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## LAUGHING WITH GEORGE ELIOT

By R. J. Jenkins

The tradition of admiring George Eliot for her genius is as old as the author herself. Alexander Main, one of her more sycophantic devotees, laid the foundations of this tradition during her lifetime with the publication of *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings*, a work dedicated 'to George Eliot in recognition of a genius as original as it is profound and a morality as pure as it is impassioned'. Though Main confesses that the preface to his book is 'not the place in which to attempt to give an exposition of George Eliot's genius', he cannot resist using it to remind us that she has made the novel 'the vehicle of the grandest and most uncompromising moral truth', that 'there is to be found, on almost every page of her writings, some wise thought finely expressed, some beautiful sentiment tenderly clothed, some pointed witticism exquisitely turned', and that the 'riches' to be found in her work 'would seem to be actually without a limit'.<sup>1</sup> If this is Main determined *not* to expound George Eliot's worth, it is hard to imagine him in an expository mood.

Main's preface, however, is more than mere goddess-worship; it also outlines the major characteristics of George Eliot's writing – 'moral truth', 'wise thought', 'pointed witticism' – qualities for which her novels have been vigorously championed and violently criticized for the last century and a half. Of these, it is undoubtedly with a kind of moralism and wisdom that George Eliot has become most closely associated since her death. Gordon Haight attributes this phenomenon largely to John Walter Cross, George Eliot's second husband and first biographer. 'The legend of lofty seriousness', Haight explains, 'fostered in the beginning by Lewes, became through Cross's efforts so firmly fixed that it colored her reputation as a novelist'.<sup>2</sup> And indeed it has. Despite the range of critical opinions that informs scholarship on George Eliot's life and work, to view her as a 'serious' artist first and foremost has become something of standard practice among her critics both cruel and kind. As V. S. Pritchett put it, 'one pictures her, in life, moralizing instead of making a scene'.<sup>3</sup>

George Eliot was certainly a serious author, and her penchant for 'moralizing' is a well-documented (if not well-loved) fact of her style. But alongside her penetrating observations of human nature and her sincere appeals to the moral conscience of her readers runs a vibrant current of something with which she is too rarely associated: humour. George Eliot may well be formidable, but she is also funny, a quality with which I think she has been insufficiently associated since her death. Like John Cross, whose devotion to the 'sibylline' George Eliot prompted him in editing her letters to highlight 'the more sententious passages' and omit altogether 'the spontaneous, trivial, and humorous remarks',<sup>4</sup> posterity, it would seem, has committed itself to an unsmiling image of the author. This essay seeks to adjust that image, to catch the sibyl in the act of smirking. By highlighting the work of critics who appreciated her capacity for humour, and by calling attention to moments in her writings which exhibit that comic capacity at work, I will argue here that to conceive of George Eliot solely as an austere, weighty, untouchable personality is to misunderstand her, and that knowing how to laugh with George Eliot is a crucial part of knowing how to read her.

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George Eliot's earliest critics appreciated openly and enthusiastically the humour of her prose. One reviewer, struck by the narrative power of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, wrote, 'We know not whether George Eliot has most power over tears or laughter; but as humour is a rarer quality than pathos, we are disposed to admire his humour most'.<sup>5</sup> *Adam Bede* prompted similar observations. 'No one can doubt', wrote a critic in the *Saturday Review*, 'that in *Adam Bede* there is real humour of a rare and genuine kind'.<sup>6</sup> Even *The Mill on the Floss*, a story about tortured relationships, ruined families and unfulfilled dreams, was praised for its humour:

[...] we must attribute a great part of 'George Eliot's' triumph to the charm of her style. She plays with her subject [...] even when she is most serious she is half sportive [...]. This pervading humour is very pleasant, and takes the reader unawares. It does not much matter what is the subject with which such a mind as 'George Eliot's' plays; the result is sure to be amusing.<sup>7</sup>

That George Eliot is 'amusing', 'plays with her subject', and is 'half sportive' even when serious seemed obvious to E. S. Dallas, a critic whose reading of her novels preceded Cross's Delphic image. Though Dallas noted that George Eliot 'is attempting not merely to amuse us as a novelist, but, as a preacher, to make us think and feel', he also recognized that she 'manages to make us smile through her novel'.<sup>8</sup> Like those writing in the *Saturday Review*, Dallas viewed George Eliot's humour both as a vital constituent of her narrative art and as a key contributing factor to her professional success as a novelist. G. H. Lewes once told George Eliot, 'I think your pathos is better than your fun',<sup>9</sup> but for Dallas, George Eliot's 'fun' was a crucial part of what made her novels so deeply satisfying.

