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John Cross and the Last Spa



As thus I spoke,
 Servants announced the gondola, and we
 Through the fast-falling rain and high-wrought sea
 Sailed to the island where the madhouse stands.
 We disembarked.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Julian and Maddalo*

George Eliot demonstrated her confidence in Continental spas most convincingly on her disastrous honeymoon with John W. Cross in 1880. After Cross had his breakdown in Venice, which supposedly included a desperate, perhaps suicidal, jump into the Grand Canal, she moved him as quickly as possible to the Schwarzwald, ending up at the spa at Bad Wildbad. George Eliot's decision to marry John Walter Cross has invited various interpretations, most of them based on its inexplicability. They range from Haight's belief that "she was not fitted to stand alone" (530) to Phyllis Rose's belief in an act of bravery that asserted her independence as a woman (211).

George Eliot's own accounting for her marriage coincides with advice she also delivered to Edith Simcox (and others), when she chided that unlikely marriage candidate for resisting her own belief that only marriage between man and woman can engender the best kind of love, tender, sympathetic, dutiful. Of her engagement, she confided to Maria Congreve that as a widow, "instead of any former affection being displaced in my mind, I seem to have recovered the loving sympathy that I was in danger of losing. I mean that I had been conscious of a certain drying up of tenderness in me, and that now the spring seems to have risen again" (*GEL* 7:296). At that point and to that degree, she could present the marriage and the subsequent honeymoon positively.¹

¹ Bodenheimer interprets the rhetoric of the letters George Eliot wrote about her engagement and concludes that Cross's attractions included his abilities as a business manager.

For Cross's part, he, too, at the outset of the honeymoon, expressed nothing but satisfaction, at least at the journey's launch: "I don't know what people generally complain so much of in their wedding journeys—ours has certainly been very full of delight and it goes on increasing and I hope will go on jusqu'à la fin—she is a very inexhaustible storehouse" (*GEL* 9:312). His wife, too, created a positive picture. Writing to Cross's brother in the United States, she creates a charming epistolary scene: "I wish you could see Venice this morning; or any other morning like it, in the clear calm light of half past nine o'clock, and have a gondola waiting below to take you wherever you liked to be guided by a picturesque gondolier in blue and white. This is our luxurious lot, and Johnnie seems as happy and well as possible under this regime" (*GEL* 7:292). At the same time, Hughes and Bodenheimer accurately point out that Cross lost a considerable amount of weight as the wedding approached (341;xxx). Indeed George Eliot mentions this twice, first to her stepson Charles Lewes, then to the distant brother. And, in the end, the only people who mention any physical contact, actual or potential, between the newlyweds are two of the Cross sisters, Emily and Florence. Emily writes to her brother, "kiss her well for me," while Florence, the youngest Cross, writes to them: "Please give each other all the kisses and love that we send you each" (ms. letter, Beinecke 7 May 1880). In doing so, Florence and Emily depart from the pattern of joyous references to the sights of the honeymoon itinerary into the realm of actual physical contact, though physical contact among the family members, rather than just the couple themselves.

At any rate, the entire tendency of George Eliot's life at the time was a family affair with the Crosses. They had been intimate friends for more than a decade. Financially and emotionally, they already considered themselves "family." Two of the sisters and a cousin named their children for George Eliot and for characters she created. Emily Cross Otter called her daughter Gwendolen Otter, and Anna Cross Druce named her little boy Eliot. Elinor Sellar, related to the Crosses through the Denistouns, named her daughter Eppie.

The eldest Cross sister, Elizabeth, nicknamed Zibbie, was, according to her cousin Eleanor Sellar, the star of the family and the sister whose loss George Eliot's marriage to Johnny helped make up for. Sellar describes them all in superlatives: a wise father and "handsome, lively, humorous mother" (74), but the oldest girl is "the peerless Zibbie" (74) and "one of the most charming and brilliant women I have ever known" (52). Cross reports that Zibbie Cross Bullock sang one of George Eliot's *Spanish Gypsy* songs on the important day in August of 1869 on which the lifelong intimacy between the Crosses and Leweses sprang up full blown.

Simcox suggests that Zibbie Cross never felt comfortable in the company of the family idol, although the Cross brothers and sisters detected many strange and portentous resemblances between their eldest sister and George Eliot (70). Eleanor Cross informed Simcox that when Elizabeth Bullock died, both her bereaved husband, William Henry Bullock, and her brother, Johnnie, were “drawn” to George Eliot because of a “strange likeness” (70) between the two women, one just turning fifty the other dead in her thirties. When the family showed George Eliot Elizabeth’s book of extracted passages from literature, it turned out that both had copied many of the same ones. Bereavement brought the two families together again in 1878 when Anna Cross and Lewes died within days of each other.

