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## George Eliot in Society

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## Months of Sundays



That trick is, the artificer melts up wax  
 With honey, so to speak; he mingles gold  
 With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,  
 Effects a manageable mass, then works.  
 But his work ended, once the thing a ring,  
 Oh, there's repriming! Just a spirt  
 O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,  
 And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume;  
 While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,  
 The roudure brave, the liliated loveliness,  
 Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore:  
 Prime nature with an added artistry.

—Robert Browning, Priory Guest, *The Ring and the Book*

Valentine's Day, 1869, fell on a Sunday and brought to London a short interlude of faux spring weather that coaxed the foliage in the Priory garden into premature budding. This uncommon February sun and warmth, added to the usual prospect of fascinating, and possibly useful, conversation, helped bring many callers to the Leweses' home in St John's Wood that day. As guests gathered in the drawing room before the long windows, for once occluded by neither rain nor fog nor the earliest of the early winter dusks, the occasion demonstrated the success of the couple's attempts to regularize their contribution to the season of London salonizing. Robert Browning had recently brought out *The Ring and the Book*, as much a metatext about writing poetry as the story of an Italian murder. He led the conversation about versification, and several of the guests noted the high points of the afternoon in diaries, memoirs, and letters to friends.

The Leweses had been moving toward such a goal since the mid-sixties period that formed a transition between social isolation for George

Eliot and the institution of Sundays at the Priory. Having found their new home in St John's Wood in late 1863, the couple began welcoming friends in various ways and numbers during 1864 without yet establishing a regular day for receiving. Callers that year included the perennials Bodichon and Burton, the Theodore Martins (she was Helen Faucit), and the Richard Congreves. During the early months of 1864, they met several times with the Martins on various days of the week, while weekend visits to and from the Congreves in Wandsworth, which occupied all of Sunday, indicate that there were as yet no regularly scheduled salon afternoons. On Sunday, 10 April 1864, Lewes's mother, Elizabeth Willim, dined with them, another arrangement that suggests they were not anticipating other visitors.

The year 1865 began with small Sunday dinners and a visitor or two afterward. Then in February they threw a Saturday night gathering George Eliot describes with an exclamation point as "our first Evening party since last winter!" (H&J 123). Since Lewes was at this time involved in the launch of the *Fortnightly Review*, such occasions facilitated his reentry into the world of journalism on the editorial side. Meanwhile, George Eliot was briefly reviving her journalistic publications with the four small pieces, including the two Saccharissa essays, for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, plus a review of William Lecky's *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, written to contribute to the success of the new *Review*.

Socializing and journalizing continued to mix at the Priory and elsewhere through 1865. On 24 June, Lewes "dined at Greenwich with the multitude of so-called writers for the Saturday" (H&J 124) at which the conversation concerned current contributors and touched on George Eliot's recent essays. The following day, a Sunday afternoon occurred that in a small way anticipated the ones to follow in later years. Seven people came to the Priory: "Barbara and the Doctor, Maestro, Colonel Pelly and his friend Mr Jeffrey the Conchologist, and Mr Neuberg. Later Danby Seymour." Two weeks afterward, an "agreeable gathering" (H&J 125) of eight, together with a group of five on 9 July and a "good group" on the twenty-third included more repeat visitors and soon-to-be regulars, notably Herbert Spencer, Robert Browning, Henry Crompton, and the Alexander Bains. Still mostly men, however, the group at this point meets Haight's description of an assemblage of journalists and positivists.

The Leweses' extensive travels of the mid to late sixties included not only the Black Forest trips of 1866 and 1867 but also the Spanish journey from January through March of 1867. But by May Lewes was at home and referring to "Our usual gathering[s]" (GHLJ 26 May 1868).

After a September 1868 interlude in Harrogate, the couple returned to London in October, where their first Sunday at home consisted of her work on *The Spanish Gypsy* and his dogged plugging away at his science, as well as another routine visit to Lewes's mother. On Sunday, 20 November, Lewes left George Eliot alone at the Priory while he went "to consult with the people concerned in the management of the Reader" (H&J 121). They finished up their social year with December dinners with Anthony Trollope and Frederick Chapman, then with Ned Pigott, one of Lewes's oldest and most constant friends. Christmas fell on a Sunday that year, and they welcomed Bessie Parkes and Isa Craig, but otherwise entertained only a "long call" (H&J 122) from Dr. Juda Stummer, the German physician who had recently treated Lewes at Malvern, but who never resurfaces on their guest lists.

Dinners at the home of the wealthy and social Ernst Benzons and concerts at St. James's Hall augmented their social life that year, as did Lewes's attendance at the 1868 British Medical Association meeting at Oxford, supposedly an occasion for increasing his status among scientists, but also an opportunity for recruiting future guests for Sundays at the Priory. In 1868, in preparation for Lewes's role at the meeting, the couple spent March and part of April at Torquay, then had an interlude in Germany before Lewes made his journey to Oxford. In addition to validating and enhancing his scientific interests at the heavily attended Oxford meeting, Lewes gathered a group of potential guests, notably Charles Eliot Norton, Haight's main source for the description of Sundays at the Priory. Other Oxford trophies included Dr. Clifford Allbutt, Dr. Joseph Frank Payne, and physiologist George Rolleston.

Indeed the afternoons Norton describes in Haight's excerpt provided the January 1869 launch of the Sundays in the form they would take for the next decade: a small lunch followed by callers, an ongoing increase in the number of women in the group, the occasional pursuit of a worthy charitable cause, and conversation that often concerned what this group would regard as business as well as pleasure, since the business of so many of them concerned some kind of published writing on topics of frequent common interests. Their travels abroad, Lewes's attendance at the 1868 BMA meeting, joining the audiences at London concerts, and introductions from friend to friend allowed them to assemble groups of respectable size most Sundays during the spring of 1869 and with a new regularity that established Sunday afternoon as the Leweses' day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Not that the Leweses had London Sundays all to themselves, the most notable competitor being G. F. Watts's salon at Little Holland House, which had an overlapping guest list with the Priory, particularly among the at that point loosely defined and delineated