The early novels were not the only ones praised for their humour. The *Westminster Review* noted that 'there are passages in *Romola* full of refined wit and as deeply humorous as any to be found in *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, or in *Silas Marner*'.<sup>10</sup> *Felix Holt, the Radical* was likewise admired for its 'exquisite humour'. 'It is natural that George Eliot's brilliant comedy should be most talked about', wrote John Morley in his review of the novel, 'because everybody in the world feels bound to like humour, and no man does not think he understands it'.<sup>11</sup> As if to prove the validity of Morley's claim, R. H. Hutton, six years later, wrote an essay – 'The Humour of *Middlemarch*' – dedicated entirely to the topic of George Eliot's 'brilliant comedy' in which he observed, 'the wealth of genuine humour in *Middlemarch* is astonishing'.<sup>12</sup> Edith Simcox, one of George Eliot's greatest admirers, echoed Hutton's thoughts in the *Academy* only seventeen days after he had published them in the *Spectator*. 'People whose idea of the world is already as gloomy as it well can be', she wrote, 'cannot fail to derive some consolation from the thought that George Eliot's wider knowledge and juster perceptions find here and there a little to admire as well as much everywhere to laugh at'.<sup>13</sup>

Such commentaries suggest how central acknowledgments of George Eliot's humour were to discussions of her work during her lifetime. Indeed, few critics writing between January 1857 (the date 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton' appeared in *Blackwood's*) and 1880 (the year of her death) failed to comment upon her power to amuse, and even though readers professed that, in George Eliot, they felt they were dealing with a mind 'preëminently contemplative and analytic',<sup>14</sup> the recognition of her consequential style and the avowal that she could be 'really philosophical'<sup>15</sup> never precluded an attendant, often delighted recognition of

her mirth. That George Eliot's novels contained 'much everywhere to laugh at' was an opinion so ubiquitously held by her mid-Victorian readership as to require no argument; that she was funny was taken entirely for granted.

Given the enthusiasm with which critics acclaimed George Eliot's comic brilliance throughout her career, it is surprising that she should be so little known for it today. The George Eliot of Cross's *Life* – George Eliot the sibyl, the sage – is the one we now collectively envision with Pavlovian quickness. Lord David Cecil, one of George Eliot's least charitable critics, once said of her, '[...] the virtues of her admiration, industry, self-restraint, conscientiousness, are drab, negative sort of virtues: they are school-teachers' virtues. George Eliot does confront human nature a little like a school-teacher; kindly but just, calm but censorious, with birchrod in hand to use as she thinks right, and lists of good and bad conduct marks pinned neatly to her desk'.<sup>16</sup> Such commentary departs dramatically from mid-Victorian criticism both in what it says about George Eliot and, perhaps more notably, in how it says it. The warm, generous appreciation furnished by her contemporaries is here replaced by callous analysis; grateful acknowledgement of her comic gifts supplanted by a supercilious recognition of 'her sad, mature wisdom'.<sup>17</sup> Cecil's commentary epitomizes the way several early twentieth-century critics viewed George Eliot – 'her insistence on moral principles', Haight argues, 'bored a generation that had done with morality'<sup>18</sup> – and though George Eliot's reputation has been largely resuscitated since the end of World War II, she has never again been credited with the power to provoke laughter in so confident and convivial a way as she was during her lifetime. In George Levine's recent description of Dickens as 'the great popular entertainer' and George Eliot as 'the voice of high culture, learned, self-reflexive, tormented by her own aesthetic and moral aspirations' – in his discussion of her 'deep seriousness' and 'strenuous moral and aesthetic standards' – one cannot help but hear echoes of Lord David Cecil and the early twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Looking always for weightiness in George Eliot's writings, her critics have consistently found it.

