George Eliot in Society

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The characters of *Middlemarch* include many gentlefolk who share the social rank of Priory guests, if not their intense intellectualism. The novel’s remote Midlands market-town physical setting, as well as its 1828–32 temporal setting, have helped to preserve the notion that George Eliot drew her characters only from her girlhood acquaintances in Warwickshire (her father Robert Evans as the model for Caleb Garth the most generally accepted among them) and to deflect attention from Priory Sunday guests as models for George Eliot’s composite characters.¹ Nevertheless, the famous identification of Emilia and Mark Pattison as the Casaubons, to which Haight takes such fierce exception despite the more general acceptance, suggests that George Eliot was already turning to her guests for inspiration. Georgiana Burne-Jones (McCormack) and Jane Senior (B. Hardy, Sybil Oldfield) have much in common with Dorothea, as does Mary Cross with Mary Garth (McCormack). Richard Ellman produces the most daring Priory-connected

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¹ See McCormack, *George Eliot’s English Travels: Composite Characters and Coded Communications*, as well as Henry’s *The Life of George Eliot*. 

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Nothing but first-rate music will go down with Miss Arrowpoint.

—*Daniel Deronda*

Alas! Alas! He was no demon foul;
But a poor mortal sprighted with a soul
Bi sexual, conflicted

—“Dweller,” Roden Noel
suggestion: that Johnny Cross supplied George Eliot with a model for Will Ladislaw.

But *Daniel Deronda*’s later temporal setting, its greater number of socially elite characters, and its London settings combine to suggest an ever stronger reliance on the Leweses’ flourishing social life as creative inspiration for the “widely sundered elements” combined in George Eliot’s characters. After the publication of *Middlemarch*, the numbers of guests at the Leweses’ Sunday salons peaked, as did the number of titled guests and of women. Meanwhile, subtractions did not necessarily suggest any rift with old friends, despite some cruel cutoffs such as those described by Walter Sichel and Eliza Lynn Linton. Sometimes, as with Anthony Trollope, other reasons accounted for disappearances from Lewes’s lists, in his case his worldwide travel, after which he returned to pick up friendly relations where he had left them off.

Among *Daniel Deronda* plot elements, the scenes of drawing room musical performances and the mysterious indifference of Gwendolen Harleth toward the men she allures have some relation to events at the Priory during the years between *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* when singing became more usual, and gay and lesbian guests made up a group of significant size.²

**Music, Music, Music**

Lewes contrived a splendiferous launch of musical performances at the Sunday salons on 23 April 1871. At the time, the Franco-Prussian War had affected both aspects of the Leweses’ social lives, their salons and their travels abroad. With both German and French friends to concern them and favorite destinations in both countries, they worried on their own and on their friends’ accounts as European travel became difficult.

On the French side, Bodichon brought to the Priory Charles Francois Daubigny whom she had known since 1864: “through working with Corot” (Hirsch 211). He attracted Bodichon’s admiration for “his efforts in trying to record transient effects of cloud and sky, working quickly to catch effects before the weather changed” (211). At the time of his visit in January, he too was in distress, a fugitive who had left his home in France including all the artistic treasures by his own hand that it housed. George Eliot’s heart went out to Daubigny, “a grave, amiable, simple-mannered

² See chapter 5 regarding the effects of the Leweses’ travels abroad on the composition of *Daniel Deronda*.
man,” whose “house on the Loire, full of his own painting on such objects as his daughter’s bedstead and all such family memorials, has been completely destroyed. He is now living with his family in small lodgings in Kensington” (GEL: 9:9). The tranquil landscapes in so many of Daubigny’s paintings contrast with George Eliot’s pained description of the artist cruelly exiled by war and trying to divert himself at the Priory.

On the other side, a ménage obliged by the war to move away from Germany, where they were enjoying the facilities at Baden Baden, consisted of an unusual group of three: the opera singer Pauline Viardot, her husband Louis, and Ivan Turgenev, the man whom for decades the Viardots had included in their family circle on a long-lasting if mysterious basis. According to Rebecca West, for Pauline Viardot, “Nothing in her life was more prodigious than the public and persistent way that Turgenev settled down in the home of her and her husband, creating a scandal, never paying them a sou for his extensive quarters and his luxurious living, and leaving his money at his death to a distant relative to whom he owed nothing” (n.p.). Meanwhile, the musical Viardots, together with their musical son and daughter, traveled about presenting performances of highly praised singing, composing operettas, and giving music lessons, and Turgenev traveled along with them in some undefined status that most people believed included tolerance on Louis Viardot’s part for a romantic attachment between his wife and the author.

Rediscovering Turgenev in London overjoyed Lewes because it renewed a friendship formed decades before when the two young men shared student days in Berlin. Viardot’s biographer, Michael Steen, describes Turgenev’s youthful enjoyments in a city “almost overwhelmingly rich in culture,” which “provided a wonderful opportunity for a young man who had an entree to the salons, where artists, musicians, scholars and statesmen met” (127). Turgenev, he further reports, became caught up in love affairs and fathered a child (128). Barely twenty years old at the time, Lewes, presumably a companion in Turgenev’s rollicking exploits, mentions their 1838 period of companionship in a letter to Robert Lytton in 1871 describing Turgenev as “a superb creature and a real genius” (GEL 9:15). When the Viardot/Turgenev ménage began entertaining widely in London, Lewes, though not George Eliot, enthusiastically attended their musical Saturday nights, which offered a variety of performances by the soprano, her husband, and enough friends to fill out choruses, quartets, and scenes from operas.

Viardot, described by West as “the celebrated sallow, long-mouthed Spanish Primadonna,” was at the time entering her fifties and, despite the lack of beauty in her plainly styled dome of hair and unprepossessing fea-
tures, had herself conducted successful salons in Paris. Her London soirées succeeded just as well, at least with Lewes, who lamented to his hostess that George Eliot’s reluctance to “go out” (GEL 9:15) prevented her being there. Finally, Viardot volunteered to sing at the Priory, and she bravely placed no time limits on her performance; she would sing, she told Lewes, for as long as George Eliot would like to listen.

Sixteen people came out the April day that Viardot sang at the Priory. Lewes exulted that Lady Castletown was making her third visit (GEL 5:143), and she pleased him further by taking her place next to him to draw his attention to the luminaries making up the audience, awed by the “variety of genius there was standing in a small circle on that occasion—Touguéneff, Viardot, Browning, Trollope, Burne-Jones, and Polly” (9:15). William Sheddon-Ralston added another friend of Turgenev to the group. Four

The performance succeeded admirably. George Eliot reported that Viardot “sang divinely and entranced everyone, some of them to positive tears” (GEL 5:143), while Lewes’s journal notes that Viardot “sang superbly” (23 April 1871). In his letter to Robert Lytton he adds an exclamation point: “a splendid exhibition it was!” (GEL 9:15). He singles out Edward Burne-Jones as particularly impressed by the performance of the plain-looking but expert soprano. Even the singer, whose performance lasted all afternoon, looked back on the occasion with pleasure. Three years later, Turgenev, in a note of thanks to George Eliot for her praise of his writing, conveys Viardot’s satisfaction at having pleased “one whose novel and sure talent she most admires” (9:119). In 1878, Viardot asked Turgenev to forward a photograph of herself as a gift to George Eliot (9:243).

Nor did the day end there. Indeed it had begun early with a visit to the Benzons from which the Leweses returned to entertain Trollope, Turgenev, William Henry Bullock, and Emily Cross for lunch. After the

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3 Catherine Brown, in “Why Does Daniel Deronda’s Mother Live in Russia,” proposes Viardot as a model for the Alcharisi (37) and mentions some of the other guests with connections to Russia.

4 According to Fleischman’s list, George Eliot read Ralston’s article on “The Modern Russian Drama” in 1868 (50) and his book of Songs of the Russian People in 1872 (60). Another guest who may have contributed answers to the question Brown’s title poses would include Olga Novikoff.

5 In the Memorials, Georgiana Burne-Jones separates the visits of Turgenev and Viardot, placing the latter on “another Sunday” (17) from the one on which she met Turgenev. During this period of the Burne-Jones marriage, the problem of her husband’s mistress, Maria Zambaco, lurks in the subtext of all the events the Memorials narrate. Dividing the visits of Viardot and Turgenev into separate Sundays, at least momentarily, dissolves and separates another pair of lovers involved in an anomalous and ongoing relationship.
musical afternoon, they joined a dinner party at Alexandra Orr’s that kept them out until quarter to twelve, making for, as Lewes’s journal concludes, “twelve hours of incessant talking!” (GHLJ 23 April). Although he could scarcely have carried on his incessant chatter while Viardot was singing, again the Leweses were demonstrating the stamina required by their life in Society.

