

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

The George Eliot Review

English, Department of

1985

GEORGE ELIOT COUNTRY

Amy Clampitt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Clampitt, Amy, "GEORGE ELIOT COUNTRY" (1985). *The George Eliot Review*. 17.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/17>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The George Eliot Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

GEORGE ELIOT COUNTRY

From this Midland scene – glum slag heaps, barge canals, gray sheep, the vivid overlap of wheat field and mustard hillside like out-of-season sunshine, the crabbed silhouette of oak trees (each joint a knot, each knot a principled demurrer: tough, arthritic, stubborn as the character of her own father) – fame, the accretion of a Pyrrhic happiness, had exiled her to London, with its carriages and calling cards, its screaming headaches.

Griff House – dear old Griff, she wistfully apostrophized it – in those days still intact, its secrets kept, has now been grafted to a motel-cum-parking-lot beside the trunk road, whose raw, ungainly seam of noise cuts through the rainy solace of Griff Lane: birdsong, coal smoke, the silvered powderings of blackthorn, a flowering cherry tree's chaste flare, the sludge-born, apoplectic screech of jet aircraft tilting overhead.

The unmapped sources that still fed nostalgia for a rural childhood survive the witherings of retrospect: the look of brickyards, stench of silk mills, scar of coal mines, the knife of class distinction: wall-enclosed, parkland-embosomed, green-lawned Arbury Hall, fan vaulting's stately fakes, the jewel-stomached, authentic shock of Mary Fitton and her ilk portrayed, the view of fish ponds – school and role model of landed-proprietary England.

Born in the year of Peterloo, George Eliot had no illusions as to the expense of such emoluments. Good society (she wrote), floated

on gossamer wings of light irony, required no less than an entire, arduous national existence condensed into unfragrant, deafening factories, cramped into mines, sweating at furnaces, or scattered in lonely houses on the clayey or chalky cornland . . . where Maggie Tulliver, despairing of gentility, ran off to join the Gypsies.

Violets still bloom beside the square-towered parish church where Many Anne was christened; the gashed nave of Coventry fills up with rain (another howling doodlebug of fright hurls itself over); the church – from which, refusing to commit the fiction of a lost belief in One True Body, she stayed away – upholds the fabric in which her fictions, perdurable now, cohere like fact: Lydgate still broods, Grandcourt still threatens and in Mrs. Transome disappointment turns to stone.

– AMY CLAMPITT

Reprinted by permission; c Amy Clampitt.
Originally published in The New Yorker
in December 1984