It should be noted, however, that George Eliot's death did not herald an end to all discussion of her humour. Though the fervour of the initial praise had fizzled dramatically by the end of the nineteenth century, not even her harshest critics, determined to challenge the pre-eminence of her writing, could deny the power of her comedy. 'So far, indeed, it can hardly be said that George Eliot is unique', wrote Leslie Stephen in 1881:

She has been approached, if she has not been surpassed, by other writers in her idyllic effects. But there is something less easily paralleled in the peculiar vein of humour which is the essential complement of the more tender passages [...]. It is enough to take note of the fact that George Eliot possessed a vein of humour, of which it is little to say that it is incomparably superior, in depth if not in delicacy, to that of any feminine writer.<sup>20</sup>

Stephen's compliment here – that George Eliot's humour is superior 'to that of any feminine writer' – is as backhanded as it can possibly be. Still, he was far kinder than George Saintsbury, who described *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* as 'studies of immense effort and erudition not unenlightened by humour, but on the whole dead',<sup>21</sup> and Arnold Bennett, who wrote of George Eliot, 'her style, though not without shrewdness, is too rank to have any enduring vitality'.<sup>22</sup>

Saintsbury and Bennett's criticisms of George Eliot are among the harshest ever levelled against her, and yet we detect even among these most incendiary affronts a grain, however meagre, of appreciation. For Saintsbury, George Eliot's 'dead' fiction is 'not unenlightened by humour', and even Bennett, unafraid to cast aspersions, admits her style 'is not without shrewdness'. Not high praise to be sure, but not wholesale abuse either. Thus even those of George Eliot's critics most resolutely bent on undermining her status as a novelist found in her humour something that could be salvaged, if not acclaimed.

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While late Victorian and early twentieth-century critics did not succeed in injuring George Eliot's literary reputation permanently, they did manage successfully to reinforce already prominent images of her as an austere, sententious, no-nonsense novelist. The predominance of such images meant that her humour, when mentioned at all, was and continues to be discussed as subordinate to more 'significant' aspects of her narrative art. Eileen Gillooly's recent book, *Smile of Discontent*, provides a provocative case in point. In a chapter entitled 'The Mill on the Floss: Humor as Maternal Protection', Gillooly discusses the ways in which George Eliot uses humour to foster a kind of protective sympathetic identification with Maggie who, Gillooly argues, functions as a symbolic 'daughter' in the narrative.<sup>23</sup> Gillooly's work acknowledges openly the fact that there is humour to be found in George Eliot's novels. It also, however, illustrates the tendency of critics to view that humour as subsidiary, as ancillary, as an instrument of some other aspect of her art. Humour in George Eliot's novels does not serve merely to make us laugh, the argument goes; instead, it is forever helping to accomplish some other more important, more substantial, more meaningful aesthetic task.

George Scott Christian, in his recent article 'Comic George Eliot', does the same. Building upon a nuanced reading of her famous essay, 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine', Christian argues that comic theory was of central importance to the nature and development of George Eliot's realist aesthetic. His assertion that 'Eliot's comic theory deeply informs and shapes her well known positivism and insistent faith in the power of sympathetic intersubjective relations to regenerate individual and social life',<sup>24</sup> though astute and accurate, replicates the assumption of Gillooly's argument: that the importance of humour in and for George Eliot's writings must necessarily stem from its ability to 'inform' something else, something more significant – in this case, her belief in sympathetic identification. The George Eliot responsible for writing 'much everywhere to laugh at' is here effectively subordinated to the George Eliot responsible for having 'a complex understanding of the comic and its formative role in structuring [...] human consciousness for the better'.<sup>25</sup> Far from a gifted comedian who, every now and then, makes us laugh for the sake of making us laugh, we are presented here, even in an article entitled 'Comic George Eliot', with a conscientious moralist who makes us laugh for the sake of making us good. The sage, inevitably, prevails. I hope not to suggest by this, of course, that critics are mistaken in reading George Eliot's comedy as serving and reinforcing other of her narrative designs, for surely that is a crucial and compelling part of what it does. But in searching always for the deeper meaning of George Eliot's humour – in having our eyes interminably peeled for the greater significance of her fun – we risk, all of us, losing sight of its very funniness. Struggling always to comprehend fully the import of a joke, we sometimes forfeit the visceral pleasure of laughing at it.