Neither the Viardots nor Turgenev remained long in London. By July 1871 Europe had settled down, and they left for Paris and then returned to Baden Baden. Despite the mutual admiration between the two fiction writers, the Leweses did not encounter Turgenev again until 1878 when they met at Six Mile Bottom at one of the Bullock-Halls’ house parties. Nor did the singing Sundays continue at the Priory. Viardot made a special exception; she did not set a pattern, for not until nearly a year later, in May of 1872, does Lewes again mention music as part of the afternoon. This time, various of the guests performed repeatedly if not inevitably. Sundays at the Priory remained primarily a literary, rather than a musical salon.

Among the most frequent performers, George Du Maurier had numerous qualifications for contributing to the pleasures of a Sunday afternoon. His granddaughter Daphne remembers, “His talk was most delightful, but above all the delight caused me by his charming singing is a thing I shall never forget” (xx). Her introduction to her grandfather’s biography compares him to Orpheus (xxi). T. Martin Wood, a 1913 biographer, claims that Du Maurier could have sung professionally and that he was a good conversationalist with “considerable interest in the progress of Science” (150), a most useful interest among the other Priory guests. At staff meetings of authors and illustrators for Punch, where he placed his satiric cartoons, Wood reports that Du Maurier smoked silently through the business portion, but “[w]hen that was over he entered into his own, regaling his comrades with droll stories” (148–49). Frederic Locker mentions his singing as one of the events that enlivened Sundays that might otherwise have succumbed to dullness (310).

Like many of the guests, Du Maurier gained more than a good time at the Priory; he also gained material for his work for Punch. As Wood points out, “We have in the portfolio of Du Maurier the epic of the drawing-room” (1), and he could hardly have ignored the resources he encountered in George Eliot’s drawing room on his frequent Sunday afternoons. One of the steadiest in attendance, both with and without his socialite wife, Emma Wightwick, he specialized in caricatures of high life and aesthetes in which his images appear above captions consisting of exchanges between the people pictured. Although Du Maurier’s figures often wear evening
dress and converse in deviant spellings designed to reproduce the speech of the aristocracy, much of their conversation would fit in well among the kinds of topics and interactions that occupied guests at the Priory.

Lewes shows some awareness of how he, for one, helped Du Maurier’s work by saving up anecdotes for his friend’s possible use. In an 1872 letter to his son Charles, Lewes recounts a recent visit to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham: “a drearier day’s pleasure I never spent. It is the last visit I shall pay that Cockney Paradise” (GEL 5:278). He then repeats a conversation he overheard in the Aquarium between “two young ladies, dressed in the extravagance of fashion” (5:278) who fault the octopus on display for its ugliness. With his comment “Wouldn’t this do for du Maurier?” (5:278) he shows his awareness of his friend’s methods of gathering material from his own social life, including the heavily anecdotal Sundays.

One late Du Maurier drawing-room cartoon, which appeared in *Punch* 22 May 1880, exemplifies those to which Priory exchanges might have contributed. Entitled “The Mutual Admirationists” and subtitled “Fragment over heard by Grigsby and the Colonel at one of Grigsby’s Afternoon Teas,” its accompanying dialogue reads: “Young Maudle (to Mrs. Lyon Hunter and her Daughters): ‘In the supremest Poetry, Shakespeare’s for instance, or Postlethwaite’s, or Shelley’s one always feels that,’ &c, &c.” Beneath the same group occurs as well: “Young Postlethwaite (to the three Miss Bilderbogies), The greatest Painters of ALL, such as Velasquez, or Maudle, or even Titian, invariably suggest to one,’ &c, &c.”

Such bracketing of the transcendent artist with members of the present company would repeat topics and combinations often encountered at the Priory. On 7 June 1879, his contribution, “Two Thrones,” pictures a group of eager men directing all their attention to a modestly dressed woman performer seated at the piano while a society woman, elaborately clothed, looks on enviously, thus recapitulating part of the Gwendolen-Mirah plot. Mutual enrichment resulted from Du Maurier’s regular attendance: good conversation and welcome singing for guests and hosts and useful material for drawing-room satire for Du Maurier.6

Richard Liebreich, a German ophthalmologist who lived in France, also fled the war of 1870 by moving to London, where he headed the ophthalmology department of St. Thomas Hospital. By 1872 he had found his

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6 Resentment over Du Maurier’s direct, though amusing, jabs at the aesthetes won him some animosity among their numbers. Burne-Jones, for example, found him too severe on D. G. Rossetti and remained distant until Du Maurier’s publication of *Peter Ibbetson* in 1892 so pleased him that it brought forth a reconciliatory letter (*Memorials* 229). Du Maurier made a reply that brims with admiration for Burne-Jones’s work and memories of their shared youthful efforts.
Figure 11. “The Two Thrones.” Punch, 7 June 1879
Between Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda

way to the Priory, singing there for the first time on 12 May. Thereafter, often accompanied by his wife, he continued to come three or four times a year, usually singing about once per season. His glee with Du Maurier brought together the eye patient and the ophthalmologist in harmony.

The Lehmann family, together with Ernst and Elizabeth Benzon (née Lehmann), occupied a significant portion of the Leweses’ social life, not only for their appearances at the Priory in numbers but also because they hosted dinner parties that George Eliot sometimes (as in May 1876) attended along with Lewes. The Chambers sisters of Edinburgh (Nina and Amelia) had married the Lehmann brothers (Frederic and Rudolph). Daughters to Robert Chambers of the Edinburgh Review, they had their girlhood roots in the world of journalism; indeed Nina Chambers Lehmann remembered seeing Lewes at her father’s home as a child (Litzinger 8). John Lehmann, in 1962, detailed these visits: “Excitement among the children grew steadily on the evenings when Lewes was expected. Shortly after he appeared, he would collect them round him, some on his knees, others sitting on the floor, and start telling them stories, on one evening weird and macabre, on another fairy-tale romances with happy endings. But they were puzzled, and a little frightened, when they were taken to see him act Shylock” (127). These events would end with “hilarious sing-songs” (127). The Leweses renewed these acquaintanceships enthusiastically partly by inviting all the Lehmann family members to the Priory.

Indeed the entire complex of Lewes/Lehmann friendships flourished in musical environments. The Leweses encountered the F. Lehmanns at the opera, they attended the Benzon dinners when lured there by the promise of wonderful music, and they welcomed the singing of Amelia Lehmann at Sundays at the Priory. Frederic Lehmann played the violin, and, although he never played at the Priory Sundays, he did accompany George Eliot’s piano playing on other evenings (Collins 76). The story George Eliot heard at Pau from Nina Lehmann concerned a courtship, hers and Frederic’s, taking place largely through musical communication and mutual admiration—as does the Klesmer marriage to Catherine Arrowpoint in Daniel Deronda.

In May of 1874, Charles Hamilton Aidé, who had made his first Priory visit in 1872, joined Beatrice Trollope, Amelia Lehmann, and Du Maurier in singing for the company. Described in most sources as both multi-talented and lightweight, Aidé wrote novels, plays, and songs with considerable success. In 1868 Charles Dickens accepted a story, “The Mystery of the Moated Schloss,” for All the Year Round, saying he was “very happy indeed” to publish the “thoroughly well told story” (Letters 205). The following year Dickens showed still more confidence in Aidé by accepting
after some revision a full-length novel, *In That State of Life*, and publishing it in sixteen serial installments. In all, Aidé published a total of nineteen novels, several of them still available. Henry Irving produced one of his plays.

In addition to his published songs, whether he was writing fiction or drama, Aidé frequently called on his musical talents. His 1875 play, *A Nine Day's Wonder* (which features a character named Christian Douglas, who, like Aidé, inherits from his parents a legacy involving a scandalous duel and later joins the army) includes as a leitmotif a song of Aidé’s composition. Sheldon Novick and Jeffrey Richards agree on the success of Aidé’s own salon, which Novick further describes as “musical evenings” (5). He sang at the Priory intermittently, generally in a group rather than solo.

The third singer, Beatrice Trollope, known as Bice, made another Priory guest whose presence resulted partly from the Leweses’ travels abroad. The Thomas Trollopes welcomed the illicit couple when they stopped in Florence in 1861 at a time when the Brownings were still standoffish. Since then, Theodosia Trollope had died, and the widower had married Frances Eleanor Ternan, the novelist.