## Poetry at the Priory

The arrival of the Nortons in St John's Wood in January of 1869 coincided with the beginning of a Priory season whose visitors and activities had much to do with poetry, for George Eliot, as U. C. Knoepfelmacher first noted, spent much of her time between *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* writing poems rather than prose ("Fusing" 47). Not only was George Eliot herself writing poetry, but she penned her own theoretical essay "Notes on Form in Art" in 1868, followed by "On Versification" in 1869. She was also reading widely in literary history. Knoepfelmacher mentions Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry* and Edwin Guest's *History of English Rhythms* as part of her autumn reading in 1868. Indeed Knoepfelmacher's tour de force contribution to Ian Adam's classic *This Particular Web* (1975) has George Eliot deciding at this point between a second long poem (about Timoleon) and the prose project that became *Middlemarch*. He argues that George Eliot's immersion in poetry creates in her later fiction a realism that differs from the simpler representation she practices and advances in her early fiction.<sup>2</sup> The saturation of *Middlemarch* with a mass of literary, historical, and artistic allusions demonstrates how "[b]y fusing history and fiction, the prosaic and the poetic, the factual and the mythological, George Eliot blurs through the superiority of her own 'sugared invention' the fixities which her main characters [Casaubon and Lydgate, for example] adopt" (50).<sup>3</sup> He quotes "Notes on Form in Art" to support his point that in *Middlemarch* her allusiveness allows her to "integrate smaller and smaller parts, all carefully differentiated by creating new 'conditions of common likeness or mutual dependence'" (51). Indeed, he describes the novel as "that poem in prose called *Middlemarch*" (68). What Knoepfelmacher calls George Eliot's "replacement" of a planned poem about Timoleon with *Middlemarch* causes Haight to celebrate (fervently) the abandonment of the grandiose poetry project in favor of the greatest novel she ever wrote (413).

At the Priory afternoons, the guests participated in differing ways in George Eliot's temporarily overwhelming interest in writing poetry. Nor-

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Pre-Raphaelites. Other regularly held Sunday gatherings would include the likes of Henry Huth's assembly of bibliophiles to sample their host's collection of seventeenth-century volumes. The sanctity of Huth's Sunday afternoons allowed, in fact probably encouraged, his wife and daughter to spend their own Sunday afternoons at the Priory. Georgiana Burne-Jones and Lucy Clifford mention that they conducted Sunday salons themselves, though both spent so many Sundays with the Leweses that it is difficult to see where they fit them in.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Limits of Realism* as well.

<sup>3</sup> *Middlemarch* allusions include Isaac Casaubon, Meric Casaubon, Francis Meres, Sidney, Dante, Wordsworth, Byron, Samuel Daniels, and, of course, Shakespeare.

ton himself was promoting Walt Whitman (whom George Eliot mentioned in a mixed tone in an 1856 number of the *Westminster Review*) among others, and his wife Susan Norton delivered to George Eliot a much appreciated volume by the Nortons' friend from Massachusetts, James Russell Lowell. Lewes was still promoting *The Spanish Gypsy*, which had finally reached publication the previous year, and most of the visitors had read it.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, George Eliot was composing poems eventually published in 1874 in a volume titled *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems*. The individual poems themselves began appearing in periodicals one by one in 1869.<sup>5</sup>

Occupied with poetry, George Eliot gathered its practitioners, theorists, and historians about her at the Priory in 1869, the height of her poetic career. The habit sustained by educated Victorians of bringing out a volume of poetry during their early twenties afflicted most of the people likely to turn up at Sundays at the Priory. But that season the Priory also entertained some of the more aspiring among professional poets of the time. Harry Buxton Forman, a friend of Charles Lewes's from the Post Office and a devoted critic of the Romantics, built on his fortuitous acquaintance with Lewes's son to extend his interests to the poetry of George Eliot, through the invitation from his co-worker to Sundays at the Priory. His visits continued from 1869 to 1873.<sup>6</sup>

Valentine's Day brought the faux spring Sunday when the garden outside the Priory showed early leaves, "budding beyond the permission of the calendar" (*GEL* 5:16). Thirteen guests, at that time considered by the hosts a "numerous" party, gathered in the neo-Gothic house on the Regent's Canal (H&J 135). In a group that included, besides Robert Browning, the *Golden Treasury* anthologist Francis Palgrave; Mark Pattison, the future biographer of John Milton (for the *English Men of Letters* series in

<sup>4</sup> So had the "Boston Set," as Lewes called it, whose members, he claimed in 1869 in a letter to his son Charles (*GEL* 5:37), could quote long passages from *The Spanish Gypsy*.

<sup>5</sup> Contributors to the September 2011 number of *George Eliot—George Henry Lewes Studies*, devoted entirely to George Eliot's poetry, speculate on what prompted her attempts in the unfamiliar genre. Herbert Tucker attributes the shift to a desire for the playful experiments possible in form, prosody, and content (20). Linda Peterson, drawing on Haight, mentions certain "events of 1864" as well as "professional motives" resulting from "the disappointing critical and commercial response to *Romola*" (31). Kimberly J. Stern, writing heroically of *A College Breakfast-Party*, believes that George Eliot chose poetry because of its usefulness as a vehicle for philosophical debate (93). Alexis Easley points out that publishing "The Legend of Jubal" and "Armgarth" in *Macmillan's* reveals George Eliot's eagerness for celebrity (107). Others, La Porte, too, poses the question and argues that she was consciously placing herself within a nineteenth-century tradition that attributed gender-specific subjects and techniques to verses written by the "poetess" rather than the "poet" (172).

<sup>6</sup> Haight attributes to Forman "Dithyrambic praise of *Agatha* in an essay in his book about *Our Living Poets* (1871)," but also names him as a participant in a bizarre forgery of the poem as well (*GEL* 5:36–7, n. 2).

1879); Alexandra Orr, who specialized in Browning and his poetry; and George Eliot, who had just that day finished “How Lisa Loved the King,” poetry dominated the conversation. Along with this solid poetic contingent, lifelong regulars Bodichon and Burton, as well as the Theodore Martins, completed the group of eager listeners for Browning and the others.