Consequently, the marriage between George Eliot and Cross did not just add one more sister to the family-like group. Instead, the Crosses regarded it as the replacement of a specific sister, their departed Zibbie. When George Eliot became Mary Ann Cross, Eleanor Cross wrote in terms that show she was still connecting her late sister and her new relative: “it is most delicious to have an *oldest sister* again!” (ms. letter, Beinecke, 6 May 1880; my italics). Rather than participating in a general restoration of the condition of sister, George Eliot was expected to take the place of the particular sister they had connected with her since the afternoon Zibbie sang the song from *The Spanish Gypsy* in the house at the foot of St George’s Hill on Weybridge Heath, henceforth a second home for the Leweses.

The wedding of George Eliot and Johnnie Cross was a family affair. On 6 May 1880, a group of eight people gathered in the late-morning light at St George’s. Popular for society weddings, it had an east Mayfair location convenient to some of the best neighborhoods in London. Although the porch atop the series of Corinthian columns offered shelter out front in the event of a rainy day, the bright weather meant that this party had no serious need of it. Coming together in the church’s wide aisle, dwarfed by the towering pulpit, they encircled the bride and groom, making but a small party in the broad aisle. The setting for a wedding that was already puzzling literary and social London earned George Eliot additional negative comment for her choice of an Anglican church despite her famous agnosticism (Haight 543).

A last-minute change introduced a single Lewes into the Cross-dominated occasion. Before the wedding, George Eliot had asked Alfred Druce, Anna Cross’s husband, to give her away. Then she had a last-minute talk with Charles Lee Lewes. Consequently the role he assumed implies approval of and respect for his stepmother’s plans. Druce attended the wedding, but Charles gave her away. The couple departed under clear skies toward Dover. They spent their wedding night at the King’s Head,

eschewing the Lord Warden, so often the first or last stop on journeys to or from the Continent. As the day ended, they walked along the beach below the white cliffs agreeing on the blessedness of their wedding (*GEL* 7:272).

To a certain degree, the honeymoon was a family affair as well. Letters from bride and groom crisscrossed with return letters from Weybridge. Writing directly after the wedding, the sisters' letters to George Eliot contain a strain of relief, and a suggestion that their brother needed caring for, side by side with references to the combination of sorrow and joy the event was prompting. Eleanor writes: "We bless you with our whole hearts for all you are giving to our best beloved. You must not think that we cannot understand the sorrow as well as the joy. We do indeed and we love you the more if that were possible for all you have suffered for him" (ms. letter, Beinecke). On 6 May, after the wedding, Eleanor returned home to Weybridge and immediately sent off a letter to the bride, a letter that acknowledges the Cross servants' concerns about the bridegroom: "Amelia and Delia were so sympathetic when I got home and I had to tell them every detail I could think of. The former was much relieved to hear that the bridegroom's brother had packed his things for him. She evidently has misgivings as to their future fate." On 10 May, the youngest sister Florence sounds the same note: "You can't think what a weight it is off our minds getting rid of our mauvais sujet of a brother and how good of you to tell us how the three days passed . . . as to the keys I hope you will not trust them to Johnnie." For all his efficient handling of finances and real estate, his sisters hardly trusted him to pack his trunk.

Did Johnny Jump?

As for the central event of the honeymoon, Cross's mental breakdown in Venice and accompanying jump into the Grand Canal, most of George Eliot's early biographers, including Mathilde Blind (1883), Oscar Browning (1890), Leslie Stephen (1902), and Charles Olcott (1911), do not mention the Grand Canal incident in any way. By mid-century, several authors (Ramieu in 1932, the Hansons in 1952, and Crompton in 1960) do mention Cross's sickness in Venice but leave out the jump. By the 1990s, all biographers felt the need to confront the question of whether fear of sex with George Eliot prompted Cross to take this supposed plunge. Taylor, Karl, Ashton, and Hughes all consider the possibility.² Brenda Maddox, draw-

² Aside from being the result of twentieth-century preoccupations with sex, the prurient version owes much to Terence de Vere White's fictionalized account of the honeymoon in which he creates Cross as a tormented creature, retreating into madness when faced by his

ing an intense if not fanciful version of the event, follows the pattern of the more popular, least scholarly biographies that embrace the progress from illness to leap, from leap to suicide, from suicide to sexual terror.³

