the hands of the publisher that she was encouraged to do other and better work and in 1859 Adam Bede her first novel was published. It is not only her first, but probably her best. Many of the characters were those of her own relations and friends disguised fictitiously. For this work she received not only the admiration of an enthusiastic public but also quite a sum of money from her publisher. They paying her &800 for the privilege of publishing the book for four years. Many of the characters of the story were Methodists, the interest of the plot centering about the Methodist preacher, Dinah Morris, the heroine of the story.

In 1860, "The Mill on the Floss" was published. Many instances in the life of our heroine are portrayed in this story.
Following this was Silas Marner, published in 1861, after which Romola appears in 1863. The scene of this story is laid in Italy, and it is the only historical novel. In the life of Pities, George Eliot pictures admirably to what defects of infancy, the love of money, of public admiration, and power, can lead men.

Felix Holt was published in 1866. In character this was a political novel, and showed especially well the different classes in political life, featuring English country people as only George Eliot can.

In 1868 she wrote her first and only drama, "The Spanish Gypsy." In 1871 Middlemarch was published and in 1874 a collection of her poems.

In the year 1876 Daniel Deronda which is considered by many one of her best works was published. The scene opening reveals to our imagination an elegantly furnished gaming room, about the tables of which busily engaged in that vilest of all things gambling, are gathered many ladies and gentlemen, not the lower classes as one would suppose...
but, on the other hand, the guineas, the
nobility, in fact the very aristocracy
of the kingdom. It is here that we
find the turning of our story, Gwenoldin
absorbed in the trickery of the game,
the winner of the evening. But suddenly
the spell is broken, she becomes conscious
of the fact that some one is scrutinizing
her. She glances up and her eyes meet
those of Devonda, the kind, albeit whom
the interest of the story centers. Her luck
fails her. She no longer wins, but loses
game after game, until she is out of
patience with herself for allowing this
entire stranger to make such an im-
pression upon her as to cause her to lose
her self-control. On returning to her boarding
place she finds a letter from her mother
in which she tells her that a misfortune
has befallen them, they have lost all
their money and that Gwenoldin must
return at once to their home, which
will be with her uncle, who is to
support them.

The early dawn of the following morning
finds Gwenoldin on her way to
Jane broke up with a necklace which she
favor in order to obtain enough money
to return home. Scarcely has she arrived
at her boarding place and begun her
preparations for the journey, when a knock
is heard upon the door, and a servant
announces a package for Miss Harleth.
She finds within the necklace she
had sold and knows that it must be
the stranger of the day before who has
returned it to her. She returns to her
new home and it is here that our
real story begins.

Pwalk, sweet, beautiful, and a society
girl, it is but natural that her uncle
looks for her to make a brilliant
marriage.

They have been living in their new
home but a few months when Grandcourt
appears in the parish. He is a wealthy
gentleman, an heir to a baronetcy. He
meets Harleth and after but a short
acquaintance offers his hand to her
in marriage. She is about to give
her consent when she is made aware
of the fact that Grandcourt is one of
the vilest of criminals, and is utterly without moral character. She resolved not
to marry him, in spite of the wish of
her relatives, to see the match, they,
knowing nothing of his character. She
goes quietly away from the place.
Grand Count knows not where. Then
she again returns. She finds her mother
almost in poverty. Grand Count finds
her again and marries his suit. Blinded
by the promise of every thing that
money can buy, and the mother re-
lieved from the poverty-striken condition,
she accepts. They are married, and
the misery of the life following cannot
be described. She sees the folly of
her marriage, too late: she sees Grand Count's
nature in its true light, a nature
cold, selfish, almost inhuman, a
nature that could not know love but
on the other hand wished for a
beautiful wife that he might command
as a slave.

But we will leave Mr. and Mrs. Grand Count
for a time and turn our attention to
Devonda. One day while out walking he
noticed a young and beautiful Jewish girl about to drown herself. He rescues her, and takes her to a house nearby, where he leaves her in care of friends. He learns from her her story, how she is fleeing from sorrow, and in hopes of finding her mother and brother, from whom she has long been separated. Despairing in her search she had determined to commit suicide but was discovered and rescued by Devonda. Mirah, for this is the name by which she was known, lives with this kind friend Mrs. Mayrick, and gives lessons in the neighborhood. Devonda regards her with fond affection and does everything for her comfort. Devonda is mean while living out her miserable life with Grand Court. One day while out yachting Grand Court attempts to fix the sail and by some misstep falls into the water. He calls to Swindolin to throw him his rope. She stands as one almost paralysed. A terrible desire in her heart to see Grand court drown. It winks and again rises, calling for the rope. She
still resists. He sinks for the last time, and still Gwendolyn stands with the rope in her hand. A terrible thought now takes possession of her, she is in a murder. During the days of fear and sorrow that follow, the kindest and best of friends to her, and Gwendolyn begins to think a great deal of him.

Deonda while talking with some Jews in a store one day discovers that Mirah’s brother lives in that city. He invites him up and brother and sister are once more united.

Mirah’s sweet beautiful nature has completely won the heart of Deonda. One thing seems to stand between them, the fact that Mirah is a Jewess. Deonda not knowing the circumstances of his birth had always had a fear of what it might be, but imagine his joy when he learned that he was by birth a Jew.

Nothing now stands between Deonda and Mirah, and they are soon married. This is a pure love to Gwendolyn, who in turn loves Deonda. And thus the story ends. She would class this
story as a Jewish novel. It holds up the
Jewish religion as if the writer herself might almost be a Jew.
But cannot help being fascinated with
the beautiful character she has created
in Deconda. But her characters are
all true to life. In Swindolm we
see a perfect type of a spoiled child ex-
pecting everybody to give up to her,
as though she were the only
person in the world, with a native,
too selfish for love for any one but
herself. Her mother Mrs. Davilow, a
perfect slave to her wishes would
sacrifice anything for her happiness
and comfort of nature. We have
already spoken of. In this character
is shown the wickedness and
corruption existing in the higher
circles of English society, as well as
the case and which it was hidden
by riches.
If we would find fault with the
story we would say the plot is
rather bare, it seeming as though one
could almost make two stories out
of the one. It is one of her most sober books, showing not even a tinge of her humorous nature. I often hear one say of George Eliot’s novels, “They always have a bad or disagreeable ending.” It is exactly this that makes her novels true to nature, for it is just the way we find it in human life, not all pleasure, and no pain and sorrow, as some novelists would have you believe.

In 1859 is published one of her most humorous productions, “The Impressions of Thespis on His Luck.” She finds a few more short stories from her gifted pen and her literary career is ended.

In the spring of 1860 she married J. W. Cross and together they went abroad visiting in Europe until July. In the autumn of the same year she died, after but a short illness.

Her novels are works of art and few writers have shown greater creative imagination. Whether historical, political
or directed against the evils of society, they were written for the good of humanity and had fulfilled their mission.

As a novelist she stands without a superior in the history of literature. As a woman novelist she has demonstrated beyond a question the ability of her sex in the field of fiction, receiving the love and admiration of an appreciative public. Many have endeavored to imitate her, but when her great work is examined with unprejudiced eyes, when her noble character is fully understood, admiration cannot be witheld. She has realized her heart's desire. "She has joined the choir invisible of those immortal dead who live by gain in minds made better by their presence."

No words more beautiful than her own could be used in describing the close of her life work. "The sun had sunk, but music still was there, and when this ceased still triumph still filled the air."