One of the Priory’s most overlooked guests, Browning created the most memorable sensation of the day. As the group gathered around the famous figure, Browning, according to George Eliot, “talked and quoted admirably apropos of versification” (H&J 135). Mark Pattison offered the opinion that “the French have the most perfect system of versification in these modern times” (H&J 135), a comment George Eliot seemed to respond to as remarkable since she emphasizes it with an exclamation point. Faucit, who had found *The Spanish Gypsy* so touching that she cried while reading it (T. Martin 299), was in the middle of Browning’s recently published *The Ring and the Book* and delighted to discuss it with the eminent poet. “How pleasant,” she gushed, “to pop upon him thus while reading his poem! If possible it gave greater zest to it.” Browning received her admiration gracefully and returned it by making a proposal that impressed the woman actor already very used to being sought out to perform, including by the Leweses. According to her diary, Browning exclaimed to her, “Ah, if I could have had you to *act* my Pompilia.” The potential for acting Pompilia enriched her reading: “As I proceed with this book this speech fills me with grateful happy thoughts. How kind of him to say so!” (T. Martin 301–2). Even Dr. Joesph Frank Payne, a lifelong but infrequent visitor from the medical contingent, contributed to the poetic discussion by bringing along his brother John Burnell Payne, who had a professional interest in *The Spanish Gypsy*. Everyone involved seems to have regarded Valentine’s Day in 1869 at the Priory as a triumphant afternoon in the service of poetry and a supreme experience in London literary salonizing.

The poetry-related discussions lingered in George Eliot’s thoughts through the following Monday when the previous afternoon’s conversation with Dr. Payne’s brother brought forth one of her hastiest post-salon notes. After her guests departed, she penned an invitation to Payne for the following Wednesday, commenting that “Mr Lewes tells me that I shrink from a duty in being unwilling to talk to you on the subject you mention [*The Spanish Gypsy*], so I am compunctious” (GEL 5:12). When the nervous young man arrived at the Priory, she responded to his timid critique by narrating the composition process of the poem, a narration Haight summarizes in notes leant him by Payne’s niece. He concludes that the version Payne heard corresponds with the creative process Cross includes in the *Life in Letters*, in the passage he calls “Notes on the Spanish Gypsy.”

On the Wednesday afternoon when Payne had George Eliot all to himself, he was not seeking casual conversation, but rather taking advantage of a Priory visit by projecting a periodical publication of his own. When he met George Eliot tête-à-tête, he began the conversation by launching a narrative of his spiritual concerns. Like many Priory guests who had reason to expect a sympathetic response to conscientious struggles of doubt and faith, he had gone through the process of preparing for the Church and later turning from orders to a writing career. With his literary goals in mind, Payne was hoping to write an “elaborate article” (*GEL* 5:16) on George Eliot’s dramatic poem.

Lewes’s encouragement of George Eliot’s invitation to tea provides another illustration of their use of the Priory as an arena for self-promotion among likely reviewers of her work.<sup>7</sup> Although George Eliot knew nothing of Payne’s own writing, she knew he contributed to prestigious periodicals. In her letters, she enumerates “the Pall Mall Gazette, Macmillan’s, Vanity Fair” (*GEL* 5:12, n.7) as venues for Payne’s publications. At this poetic tea party, she also learned they had friends in common in Warwickshire, for the Paynes were related by marriage to her old Coventry schoolmistresses, the Miss Franklins.

Payne’s writing career produced critical essays on both literature and art. By 1869 he had published a three-part series on Pre-Raphaelite painting, the first part, according to William Michael Rossetti, a small history of *The Germ*. His piece on “English Art” came out in June of 1869 in *Macmillan’s*. But sad reasons intervened to prevent completion of the “elaborate” article for which he was gathering material during his post-salon interview with George Eliot at the Priory, for Payne died later that year at the age of thirty.

Meanwhile, a tense little note to her old Coventry friend Sara Hennell reveals how seriously George Eliot was taking both her poetry writing and the opinions of the circle that gathered at her salons. Together with Spencer, Hennell lunched at the Priory the week before Valentine’s Day, and the talk concerned Browning’s poetry. Without any of her usual graceful introductory personal remarks, the letter George Eliot hastened to write after the luncheon moves directly to a discussion of *The Ring and the Book*, which pivoted on Browning’s assertion (to the best of George Eliot’s memory) that “Man cannot create, but he can restore” (*GEL* 5:13), as illustrated by allusions to *Faust* and then the biblical Elisha in Part I of *The Ring and the Book* (5:13). George Eliot does not restate Hennell’s point of view, though the latter’s interests in faith and piety may have called

<sup>7</sup> See Easley regarding George Eliot’s poetry and her abilities at “self-marketing” (107).

forth a spiritual interpretation of the biblical allusion. But she corrects her friend's interpretation of the two allusions which, in apparent contradiction of Hennell's interpretation, she calls "manifestly symbolical" (5:14). She then hastens to account for Hennell's error by theorizing that her old Coventry friend read the lines out of their context, or that they were possibly "pointed out or quoted to you by your friends" (5:14). With little tact, she laments how misinterpretations of literature afflict authors (linking herself with Hennell, whose work on *Thoughts in Aid of Faith* drew mixed responses) and abjures Hennell "to set any one right, when you can, about this quotation from Browning" (5:14). The crispness of the note indicates how, as George Eliot was developing a star-studded social life in London, she was withdrawing slowly but steadily from the friends of her youth in Warwickshire, a withdrawal abetted by Lewes, who found the lot of them, especially Charles Bray, intellectually inadequate. The Coventry friends did not appear at Sundays at the Priory, although the correspondence with Hennell continued for a good while with some regularity before dwindling to annual birthday notes.

The Sundays of early 1869 also marked the first occasions on which George Eliot read from her works in progress to guests at the Priory. Lewes clarifies how this practice began with the private readings in which they engaged during her entire creative life. On 14 February 1869, he notes, "Polly read her poem of *Lisa to me*" (my italics). On the twenty-first, he follows his guest list with the notation that she read "Lisa aloud," though he does not specify the audience. But on the twenty-eighth, he clarifies his assertion when he names their post-salon dinner guests: "*Dr Ward* [his italics], Gertrude and Charles to dinner. Polly read them *Lisa* and *Armgar*." Reading aloud to her guests, a practice rarely if ever associated with George Eliot, but which she carried on with her subsequent works, began with the poetic endeavors that coincided with the commencement of the regular Sundays in 1869.

## The Big "S"

Society with a capital "S" was represented in those early days by members of the titled Stanley family. Lyulph Stanley became the first to visit, in January 1869, and he continued coming, although infrequently, through 1880. Just turning thirty at the time of his first visit, he belonged to a family of passionate social activists and, like Payne, followed the common Victorian pattern of losing his religion, in his case followed by a leaning toward Comtism (Jones 14). Afterward, he dedicated himself to reform from a

secular perspective. He eventually found his main endeavor in educational improvements. When he married Mary Bell in 1873, he did not hesitate to bring her to the Priory.