Barbara Hardy, among others, has raised questions about whether the jump occurred at all (104). Contemporary versions, on which Haight relies with undue confidence, come from people, most of them in England at the time of the event, who heard about it by rumor or report. These include Lord Acton and Walter Sichel who agree that Cross had shown signs of mental illness previous to the incident. Acton and Sichel, however, also include demonstrably false details in their versions that conflict with the illness, jump, suicide attempt, and sexual repulsion that has become irretrievably part of the story. Lord Acton concludes, "At Venice she thought him mad," and mentions that she reported to Dr. Richetti, the hotel doctor, that Cross had a mad brother. Acton goes on to assert that during the doctor's presence in their hotel rooms, she "just then heard that he had jumped into the canal" (quoted in Haight 544). No other version supports Acton's conclusion about the doctor's presence at the time of the jump.

Sichel (who also believed that Agnes Jervis Lewes was shut up in "a lunatic asylum" [186]) in later years played bridge with Cross at the Sheridans' Club. He found him unforthcoming, either about his excellent handling of the cards or about his honeymoon with George Eliot, and in any event he introduces his version with a disclaimer: "The silliest gossip was bruited about their honeymoon. It was rumoured that after a prolonged course of Dante at Venice he had cast himself into the Grand Canal and begged the gondoliers not to rescue him. But such inventions were probably due to the ignorance of thickheads who could not understand how a literary man of business became united to a genius through a worship of

wife's sexual expectations. George Griffith (email to author) locates versions of the story in the American periodical *Literary World*, while K. K. Collins mentions its publication in the *Examiner* shortly after George Eliot's death and adds George Howard, Caroline Jebb, Hallam Tennyson, and Bertrand Russell as sources for sometimes conflicting accounts. Despite the prurient cruelty with which White treats George Eliot, he accurately emphasizes the almost daily intimacy the Crosses shared with William Bunney, Ruskin's protégé in Venice, creating a possible Ruskinian link to the honeymoon events. The timing of the Crosses' visit suggests that, along with purchasing one of Bunney's paintings for the Heights, his connection with them may have provided the occasion for them to read *Fiction Fair and Foul*, with its harshness regarding *The Mill on the Floss*, available in Venice, at this crucial point in the honeymoon.

³ Collins accepts the story of the jump because of Maddox's research coup: her discovery of stories concerning the incident in Italian newspapers and a police report that appear to corroborate Cross's jump and his refusal of help from the gondoliers (218). Nevertheless, the inflated style of Italian journalism, together with the possibility that Cross did not need help because he could swim perfectly well, qualify this evidence as the final word.

mind and character” (186).⁴ Simcox secured her version of Venice from the Cross sisters at Weybridge but does not mention any Grand Canal jump, only an attack of mental illness. On hearing a report of Cross’s crisis, she hastened out to the house on the Heath where she learned that the brother had a history of mental illness. She and Eleanor Cross “spoke a little about the marriage,” and Eleanor reported “that they had been very anxious before their marriage, he was so worn and ill” (128). Simcox regarded this as the explanation for George Eliot’s decision because it identified a plausible reason for admiring her plucky young husband handling a mental illness with fortitude. Also, with Cross losing weight and looking ill, a journey abroad, more conveniently undertaken by a married couple, might have the objective of helping to restore his health.

John Dalberg-Acton shared no close friendship with either George Eliot or Lewes. After a brief meeting in 1872, he did not turn up at Sunday at the Priory until late spring 1878, and then for but two visits, neither of which coincided with Johnny Cross’s. Nevertheless, Acton formed a relationship with Cross himself during the writing of his late wife’s biography. He also took a rarely noticed active part in its composition. When George Eliot’s widower settled down to doing the *Life in Letters*, he composed a good deal of it while wintering on the Riviera where Acton kept a villa in Cannes. Turning to the Catholic historian/moralist, Cross accepted Acton’s active interest and considerable anxieties about his project. According to Acton, in his letters to Mary Gladstone, “They tell me that Mr. Cross is here. If so, I hope to have a talk with him about the difficult life he is writing.” On 7 March 1883, Acton writes from his home in Cannes, that “Cross is in great force, writing the biography and wanting me to read the papers” (*Letters* 117). Two weeks later, Acton ventures his opinion of Cross’s now-famous collage of excerpts from letters occasionally interrupted by his own narrative passages, describing the method on 31 March 1883 as a “v. interesting stringing together” (166).

