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**William Baker, ed., *The Letters of George Henry Lewes, vol. III,*
with new *George Eliot Letters*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series,
No. 79 (University of Victoria, B.C., 1999) pp. 189, \$15.50. ISBN 0 920604 65 X**

This helpful, clearly edited supplement to the original two-volume *Letters of George Henry Lewes*, which appeared in 1995, actually contains more letters by George Eliot than from Lewes: 79 by her and 54 by him, of which 92 (47 by him and 45 by her) are published for the first time. As William Baker says in his introduction, the letters cover each phase of their lives: her work with the *Westminster Review*, his with the *Leader*, their meeting and life together, his death and its devastating impact upon her. There are no dramatic discoveries, but the thirteen letters Lewes wrote to Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, friend from childhood, minor poet and Viceroy of India from 1876-80, recently discovered at the India Office Library, shed fresh light on Lewes's later years. Baker claims that these letters reveal Lewes's 'wit' and 'erudition' along with 'the nature of his comradely relationship with Lytton'. The new George Eliot letters provide more details of her even more impressive clarity of mind both in her dealings with John Chapman over the *Westminster* and in her comments on her own work.

Lewes's letters to Lytton are certainly crammed with jokes. Lewes seems to have felt it his duty to lighten the burdens of office in India by lacing each letter with racy (and quite often racial) stories. Some of these, to be fair, are genuinely funny, for instance the Zulu translator of the Bible, groping for a word for God, who settles on the word for 'meat in a state of decomposition', an over-literal rendering of '*the most High*', or the difference between Universalists and Unitarians: 'the first believe God is too good to damn them the second they are too good to be damned'. Lewes shows an endearing ability to laugh at himself, whether resisting being taught Hebrew by Eliot or acknowledging of Napoleon, 'I wish I had his power of silence'. At other times his garrulousness and self-confidence can be annoying, typified in his report of Darwin thinking 'my fundamental criticism of his theory...true and of great importance'.

Eliot's letters, as one might expect, contain fewer jokes. But they do give additional insights into her way of working, particularly those written while she was involved with the *Westminster Review*. She can be seen defending George Lewes's translation of *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences* against Thomas Huxley's review, which she tries to persuade John Chapman not to publish, and attacking an article sent to her as 'feminist rant of the worst kind', 'bombastic...trash'. To 'accept articles of this calibre,' she tells Chapman, 'would be the damnation of the Review. Pray admit nothing that touches on the Position of Woman, that is not sober, well thought out, and expressed in good English', advice that retains a certain validity.

There are a clutch of letters from Eliot about her own work and its translation into French and German. She tells James Fitzjames Stephen, who wanted Dorothea to marry Lydgate, that the ending of *Middlemarch* 'is delicately devised to disappoint everybody'. Congratulating François D'Albert-Durade on his translation of *Adam Bede* into French, she ventures the interesting judgement that 'there is more thought and a profounder veracity in the *Mill* than in *Adam*; but *Adam* is more complete and better balanced'. She is similarly grateful to Emil Lehmann for his accurate rendering of *Middlemarch* into German but reveals how sensitive

she is to any attempt to render her work differently: 'I have my own fastidious choice of words which seem to me the very flesh and blood of my thoughts' so that 'the substitution of other words', even those of another language, comes as 'a sort of flaying'.

Some letters recently acquired by the British Library from Eliot to the Positivist barrister Henry Crompton demonstrate her continuing interest in Positivist doctrines. She preaches like Caleb Garth on the importance of sound work, 'the injury that is done to every member of society, by bad, careless work of all kind'. She also displays a firm grasp of the law of the three stages (theological, metaphysical or negative, and positive): 'I am very anxious,' she tells him, 'that Positivism should turn its sympathetic phase [sic] to the world, and not too exclusively its antagonistic phase'. This is an example both of an Eliot joke (the pun on face and phase) and of her development from attacking existing religious belief to the process of reconstruction.

On a personal level, many of these letters reveal the Leweses' ongoing worries about health: headaches, neuralgia, diarrhoea, 'buzzing and ringing in the right ear' and finally the inflammation of the stomach which was the immediate cause of Lewes's death. There is a moving appendix containing three letters from Charles Lee Lewes written immediately after his father's death but perhaps the best tribute of all comes in the final letter of the volume, in which Lord Lytton writes, 'He had the most omnivorous intellectual appetite and digestion of any man I ever knew'.

These letters, accompanied as they are with extremely helpful and detailed notes (only once inaccurate, calling F. D. Maurice an 'evangelical' when he was, or course, a prominent figure among Anglican liberals), provide a useful supplement to the existing corpus of letters. An 'additional note' mentions a number of even more recent discoveries of George Eliot letters in the Myers and Sidgwick archives at Trinity College, Cambridge. It is exciting to realize that more discoveries could be on the way, leading to more volumes for Baker to edit.

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