Stanley's sisters, Kate and Rosalind, contributed the respectability of titled woman guests to the early Sundays. Kate, Lady Amberley, came with her husband once or twice a year until her early death in 1874, while Rosalind, married to George Howard, the ninth earl of Carlisle, made year-round and regular appearances, often together with her husband, but sometimes individually, through 1877. Like the Pattisons, the Howards had a reputation for carrying on in an unhappy marriage. Biographer Virginia Surtees Michael catches the sense of turbulence in her title, *The Artist and the Autocrat*. She describes George Howard as mild and "uxorious" (18), a patient Pre-Raphaelite watercolorist, and Rosalind as an aggressive suffragist whose temperance activities eventually resulted in her closing all the pubs around Castle Howard where, by the 1880s, she was living apart from her husband. Meanwhile, she had borne eleven children, many of them during the 1870s, the decade during which she participated in the salons at the Priory. George Eliot welcomed her partly for her decorativeness; she describes her later as "pretty Mrs. G. Howard," one of several visitors (Edmund Gurney, William Allingham, Kate Field, and the golden-haired Emilia Pattison) whose comeliness balanced the appearance of the famously plain-looking Priory hosts.

As a friend of the Burne-Joneses, Rosalind Howard found Georgiana Burne-Jones's socializing with the Leweses helped pave the way for her to follow her friend to the Priory despite the Leweses' scandalous circumstances. The two couples spent Christmas together in 1868 and talked about George Eliot's lack of beauty and about *The Spanish Gypsy*, which George Howard liked, while the Burne-Joneses, who had not yet read it, remained apprehensive about their friend's ability to handle poetry (Michael 64). Indeed the Howards preceded the Burne-Joneses to the Sundays, although not to the Priory where the more famous artist and his wife had lunched the previous March. The George Howards made their first visit on 7 February: he in his long Victorian beard, she with her short and temporarily un-pregnant figure clothed in the usual Pre-Raphaelite dress, sans crinolines. Two weeks later, despite the return of winter in the form of intermittent snow showers, the Amberleys followed the Howards, making the unusual move of bringing their three-year-old son, Frank, sent to play in the garden until the sporadic storms drove him inside to the care of the maids (children appeared very rarely at the Priory). In the *Amberley Papers* Kate Amberley concludes, "I liked my visit . . . I talked entirely to Mrs Lewes, and like her very much" (38). The two women touched on the

education-related topics that absorbed nearly all the Stanleys, including the mother Henrietta, involved in the founding of Girton College. They also, in what had become a set topic, talked about poetry.

### The Summer of '69 and the Illness of Thornie

Although the Leweses had made a long European tour in the spring, they remained at home through the summer of 1869, and the Sundays at the Priory continued. At some points during the summer, however, they survived only barely.<sup>8</sup> Lewes's second son, Thornie, had arrived home from Africa gravely ill, and, although the couple looked forward to receiving guests as a welcome respite from daily involvement with serious illness, sometimes the numbers dwindled. On the Sunday in May that Haight describes as a "devastating" (514) first visit to the Priory by Henry James, the eager young novelist found himself rushing out for a doctor to attend to Thornie. Though attendance remained strong through May and June, with between eight or nine and sometimes as many as fifteen guests, it fell off in July, and on the twenty-second Lewes wailed in his diary, "No one called!" The following Sunday, only John Walter Cross appeared, for his first visit. Meanwhile Bodichon was not waiting for Sundays to form a particularly close day-to-day relationship with the invalid, though she sustained her attendance on Sundays throughout the summer as she did throughout her life.

At the same time, the summer brought some important new faces to the group, including Nikolaus Trübner, responsible for publication of many of the authors he met there; Richard Monkton Milnes (Lord Houghton) whose own gatherings attracted such fearful gossip; Emanuel Deutsch, widely accepted as the model for Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda*; and Sidney Colvin, who in 1873 became Slade Professor of Art History at Cambridge and Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum. Nannie Smith, Bodichon's sister, was in town and occasionally brought her companion, Isabella Blythe, while Eliza Lynn Linton did not give up on the Priory until the following year.<sup>9</sup> Another addition resulted from the engagement of ultra-Positivist

<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Ashton declares that, after the return of Thornie they did not resume Sundays at the Priory until 1870: "After ceasing to entertain or go out while they had been nursing Thornie, they now resumed their Sunday afternoons at The Priory" (*George Henry Lewes: A Life* 250). Lewes's journals, however, prove that the Sundays went on that summer despite the need to nurse Thornie.

<sup>9</sup> Linton's resentful review of Cross's *Life in Letters*, which complains that George Eliot had some inordinate power over men, most probably draws on her observations as the guests crowded around George Eliot at Sundays at the Priory.

Edward S. Beesly, who proudly introduced his fiancée, Emily Crompton, on 5 December 1869. George Eliot found marital engagements among her guests delightful and romantic. She wrote to Maria Congreve that Beesly was “one of a group of prospective marriages which we have had announced to us since we came home. Besides Mr. Harrison’s there is Dr. Allbutt’s, our charming friend from Leeds” (*GEL* 5:40). Sister to Henry Crompton, another regular, Emily Crompton helped keep the Positivism in the family.

Bodichon’s record at the Priory confirms her position as George Eliot’s closest friend. Not only did she visit nearly every Sunday when she was in London, but she brought important people with her. In the earliest years, the notations of Lewes, since they often place her early arrival side by side with one of her friends, suggest her responsibility for the appearance of, in particular, artists, educators, and feminists, some of whom became long-time stalwarts. While Bessie Parkes’s friendship with George Eliot went back as far as Bodichon’s (that is, to the early fifties), and she would have arrived without needing an introduction from anyone, Nannie Leigh Smith and Isabella Blythe, for example, would hardly have turned up at the gate in St John’s Wood without Bodichon’s instigation.

Indeed Bodichon’s friendships provided some of the most persistent Priory visitors. The Priory acquired another woman regular when on 23 May Bodichon introduced a co-worker in the cause of women’s education, Anne Jemima Clough.<sup>10</sup> The two had met during the early fifties, indeed shortly after Clough’s flight to Florence to the deathbed of her beloved poet/brother, Arthur Hugh. At that time, according to Hirsch, “In conversations about the higher education of women the two women grew to have great respect for each other” (181). Her name appears in Lewes’s diary linked with her friend’s, and Clough soon became a Priory regular.