But little Bice, twelve years old at the time of her mother’s death, had difficulty accepting it. Trollope took her into seclusion on a broken-down farm in the Oltrarno. Unable to bear the vacant beauties of their beloved house in the Piazza d’Indepenza, he moved the two of them across the river: “And so I and my motherless Bice went to live among the vines at Ricoboli” (13). The loss of her mother had also deprived Bice of singing instruction formerly carried forth by Theodosia Trollope, but supplemented by Italian masters. At Ricoboli, Trollope not only found a family of girls nearby as companions for his daughter, he eventually engaged an English governess (Ternan, whom he later married). In Florence, Bice remained popular where her talent resulted in her being “besieged with invitations” (63). Befriended by Isa Blagden, she visited England and had a year at a school at Brighton in 1867 (63). She came to the Priory primarily during the spring of 1874, singing several times.  

Bice Trollope shares with Mirah Lapidoth her stature, her mild manner, and her accomplished singing: “Petite in her person, though thoroughly well and elegantly formed,” she showed herself “gentle and affectionate” (Trollope 17). She also had from her earliest years ample supplementary

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7 She also sang at Lady Castletown’s, thereby again bringing the Gwendolen-like Cecilia Wingfield into the same musical drawing room as one of the models for Mirah (*GEL* 6:51, n. 7). Three days earlier, she had performed at the Priory, another of several occasions placing the two women side by side.
training with Italian masters and the ability to tackle Italian music. On 11 May 1874, George Eliot, apologizing to Mary Cross for the discomfort of the “long, cold journey” (GEL 6:48) from Weybridge to the Priory, takes comfort that she had the opportunity to enjoy Bice’s singing.

But if Bice Trollope’s stature, artistry, and Italian material link her with Mirah, vetted by Klesmer specifically for drawing-room venues, she joins another Priory performer much more frequently mentioned as a model for the diminutive singer, Phoebe Sarah Marks, beloved protégée of Barbara Bodichon. Bodichon befriended the young woman when she aspired to enter Girton College, and Pam Hirsch regards the relationship as one that brought deep satisfaction to Bodichon in her later years and helped compensate for her own childlessness. Bodichon devoted a good deal of energy getting Marks (nicknamed Hertha) into Girton College, and George Eliot not only donated ten pounds to the effort (Hirsch 282) but offered verbal encouragement as well.

Specifically connecting her with the musical scenes in Daniel Deronda, many readers have suggested Marks as a model for Mirah, both for her ability and her ethnicity. Although the young woman herself read Daniel Deronda and could detect no resemblance, she shared Mirah’s masses of irrepressible dark curly hair and in fact did concede that one of the personal comments George Eliot made to her found its way into the voice of the narrator in the novel: that “her utterance sounds foreign from its distinctness” (quoted in Hirsch 282). Bodichon brought her to the Priory on 3 January 1875 and thereafter she attended with regularity, usually in the company of Bodichon, through 1877. Bodichon’s French-born husband, Eugène Bodichon, had taught Marks French songs for a capella singing that may have had their place at the Priory, material that would distinguish her from Bice Trollope (and from Mirah). But although she entertained the group with her “lovely, rather low-pitched singing voice” (Hirsch 279), she never, according to Lewes’s journals, became a regular singer as did Bice, Richard Liebreich, Amelia Lehmann, Hamilton Aidé, or George Du Maurier.

On 5 May 1872, the Leweses were finishing up the Priory season and in the process of preparing for their summer let. During May, in an unusually frantic search, they consulted agents and inspected at least five houses, in Red Hill, Watford, and Chislehurst, before settling on Elversley, set high on the hill just south of the North Downs overlooking the town of Red Hill. Here George Eliot worked through the summer on Middlemarch in the quiet retirement the couple preserved when in Surrey.

But before they left, their Sundays had come to average between eleven and seventeen guests, and singing was about to become more usual. On 5 May the hosts permitted two of the women guests to join Du Maurier in performing. Gertrude Smyth, wife of Colonel Edward Skeffington Randal Smyth, and her sister Cecilia Wingfield, ventured to entertain. Wingfield generally arrived with her mother, Lady Castletown, and the relationship they developed with the Leweses later in the year when they all shared time in Bad Homburg together suggests Cecilia Wingfield and Lady Castletown as plausible models for Gwendolen and her mother in *Daniel Deronda*. The singing incident on the fifth reinforces the suggestion.

As in *Daniel Deronda*, the performances of the untried amateurs did not go well. Matilda Betham-Edwards, who otherwise was having a most satisfying afternoon, was there to comment. Lewes had begun by introducing her to Liebreich, perhaps bringing Edwards, whose nickname, she reports, stemmed from her French inclinations, together with the German as a peacemaking gesture. Edwards commented on Liebreich, whom Lewes introduced as “the inventor of Chloral,” specifically as a German. She expected, she writes, to meet Germans socially at the home of the biographer of Goethe.

Betham-Edwards had her little individual talk by the fireplace with her hostess, which, she remembered, turned on their shared experiences of growing up on a farm. Afterward, she yielded her place: “our brief chat over, I fell back” (44). She found a vacant chair next to an old acquaintance, Frederic Leighton: “On this Sunday afternoon he seemed oblivious of everything around him, his eyes fixed on the priestess-like, rather Sybil-like figure opposite. After a mechanically uttered phrase or two he burst out—a lover’s voice could hardly have been more impassioned: ‘How beautiful she is!’ After all, was not the artist right? What is physical perfection compared to spiritual beauty?” (44).

But Betham-Edwards objected to what happened next as the guests drank their tea. She quotes Lewes as saying, “We have a singing bird

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9 See chapter 5 for a detailed account of the Bad Homburg holiday and additional connections between the Castletowns and *Daniel Deronda*.

10 By 1874, Betham-Edwards may have had reason to deplore her meeting with Liebreich, the “inventor of chloral.” In a July 1874 letter to Bodichon, George Eliot implies that her friend has reported news of Edwards’s addiction and impoverishment: “Your picture of poor Miss E[wards] is deplorable. I cannot help thinking it is a misfortune that she took to writing. But it seems that the only chance of her finding dignity and independence is that she should be left to extricate herself. That chorale is a very pernicious thing to begin taking: the doctors say that women who begin with it never leave it off” (*GEL* 6:69).

11 In this passage, Betham-Edwards again refers to George Eliot’s dark eyes (45).
here. . . . She must charm us before departure.” Betham-Edwards reports, “The fashionably dressed young lady in question, some Lady Clara Vere de Vere, did not deny the delicate imputation, and true enough, before the party broke up, those almost solemn precincts were ringing with just such a song as might divert the guests of any Belgravian drawing-room.” Betham-Edward’s “Lady Clara” could only have been one of the two young Irish women, that is, either Smyth or Wingfield, both of whom sang that day.

The scene in *Daniel Deronda* when Gwendolen’s singing fails in the drawing-room setting climaxes the chapter concerning the entertainment at Brackenshaw Castle, after which Klesmer delivers the blow to Gwendolen’s confidence and vanity: “it is always acceptable to see you sing” (ch. 5). But neither of the usually suggested models for Klesmer (most often Franz Liszt and Anton Rubenstein) was in attendance at the Priory either 5 May or indeed at any other time. Moreover, Klesmer’s harshness toward amateur singing (especially by pretty young women), does not repeat the practices of the hosts at the Priory. None of the favorite performers, Amelia Lehmann, Du Maurier, or Liebreich, sang professionally.

According to Lewes’s guest lists, Gertrude Smyth did not reappear at the Priory, though Cecilia Wingfield remained a steady visitor. However, she never sang again. By whatever process she learned that she (and/or her sister) had not met the standard required by the hosts and the rest of the audience, she responded with some pluck by continuing her attendance as a (non-singing) guest.

Betham-Edwards regarded the mediocre singing as a turning point: “Belgravia, indeed, had forced an entrance into the Priory, and, as we might expect, that intrusion was followed by an exodus. More than one old friend and habitué, more than one distinguished guest dropped off” (45). The “gathering place of souls” gradually changed its character. Its doors had been thrown too wide and “fools rushed in where angels feared to tread” (45–46). At the same time, Betham-Edwards herself continued coming to the Priory through 1873, often sharing the afternoon with the Belgravians. Given her faulty chronology long after events, she could be anticipating the most conspicuous of Belgravians, who began their visits in 1875, two members of the Grosvenor family, Richard and Norman.

The Leweses never permitted a mediocre musical entertainment at their salon again. The following Sunday they presented singing by one professional woman and two tried-and-trues of their male singers, Liebreich and Du Maurier. Friends from the Berlin days, the Adolf Stahrs, had sent along Madame Marianne Brandt, a pupil of Madame Viardot. (Suhn-Binder; *GEL* 5:272–73, n. 2). For some reason omitting Brandt, George
Eliot comments in a letter to Kate Field about her regret not only that Emilia Pattison had failed to appear as hoped for on the twelfth but also that Field herself had missed “some pleasant singing of men’s voices” that day (5:272). The pleasure provided by the welcome performers was prolonged. As Lewes notes, the music continued until quarter to seven, as the afternoon turned into evening, an exception he made sure of noting in his records.