As his project advanced, Cross continued to consult Acton. On 9 December 1884, Acton was reviewing Cross’s draft when he spoke to “a young Englishman [who] described the Grasse Hotel to me, where he had lived with Cross who was writing a book” (*Letters* 198). Acton was amused that the young man “did not discover that it was the book in my hand” (198). He entered into his work on Cross’s draft with thoroughness: “I have sent it back with some considerable suggestions” (198). Finally, on 22 January 1885, Acton was looking forward to seeing the publication to which he had contributed first hand. At his home in Cannes, La Made-

⁴ Most versions of this passage truncate the disclaimers.

leine, he writes in anticipation, "Cross is coming with his book next week" (205).

Acton's worries about the biography probably helped result in its turning out, as famously described by William Gladstone, a disappointing "reticence in three volumes." Uneasy about her union with Lewes and with her agnosticism, yet devoted to her novels, he fretted over counsel that could not fail to concern containing potential scandal.

On the other hand, the winters on the Riviera and the intimacy between Cross and Acton provide just a little room for remaining doubt. Who knows but that some afternoon or evening among the palm trees Cross did not confide in Acton about a jump into the Grand Canal?

Henry Sidgwick also suggested revisions to the project to which Cross responded positively. Cross forwarded volume 3 to Sidgwick on 11 December 1884 urging him to review it quickly as the printer's deadline was approaching. Cross points out that "no one outside his own family, aside from Lord Acton, has yet seen it" and claims that he shall feel it "greatly strengthened by [HS's] revision" because he does not know anyone "whose judgment [his] wife would have trusted more" (Cambridge Trinity Add. Ms. c/93/102). Cross ended up accepting Sidgwick's revision to one of the most important narrative passages that link the excerpts from the letters, the passage that pinpoints the beginning of his romantic relationship with George Eliot. On 12 December, having read the forwarded material, Sidgwick suggests, "The 1st sentence of what you have written might perhaps suggest to stupid or careless readers ideas which you did not intend, and would not desire, to suggest" (ms. letter, Beinecke). He offers as a revision the statement: "From this time forward I saw her 'constantly' or some such phrase" (ms. letter, Beinecke). Although neither piece of correspondence reveals the phrasing of Cross's original passage, he accepted Sidgwick's revision word for word. Following a quotation from a letter from George Eliot, he inserts: "From this time forward I saw George Eliot constantly" (JWC 3:292). Like Acton, Sidgwick was making an effort to protect George Eliot's moral reputation.

Meanwhile Acton's letters to Mary Gladstone contain the interesting detail that Cross did some of his writing in Grasse while living with the "young Englishman." While this could mean only that they stayed at the same hotel, it could also mean what it says: that the widower-biographer and the young man lived together. While providing no more than a thread of possible support for Haight's story about a jump into the Grand Canal, Acton's letter may supply the key to the marriage itself. If Cross sought love in the arms of a young man at the Grasse Hotel, he perhaps did enter the marriage to George Eliot in the spirit of an alliance between two close

friends, the younger one without interest in the opposite sex, who joined together for the sake of health, convenience, and platonic affection.

Simcox, though apprehensive about Cross's version of her beloved's life, upon its publication expressed relief. Not until the second edition did she mention a serious objection, an objection directly concerning Acton. In both editions Cross acknowledges the service of Acton whom he calls "a friend always most kindly ready to assist me with valuable counsel and with cordial generous sympathy" ("Preface"). On 17 January 1886, Simcox notes bitterly, "I don't forgive Mr. Cross for leaving the reference to Lord Acton in the preface to the new edition" (228). Simcox does not account for her irritation with Cross's acknowledgment of Acton, but it did not improve her touchy relationship with him despite her affection for his sisters Mary and Eleanor. No reference to the supposed jump appears in Cross, *Blind*, Simcox's journal, or the article-length intellectual biography of George Eliot which Acton published in *The Nineteenth Century* in March 1885, where he reviewed the very book to whose composition he claims to have contributed substantially.

Meanwhile, Kathleen Adams departs from the happy-extended-family version of the marriage. In *Those of Us Who Loved Her*, she reports a family tradition contrary to the one suggested by the letters of Mary, Eleanor, and Florence Cross. According to this interpretation, gained from John Cross's great-niece Joan O'Conner, "who knew him well during his latter years" (v), the Cross sisters regarded George Eliot as "a very autocratic old lady" (175). Adams goes on: "If they were right in thinking that George Eliot had, even subtly, persuaded him into the marriage, then their subsequent view that Johnnie had, on his honeymoon, suddenly realised that he was saddled with an old lady of powerful intellect and a will of her own, and deeply regretted the trip in which he found himself, would seem amply justified" (175). Hughes also suspects a hint of danger in George Eliot's report of Cross's severe weight loss in the year leading up to the event (341).