George Eliot’s well-known connections with the founding of Girton College resulted from her lifelong intimacy with Bodichon, the institution’s co-founder (with Emily Davies). George Eliot’s monetary support, her suggestions for a suitable curriculum, and her 1877 visit prove that she made her most important contributions to higher education for women to her dearest friend’s institution at Girton rather than the Sidgwicks’ at Newnham. But Newnham’s advocates also attended Sundays at the Priory, including Henry Sidgwick, F. W. H. Myers, and Clough herself, whom Sidgwick chose in 1871 to supervise lodgings in Cambridge for women come to town to attend the university lectures then open to them. In the

<sup>10</sup> In addition to Clough, Bodichon’s friends included the Allinghams and Betham-Edwards and, later, fellow artist Emily Greatorex as well as Bodichon’s Girton protégée, Phoebe (Hertha) Marks.

beginning, these lodgings moved from one location to another, but Clough continued in her position after the construction of the building that forms the heart of Newnham College today.

Clough turned up at the Priory regularly but not frequently. Her occupations in the late sixties and early seventies took her all over England. At that time she was serving on the North of England Council, an organization devoted to offering university-level lectures to women locally in cities such as Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester. At the same time, she often stayed in or near London. The widow of her beloved brother, Arthur Hugh, welcomed her in the city, as she did to the household at Combe Hurst, just outside London. She came to the Priory three times during the summer months of 1869, usually on days when Bodichon was also visiting. Thereafter she attended about once or twice a year.

Although the Priory crowd would have offered Clough a pool of talented, expert speakers for the lectures she was organizing, it is unlikely that she made any great contribution to the day's conversation. Clough's niece, Blanche Clough, who authored a memoir of her aunt in 1897, describes Clough's dedication to improving education for girls and women at all levels and in numerous locations. But she also describes her aunt's speaking ability and social skills less positively. In public, "she did not come forward as one who had many ideas to communicate" (138). In society, she "used to take but little part in general conversation, and kept rather in the background, but that there was a serenity in her manner and a suggestion of power about her which impressed people. Mr. Symonds remarked of her about this time that it was difficult to talk to her, because she usually seemed to slip out of the conversation, but if the talk was turned on educational matters, it was at once clear that she was on her own ground" (Clough 106). Clough's portraits show a wide mouth under a no-nonsense, eagle brow, and if she rarely made the sort of comments that led Lewes to crow about "capital talk," she did help make up the numbers during the terrible summer of Thornie's illness, and she also evened the balance between the Girton and the Newnham crowds, both of which visited at the Priory. Other guests who joined the committees formed to promote Newnham, Frederic Myers and W. K. Clifford, did not begin their own attendance at Sundays until 1872 and 1873, respectively.

Finally, just before Thornie's death prompted them to cease all social life and retreat to a farmhouse in Limpsfield Surrey to mourn, George Eliot wrote enthusiastically to Oscar Browning of the visit of a Russian couple, the Kovalevkys, who arrived at the Priory via the good offices of William Shedden-Ralston of the British Museum who published collections of Russian fairy tales. Miriam Haskell Berlin, who translated and

introduced Madame Kovalevsky's reminiscences of George Eliot in the 1984 *Yale Review*, suggests that the couple's marriage, entered into to remedy the wife's inability to obtain a passport without her parents' consent, did not bring them together in a familial union (533).<sup>11</sup> The wife's ambition to study mathematics, which at home had suffered repeated obstacles because of her gender, benefitted from the independence she achieved by marrying geologist Vladimir O. Kovalevsky, a circumstance that enabled her to flee to Heidelberg to pursue her studies. The couple seldom lived together; indeed he soon departed for Vienna while his wife returned to Heidelberg. In her journal, George Eliot records her reaction to these plans with an admiring exclamation point (H&J 138).

The Russian couple did, however, arrive at the Priory together on 3 October 1869. According to the wife's colorful account, her presence at the Priory, and George Eliot's discovery of her ambitions, delighted the novelist. George Eliot reported in her journals that so did young Madam Kovalevsky's appearance and demeanor: "a pretty creature with charming modest voice and speech" (H&J 138). Although Lewes notes only eight guests on 3 October 1869, Kovalevsky remembers a group of twelve that included "a young lord just returned from a long journey in a little-known country, several musicians and painters, two or three people without a definite specialty" (544). Nevertheless, Kovalevsky insists that the events she narrates took place on her first meeting with Herbert Spencer, and Lewes and she agree on his presence on 3 October. Writing sixteen years after the event, Kovalevsky reports George Eliot's conversation word for word:

I had already been there some time when an elderly man with grey whiskers and a typical English face entered. No one spoke his name, but George Eliot went to him immediately saying, 'How glad I am that you have come today, I can present to you the living refutation of your theory—a woman mathematician. Permit me to present my friend. I must warn you,' she said to me, still not uttering his name, 'that he denies the very possibility of the existence of a woman mathematician. He admits that from time to time a woman might appear who equals the average level of men in intellectual capacity, but he argues that an equal woman always directs her intellect and insight to the analysis of her friends' lives and never would chain herself to pure abstraction. Try to dissuade him.'<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Although Haight gives her first name as Sonya (*GEL* 5: 59, n. 6), Berlin reproduces the name as Soph'ia Kovalevskaia (533).

<sup>12</sup> See Nancy Paxton's *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer*, which argues that each of George Eliot's novels engages a favorite theory of Spencer's and, one by one, demonstrates their inadequacies. K. K. Collins also quotes Kovalevsky's account of meeting with Spencer (99–100), as well as two other passages from the Berlin version.

Kovalevsky, still unaware of his identity, gave Spencer forty-five minutes of women's rights "with the enthusiastic fervor of a neophyte" (545). After which, she remembers George Eliot saying "you have defended our common concern with such courage . . . and if my friend Herbert Spencer is not yet persuaded, then I am afraid that he must be judged incorrigible" (545). Only then did the nineteen-year-old, according to George Eliot, a "perfect Hebe in face" (*GEL*: 5:59), identify the old man with whiskers to whom she had been speaking with such confidence. Kovalevsky returned to the Continent soon after the October encounter with Spencer to continue her studies. She went on to a remarkable career. Having earned a doctorate, she became professor of mathematics at Stockholm University.<sup>13</sup>

## 1870

In 1870 the Leweses sustained a grueling six full months of salons throughout January, February, March, September, October, and November. While in 1869 they hosted a guest list of around sixty-five, in 1870 the total number of individuals who showed up at the salons was climbing towards a hundred. Some of the most regular visitors began coming in 1870, among them members of the Cross family; William Allingham and, eventually, his wife; and Thomas Sanderson, later the bookbinder Cobden-Sanderson. A heavily underlined entry in Lewes's journal notes an isolated visit, but one of extreme importance on 6 March: "*Dickens* to lunch." Willy nilly, the lunch was his last visit, for within three months (9 June) Dickens died. Having contributed to the lunch a spooky anecdote concerning Abraham Lincoln's anticipation of his own death, Dickens soon followed the American president to the grave.