The dynamics of tactfully presenting only good music to one’s guests, specifically the scene in which Gwendolen tries and fails, make Daniel Deronda resonate with the results of 5 May 1872 at the Priory. But after one more Sunday afternoon, the Priory season ended, and the Leweses retired to Surrey, where George Eliot was still working on Middlemarch.

Gay and Lesbian Guests: “Unknown Struggles of the Soul”

Sundays at the Priory occurred just before the fracturing of the homosocial continuum that Eve Sedgwick locates at the end of the 19th century. According to Sedgwick, this fracturing created perceptions of gay men as threats to the power of men in general and to domestic order, at the same time establishing a homophobic antagonism based on the creation of a new category for gay men that resulted in a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. As Foucault asserts, the adoption of the term “homosexual” at the time led to a perception of gay men as a separate “species” (quoted in Sedgwick 5). According to Sedgwick’s timetable, the Leweses had less homophobic motivation to inspect their guests for sexual orientation than would have been the case had their salons occurred two decades later.

Throughout their existence, Sundays at the Priory welcomed guests whose biographers’ declarations, sustained relationships with same-sex partners, long avoidance of marriage, and/or comments of contemporaries concerning effeminacy in men or mannishness in women suggest manifestations of same-sex desire. Haight, not unusually for the time in which he wrote, considers same-sex love abnormal, perverted, and unnatural. He takes a defensive stance determined to quash suggestions about sexuality he regards as unusual. He applies the word “bachelor” to single men and invests it with an overlay of man-about-town independence, rather than the sexual interest in men it often blurred. Haight completed his work

Elizabeth Dell and Jay Fosey agree with Sedgwick’s timetable, noting passage of the Criminal Law Act that outlawed “same sex” relations in 1885 (10).

See Dennis S. Gouws’s “George Eliot’s enthusiastic bachelors: topical fictional accounts
just before the sexual revolution of the 1960s, indeed on the very eve of the Stonewall resistance, at a time when attainment of gay rights still lay in the future. Haight acknowledges only Edith Simcox (and, on the basis of Simcox’s assertion, Maria Congreve) as women who loved George Eliot with sexual passion.\textsuperscript{14} Having repeatedly consulted Simcox’s \textit{Autobiography of a Shirtmaker} as one of his most important sources for his subject’s later life, he could not possibly deny the sexual component of her love for George Eliot.

Meanwhile, several women personally involved with other women came to Sundays at the Priory. Nannie Smith and Isabella Blythe, both journalists who had contributed to \textit{The English Woman’s Journal}, maintained a house in Algiers next door to the Bodichons’ home. Eliza Lynn Linton’s biographer, Nancy Fix Anderson, in \textit{Women Against Women in Victorian England} (1987), describes Linton as a lesbian, partly on the basis of the \textit{Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland}, written in a male voice.

Mary Ponsonby, after a single visit in 1873, made a series of more closely spaced Priory visits during a spiritual crisis she suffered in 1876. In \textit{Henry and Mary Ponsonby: Life at the Court of Queen Victoria}, William Kuhn devotes considerable space to discussions of Mary Ponsonby’s sexuality. He describes her carpentry as part of her “delight in pastimes usually favored by men” (20), pastimes in which “the masculine element keeps occurring” (21). For all her typically women’s accomplishments in dancing and watercolors, she also, in Canada, “went with her husband into the woods and took target practice with a rifle” (21). To clinch his argument, he mentions that she liked to play billiards.

On the subject of the “faint element of ambiguity about Mary Ponsonby” Kuhn also mentions some of the friendships she sustained with women, specifically naming “Ethel Smyth and Violet Paget (Vernon Lee) both of whom would be regarded as lesbians or bisexuals today” (22). He continues that she preferred the company of women to that of men, although his sections on friends also name a number of men. Early in the biography, he notes that, at twenty-eight, Ponsonby married later than most Victorian women and that her passion during the courtship did not match that of her husband who produced the more ardent marital letters.

\textsuperscript{14} He does call Emily Faithful a “decidedly queer” young woman (243).
Simcox’s *Autobiography* contributes accurate knowledge of other women like herself. John Walter Cross’s two sisters, Eleanor and Mary, participated in a painful same-sex love triangle whose interactions went forth at the Priory. While Simcox considered the elder, Mary, as a possible confidante regarding her love for George Eliot, Eleanor, the younger, had a crush on Simcox, who did not take her interest seriously. Of all the sisters, Eleanor Cross kept Simcox informed about George Eliot during the difficult aftermath of the marriage to John Cross, a period during which the novelist ignored Simcox and her devotion. When urgency compelled Simcox to seek information about George Eliot (as when she heard news of the groom’s illness during the Venice portion of the honeymoon) she took the railway out to Weybridge Heath to the Cross home, where she found in Eleanor her most reliable informant.

Meanwhile, several of the male Priory guests, including Oscar Browning, F. W. H. Myers, Arthur Sidgwick, Henry Sidgwick, Alexander Kinglake, Roden Noel, George Romanes, Edmund Gurney, Charles Hamilton Aidé, and others, made up a group whose sexuality could well have united them in mutual interests and understandings unshared by many of the other guests. Several of these men, members of the Cambridge Apostles, belonged to the set whom Myers, though not himself an Apostle, invited to meet George Eliot at his Trinity College rooms in 1873. The visit prompted Myers to produce the most tedious and wearisome of George Eliot anecdotes, generally known among specialists as the sibyl-in-the-gloom story, reporting her ponderous reflections about God, Immortality, and Duty (in capital letters). Although the Cambridge men who attended Myers’s party formed the most cohesive group of gay men at the Priory, their central personality, J. A. Symonds, did not come along with them. Instead, their circle included Myers, the Sidgwick brothers, Noel, Romanes, and Gurney, some of whom launched their seasons at the Priory after Myers introduced them to George Eliot at his Cambridge party in 1873.

The interests shared among the Cambridge men included an interweaving of traditional philosophy, physiology, psychology, and parapsychology, the latter a curious set of beliefs that did not accord with the rational skepticism that prevailed at the Priory. Henry Sidgwick, for one, with his academic position at Cambridge, combined serious philosophical inquiry with his interest in spiritualism. Lewes expresses his scorn for séances and spirit rappings on several occasions, and he makes fun of Myers for his predilections in a letter that Haight dates 11 January 1875, which issues an invitation to lunch for the following Sunday. Lewes claims that he intended the invitation to occur the previous day, but “[t]he dis-
discussion of Spiritualism drove it out of my head; probably by mediums of unknown powers?” (GEL 9:142). He resisted the psychical paraphernalia proceeding from concentration on a possible all-spirit alternate sphere even more strenuously and disrupted the single séance the couple agreed to attend with Sidgwick and Myers. But the Cambridge group took its spiritualism seriously and sustained this interest through the 1880s, institutionalizing their preoccupation in founding their Society for Psychical Research.

In Providence and Love, John Beer frames his narration of George Eliot’s friendships with Sidgwick and Myers within a discussion of the beliefs she by and large did not share with them. While they speculated and argued about multiple personalities, second sight, clairvoyance, and the afterlife, she had all her writing life, or at least since her essay on “Worldliness and Otherworldliness The Poet Young” appeared in the Westminster in 1857, argued that motivating morality by the promise of an ultimate reward misascribes human virtue to fears of a miserable punishment hereafter. Good acts more usually proceed from human considerations rather than an egoistic fear for the fate of one’s own soul. She planned her unwritten book-length “Idea of a Future Life” to examine the moral effects in the here and now of a belief in future happiness.

Daniel Deronda shows no departure from the beliefs about immortality that George Eliot expresses in her 1867 poem “Choir Invisible”: that the best moral effect possible lies in the legacy of a positive influence on living souls. Even Mordecai’s happy death depends not on his anticipation of heavenly rewards but in his faith in national memory and Daniel’s share in his commitment. The novel does, however, contain dialogue and incidents that involve clairvoyance, séances, and the possible presence of departed souls moving unseen among the living, all drastic contrasts with George Eliot’s previous fiction. In one important incident, Mirah senses her father’s presence in her immediate area without any physical evidence as she walks down a London street. The accuracy of her intuition validates her non-rational conclusion.

The more important event occurs earlier in a chapter George Eliot opens with the declaration, “Second sight is a flag over disputed ground” (ch. 38). Standing on Blackfriars Bridge one evening, Mordecai intuits Daniel’s imminent arrival, and the fulfillment of this vision validates the process represented as a “flag over disputed ground.” Finally, Mirah shows more belief in spiritualism than any other character because she constantly feels her dead mother’s presence: “She has been just as really with me as all the other people about me—often more really with me” (ch. 37). When Mirah and Mordecai have their first meeting since Mirah’s childhood, as
arranged by Daniel, the mother’s spirit also participates: “It was less their own presence that they felt than another’s [i.e., their mother’s]” (ch. 47). The ultra-realist George Eliot, in her last novel, retreats from the hard reliance on the necessity of rationalism and demonstrable physical facts to the achievement of reliable conclusions.