Two incidents on the honeymoon support Adams's suggestion of a connection between a panicking groom and an "autocratic old lady" (175). One of George Eliot's letters home, from Milan, mentions a concession she made to follow her new husband's inclinations rather than her own: "Last evening, to satisfy J's curiosity, we went to see Rossi in Hamlet" (*GEL* 7:288). She had already seen the performance in London, and in Milan she reported, "Anything so unintelligent, so—*drunken* [her emphasis] as the performance last night I never saw on any stage English or foreign. In the scene with his mother he roared (hoarsely) and stamped, and pulled the poor women's arms as if he meant to put them out of joint" (*GEL* 7:289).

The intemperance of the language in the evaluation of Rossi makes a departure from the generally contented tone of the honeymoon letters and suggests George Eliot may have blamed Cross for the unpleasant evening undertaken solely to humor him.

The second suggestion of autocracy concerns swimming. Three days before the plunge into the Grand Canal, the couple crossed the lagoon in their gondola to visit the Lido where they sat on the sands and watched the waves. At the Lido, as George Eliot wrote to the Cross sisters, her bridegroom expressed a desire for some sea bathing: "J rather longs to have a swim there" (7:298).⁵ She remains vague about the reasons for his not gratifying this desire, speaking of it as having to do with insufficient temperatures of the air: "But though the temperature is agreeable it has not the sort of heat that makes a plunge in cold water as good as a drink to the thirsty" (7:298). According to her letter, only excessive heat might justify swimming, not the need for exercise.

If John Cross did make the jump so long associated with the honeymoon, his motivations, though connected with a mental illness, need not have included suicide. Supposing, for example, Cross, known for his athleticism, was a swimmer.⁶ Prevented from doing so at the Lido for whatever reason, a plunge could have been a defiant gesture rather than a suicide attempt. His own version blames heat, filth, and lack of exercise, and when the couple departed from Venice, they sought to reverse these conditions. Indeed their longest stop on their return journey remedied the specific lack Cross identifies, for Bad Wildbad, among all the spas, was renowned for its piscine swimming baths.

Bad Wildbad

As the couple fled homeward, they paused for more than a day or two at a time in only two locations: Innsbruck, Austria, and Wildbad, Germany. After stopping for one night each in Verona, Trent, and Bolzano, they arrived in Innsbruck on Saturday, 26 June 1880. They were seeking

⁵ Note that George Eliot mentions a *swim*, rather than a *bath* or a *bathe*.

⁶ Cross's obituary emphasizes his athleticism, but does not mention swimming: "Cross was accustomed to outdoor exercise; he played tennis for some years at Prince's, though he took up 'the game of kings' too late in life to attain proficiency. Later he took to golf, at which he was a respectable performer; and for a season or two he tried mountaineering, but found that this was too strenuous a pursuit for a man well over 59 to take up for the first time" (*Times* 4 November 1924). Nevertheless novelist Weisgall, whatever her sources (and otherwise she uses Harris & Johnston scrupulously) makes his ability to swim a pivotal part of the plot of her novel, *The World Before Her*.

therapies that would address the causes Cross assigns to his illness: lack of exercise and bad air (JWC 3:331). In Innsbruck and Bad Wildbad, they could reverse both of these conditions.

Indeed Innsbruck offered surroundings exactly the opposite to those of Venice. Instead of air the English regarded as tinged with malaria, they had mountain freshness. Instead of water famous for its impurity, they had mountain streams. The Crosses waited a few days for the rain to cease, then they started making drives in several directions to take the air: toward the Mariabrunn forest monastery, along Engadine Road, southward toward Italy (H&J 207). To the end, George Eliot (and George Henry Lewes before his death) sustained a belief in the therapeutic benefits of the right air, and Innsbruck's mountain location offered the clarity and briskness the Crosses sought.

After six days in Innsbruck, the couple began the journey to a second mountain destination where they remained longer. George Eliot left no account of why she chose Bad Wildbad, and she had no firsthand knowledge of the spot, not having visited there with Lewes.⁷ But the guide books to German spas, at least two of them written by acquaintances of George Eliot, chorus their approval of Bad Wildbad for its popular English physician, its romantic situation, and its swimming baths.

