

religion to politics is a natural turn, as anyone who has read Anthony Trollope recognises. Nancy Henry argues that Eliot was not directly politically aware in the way that Trollope was and resolves politics into three key issues for Eliot: war, colonialism and nationalism. Henry addresses *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* as a key document here. *Impressions* has always been less-known and, dare I say, less accessible than most of Eliot's oeuvre. Henry determines ultimately that the politics about which Eliot cared most were the "politics of culture" (157). Of course the politics of culture was and is a gendered one and in "George Eliot and Gender" Kate Flint launches immediately into the key feminist debate, which asks why Eliot's heroines renounce opportunities for a free life. As Flint points out, this is a question Mathilde Blind was posing as long ago as 1883 in her study *George Eliot*. Flint's response is to suggest that Eliot was more interested in the individual than she was in gender and warns that it may be misguided "to assess George Eliot by late twentieth-century – or, indeed, by nineteenth century-feminist standards" (163). Flint concludes that questions about women's power, status and so on cannot be resolved in isolation, rather they are part of a "wider, organically conceived, and hence frequently contradictory whole" (179).

Finally, Kathleen Blake laments, in her overview of Eliot's critical heritage at the end of the *Companion*, that post-seventies ideological and political criticism "has found it very hard to appreciate George Eliot" (222). Perhaps. But not even the most inveterately opposed critic could deny that Eliot's writing generates and continues to generate a lively engagement, and ongoing fascination that has culminated in over 2,000 studies since 1981. And if a range of critics has failed to "appreciate" Eliot, they have still contributed to the appreciation of the value of Eliot scholarship as a useful approach to the social, political and cultural life of that most fascinating of eras, the Victorian age.

Andrew H. Miller

Suddenly, our entrance into the company of canonical authors has become richly attended, the doorways into literary study crowded with guides and companions, as if we were tourists contemplating the sculpture of the past, the ruins of Rome, the galleries of the Uffizi. If the genre of "companion" implies that writings of the past have achieved the status of impressive artifacts, requiring the attendance of an instructive guide, the work at hand sets itself against its own generic expectations. George Levine closes his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* by saying that "the object of this volume is to help lift George Eliot from the frozen condition of literary monument, to make the resistant richness of her art more clearly visible, and to make her superb intelligence and imagination more accessible to readers who have begun to recognize the power and originality of her art" (19). On these terms, *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* amply succeeds.

Collectively its essays animate Eliot's writings, displaying the extraordinary range of their implications, their continuing vivacity. Individual chapters stand out as especially fine. Alexander Welsh's essay quietly channels his learning into sharply discerning observations on the late novels. Don Gray's essay on Eliot's relation to her publishers makes of that topic a richly human study. Nancy Henry shrewdly considers not only the politics implied by Eliot's novels but her explicitly stated opinions on contemporary political issues, especially as they were consequential for her family with Lewes. In her essay on Eliot and philosophy, Suzy Anger is impressively knowledgeable about Victorian philosophical writing and about the longstanding debates it engaged. Levine's introduction shrewdly conveys Eliot's current critical standing, and the closing bibliography allows new readers of Eliot to take the next steps in their reading confidently. Taken together, the essays provide a view of what now matters to us in George Eliot's life and work. Much is made of her life as a scandal (we read the word scandal or scandalous seven times in the first six pages of the introduction); *Romola* receives a surprising amount of attention, as does *Daniel Deronda* and especially the figure of the Princess Alchirisi. No one, on the other hand, makes a case that Eliot's poetry (or her desire to write it) deserves renewed study.

A forum such as this, however, provides the opportunity not only to assess the success of a book on its own terms but to study those terms themselves. What sort of criticism is furthered by this volume? How might readers be guided by its structure to look at Eliot's work? A quick and not entirely misleading answer is provided by the chapter titles. An essay on Eliot's life is followed by one on the early and one on the late novels. The rest of the *Companion* is composed of chapters on George Eliot and philosophy, science, religion, politics, gender, and her publishers before a final chapter considers her critical heritage. On the face of it, this straight-forward organisation shows remarkably little influence of the past couple decades of literary study; a companion to Eliot's work written in the 1960s might as easily have had these chapter heads. (For better or worse, other recent Cambridge companions organise their material more flamboyantly: "Oscar Wilde: The Resurgence of Lying"; "Wilde and the Dandyism of the Senses"; "The Professional Woman Writer"; "Money"; "Austen Cults and Cultures"; and even "Hardy and Critical Theory"). True, one wouldn't have found "George Eliot and Gender" forty years ago, but it's noteworthy that the study is of gender rather than sexuality. And there is no chapter on Eliot and economics or class or commodification. (Does this say more about Eliot or about this "companion"?). Looking beyond the chapter titles, on the evidence of this volume, deconstructive readings of her novels – by Cynthia Chase and Neil Hertz most famously – might never have been written. The effects of New Historicism are felt more strongly – especially the work of Catherine Gallagher – but even here I was struck by how insignificant its impact appeared. Nancy Armstrong's scholarship, for instance, is mentioned in the "Critical Heritage" chapter, but does not play a role in the rest of the book.