One way that some critics have tried to reconcile George Eliot's sibylline image with the reality of her humour is by discussing that humour as wit (to use Main's term, 'pointed witticism'). Defined by George Eliot herself as being 'more nearly allied to the ratiocinative intellect',<sup>26</sup> the term 'wit' seems to suggest a 'higher' order of comic activity, one that requires for its successful deployment a certain cleverness. That wit suggests intelligence (insofar as the possession of the former depends upon the possession of the latter) makes it a convenient lexical alternative for those who wish to acknowledge George Eliot's comic gifts without running the risk of injuring her reputation as an intellectual giant. As Christian points out, Robert Martin, in *The Triumph of Wit*, attributes George Eliot not with humour, but with 'wit and intellect'.<sup>27</sup> A few pages later, Christian himself tells us:

If we find laughable the 'old women' and 'heavy clowns', we are guilty of Hobbesian exultation over our weaker neighbour and are no further along the evolutionary spectrum than our acorn-munching avatars. Through this kind of primitive comedy we once excised the ugly and low and made them objects of derision. In that phase of individual and moral growth, we were 'cruel' [...]. Instead of finding the ugly and low 'laughable', we now regard them 'with loving admiration at some trait of gentle goodness' (*Adam Bede*, ch. 17).<sup>28</sup>

Christian's formulation claims that the process of 'moral and intellectual development' requires a dramatic shift in the objects of comic satisfaction. To find physical deformity or stupidity in one's fellow men laughable is to betray a 'primitive' sensibility, to resist the forward movement of civilization. In other words, progress demands that what was once an object that elicited laughter becomes one that evokes love.

Christian's analysis of comic theory in relation to George Eliot's aesthetic manifesto is useful, but fails, I think, to account for the many instances in her writings in which she is herself 'guilty of Hobbesian exultation' over her neighbours. George Eliot's writings abound with moments in which she exercises the sense of humour for which she was so widely appreciated during her lifetime, and while some of that humour certainly manifests itself in 'refined wit', there is also much that takes the form of pithy observation bordering, at times, on sheer rudeness. Mr and Mrs Charles Bray received many letters from George Eliot in which she displayed her aptitude for 'primitive comedy' by portraying her fellow men as 'objects of derision'. 'We are going to dine at Mr Hughes's this evening', George Eliot wrote to the Brays in November of 1843, 'so I am doomed to indigestion and whist, the latter of which I choose as a smaller evil than trying to be agreeable in spite of dame Nature and circumstances'.<sup>29</sup> In another letter, dated 5 August 1849, she wrote, 'the squinting Marquis is the most well-bred, harmless of men. He talks very little – every sentence seems a terrible gestation, and comes forth fortissimo'. Such playful quips illustrate George Eliot's talent for rendering expertly the physiognomic and verbal particularities of those whom she encountered, a talent perhaps best exhibited in a letter she wrote fifteen days after her awkward tête-à-tête with the 'squinting Marquis'. 'Two other young Germans – Prussians – are here', she wrote to the Brays, 'the eldest odious, with an eternal simper and a mouth of dubious cleanliness. He speaks French very little and has a miserable splutter between a grunt and a snuffle so that when he begins to speak to one one's brain begins to twist and one feels inclined to rush out of the room. His brother frowns instead of simpering and is therefore more endurable'.<sup>30</sup>

If, as Christian argues, laughing at others and making them the 'objects of derision' places us 'no further along the evolutionary spectrum than our acorn-munching avatars', then George Eliot, here, is definitely munching on acorns. That her eviscerating commentary focuses on 'characteristics' as opposed to 'unexpected and complex relations' makes it, according to her own definition, humour, and yet the lack of any appeal to the 'sympathetic emotions' precludes it from being humour of a 'higher form'.<sup>31</sup> Instead, her descriptions of the squinting Marquis and spluttering Prussian belong to what she herself called 'barbaric' humour, the humour of 'loud-throated laughter over the wine-cup' and 'grotesque physiognomies', which finds its 'flavour' in 'triumphant egoism or intolerance', its ancestor in 'the cruel mockery of savage at the writhings of a suffering enemy'.<sup>32</sup> George Eliot, in other words, is luxuriating in a crude joke at another's expense. She is being relentlessly judgemental. She is being rude. She is consciously misbehaving, and she is revelling in it.