On the journey toward Bad Wildbad, the honeymooners moved a bit more slowly than they did on the leg to Innsbruck. The Leweses had usually interrupted their stays at the spas to visit places such as Stuttgart and Karlsruhe where they could supplement the spa concerts with some full-scale opera, and now the Crosses traveled by train to stops in Munich, Augsburg, and Stuttgart. In 1868, the railway from Pforzheim had reached the formerly remote spa town of Bad Wildbad, tucked away in a deeply carved river valley. Now many more guests could enjoy its views and surrender themselves to the waters of its thermal springs. Its popularity with English patients led to the establishment of an English Church in 1865 (Bechtle 44), whose vicar, Burckhart, became one focal point for the physically feeble members of the expatriate community. When the train carried George Eliot and John Cross through the valley into the station near the Kurplatz, she took satisfaction that Bad Wildbad supplied all the "commodities" (*GEL* 7:303) she felt they needed.

Bad Wildbad addressed its patients' health problems more seriously than many of the other nineteenth-century Black Forest watering places George Eliot had visited. Even its myth of origin differs from those of

⁷ On the other hand, the unnamed book of poems by Ludvig Uhland she received as a good-bye present from Gustav Schöll in Weimar in 1854 might have been the volume that contains "Der Überfall im Wildbad," set in the remote Schwarzwald town.



Figure 14. Bad Wildbad, the Bad Hotel on the Kurplatz

the more frivolous spas. Baden Baden, for example, emphasizes its Roman origins, a bathing culture with as many social dimensions as therapeutic. Bad Wildbad's legend, on the other hand, features a wounded boar that heals himself in the waters of the thermal spring. One patient, Egyptologist Georg Ebers, in describing his convalescence in Bad Wildbad, provides a reminder that many patrons of the spas had more wrong with them than gout. He reminisces about a young woman he met there with whom he shared a poignant evening as they both looked on from their wheelchairs at a dance in the Kursaal. A year later, Ebers's lovely young companion had died.

Among the various therapies offered—exercise, drinking waters, and the care of respected physicians—the pride of Bad Wildbad was the swimming baths, the feature that singularized this serious spa among Schwarzwald watering places. The baths occupy a large building on the Kurplatz kitty-corner from Klumpp's Hotel. Madden approves of these baths as “the most perfect bath establishment in Europe for its size” (256). The building stands out conspicuously from the staid hotels with which it shares the Kurplatz because of its size, architecture, and color. A deep dusky red, the stone contrasts with the green hills that provide its backdrop and with the more neutrally colored hotels all around the perimeter of the square. Tall arched windows admit the light on all sides, and its porch repeats the arches to the front. Within, Moorish decoration provides color and exoticism. Wilson finds the Bad Wildbad baths “patterns of their kind” (289). Madden estimates at least 80,000 baths taken there in a single season.

It was the construction of the baths that distinguished this Bad Hotel from Bad Homburg or Baden Baden (although Schlangenbad, too, had swimming baths). Julius Althaus describes them as “large reservoirs the soil of which is covered with fine sand, through which the water rises from the depth at a temperature just suitable for bathing.” According to Madden, the water “percolates” through solid granite rock of building (251). Wilson notes that because the Bad Wildbad waters are “chiefly taken in so-called piscines, or swimming-baths . . . It is therefore not necessary to heat or cool the water, and a constant renewal of it is also rendered easy” (40). Wilson regards swimming as a major contribution to good health. He laments the lack of swimming baths in Britain and calls for swimming schools as well (40). He describes the pleasantness of a bathe in the Wildbad water where “[b]ubbles of nitrogen in which the Bad Wildbad water is very rich, continually glide along the surface of the body, and produce a sort of titillation which is by no means unpleasant. If the stay in the bath is too prolonged, weariness, fatigue, vertigo, headache, and febrile symp-

toms are apt to follow” (253). He also prefers swimming baths to bathrooms: “Baths are either taken in single rooms or in common reservoirs, the so-called ‘piscines’ or swimming-baths, in which exercise is possible.” Unable, for whatever reason, to bathe at Venice, John Cross had ample opportunity to do so at the beautiful facility in Bad Wildbad.

In keeping with their reputation for seriousness, Bad Wildbad waters had a reputation for addressing a great variety of disorders. Madden’s list begins with “old gunshot wounds, and contractions resulting from this cause; some forms of paralysis, especially of the lower extremities” (256). After mentioning “neuralgia, sciatica, and some other nervous affections,” Madden comes to the only one relevant to Cross’s difficulties, but associated exclusively with women: “hysteria and other diseases peculiar to females, when dependent upon the obstruction of certain functions.” He mentions effectiveness for skin diseases and “above all, in chronic gout and rheumatism” (256). But because Madden’s taxonomy depends on therapies no longer recognized by physicians or psychologists, Bad Wildbad might have had some efficacy for male nervous disorders and offer Cross the exercise he sought as well.