William Allingham, on the other hand, another fresh face introduced by Bodichon, joined the core group and remained a faithful visitor for the duration. Born in Donegal, he began collecting Irish ballads while working as a customs official in Ireland. Moving to England in the mid-sixties, he sought to remedy his susceptibility to depression in Lymington on the Hampshire coast where he made the acquaintance of Tennyson, who was

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the 1869 visit, Kovalevsky claims she met George Eliot in London just days before the novelist's death in 1880. Even Berlin expresses some doubt about this claim, pointing out that "George Eliot rarely talked about her work," as Kovalevsky claimed she did that afternoon, but concedes that a letter from Charles Darwin at Down proves that both Kovalevskys were in England in December 1880 (535). Their discussion about death in George Eliot's novels gives Kovalevsky a neat ending to her memoir, for George Eliot's own death followed within days of the supposed meeting.

living nearby at Ferringford in Freshwater, Isle of Wight. While collecting and composing ballads, Allingham continued to enlarge his English acquaintance in the Pre-Raphaelite circle as well, including D. G. Rossetti, the Burne-Joneses, and John Everett Millais, and also cultivated one of his most treasured relationships: with Thomas Carlyle. As John Norwich concludes, “A lion hunter he may have been, but his lions loved him” (*Diary*, Introduction 15). Tennyson took to him for his wit and his reverent manner toward the Laureate (Welch, *ODNB* 1:865).

Allingham visited George Eliot on Sundays from the autumn of 1870 to as late as 15 February 1880. His *ODNB* entry describes a vibrant Irish charm: “To his contemporaries in England, Allingham seemed to carry an atmosphere of Irish open space and vitality. They relished his ready wit and appreciative presence; and his reserve and dark good looks were remarked upon by Georgiana Burne-Jones” (1:865). In his creative imagination, he inhabited the world of the fairy tales and Irish ballads he collected and himself penned the well-known fairy poem that begins “Up the airy mountain,” always mentioned as an important detail in even the shortest biographical snippets. Pam Hirsch asserts that editing *Fraser’s* not only changed Allingham’s life for the better, it also introduced him to his future wife, who produced illustrations for his periodical (279).

Allingham was forty-nine when he first began coming to the Priory where George Eliot made him feel welcome with friendly compliments. He attended with regularity for several years until 1874 when he presented to George Eliot a copy of *Lawrence Bloomfield*, his 1864 rhymed-couplet narrative poem about Ireland’s sorrows and conflicts, as full of spies, intrigue, and stereotypes as anything produced about Italy during the 1860s. George Eliot thanked Allingham for the poem and concluded that “its wisdom and fine sympathies have cheered me greatly” (*GEL* 6:33). Shortly later, he married and immediately brought his wife to Sunday at the Priory, a meeting that took off brilliantly. When George Eliot saw Helen Allingham’s delicate watercolors of country cottages, renderings that stop just this side of pastoral sentimentality, she conceived the idea of a new set of illustration for *Romola*.<sup>14</sup> Although this series never materialized, Helen Allingham produced a frontispiece for her brother Arthur Paterson’s *George Eliot’s Family Life and Letters*, published in 1928.<sup>15</sup> The watercolor represents George Eliot’s country house at Witley from the

<sup>14</sup> The suggestion, however, could not have come from dissatisfaction with Frederic Leighton’s original illustrations in the *Cornhill* as their exchanges of letters on the subject convey her general satisfaction, and the artist became a perennial guest at the Priory.

<sup>15</sup> According to Baker and Ross, an engraving “signed WHYMPER” (496) adapted her watercolor as an illustration for the third volume of Cross’s *Life in Letters*.

sunny, south-facing rear, abundant with delicate green foliage climbing the walls toward the red roof. A stone stairway on the left leads to a curving pathway flanked by flower beds of red, yellow, and purple, while two white birds of undistinguishable species peck their ways across the path. On a later page, Paterson also includes a watercolor of George Eliot herself, possibly also contributed by Helen Allingham.

The Allinghams remained visitors to George Eliot even after Lewes's death. On 15 February 1880, they joined a group in the drawing room at the Heights near which they had bought a home of their own, Sandhills. The afternoon, on which six guests attended, made a depleted but plausible imitation of Sundays at the Priory just three months before George Eliot married John Cross and departed for a summer honeymoon on the Continent.

Another new guest noted, like Allingham, for his sensitivity, Thomas Sanderson began his visits in 1869 but continued them in 1870 and beyond. Sanderson did not find his niche in life until after Sundays at the Priory had ceased forever, for he did not begin learning the bookbinding craft until 1883. The introduction to *Credo*, his autobiography, published of course by his own Doves Press, describes him as "Master Bookbinder, ardent Socialist, advocate of the Arts & Crafts Movement, proprietor of the most personal of the great English private presses: Cobden-Sanderson was a passionate idealist. He believed in the value of craftsmanship as an aid toward the ideal. His mystical gift was most evident when he contemplated the universe in the world around him. His extraordinary sensitivity and his pantheistic spirituality are remarkable. The Doves press was established to reflect C-S's [*sic*] spiritual vision" (n.p.). According to E. L. DeCoverly, "He had many influential friends; he seemed to know everyone in the literary and artistic world." The frequency of his Priory visits throughout their existence brought him into the very world DeCoverly describes as contributing to the success of the eventual Cobden-Sanderson press.

After a single Sunday during the summer of '69, the day on which he made the only guest, John Cross returned in January of 1870, and, as the months went by, one or more of his surviving sisters (Anna, Mary, Emily, Eleanor, and Florence), or his brother William, might join him in varying combinations. In *George Eliot's Life in Letters*, Cross claims that the intimacy between the families sprang up full blown in August of 1869 when the Leweses visited the Crosses at Weybridge and heard the eldest sister, soon to die after childbirth, sing some verses from *The Spanish Gypsy*. Nevertheless, it took half a year more before the sisters joined their brother John at the Priory.