As Haight notes, it is within George Eliot's letters that 'the humourist's satirical pen [...] ran unrestrained, catching to life the affectations and absurdities of the varied circle of guests at Swiss pensions or 142 Strand', but her letters, I would argue, are not the only documents marked by 'the humourist's satirical pen'.<sup>33</sup> Her novels, too, are populated by characters whose physical, mental and emotional 'affectations and absurdities' are enumerated as enthusiastically as those of her simpering and frowning (respectively) Prussian acquaintances. In *Adam Bede*, for example, we meet Bill, Bartle Massey's student who 'found a reading lesson in words of one syllable a harder matter to deal with than the hardest stone he had ever had to saw', and whom we witness 'pointing his big finger towards three words at once, and turning his head on one side that he might keep better hold with his eye of the word which was to be discriminated out of the group'.<sup>34</sup> Later, we observe Bartle Massey's students collectively: 'It was touching to see these three big men, with the marks of their hard labour about them, anxiously bending over the worn books [...]. It was almost as if three rough animals were making humble efforts to learn how they might become human'.<sup>35</sup> This scene, as unavoidably condescending as it is comical, echoes a similar scene from *Scenes of Clerical Life* in which the reverend Amos Barton preaches to a deliciously motley crew of less-than-rapt listeners at 'the College'. I reproduce much of it here for fear of enervating its comic force through paraphrase:

Right in front of him – probably because he was stone-deaf, and it was deemed more edifying to hear nothing at a short distance than at a long one – sat 'Old Maxum,' [...] with protruded chin, and munching mouth, and eyes that seemed to look at emptiness. Next to him sat Poll Fodge [...] a one-eyed woman, with a scarred and seamy face [...]. Beyond this member of the softer sex, at the end of the bench, sat 'Silly Jim,' a young man afflicted with hydrocephalus, who rolled his head from side to side, and gazed at the point of his nose [...] On his left sat Mr Fitchett [...]. Mr Fitchett had an irrepressible tendency to drowsiness under spiritual instruction, and in the recurrent regularity with which he dozed off until he nodded and awaked himself, he looked not unlike a piece of mechanism, ingeniously contrived for measuring the length of Mr Barton's discourse. Perfectly wide-awake, on the contrary, was his left-hand neighbour, Mrs Brick, one of those hard undying old women, to whom age seems to have given a network of wrinkles, as a coat of magic armour against

the attacks of winter, warm or cold. The point on which Mrs Brick was still sensitive – the theme on which you might possibly excite her hope and fear – was snuff.<sup>36</sup>

If to giggle at the expense of others is to be guilty of ‘Hobbesian exultation over our weaker neighbour’, then George Eliot is not altogether un-Hobbesian here. Though it is unimaginable that George Eliot does not want her readers to experience a moment of genuine sympathy for Bartle Massey’s struggling students and Amos Barton’s world-worn parishioners, it is equally unimaginable, I think, that in taking such pains to capture the cockeyed tilt of Bill’s head, the mechanical drowsiness of Mr Fitchett and Mrs Brick’s acute sensitivity on the subject of snuff, George Eliot does not also hope to afford her readers a healthy snicker or two. Run though they may against the grain of her larger social and ethical preoccupations, passages such as these reveal George Eliot at her most ‘primitive’, and suggest that behind Cross’s (and, consequently, the twentieth century’s) shrine to the sibylline George Eliot lurks a very different George Eliot, one who might just giggle when you trip up the stairs or smirk at the shape of your nose.

