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Gerry Ashton
EL DIALECTO EN LAS PRIMERAS NOVELAS DE GEORGE ELIOT:
GRAFÍA Y VOCALISMO
by María Fuencisla García - Bermejo Giner
Salamanca, 1991

This is an examination of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* from the point of view of the linguist. The author points to these novels as repositories of examples of dialect speech of the Midlands in the first part of the nineteenth century. That George Eliot was interested in language and languages, and that she had a passion for getting local detail right makes it unthinkable, according to the author, that her use of dialect in these novels could be anything other than authentic. The examples of dialect speech by characters in these novels was applauded for the most part for the fidelity of its representation by George Eliot's contemporaries.

The method employed in the study is to take a vowel as pronounced in RP and to show how many variants on this are uttered in the representations of dialect in the four works of George Eliot. Thus, instead of RP [i] we have examples where the pronunciation is clearly [e], as in *conspiracy*, *erigations*, *pudder*, *regester*, *'rethmetic*, *sperrit*, and so on. The discussion of each of the pronunciation changes is based on information to be found in a wide range of dialect dictionaries. Each is discussed with reference to its appearance in other authors, notably Dickens, Thackeray and the Brontës, its appearance in George Eliot novels is catalogued minutely, and the inconsistencies of use are also noted. Mr. Poyser, for example, once says 'iverybody' and once 'everybody', Mrs. Tulliver says 'iverything' once, and at other times 'everything'. The frequent pronunciation of the word in *The Mill on the Floss* (Luke, Bob Jakin, Mrs. Glegg) is, however, 'iverything'.

This work is impressively documented and will be of interest to the historian of dialect. That it should come from the University of Salamanca is at first sight surprising, but as one reads one realises that the author has a command and even a passion for the language she is discussing. As she rightly points out, George Eliot's use of non-standard patterns in these works is within a tradition in English literature, a tradition to which George Eliot adds abundantly. In George Eliot's case the use of patterns of pronunciation familiar to her from childhood experience might well be seen as an attempt to retain the irrecoverable - the beginning of her writing career coinciding as it did with the rupture of her relations with loved ones.