Indeed George Eliot’s “second-sight” passage accounts for the “matter of knowledge that there are persons whose yearnings, conception—nay travelled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power” (ch. 38). She regards such yearnings as a possible super-sensitivity to an accumulation of small impressions that seem to predict a feared or desired event. She concludes that people who have confidence in their prophetic ability “are not always the less capable of the argumentative process” (ch. 38), a remark that would apply to Priory visitors such as Henry Sidgwick, a professor of philosophy and a parapsychologist at the same time.

Meanwhile, Daniel Deronda characters make remarks that suggest the prevalence of such topics in mid-century Victorian culture, rather than indicating or advancing the narrator’s or the author’s beliefs. In the scene during the Offendene charades, when the suddenly opening panel terrifies Gwendolen, members of her audience attempt to explain the embarrassing incident. When someone suggests that the absence of a medium in the audience precludes supernatural agency, the narrator goes on to identify that human agency: little Isabel, one of Gwendolen’s superfluous sisters. But members of the audience for the charades have shown their familiarity with the procedures of the séance. Gwendolen herself applies the word clairvoyante (ch. 7) to her cousin Anna’s suspicions on the day that Gwendolen has secret intentions of running off with the hunt. At dinner at Topping Abbey over the Christmas party, the company in general speculates on the resurgence of the medieval monks as spirits moving around the rooms of Topping Abbey, their former home.

Finally, George Eliot’s laconic diary entries during her last years contain an indication that she was not impervious to the parapsychological theories of her Priory guests. The snippets she enters during spring of 1879 include such entries as “lovely mild day” (22 May 1879; H&J 174) and “Ill” (17 May 1879; H&J 174). Then, on 28 May 1879, between a notation on driving to Godalming to open a bank account and one recording receipt of a letter from Emilia Pattison, the former skeptic writes: “His presence came again” (7:152). In addition to the emphasis of italics, what distinguishes this apparent reference to Lewes’s spirit is its indication that he has come before in some sort of spiritual manifestation at least once without her mentioning it in her journal.
During this period of her mourning George Eliot was associating more with Henry Sidgwick than with any others of the old Priory crowd (except Michael Foster, also involved with her project) as she worked to establish the George Henry Lewes Studentship at Cambridge. She met with Sidgwick throughout April, and on the sixth noted visits by Cross, Charles Lewes, and Trübner, “and finally when I was alone Mr. H. Sidgwick with whom I had a long and important conversation about the Studentship and other interesting subjects” (9:127, my italics). Just six weeks later she writes about a repeat visitation from Lewes’s spirit that would accord with events Sidgwick considered possible. If George Eliot’s discussions with Sidgwick prepared her to receive a visitation from the spirit of her departed beloved, it also brought her closer to the Victorian belief that departed souls might intermingle with the living. Not impervious to the spiritualism of Victorian culture, the Leweses discussed such matters during their salons, and she, at least, shows this sign of susceptibility to spiritualism as embraced by the Society, many of whose members had visited at the Priory.

In *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe*, Bart Schultz details additional interests that bound his subject’s group together, mentioning the writing of John Stuart Mill, Walt Whitman, Wordsworth, Arthur Clough, the Tennyson of “In Memoriam,” and the Greek revival underway at the universities.\(^{15}\) He remarks that “nearly all of Sidgwick’s closest friends were champions of male love” (17). After giving up his Cambridge position in 1869 because of his inability to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, Sidgwick returned to the university as Knightsbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1883 (Schultz 22). Indeed, he “spent his entire adult life in the academic setting of Cambridge” (22) where Newnham College stands as the most conspicuous monument to the Cambridge reforms he accomplished. His publication of *The Methods of Ethics* in 1874 made for a timely increase in his reputation just when the Cambridge men added themselves to the guest list at the Priory. His friends describe him as a brilliant conversationalist. Schultz quotes Frank Podmore about talk “alive with sympathy and humor” (quoted, 22). Another reaction, from F. W. Maitland, goes even further: “a wonderful talker; a better I have never heard” (Schultz 24). Such glorious fluidity guarantees his place among the “capital” talkers valued at the Priory.

Sidgwick’s serious university scholarship on “Moral Philosophy” makes an incongruous combination with the spiritualism that increasingly absorbed the Sidgwick/Symonds clique. Trevor Hall, writing on

\(^{15}\) See Frank Turner’s *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, especially regarding the effects of Benjamin Jowett’s translation of Plato.
The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney in the mid-1960s, employs strategies similar to the ones Haight uses in his 1968 biography of George Eliot: specifically, defensiveness about sexuality embodied in assertions of "normality," especially regarding Gurney himself. Hall describes F. W. H. Myers as a bad influence on Gurney on the basis of his sexual orientation (xxviii) and points out that “Arthur Sidgwick, Frederic Myers and John Addington Symonds were all linked by homosexual relationships, according to the biography of the last-named by Phyllis Grosskurth (1904)” (xxviii). As with Haight’s noting relationships with women to dismiss similar suggestions about John Walter Cross, Hall cites Gurney’s marriage and his attractiveness to women to support his conclusion that “I believe Gurney himself to have been perfectly normal” (xxix). He adds that Myers accompanied the newly married couple on their honeymoon, a not unusual Victorian practice, though Schultz reports that the bride did not welcome the extra man.16

Several members of this circle of gay men, ten years after Sundays at the Priory ceased, became involved in the incidents of the “Strange History” evoked in Hall’s title. Hall’s book attempts to sort out the suggestions of suicide in the circumstances surrounding Edmund Gurney’s death.17 He hypothesizes that, before decamping to Brighton where he died in a hotel room, Gurney had discovered that the mesmerism and séance exhibitions celebrated in the 1886 book Phantasms of the Living, published by the Society for Psychical Research, included examples of contacts with spirits, clairvoyance, and hypnotism fraudulently contrived and engineered by members of the Society. Attributed on the title page to Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, the book contains examples of contacts with spirits, clairvoyance, and hypnotism conducted by the Society, which also names Noel and Romanes among its practitioners. The activities Hall describes include the exhibition of episodes in which the hypnotic subjects were the “Brighton Boys,” working-class youths recruited for the purpose.

Hall attributes suggestions that George Eliot modeled Daniel Deronda on Gurney to the young man’s extraordinary good looks. For the rest, he regards him as a “saintly” dupe of his two fellow authors, Myers and Podmore. In all, besides his appearance, everything else about Deronda fails to apply to Gurney: the character’s aspirations toward a life of historical significance, the weighty moralizing intellectualism, and the discovery of his Jewish heritage.

16 Schultz quotes Richard Deacon’s The Cambridge Apostles.
17 See Schultz’s note on the suicide (765, n. 42), which cites Gordon Epperson, whose The Mind of Edmund Gurney dismisses Hall’s suggestion about suicide.
Some members of the Cambridge contingent at the Priory did little to conceal their sexual activities and desires. Schultz describes Roden Noel as “one of Sidgwick’s most licentious bisexual friends, one who was once photographed naked as Bacchus” (76). According to Grosskurth, he even led Symonds astray: “The Hon Roden B. W. Noel, handsome, feminine in manner, and inordinately vain,” frequently tempted Symonds “to succumb to homosexuality” (11). It was when Noel came to stay with him that Symonds “abandoned himself to sex” (11). According to Brian Reade, Noel maintained an “uninhibited” (21) manner and believed that he inherited his sexual orientation (22). Reade concludes that Noel’s poetry contains manifestations of his sexuality: “In Noel’s ‘Water-Nymph’ of 1872, pederastic images were presented through the fictional thoughts of a mermaid. . . . In a large part of his published work there seems to be a consistent ambivalent glow, suggesting that here was a man, happily married and with a family, who throughout adult life was beset strongly by both homosexual and heterosexual feelings” (23). He adds that Noel very much liked the poetry of Walt Whitman.

According to Henry James biographer Sheldon Novick, though not a member of the Cambridge group, Priory guest (and singer) Charles Hamilton Aidé participated, along with many of these men, in “an overlapping, vaguely defined circle that a later generation—not entirely accurately or fairly—would call aristocratic and homosexual and that the middle-class press satirized as ‘aesthetes’” (5). Novick describes Aidé as a slight, bearded but effeminate-looking man. Aidé sported a “youthful appearance” (5) and dressed “perhaps too carefully” (5). Both Richards and Novick describe him as fond of mentoring younger men, including Henry James. Novick believes that James modeled Hyacinth Robinson of The Princess Casamassima on Aidé. He concludes by describing Aidé’s own salons in Queen Anne’s Gate as unique because they were led by a man, unlike Paris salons conducted by women, where the “dynamics were driven by heterosexual attractions” (6). At the Priory, however, the London Sunday salon that welcomed both men and women, the substantial number of gay and lesbian guests assured that “heterosexual attractions” were far from monopolizing or governing the sexual dynamics.

