

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

The George Eliot Review

English, Department of

1986

Respond to the Speech at the Unveiling of George Eliot Statue

Kathleen Adams

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](#)

Adams, Kathleen, "Respond to the Speech at the Unveiling of George Eliot Statue" (1986). *The George Eliot Review*. 53.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/53>

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.

KATHLEEN ADAMS RESPONDED, ON BEHALF OF THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE EARLIER SPEECHES:

The George Eliot Fellowship feels a great sense of achievement today, for, after two years of work and effort, we now have George Eliot in the heart of 'Milby' - the name she chose for Nuneaton. We are proud to have played so large a part in having this fine memorial statue erected as a token of our admiration of a great but warm and human woman. What she would have thought of the statue we have no way of knowing. But, although she was a diffident person, I like to think she would have been warmed and touched that so many people, in all parts of the world, admire her work enough to want to commemorate her in this way.

But she was not always so accepted. In 1854 she began to live with George Henry Lewes although he could not divorce a faithless wife. They both regarded the relationship as a real 'marriage' and remained devoted and faithful until his death 24 years later. But their liaison alienated her friends, and her family here in Nuneaton disowned her. Although she much later became reconciled with her family at Griff House, she died before she had the opportunity to come home and see again that part of England which she loved so much and which inspired a great deal of what she wrote.

The world is very much changed since she was ostracised for living with a man who couldn't marry her, and we see her life with Lewes in a much different light from the Victorian one. Nowadays, her lifestyle would raise few eyebrows.

But I hasten to add that this is not the reason for the statue. We are not saying "Come home, Mary Ann, all is forgiven!" What we are saying is how proud we are of her genius and her undoubted place in world literature, and how very proud we are that she belongs, primarily, here in Nuneaton. Here she was born, and here she grew to love the Warwickshire

countryside. That it meant such a lot to her can be seen only too clearly in her writing. She is said to be the first novelist to write of real people with real homes and real jobs, and her knowledge and understanding of the weaknesses of real people has won her a unique place in English literature. A great deal of that knowledge and compassion began here in Nuneaton.

We are immensely proud of her today, and we trust that, far into the coming centuries when we are all forgotten, she will still be read and remembered with pride.