George Eliot found Bad Wildbad completely satisfactory. The party of three checked into the foremost hotel, Klumpp’s “the chief hotel in Wildbad . . . one of the most comfortable and cleanest hotels in Germany” (Madden 250). Many of Bad Wildbad’s inns face the river or the Kurplatz; Klumpp’s faced both. Ebers admired the Kurplatz and its smooth-faced hotels where “one stately building of lighted sandstone adjoins another” (ch. 25). The Crosses’ rooms overlooked the platz and its hotels and, to the right, the baths. Directly across the square stood what George Eliot called the ugliest church in town. Nevertheless, the views of pine-covered mountains stretched outward and upward in all directions, while the kur-park paths began nearby before extending out of the town along the rocky river. A path suitable for wheelchairs formed the river’s immediate border, with a steep rise on the other side of the path for more challenging climbing.

In the location she hoped would “put the finishing touch to Johnny’s recovery” (*GEL* 7:303), George Eliot’s new husband improved steadily. After four days, he had gained enough health so that Willie Cross left them and returned to England. The Cross household, reduced by the death of the mother and the recent marriages of Emily, Anna, and John, was moving from Weybridge Heath, their beloved location at the foot of breezy St George’s Hill, to London. Having inspected a property in Kent Terrace Regent’s Park, not far from the Priory, they decided instead on one in Redcliffe Gardens, considerably closer to the house the newlywed

Crosses had bought at 4 Cheyne Walk overlooking the Thames. These considerations of proximity would keep George Eliot even closer to the Crosses now that they had formalized the family relationship through the marriage.

The couple themselves remained in Bad Wildbad nine days, walking extensively every day. They sometimes drove out of town and over the mountains for dinner. After a few days, George Eliot wrote to Elma Stuart, who often traveled on the Continent, to recommend Bad Wildbad for Stuart's chronic ailments. On the thirteenth, a thunderstorm cut short their planned excursion into the hills for lunch: "I never saw so incalculable a state of weather as we have in this valley. One quarter of an hour the blue sky is only flecked by lightest cirrus [*sic*] clouds, the next it is almost hidden by dark rain clouds" (*GEL* 7:305). Nevertheless, "Johnnie is quite well again but is inclined to linger a little in the sweet air of the Schwarzwald which comes to one on gently stirred wings laden with the scent of the pine forests" (7:304). On hearsay, she then recommends Bad Weiler to Lewes's son Charles in preference to Wildbad as "much more lovely than this place" (7:305).

After more than a week at Bad Wildbad, the couple resumed the journey home and crossed the hills on the day-long drive to Baden Baden. George Eliot, having boarded trains more days than not since leaving Venice, had grown weary of traveling by railways and anticipated the slower, quieter pace of the carriage along its scenic route. Halfway there, another spa town, Bad Herrenalb, offered the opportunity for a *mittenessen*. After a journey of seven hours, the honeymooners' vehicle came within sight of Baden Baden.

Back in Baden Baden again after many years, George Eliot discovered that elaborate new baths, the Friederichsbad, more than a decade in the building, had opened three years previously. If the couple followed her previous practices, they drank the waters and took their baths. But the Kursaal and trinkhalle still drew guests to the other side of the little river, familiar to the new Mrs. Cross from her time there in 1868. When the Crosses walked along the colonnade fronting the trinkhalle and especially from the steep gardens behind it, they could view the town and the hills opposite, one of them crowned with the medieval Schloss towards which George Eliot and Lewes had climbed on their healthiest day at Baden Baden twelve years previously.

During the Middle Ages, the Altes Schloss had sheltered the margraves who held Baden Baden through force and authority from the eleventh century on. A few centuries later, the family had mellowed and moved away to the town in the valley into an elaborate establishment called the

Neues Schloss. High on the mountain, the old Schloss remained to remind Bad Wildbad of the Middle Ages. Half cliff, half castle, the unusual structure commands the kind of view necessary for observing enemy armies as they advance through the valley below. It stands among its sister cliffs of pinkish irregular stones in mellow contrast with the pines surrounding it.