An 1870 addition to the titled guests was Lady Colville, born Frances Elinor Grant in 1838 and married to Sir James Colville, who gained his experience in Bengal, beginning as Advocate General of the East India Company of Calcutta. Born in 1810, he was twenty-eight years older than his wife whom he married in the incongruously Neo-Gothic Calcutta Cathedral. Eventually Lady Colville brought along her sister, Jane Strachey, also married to an older man, General Richard Strachey, who occasionally joined his wife and sister-in-law at the Priory. Strachey also gained his fortune and experience in Bengal, in his case as an engineer. Jane Strachey's life took her from the Earl of Hardwick, on which she was born as the ship was rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1840, through intense activities on behalf of women's suffrage, to Gordon Square where she joined the Bloomsbury Group in 1919 at the age of nearly seventy. She wrote children's books and a volume called *Poets on Poets*, which came out in 1894. Together with the wealthy Irish, such as Lord and Lady Castletown, who owned miles of land in Ireland, veterans of service to the empire in India made up a group of Priory guests who, like George Eliot herself, profited from the expansion of the British Empire.<sup>16</sup> From 1872 through 1880, the sisters remained friends with the Leweses; indeed, the last pen stroke of George Eliot's life addressed Jane Strachey concerning Sir James's death. Fittingly, the letter was a gesture prompted by a friendship carried forth at the Priory Sundays since 1869.

### “Poetry Halts”

Meanwhile, for all the attention to poetry in the Priory conversation during 1869–70—discussions of its theoretical underpinnings and techniques, the presence of eminent practitioners such as Browning, and George Eliot's own output—prose was also occupying the creative energies of the novelist, for all along she was engaged in the combination of two planned stories into her masterpiece, *Middlemarch*.

By October 1869 George Eliot had written some three chapters of her new novel (Haight 421). On the twenty-eighth, Lewes's diary records a family lunch that included his son Charles and a visit from his nephew

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Henry's thorough description of George Eliot's familial and financial involvements with empire mentions friends of the Leweses, such as Trollope, whose children, like Thornie and Bertie Lewes, ventured out to the colonies, but omits their friends who themselves had returned from India to England where they become visitors at the Priory. In interview, Caroline Daker has noticed the immense wealth of some of the guests at the Priory, who, like the colonials, had amassed great wealth, noticing particularly the Alfred Morrisons, another pair of lifelong visitors.

Vivian. He reports that “Polly read aloud Jubal and Middlemarch.” Haight proposes that, afterward, when she stalled on her story of provincial life, she “turned again to poetry” (421), not to resume her novel until she completed her “Brother and Sister” sonnets and some other pieces. Then, more than a year later, on 4 December 1870, George Eliot did something which signaled the final waning of her foray into poetry. She read aloud to a Sunday group, not from her poetry in progress but from the portion of her narrative not yet included in *Middlemarch*, the narrative about “Miss Brooke.”<sup>17</sup> The presence of John Blackwood, its potential publisher, assured the ardent interest of at least one of the small group present. Others who may or may not have stayed long enough to listen included Eleanor and Emily Cross, as well as Sir Henry Maine and Elphinstone Mont Stuart Grant Duff who generally arrived at the Priory together.

Henry Maine, at the time Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford (H&J 424) and Grant Duff, Under-Secretary for India (H&J 404), were fast friends, and Grant Duff authored Maine’s memoir when the time came in 1892. Maine gained fame for his book *Ancient Law* (1861) and did articles for the *Saturday Review*, several of whose authors the Leweses welcomed despite their ridicule of the periodical itself. Avrom Fleischman’s list of George Eliot’s reading notes that she read several of his articles.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, of all Maine’s various topics, Fleischmann singles out his sociology as having much in common with ideas George Eliot embodies in *Middlemarch*: “The organic unity of traditional societies and their tendency to break down and become something else is the realm in which his thought and Eliot’s although not identical, meet” (*Intellectual Life* 173). He would have made a most sympathetic listener for “Miss Brooke.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> A tiny trace of ambiguity, however, occurs in Lewes’s notation (“Polly read what she has of ‘Miss Brooke’ aloud”) because the pair often spent Sunday evenings, after everyone had gone, reading aloud to each other, and he notes the texts in his journal entries directly after listing the guests. However, the diary for 28 February 1869 noting the guests and that “Polly read *them* [my italics] Lisa and Agatha” confirms that she had already begun including Priory visitors in her creative process. In the case of “Miss Brooke,” the presence of Blackwood and the small size of the group suggest that she carried forth the reading at some point during the afternoon. In addition, Lewes notes subsequent Sunday readings of what they by then were calling *Middlemarch*: on 22 October 1871, then on the third and thirty-first of March and the twenty-eighth of April, 1872. If Lewes alone heard these readings from *Middlemarch* then it would be odd that they occurred only on Sundays.

<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly, Fleischmann’s useful list of George Eliot’s reading does not bulge with Priory names. She read Spencer, of course, as well as Turgenev and Trollope and the articles of Frederic Harrison, whom she consulted about legal matters while writing *Felix Holt*. Among biographies, she read Leslie Stephen’s *Samuel Johnson* and C. Kegan Paul’s *William Godwin* and selected some of the lighter literature including Mary Cross’s short story “Marie of Villefranche,” Allingham’s “Songs, Ballads and Stories,” William R. Shedden-Ralston’s *The Songs of the Russian People*, and Frederick Locker[-Lampson]’s *London Lyrics* (1–106).

<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, in connection with her participation in the conduct of Charles Appleton’s

Meanwhile his friend Grant Duff found none of the awkwardness sometimes attributed to George Eliot in her Priory manners. In his diary he notes: "To see Mr. and Mrs. Lewes (George Eliot) at the Priory, St John's Wood. She receives every Sunday afternoon, and has a good deal of skill in managing a *salon*, in addition to her other gifts" (*Notes from a Diary* 139). His diary repeats several of Lewes's anecdotes that he found amusing, but omits any mention of the reading of "Miss Brooke." Grant Duff, too, would have made a good audience for an anecdote or a reading, as his obituary describes him as at once "inarticulate" and opinionated because "[h]is habit of considering questions from various points of view did not prevent him from forming strong opinions." The multi-perspectival narrative of *Middlemarch* could just suit a tendency to shift points of view. They both remained callers even after Lewes's death.