Meanwhile, three examples from among Priory guests help clarify the attitudes of the Leweses to all this: Oscar Browning, Frederic Myers, and Edith Simcox.18

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18 Henry’s investigation of encoded same-sex eroticism in Romola depends partly on recognizing allusions to texts from or about fifteenth-century Florence that leave no doubt of George Eliot’s awareness of the nature and prevalence of such relationships. She concludes, “Eliot’s knowledge of homosexuality—and boldness in representing it (however coded)—should not surprise us” (329).
Browning’s delicate professional situation at Eton elicited from the Leweses their firm, if belated, support. Many sources praise Browning’s pedagogy. According to Noel Annan, he downplayed class differences among his students so that a beneficial social equality prevailed in his house at Eton. At the same time, for leisure entertainment, he toyed with the piano at all-male gatherings that included soldiers and sailors: “Browning left behind him 10,000 letters, of which 2,000 were from soldiers or sailors and some from a few shady characters. He never concealed his interest in young men and wrote an ode in alcaics to the penis” (quoted in Schultz 411). He was dismissed from Eton College in 1875 during a long wrangle with headmaster J. J. Hornby ostensibly based on the number of students Browning admitted to the house he, with his mother supplying the maternal touch, supervised. Although both historians and contemporaries express doubt as to whether Browning ever engaged sexually with the Eton boys, the scandal also concerned suspicions of excessive intimacy. The tussle went on with considerable publicity, including Parliamentary debates, newspaper commentary, and several attempts to support Browning with “memorials” (Wortham 111). He gained some of his strongest support from Priory visitors Fitzjames Stephen and Charles [Kegan] Paul.

A less regular visitor than his biography of George Eliot implies, Browning appeared occasionally at the Priory between 1866 and 1878.19 While away from London traveling with Simeon Solomon, sometimes identified as his lover, he corresponded occasionally with George Eliot and brought her small souvenirs as gifts. Early in the crisis, George Eliot wrote to him concerning the difficulties of the decision he faced: to leave Eton or to stay and fight, a letter full of sympathy and advice. Meanwhile, at the peak of his professional problems, in December 1875, he called at the Priory. The week before, Lewes had penned a note of support from himself and George Eliot in the form of an expression of willingness to sign the supportive Memorial in Browning’s favor. Lewes wrote in French, an odd choice if he were seeking discretion because most educated Victorians, that is, the people who would have anything to do with Browning’s fate, could read French. He concludes,

Nous ferons notre possible—même notre impossible! Envoyez-vous une liste des noms. Nous pensons signer de nos deux noms le même testimonial. Est-ce que cela serait convenable? (GEL 9:168)

19 Although Lewes starts out using the name “Browning” to refer to the poet, at some point the Browning in question changes to Oscar. In any event Oscar Browning was abroad during the early days of the Priory. When the latter appears on the guest lists, Lewes, to prevent misidentification, often mentions his first name.
[We will make our possible the same as our impossible! Send me a list of the names. We think to sign our two names on the same testimonial. Will that be suitable?]

Lewes’s opening, as well as his writing in French, shows some anxiety about Browning’s situation. It implies a previous strong refusal to sign: the “impossible” that turns into the possible. But in the end, he emphasizes, both their names will appear. Whatever the Leweses knew or believed about Browning and the boys at Eton, they agreed in supporting him against Hornby. At the same time, the initial refusal and the letter in French suggest their caution. The 19 December 1875 visit to the Priory made his last for several years, although contact never ceased entirely, and he came again at least once as late as 1878.

According to Browning’s own Memoirs, George Eliot repeatedly advised him to marry. He repeats one of her playful injunctions: “She used often to tell me to get married; ‘Never show your face here again without your wife,’ and in that I disobeyed her. I told her that if she made her command more precise, and would tell me whom I was to marry, I would comply directly, but that I could not accept a general injunction. I felt that Lydgate’s experience of marriage had not been so successful as to induce the man, from whom in some measure she had drawn the character of Lydgate, to try the same experiment” (193).

Fred Myers, whom queer histories always mention as one of the Cambridge gay contingent, began coming to Sundays at the Priory in February 1872 and continued for the duration. His friendship with the Leweses intensified after May 1873 when they accepted his invitation to visit Cambridge and see the boat races (GEL 9:90, n. 1). Alongside the sibyl-in-the-gloom incident, which took place on this occasion in the Trinity gardens, Haight quotes the appalling Pindaric ode that conveyed Myers’ invitation to meet the Leweses to his friend R. C. Jebb (464) and names Gurney as one of the young men whom Myers introduced and invited back on the second day of the visit.

George Eliot’s thank-you note to Myers after the party emphasizes the joys of marital union. She expresses her hope that Myers himself will one day marry: “You will yourself some time know by experience, I trust, that happy husbands and wives can hear each other say the same thing over and over again without being tired” (GEL 9:95–96). Her observation demonstrates her belief in what Schultz calls “the marriage solution.” She

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Haight regards Browning’s belief in himself as a model for Lydgate utterly misplaced, although it appears both in his Memoir and in the Bookman for 1900: “It is difficult to explain the vanity of Oscar Browning. . . . Perhaps he was confusing him with Ladislaw” (448).
remained consistent in her belief that everyone should marry regardless of her awareness of impulses incompatible with normative marriage.

Myers confessed some version of his deepest fears and needs to George Eliot in the precarious privacy of Sunday at the Priory. In a follow-up letter, dated 31 May, concerning his visit on Sunday, 11 May 1873, he expresses himself elaborately to her: grateful for her “compassion for mankind, dwelling as they do in such forlorn darkness that what no doubt seems to you the feeble and smoky glow of your own presence and character should nevertheless be to so many of them the masterlight of all their days” (GEL 9:97–98). He goes on: “you seem to bring to everyone what he needs, to me your presence, like your writings, gives most of all the sense of example and companionship in the higher and unknown struggles of the soul” (9:98). His ponderous diction reveals that he regarded the fears and needs about which he confided in George Eliot most seriously.

Perhaps some hope of mitigating such struggles impelled the Leweses to invite Myers, together with Henry Sidgwick, to their summer home, where they rarely entertained the London crowd, that year. But when Myers proposed bringing Gurney with them to Blackbrook, in Kent, George Eliot demurred: “We shall be delighted to see Mr. Gurney in town (we shall be up again some time early in November). But just now we prefer having you and Mr. Sidgwick only” (GEL 9:103). She attempts to compensate for the refusal: “I should be sorry to think that I should not see more of Mr. Gurney, who greatly charmed me. I trust that I am only deferring a pleasure” (9:103). Her letter emphasizes that entertaining people in the country made an exception to their rule, as it did. Before they bought The Heights in 1876, a potential visitor pretty much had to be Barbara Bodichon to get an invitation to join the Leweses at one of their country retreats.

The refusal did not cause Gurney to falter in his Sunday visits. On 7 December of the same season he came to the Priory with Myers. On Sundays when they both attended, Lewes lists their names side by side, a usual indicator that the guests named before or after any particular entry may have arrived together. In the case of Myers and Gurney, Lewes sometimes more explicitly lists them as a pair, specifically on 5 April 1874 and 14 November 1875. Between April 1874 and December 1875, in a series of eight visits, Myers came to the Priory without his beauteous young friend just once, on 10 January 1875. Then, in May of 1876, Gurney married.

After the marriage, the visits of the two men coincided less frequently. Twice in May of 1876, Gurney arrived accompanied by his wife, both on days on which Myers did not attend. Indeed, after the marriage, Gurney and Myers shared only one afternoon in the same group of guests, 11
February 1877, an unusual day because John Addington Symonds also attended.

Myers’s further correspondence with George Eliot reveals that he was continuing to find life an ordeal. Schultz points to the 1876 suicide of Annie Marshall, a married cousin with whom Myers had fallen hopelessly in love, as the motivation for his turn to spiritualism. He hoped to, and believed he did, receive messages from her during a séance (301). One Sunday afternoon, 16 November 1877, he unburdened himself on this or some other overwhelmingly serious matters to George Eliot. Steady, heavy rains reduced attendance that day to only five additional people: Simcox, who had a happy hour alone with the Leweses, then Myers, Amelia Lehmann, and Frederick Locker with his daughter, something of a celebrity on the eve of her marriage to Lionel Tennyson at a ceremony attended by the Leweses.