Seen from below, the Schloss rises like a pueblo, presenting a formidable outline against the sky. Close up, it loses little of its ferocity. Its empty rocky window frames, filled with nothing but views of more rocks, made it a somewhat gloomy destination for a man recovering from a psychological jolt. Nevertheless, the Schloss added to the opportunities Cross craved for exercise, even though the couple, unlike the Leweses, drove to its base rather than climbing up through the woods. Once entered, however, Baden's Schloss, built in three separate stages over many years, required an ascent up hundreds of steps to reach the top. Again, the journey home was providing exercise for Cross.

Refreshed by Bad Wildbad, exercised at Baden Baden, the couple departed for England the next day, Monday 19 July. A week later they were back home at Witley.

Soon after their return to England, George Eliot wrote letters complaining about travels abroad, about European noise, and, to a certain extent, about foreignness in general. On 28 July, to the Hollands, their neighbors at Witley, she praises "the delicious stillness here, which seems to us to make life a new thing after the noise of continental towns" (*GEL* 7:307). To Barbara Bodichon on the first of August she again expresses her contentment at Witley as "a delight to be at home, and enjoy perfect stillness after the noisiness of foreign bells and foreign voices indoors and out" (7:308). Her choices here, the solemn or joyous chime from the churches of Catholic countries and the multilingual human talk around her, hardly intrinsically annoying sounds, have become so for her.

After his honeymoon, Johnny Cross never omitted his exercise again. His description of his illness in Venice names "riding or rowing" as his usual methods of exercise. But at Witley, he had less opportunity for rowing than he did at Weybridge, and he makes no mention of horse riding anywhere. Instead, the final letters of George Eliot bulge with references to Johnny's tennis. At Witley, at Weybridge, in Brighton, he played with the Crosses, including his sister Florence (7:325); again with family members at Sevenoaks; and, as had Lewes, at Six Mile Bottom when visiting the Halls. He booked into the public courts at Brighton, and the couple made plans for their own tennis at Witley (7:337). At home in Surrey, they laid out a new private court, and Cross chopped down trees in preparation for its installation, sustaining vigorous activity even before the court could be

built. George Eliot remained vigilant about his exercise and fitness. Neither wanted a recurrence of whatever happened in Venice.

Although George Eliot never again traveled abroad, her last months took her away from home for days at a time as the couple duly made their wedding visits to family: the Cross sisters who lived at Sevenoaks, Ranby, and Newmarket, followed by another journey to Brighton. The new house in Chelsea stood waiting for them on the banks of the Thames to offer a welcome back to town for the winter-to-spring season. If life in a London townhouse prevented Johnny from exercising with his tennis, the river could not have been more convenient for rowing. But the healthful life on the river bank never materialized. George Eliot lived only nineteen days in the house overlooking the Thames, the same river that, farther upstream, had inspired Maggie Tulliver's rowing scenes and, from Kew Bridge to Blackfriars, supplied settings for *Daniel Deronda*. Most importantly, the river overlooked by the house in which she died had carried Marian Evans off to Belgium in 1854 to begin her joined life with George Henry Lewes, traveling abroad. The travels begun then, together with their Sunday salons, placed the Leweses within a group of people who not only constituted the Society of their era, but also contributed to some of the most important scientific, philosophical, social, artistic, and literary expressions of late Victorian culture.

Conclusion

Collins concedes of his additions to the forty most often-gleaned biographical sources that “[i]t would be an exaggeration to say that these unfamiliar sources demand a radical revision of the George Eliot, complex and contradictory, who emerges from the familiar ones. But they do complicate her character and circumstances even further, often in richly modulated ways” (xviii). He specifies her more detailed childhood, her earlier novelistic ambitions, and how in Weimar and Berlin, “she comes into her own conversationally and socially, almost as if she is rehearsing in a foreign tongue for her impending role as one of the most private of public figures back home” (xviii). Similarly, the version of George Eliot created through additional information about the Priory and the travels abroad creates a more socially active person who surrounded herself with men and women who both contributed to her creative imagination, especially as she (and her characters) moved upward in social status, and engaged her interest, affection, and sympathy. They also help humanize her by revealing the impatience she sometimes felt toward her less charming guests and the

measures she took to smooth hurt feelings after a Sunday salon at which disappointments, frictions, or mild or serious confrontations occurred. The guests themselves also made use of the Priory to gain material for their writing, to gather audiences for their projects, to engage in fruitful intellectual exchange, to enjoy musical performances, and, possibly, to fall in love. The “unfamiliar sources” confirm that the mature George Eliot of the 1870s ill deserves a reputation as reclusive. Rather, during the winter social season, she and Lewes together indefatigably conducted one of the most visited, vital, and influential London salons of the decade.