For their part, Emily and Eleanor Cross not only continued as guests at the Priory; they and their brothers and sisters were developing into a quasi-family of Crosses and Leweses that became ever more intimate. They celebrated Christmases together, made plans, eventually, to move their main residence from Weybridge Heath west of London to some location closer to Cheyne Walk where George Eliot and brother John intended to spend their married days, and indeed welcomed George Eliot as their new sister when the couple married in 1880. However, much of their contact still took place at Sundays at the Priory where they augmented the family closeness of the relationship with more formal meetings that nevertheless helped sustain the most important friendship of the Leweses' later years.

Whichever members of this small group had the first taste of *Middlemarch*, hearing George Eliot read of Dorothea's religiosity and her meeting with Mr. Casaubon, they participated in a historic occasion and one that began the contribution of the Priory salon to the publication history of *Middlemarch*. While many biographers and scholars (notably Carol Martin) credit Lewes's innovative plan of publishing *Middlemarch* in its own volumes issued serially during 1871 and 1872 as a revolutionary and pivotal publishing strategy that helped weaken the dominance of the officious lending libraries, the ongoing campaign Lewes sustained of stirring up interest at the Priory also belongs to the publication history of this particular book as one of his marketing tactics. Martin's list of reviews of *Middle-*

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periodical, the *Academy*, Fleischman overestimates the importance of George Eliot's visits to Oxford where, he believes, George Eliot, Appleton, and Mark Pattison conversed and made plans for the *Academy*. At the time, Pattison and Appleton were both among the most regular Priory visitors and need not have waited for the rare Oxford visits for their exchanges of (according to Fleischman, neo-Hegelian) ideas.

*march* reveals that about half the periodicals waited until the entire eight volumes appeared in print, while the rest noticed it part by part. For marketing purposes, Lewes far preferred the latter approach. He took Charles Appleton of the *Academy* to task for delaying his notice until January 1873.<sup>20</sup>

Originally, Lewes complained about Appleton's decision to review the parts not one by one as they appeared but only after the final segment came out, which not only delayed the publicity (thus failing to stir up more interest) but also minimized the final product which could hardly deal in the detail possible in a series of eight essays, each reviewing just one of the eight parts. Even a very long review could not devote as much space to the novel as segment-by-segment reviews. But the editor had been attending the Priory sessions since January 1869, and whatever Lewes said to Appleton about reviewing *Middlemarch* in the most productive way resulted in an invitation for the reviewer the editor had selected, Edith Simcox, to the Priory before the publication of her review. Simcox called on 13 December 1872. Not until three weeks after her first visit did the *Academy* publish an almost outrageously positive review. These events all helped initiate her desperate passion for George Eliot, and she became a frequent Sunday visitor for the rest of George Eliot's life.

Sundays at the Priory thus joined the published reviews of individual volumes as part of the marketing and indeed the composition of *Middlemarch*. Martin corrects the notion that, unlike Dickens, for example, George Eliot took no account of responses to the earlier parts of her novel in composing the later parts. She argues that "Eliot's and Lewes's journals, as well as other correspondence, modify these assertions by showing how Eliot valued and needed positive responses" (190). She concludes of George Eliot that "she might not have *read* reviews but she knew what they said" (her italics, 191). Martin goes on to describe how critical responses impelled George Eliot to make sure that favorite characters appeared side by side in all the volumes, rather than alternating the Dorothea and the Vincy/Featherstone plots from one part to another.

Lewes sometimes also tantalized his guests with bits of *Middlemarch* plot events that they could anticipate. He colluded with Blackwood, who attended the salons when in town from Edinburgh, to publish Alexander Main's *Wise Witty and Tender Sayings* in January 1872 in between the appearance of Book 1 in December and Book 2 the following February.

<sup>20</sup> He also took Blackwood to task as a result of a journey to Weybridge in 1872 when, checking availability at Waterloo Station, he found no copies of *Middlemarch* in stock at Smith's. Sarcastically, he inquired whether "one couldn't stir Smith up to look after his stalls" (*GEL* 5:232).

He encouraged intimate Priory guests, notably Sidney Colvin and Lord Houghton, to write reviews of the novel despite their personal association with the author. So that, during 1871 and 1872, the salons provided a series of opportunities by which Lewes (and the less energetic but equally conspicuous participant George Eliot) worked to guarantee the success of *Middlemarch*.

After the initial foray in December 1870, no reading from the masterpiece-in-progress occurred until the following October 1871. The guests then included three of the Cross sisters, Mary, Emily, and Eleanor, as well as Burton, Robertson, Payne, and Beesly, who heard the “closing scene of *Middlemarch* Part III” (GHLJ 22 October), the scene of Mary’s refusal to open Featherstone’s iron chest so that he can burn one of his wills, which appeared in print the following April. With the first part due out in December of that year, George Eliot was giving her guests quite an advance. The following March, she read again to groups as many as thirteen or so guests, and on 28 April, “Polly finished reading Part V of *Middlemarch*,” the confrontation between Raffles and Bulstrode at Stone Court which came out in volume form the following August.

The privileged folk who visited on those Sundays participated in Lewes’s most ferocious attempts at promoting interest in George Eliot’s writing to date. Colvin, for one, found one of Lewes’s strategically tantalizing interest provokers a bit contrived: “During the serial publication of *Middlemarch* I particularly remember his taking me apart one day as I came in, and holding me by the button as he announced to me in confidence concerning one of its chief characters, ‘Celia is going to have a baby!’ This with an air at once gratified and mysterious, like that of some female gossip of a young bride in real life” (91–92). He nevertheless produced a frequently anthologized and highly positive review.

Sundays at the Priory not only allowed the Leweses to stimulate interest in *Middlemarch*, its successful publication swelled attendance at Sundays at the Priory. It clinched George Eliot’s celebrity and brought increasingly large parties of guests to St. John’s Wood, so that the years between *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* became the heyday of the Leweses’ Sunday salons. George Eliot’s notation on New Year’s Eve of 1870 that “poetry halts right now” (H&J 142), in favor of her work on *Middlemarch*, marks the reduction of her preoccupation with poetry.

No matter how thrilling Helen Faucit, Mark Pattison, George Eliot, and Browning himself may have found Valentine’s Day of 1869, now that George Eliot had switched from poetry back to fiction her salons grew larger, more socially elevated, and more stimulating to her creative imagination as she composed *Daniel Deronda*. The salons had come a long way

from the mostly male gatherings of journalists and positivists, and in the years between *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* they flourished. New additions included people of the same social rank as the *Deronda* characters, and their interactions within the Priory's salon culture supply events and people similar to plot elements and characters in *Daniel Deronda*.