After the Lockers, Myers arrived, and, like Simcox, he, too, had a memorable and intimate discussion with George Eliot. Five days later, George Eliot wrote him a letter full of weighty thoughts. She expresses her happiness that he has confided in her as she takes an interest in the struggles of younger minds such as his. She quotes a doleful lament from Myers: “My own mournful present and solemn past seem sometimes to show me as it were, for a moment, by direct revelation the whole world’s love and woe, and I seem to have drawn closer to other lives in that I have lost my own” (quoted, GEL 9:201). The increase of fellow-feeling resulting from some calamity found favor with George Eliot: “What you have disclosed to me affects me too deeply for me to say more about it just now than that my sympathy nullifies to my mind that difference which we were trying to explain on Sunday” (9:201). The mysterious vagueness does not clarify what justifies Myers’s extreme language about having “lost his own” life (9:201) or the nature of the “difference” they discussed. She goes on encouragingly: “I gather a sort of strength from the certainly that there must be limits or negations in my own moral powers and life-experience which may screen from me many possibilities of blessedness for our suffering human nature” (GEL 9:201). The vagueness of both Myers’s and George Eliot’s words about Myers’s self-described loss of his life, allows the possibility that he was speaking of a hopeless love for Annie Marshall, the suicide, or for Gurney, now married and drifting away.

Myers’s own marriage in January 1880 to young Eveleen Tennant elicited a request for a visit to George Eliot and another celebration of the joys and opportunities of marriage. She rejoices “in this new blossoming of joy for you” (GEL 9:287) and wishes that “with this steady light of a thoroughly sanctioned affection you will do better and better things of the same sort as
those you have already done so well” (her italics, 9:286). Fred Myers had finally taken the marriage solution.

The welcome publication of *Autobiography of a Shirtmaker* in 1998 leaves no doubt about the passionately sexual love Edith Simcox sustained for George Eliot. At the Priory, she far preferred the early parts of the afternoon, when she might have George Eliot more or less to herself, to the busy throngs that assembled later on, especially during the heydays of the seventies. If not invited to lunch, Simcox planned to arrive early, and she often appears in first or second place on Lewes’s guest lists. As the afternoons advanced to early evening, from solitary adorations to thronged chat-fests, Simcox tended to fall into silence or to leave the Priory early. Indeed, she prided herself on her truncated visits. During Lewes’s lifetime, the Sundays did not constitute the entire relationship with Simcox, for they often welcomed her on weekdays as well, encounters that satisfied Simcox better than the salons. She often notes in a tone of pride how she has controlled herself enough to restrict her Sunday visits at which, unlike Sidgwick or Du Maurier, she did not shine in conversation.

But on 16 November 1877, as the first arrival, Simcox saw George Eliot alone for a full hour, and she made the most of it. She finally elicited her host’s response to her book on *Natural Law*. Dedicated to George Eliot, the book escaped her comment when first presented, and Simcox agonized over the omission. On the rainy day in February, however, the Leweses told her that the absence of other visitors meant that Simcox could “have the afternoon to myself” (Simcox 6). They talked about clothes (bonnets and trousers) and then about *Natural Law*, which George Eliot praised as “perfectly reverent” and “wholesome” (8). Finally, Locker’s arrival interrupted one of Simcox’s happiest days with her beloved. Simcox enjoyed her happiness all the way home through her walk in the rain, and was still drawing on it for pleasure-filled memories and energizing effects several days later.

At the same time, George Eliot often exasperated Simcox with her belief that marriage would answer all her emotional needs were she only to give it a chance. Near the end of 1877, Simcox paid a Monday call at the Priory by way of celebrating her original contact with George Eliot by letter five years earlier. The conversation wound about a bit before settling on a discussion of her employee Mary Harrison’s marital chances. Simcox ventured her opinion that “at 27 there was not much time to lose” (13). George Eliot became “rather wroth with me for expressing a prejudice against late marriages; she thought that people who go on developing may have a much better chance of happiness in marrying after 30 than at 20” (13). Simcox, thirty-four at the time, forgives George Eliot’s insensitivity
to her own desires: “she was so beautiful and I was so fond of her that I wasn’t angry when she proceeded to affirm that I had never been so fit to marry as now” (13). The call ended with George Eliot’s admonition for Simcox not to come early to the following Sunday (on 16 December) as they would have lunch guests, and, finally, encouragement for Simcox to arrive in a mood “to make myself agreeable” (15). As with Browning and Myers, George Eliot was promoting the “marriage solution” for Simcox, too.

These three examples indicate that George Eliot refused to condemn the acts or inclinations of her gay and lesbian friends, but also that she did not acknowledge that same-sex physical relationships went forth between people she knew and entertained. She applied the word “bachelor” to some of her gay guests, notably Alexander Kinglake. But, most of all, she believed in marriage for the few people who had any likelihood of having confessed to her their same-sex desire. She encouraged both men and women, specifically Browning, Myers, and Simcox, to marry in order to achieve the highest moral possibilities of human life. And in the end, most of the Cambridge set, in particular, did marry. Symonds married Catherine North; Roden Noel married Alice de Broe; Fred Myers married Eveleen Tennant; Edmund Gurney married Kate Sibley; Henry Sidgwick married Eleanor Balfour.

Similarly, in George Eliot’s fiction, the characters who show no interest in normative relationships also show no interest in same-sex love and live emotionally circumscribed lives. Priscilla Lammeter takes satisfaction in managing the Lammeter establishment, but has only her simple-minded father for companionship, a respectable, competent, but emotionally limited life that reduces her opportunities to enact fellow feeling. Mr. Brooke, too, has views that arise from a complete lack of respect for or interest in women as women, but he forms no close attachments with men either. Finally Gwendolen Harleth, who never responds emotionally to the men she captivates, takes no part in any romantic friendship with a woman, despite the depth of her daughterly affection for her mother.21

21 Nancy Henry makes a persuasive case that in Romola, Nello the barber demonstrates a persistent sexual interest in Tito, while Gouws focuses on Dino de’ Bardi from the same novel. Richard Dellamora asserts that “Gwendolen’s friendship with her mother, with its incestuous tremors and components of masochism and androphobia, edges into decadent territory” (130). He believes that “Eliot was familiar with the standard features of female sexual inversion as it would be described in sexological literature of the late nineteenth century” (142). However, he bases this observation on George Eliot’s reference to Lewes’s psychological research in Berlin in 1870 as a “hideous branch” of study. Although Lewes did consult Carl Westphal, an authority on “desire between women” (142), George Eliot’s comment does not specify this particular aspect of Lewes’s work; hence her comment could concern his general
Indeed one arguably gay character in George Eliot’s oeuvre appears long before she met the variety of sexualities she encountered in her own salon in London. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the hairdresser summoned from St. Ogg’s to deal with Maggie’s scissoring of her troublesome hair shows some unmistakably campy inclinations. He attends carefully to his own elaborate hairstyle: “his well-anointed coronal locks tending wav- ily upward, like the simulated pyramid of flame on a monumental urn” (Book 1, ch. 9). After “holding up one jagged lock after and saying, ‘See here! Tut–tut–tut’ in a tone of mingled disgust and pity” (Book 1, ch. 9), his manner makes Maggie resolve to avoid forever the St. Ogg’s street where he keeps his shop. Even Mr. Brooke, the least interested of George Eliot’s characters in women in any form, lacks the campy effeminacy of Mr. Rappit.

### International Additions

During the *Middlemarch* years, the Priory guest list acquired a gaggle of newcomers who returned time and again over a period of years. One 1873 addition, Olga Novikoff, a well-known participant in the European spa/salon culture, found her way to the Priory through the offices of Oscar Browning, that is, as a friend of a friend. Lewes soon consulted Robert Lytton for his opinion as to her suitability, and Lytton responded with a vitriolic letter attributing great vulgarity to Novikoff and all her tribe: “the Bêtes Noires of Vienna” and “very underbred ridiculous people” (*GEL* 9:83). He repeatedly refers to her excessive weight and introduces two incidents of strange doings by Novikoff. Sister-in-law to the Russian consul, she came to Vienna because of her sister’s involvement in a minor but unsalacious scandal, “a pushing, gushing, toadying, fulsome fat woman with the manners of a second rate adventuress” (9:83). A scrape of some kind arose from her sister-in-law’s efforts to solicit the attendance of the Princess Metternich at her salons: “There was talk of half a dozen duels” (9:84). Olga Novikoff arrived in Vienna to smooth things over, but Lytton regards that mission as both ineffective and graceless. He introduces a second damaging rumor: that she and her sister staged a theft of their own jewelry but that “the matter was hushed up” (9:84). Haight acknowledges the importance of this exchange of letters concerning Novikoff by including on one of his chronology pages the note: “Lytton describes Mme. Olga Novikoff” (9:73).
According to Lytton, Novikoff forwarded her social and political ambitions by claiming friendship on the flimsiest bases, in the case of his mother-in-law on a single meeting “in the streets at Ryde” (GEL 9:83). He goes on to report with glee that his wife decisively snubbed Novikoff, who was falsely claiming friendship with several Lytton relatives. Edith Lytton “who can be, when she pleases, a perfect refrigerator, iced the volcano at the first eruption” (9:84). He acknowledges that Novikoff carries on a correspondence with Prince Aleksandr Gortchakov, but quotes his own superior Sir Andrew Buchanan, who concludes that she “was in no sort of society at St. Petersburgh” (9:84). Lytton cuts short his own tirade with the simple statement: “I do not like Madame Olga” (9:84), then goes on to guess accurately that the Leweses wish to gratify a friend seeking her admission to their home. He concludes “I know of no reason whatever why you should refuse to having the pleasure of adding G. Elliot [sic] and yourself to the list of her ‘distinguished acquaintances’” (9:85). Turgenev, too, did not like Novikoff (9:83, n.5).