And to those who would charge George Eliot with making the working classes too often the mark of her comic aim, I would direct them to the curate Mr Crewe, whose ‘brown wig was hardly ever put on quite right’; to Miss Mary Linnet, whose ‘face was like a piece of putty with two Scotch pebbles stuck in it’; to Mr Pilgrim, whose tendency to ‘splutter’, it would seem, was inspired by the very Prussian George Eliot found so objectionable in her letter to the Brays; to the gentlemen of Milby, who ‘fall into no other excess at dinner-parties than the perfectly well-bred and virtuous excess of stupidity’; to the reverend Amos Barton, who ‘had a knack of hitting on the wrong thing in garb as well as in grammar’; to Maggie Tulliver’s Uncle Pullet, who ‘had a great natural faculty for ignorance’; to the scholar Mr Casaubon, by whose soup-eating habits Celia Brooke finds herself not a little repulsed; or to the friend of an unnamed gentleman in *Felix Holt* who ‘was the reverse of good-looking’.<sup>37</sup> George Eliot even drew attention every now and then to her own ‘affectations’, going so far once as to exclaim in a letter, ‘The people here are so ugly! Almost as ugly as I am’.<sup>38</sup> Such jocularities makes Virginia Woolf’s claims that George Eliot ‘is no satirist’ and that ‘the movement of her mind was too slow and cumbersome to lend itself to comedy’ read like something of a bad joke.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it would appear that George Eliot, like her creation Gwendolen Harleth, boasts ‘a keen sense of absurdity in others’<sup>40</sup> and, like Thackeray’s Becky Sharp, is unashamed to luxuriate in it.

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In her article, ‘Provoking George Eliot’, published in a recent volume of essays from the English Institute, Mary Ann O’Farrell complains that ‘George Eliot cannot tell a joke’. This George Eliot, the Eliot who acknowledges that other people tell jokes but refuses to tell any herself, ‘provokes’ O’Farrell ‘to provocation’:

Wanting something from the good girl [George Eliot], the good-girl-gone-bad pokes and prods [...], enjoying those transitive pleasures for their own faux-wicked sakes, but also because she wants the good girl to be more fun, to have more fun, to know – as daily she still learns them – the angry joys of being loosened up.<sup>41</sup>



O'Farrell's frustration – her wish that George Eliot would cast off her eminently Victorian middle-class decency and act every bit the 'bad girl' that we so often sense she wants to be – is understandable. And yet, as I hope to have shown, our collective confidence in George Eliot's unassailable sobriety – our view of her as the unimpeachable 'good girl' of the British nineteenth century – is itself a fiction. George Eliot was not without her fun, not without her 'faux-wicked' pleasures, and not perhaps as unfamiliar with 'the angry joys of being loosened up' as we are accustomed to imagine her. Indeed, Gordon Haight may well be the only critic of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who, in his work on George Eliot, acknowledged and appreciated her humour to an extent anywhere near that of her contemporaries. This appreciation no doubt came, at least in part, from his prolonged contact with her letters, documents in which the powers of observation for which George Eliot would become famous as a novelist were most often trained not on profound questions of human nature, but on the particular shape of a person's brow, the fall of their hem, the 'brain-twisting' quality of their speech. But Haight not only appreciated her humour – he seems to have understood it. In a generation convinced of George Eliot's sententiousness, Haight emphasized her 'lively sense of humor, her mimicry, her biting satire',<sup>42</sup> qualities he felt striking enough to be mentioned and discussed in their own right. In this he was not unlike R. H. Hutton, whose essay on *Middlemarch* argued that George Eliot was every bit a humorist as she was a moralist. In her writing, Hutton claims, 'George Eliot laughs at the common modes of thought and feeling much more than with them',<sup>43</sup> an observation which, in its refusal to prostrate itself at the foot of the sibylline George Eliot, does her much justice. As both Haight and Hutton demonstrate, to acknowledge that George Eliot laughed and elicits laughter need not threaten her literary reputation. Indeed, to think it could betrays a sad lack of faith in the worrier.

[For lending me their skilled eyes, and for encouraging my unhealthy obsession with George Eliot, I would like to thank Jan-Melissa Schramm, Elaine Scarry, Nicholas Dames, Leah Price and Michael Seidel, and, for making each day a little easier, Nikki Skillman.]