There are remarkably few judgements (aesthetic, political, or ethical) made in these essays. Each of the contributors reports on the judgements of others (naturally this is most pervasively so in Kathleen Blake's chapter, "George Eliot: the critical heritage"), but only a few of them offer judgements of their own. Eliot's conception of Dorothea Brooke and, more pointedly, her moral vision at the close of *Deronda* come in for some well-considered criticism by Welsh, and Kate Flint finds the conclusion to *Romola* disappointing, as it apparently leaves Romola in support of patriarchy. Anger's chapter is interestingly distinct in this regard, as traditions of philosophical argumentation provide her with a context within which to evaluate the moral claims implied by Eliot's fiction. "It is easy enough to be swept up in the thoughts of George Eliot's very smart narrator, to side with the 'wisdom of George Eliot' that so appealed to the Victorians. Nevertheless, she seems philosophically confused" in her conception of moral principles and their status (95). (There is an interesting point here to be made about the differences between disciplines and their histories, and thus between kinds of interdisciplinary study. In her essay on Eliot and science, Diana Postlethwaite takes from current science no impulse to criticise Eliot's writing; but the issues Eliot engaged in philosophy are still live and worth contesting). In general, however, these writers have taken their task not to be judging Eliot – they are not in this way critics – but reporting on her books, and their critical reception. Henry's chapter on Eliot and politics, where given the topic, one might expect criticism, is notably dispassionate, for which one can be grateful. At a moment when the hermeneutics of suspicion is pervasive, perhaps the genre of the "companion" is emerging to allow our more appreciative instincts room for development; perhaps also its emergence is new indication that the hermeneutics of suspicion is losing its sway.

To put this point a different way, to different ends, I can say that, for the most part, the authors of these essays have taken their lead from George Eliot, have seen their topics from her point of view. The study here is largely immanent in this way, allowing her to set the framework for discussion. At their best, these essays thus amplify Eliot's own work, providing for it a sympathetic environment in which its consequences and achievements can resonate, intertwining her writing with our own lives more fully. Reading Welsh's more comparative essay however, alerted me to the limitations of this immanent mode of criticism. Certainly sympathetic, Welsh's writing also effortlessly juxtaposes Eliot's late novels with writing by Mill and Dickens, Fielding, Dante, Virgil, and Homer. Of course Welsh is in some sense following Eliot's lead, for she knew the texts to which he refers. But his point is to highlight Eliot's work by contrast with others', rather than by describing her sources. Thus he writes, "Instead of the shelter that marriage affords at the end of Dickens' exposures of modern society, say, these marriages [of the Casaubons and Lydgates] allow that threadlike pressures may swell to the strangulation point in the closeness of two persons living together" (66). Or again, "One way George Eliot's commentary differs from Fielding's is in the reach of her metaphors (though the

reach of the latter's mock heroics are a version of the same thing) (68). Similarly, if more briefly, Don Gray shrewdly devotes a paragraph to comparing Eliot's yearly earnings, as she began working for the *Westminster Review*, with those of Herbert Spencer and Lewes, and Chapman, and his assistants. But such comparative criticism is rare.

The instinct to follow Eliot's lead is a sensible and unsurprising mode of preparing a companion to her writing: readers come to the book, after all, wanting to know more about Eliot and what she made of her environment, the people and institutions around her. As I've suggested, this produces a very sympathetic mode of response and, in this way, is true to Eliot's own highest ethical and artistic impulses. To ask, "But why always George!" might appear faintly ridiculous. But, as my allusion to Chapter XX of *Middlemarch* suggests, in another way, the determination to follow Eliot's lead, to see the world from within the framework she provides, is not faithful to her highest impulses, for she insisted that lives and works be understood comparatively. To understand Dorothea we must understand Causabon, seeing him not only from Dorothea's vantage. The *Cambridge Companion* succeeds so amply in its purposes that I am reluctant to present this thought as a complaint. Indeed, that would be ungrateful, for it is only my sustained engagement with essays of such intelligence, working on an author of such intelligence, that has prompted the thought – a deconstructive one, I'd venture – that this volume is least like Eliot when it most follows her.

RESPONSE

George Levine

When the editors first told me that they proposed to hold a Review Forum around the *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, I was a little surprised. A "companion," after all, is not likely to be a ground breaking or particularly controversial sort of volume. Companions have work to do and their appeal is not to a specialised public but to whatever there may be remaining of the "common reader," which often means, for the most part, undergraduates studying literature for the first time and needing a kind of pony to help them gallop through. An editor's relation to a "companion" is always in some sense compromised by the publisher's requirements.

It's not quite the case, as Andrew Miller suggests, that "suddenly our entrance into the company of canonical authors has become richly attended." The *business* of post World War II literary study has always produced too many volumes of "companions," although the word has now been appropriated for the Cambridge series in which my George Eliot appears. Companions belong to a genre that, as Andrew McNeelie of Blackwells pointed out in an MLA session on "companions," produces about the only critical books that are likely to make money. Publishers like