Lytton ends his spiteful letter by putting off the Leweses who were looking for an invitation to Knebworth, the Lyttons’ home in Hertfordshire, elaborately Gothicized by Robert Lytton’s father, Bulwer Lytton, whom Lewes had visited there. Lytton declines the Leweses’ company on the grounds of an insufficiency of bedrooms to accommodate a couple. Lewes may, however, come alone, concludes Lytton: “en garçon” (GEL 9:84). Although the Lyttons entertained the Leweses warmly in Vienna in 1870, and although Lytton couches his demurral within several declarations of affection, Lytton came to the Priory only rarely, did not bring Lady Lytton, and, indeed, his declining the Leweses’ company at Knebworth perhaps shows a bit of the refrigerator side of himself.

Lewes’s relations with Lytton merited no such coolness, for Lewes made repeated efforts to help Lytton with his literary efforts, giving Lytton’s writing ambitions his invariable support. In 1871, just after the visit to Vienna, he recommended that Lytton submit a paper on Voltaire to the Fortnightly Review, which, however, did not publish it (GEL 9:6). In June, Lewes advised him to correct the “imperfections” of the fable Lytton had forwarded for his opinion and his help in placing it. In March 1872, Lewes was celebrating Blackwood’s acceptance of Lytton’s Fables in Song (9:45), although in June of the same year he was still struggling to improve the work: “Its chief want is unity of feeling” (9:54). By April 1874, Lytton was writing to express his gratitude to Lewes for finding a sympathetic reviewer for the poems. Edith Simcox’s brother, George Augustus, who often came to the Priory with his sister, wrote a positive response to Lytton’s work for the Academy, and Lytton showed some appropriate
gratitude: “I am most obliged to you for sending me Mr. Simcox’s valuable notice of them, and very grateful for the notice itself. It is not much to say that it is the best I have seen, for in fact it is the only good one” (9:123). Lewes’s letters to Lytton show not only his willingness to help “Owen Meredith” along, but his eagerness to entertain the diplomat. Interspersed with anecdotes, his letters drop as many names as possible.

Haight tentatively dates the Lytton letter about Olga Novikoff as sent 21 March 1873. If so, it came a week too late. Novikoff “presented herself” (GEL 9:82) at the Priory on 16 March. If the Leweses found Novikoff as vulgar as did Lytton, they nevertheless put up with her patiently over a four-year period. Meanwhile, Russians appear but rarely in George Eliot’s fiction, though Grandcourt spends time with “some Russians” in Baden Baden, thereby slowing his pursuit of Gwendolen to Leubronn. In Daniel Deronda, Grandcourt seldom shows good taste in people, and the Russians suffer guilt by association with him.

Novikoff, the Priory’s Russian, like so many international authors, gathered her material at salons, including the Leweses’. Her Is Russia Wrong? A Series of Letters by a Russian Lady appeared from Hodder and Stoughton in 1878 and offered a preface by J. A. Froude. Her rhetoric often depends on prejudices expressed by hypothetical English friends in conversations of the kind that occurred at the Priory. She makes a rhetorical practice of attributing opinions to “a polite Englishman” or “my English friends.” Letter VI complains that only ignorance accounts for British fears of Russia (81) and protests that at least Russians, unlike Britons, no longer whip their sailors. She dismisses many English people as “Turkophiles” (132) who “know but little about the causes of hereditary hatred of the Russian for the Turk. I venture, therefore, to state briefly the facts which my countrymen can never forget” (70). If similarly confrontational engagements with “English friends” occurred at the Priory, where she had the opportunity to meet “educated” and “polite” Englishmen, hers might not have been (as Lytton predicted) an uninterruptedly endearing presence.

But not everyone agreed with Lytton and Turgenev. Alexander Kinglake, whom George Eliot always described as a favorite of hers, befriended Novikoff and went to see her every day at her rooms at Claridge’s. Kinglake, a sporadic guest of the Leweses, plays little part in the letters and memoirs that describe Sundays at the Priory. Indeed, Gerald De Gaury admits that Kinglake was “habitually reserved in society” (81), a possible result of hearing difficulties. The more intimate setting at Claridge’s neutralizes the limitations created by poor hearing in a crowded drawing room like the Priory’s. Far from regarding Novikoff as social poi-
son at the embassies, De Gaury’s biography of Kinglake reports: “She is described as being of keen intellect and warm sympathies. As god-daughter of the Tsar, and through her mother a friend of the popular Russian Ambassador in London before and after the Crimean War, the Baron Brunow, she was well received at the Russian embassy” (134). A veteran of the Crimea, Kinglake shared one of her major interests, Russo-Turkish relations.

Novikoff made several London salons into arenas for her pro-Russian proselytizing. Indeed she first met Kinglake at Little Holland House. But in general she evoked mixed opinions from the English people she was attempting to educate. According to De Gaury, a writer for the Standard expressed a negative opinion on her influence with Gladstone: “A serious statesman should know better than to catch contagion from the petulant enthusiasm of a Russian Apostle” (137). It described her as having “through her natural endowments and long familiarity with courts a capacity for controlling and entertaining social circles in a way which recalled the ‘salons’ of the past, the drawing-rooms of le Brun and Récamier. Others had likened her in influence to the Princess de Lieven” (xx). From 1873 through 1876, she visited the Priory just a few times a year, usually clustering her afternoons within a single month.

Another woman of European origins, Mrs. Henry Huth, always accompanied by her daughter, visited during the same three-year period as Novikoff. According to her husband’s biographer, W. C. Hazlitt, Henry Huth maintained a large book collection that included many seventeenth-century volumes. Hazlitt believes Huth invariable in his Sunday activities: “Mr Huth set aside Sunday afternoons, as I mention, for the visits of his bibliographical acquaintance, and he would make no exceptions to this rule” (275). Although not conducted by a woman, Huth’s gatherings might themselves pass as salons, albeit highly specialized ones.

Hazlitt’s comments on the Huths carry hints of marital incompatibility. According to Hazlitt, Huth had a delicate mental health, a “nervous debility” that sometimes left him “overcome by depression” (269). His Austrian wife arrived at the Priory without him, possibly because of Huth’s shyness. Hazlitt thought Mrs. Huth materialistic: “poor soul!” she “laid greater stress . . . on her husband’s wealth than he did, for of all the men whom I have known he was the most unassuming” (268–69). The Priory offered her a refuge from Huth’s bibliographical gatherings, and she added to the ton of the parties. With international guests from America, Russia, Germany, France, and elsewhere, the Priory supplied a link in a loose chain of social venues frequented by members of overlapping international social circles.
In his biography, Haight comments that “[a]fter the publication of *Daniel Deronda* the Leweses’ social life grew quieter. The Sunday afternoons—perhaps by design—were less crowded” (498). But Lewes’s journal for 1877 not only shows many of the same names as before, but affirms that the months of Sundays ran from January through May and included November and December as well. On 27 May 1877 Lewes exulted in the number of guests: “27 people!” Moreover, they were receiving more visitors at their country home, including, that summer, the Henry Cromptons, Frederic Harrison, the Congreves, Gurney, Allingham, Benjamin Jowett, Spencer, Elma Stuart, and Alice Helps among them. But Haight also notes that “a few of the ‘swells,’ whose names Lewes delighted to note, disappeared from the lists” (498). Among the dropouts who deserve the name *swells*, members of the Castletown family failed to reappear. Having survived the snub to Cecilia Wingfield’s singing, they did not survive the publication of the novel in which the daughter of a loving, dominated mother escapes to a spa as did the Castletowns and the Leweses two seasons in a row during the writing of *Daniel Deronda*. 