#### Notes

- 1 Alexander Main, *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse* (Edinburgh, London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1873), ix-xi.
- 2 Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954-78), I, xv (hereafter noted as *Letters*).
- 3 V. S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), 102.
- 4 *Letters*, I, xiii.
- 5 Unsigned review from *Saturday Review* (29 May 1858), reprinted in David Carroll (ed.), *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 70.
- 6 Unsigned review from *Saturday Review* (26 February 1859), reprinted in Carroll, 74.
- 7 E. S. Dallas, unsigned review in *The Times* (19 May 1860), reprinted in Carroll, 132.

- 8 *Ibid*, 135, 133.
- 9 See George Eliot's journal, 'How I Came to Write Fiction' (entry dated 6 December 1857), reprinted in *Letters*, II.
- 10 *Westminster Review*, 80 (October 1863), 344.
- 11 John Morley, *Saturday Review* (16 June 1866), 723.
- 12 R. H. Hutton, 'The Humour of Middlemarch' in *Spectator* (14 December 1872), 1582-83, reprinted in Robert H. Tener and Malcolm Woodfield (eds.), *A Victorian Spectator: Uncollected Writings of R. H. Hutton* (Bristol: The Bristol Press, 1989), 200-01.
- 13 Edith Simcox, *Academy*, 4 (1 January 1873), 1-4, reprinted in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *A Century of George Eliot Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965), 78.
- 14 Henry James, 'George Eliot's *Middlemarch*' in the *Galaxy*, 15 (March 1873), 424-428, reprinted in Haight, 81.
- 15 *Ibid*, 86.
- 16 Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (Indianapolis, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1935), 309-336, reprinted in Haight, 206.
- 17 *Ibid*, 210.
- 18 *Letters*, I, xiii.
- 19 George Levine, 'Introduction: George Eliot and the art of realism' in George Levine (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.
- 20 Leslie Stephen, *Cornhill Magazine*, 43 (February 1881), 152-168, reprinted in Haight, 139-40. Leslie Stephen was not the only critic whose assessment of George Eliot's fiction, and her humour, was conspicuously gendered. See also Algernon Charles Swinburne's *A Note on Charlotte Brontë* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1877), 6-53.
- 21 George Saintsbury, *Corrected Impressions: Essays on Victorian Writers* (New York, 1895), 162-172, reprinted in Haight, 167.
- 22 Arnold Bennett in Newman Flower (ed.), *The Journals of Arnold Bennett* (New York: The Viking Press, 1932), 5.
- 23 Eileen Gillooly, *Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 164-204.
- 24 George Scott Christian, 'Comic George Eliot', *George Eliot Review*, 34 (2003), 21.
- 25 *Ibid*, 21.

- 26 George Eliot, 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine', reprinted in Thomas Pinney (ed.), *Essays of George Eliot* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 218.
- 27 Christian, 21.
- 28 *Ibid*, 24.
- 29 See letter dated 24 November 1843
- 30 See letter dated 20 August 1849.
- 31 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine' in Pinney, 218-19.
- 32 *Ibid*, 219. I owe a debt to Eileen Gillooly for the structure of this sentence.
- 33 *Letters*, I, xii.
- 34 *Adam Bede* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 233-34.
- 35 *Adam Bede*, 235.
- 36 *Scenes of Clerical Life* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 26-27.
- 37 *Scenes*, 205; *Scenes*, 214; *Scenes*, 200; *Scenes*, 202; *Scenes*, 20; *The Mill on the Floss* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 75; *Middlemarch* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 48; *Felix Holt: The Radical* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 454.
- 38 See letter dated 8 November 1843.
- 39 Virginia Woolf, *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 (20 November 1919), 657-658, reprinted in Haight, 186.
- 40 *Daniel Deronda* (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 45.
- 41 Mary Ann O'Farrell, 'Provoking George Eliot' in Lauren Berlant (ed.), *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 147.
- 42 *Letters*, I, xiii.
- 43 Hutton, 202. Hutton's italics.