
William Baker, ed. *The Letters of George Henry Lewes, Vol. III, with New George Eliot Letters*. English Literary Studies Monograph series, No. 79. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, 1999. 189p.

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This new volume of letters of George Henry Lewes and George Eliot, like the first two, is edited by the indefatigable William Baker, editor of *George Eliot–George Henry Lewes Studies* and the four volumes of the George Eliot notebooks in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library (1976), and author of *George Eliot and Judaism* (1975). In these and other works, Baker has made major contributions to scholarship on various nineteenth-century British writers, but especially to our knowledge of what must surely be one of the most significant English literary partnerships of the nineteenth, or perhaps any other, century. The letters adopt the format of the 9-volume *George Eliot Letters* published by Yale University Press between 1954 and 1978, edited by Gordon S. Haight, and the first two volumes of *The Letters of George Henry Lewes*, edited by Baker and published in 1995 in the University of Victoria monograph series.

With the nine volumes from Yale and Baker's previous two volumes from the University of Victoria Press, one might wonder if there could be much significant correspondence left undiscovered. This volume makes it clear that the answer is, emphatically, yes. No mere catch-all for the odd memo thanking someone for a cheque received or issuing an invitation to dinner, volume 3 of *The Letters of George Henry Lewes* includes lengthy letters from both Lewes and George Eliot, especially from the 1870s, that give insight into the years when their company was eagerly sought by "Society"; years when Eliot's longest and most complex novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, appeared; years in which their increasing financial security was accompanied by declining health. The letters depict all this and much more, including insights into their personalities as they grew older. One set of letters presents the George Henry Lewes who delighted in comic anecdotes. He recorded many of them in his (alas, mostly unpublished) journals — for what audience, I have always wondered. This volume suggests an answer. Perhaps he jotted them down in his journals so he would have them ready for the next letter to his friend Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, who served as Viceroy of India from 1876 to 1880. Baker prints thirteen of Lewes' previously unpublished letters to Lytton, found in the India Office records at the British Library. In several letters, accompanying their discussion of politics and personal matters, Lewes recounts what he calls "my stories" (letter 597), often in exchange for "stories" that Lytton

has sent him. In letter 599, for example, he thanks Lytton for his photograph in his “royal robes” which “threw our maid Elizabeth into ecstasies ‘How very kingly, Lord Lytton looks, Sir.’” This comment reminds Lewes of a story about the maid of a friend seeing Louis Napoleon lying in state “in military uniform and waxed mustachios.” Lewes continues, “Now the strong tap is turned on, let it dribble” – and it does, with four more anecdotes, which, though some may cast doubts on Lewes’ potential as a stand-up comedian, reveal his lively good-humor and sense of fun. Among the other previously unpublished letters is one (manuscript at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) in which Lewes writes to George Smith about a friend who is going blind, to whom Smith has sent a cheque apparently now being returned through Lewes. The different sides of his character are revealed in these letters: serious, sensitive, and kindhearted; lighthearted and full of fun; widely and deeply read.

Although Lewes’ letters alone make the volume well worth reading, an extra bonus comes in the shape of substantial letters from George Eliot, either previously unpublished or at least uncollected. Both she and Lewes wrote to Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant Duff or Mrs. Grant Duff. The former was a contributor to periodicals and served in government positions in India. Eliot is also represented by several previously uncollected letters (published in *George Eliot–George Henry Lewes Studies* in 1992) to Mary Elizabeth Ponsonby, wife of Henry Ponsonby, private secretary to Queen Victoria. Mrs. Ponsonby, a note points out, “initially met George Eliot at the Priory 16 March 1873.” The story of Princess Louise asking to be introduced to George Eliot is well-known; the friendship between Eliot and Mrs. Ponsonby is another example of the way in which the now famous author, once a social pariah, was in the 1870s accepted by women at all levels.

George Eliot’s letters strike one as more intense, more serious in tone than Lewes’ overall. The subjects vary — the health of friends, the pleasure of their new home, Witley Heights, Surrey, musical and literary evenings. Some provide valuable additions to her views on women found in the novels. For instance, in July 1870 in a letter to Mrs. Lytton previously published only in extracts and corrupt copies, she discusses women’s tendency to live

too exclusively in the affections, & though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life.... It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed; because all their teaching has been, that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience which they could confess without being laughed at. (letter 538)

Lest one despair that this short volume might not be followed by another in a few years, an Addenda section after the regular sequence gives eight more letters, four from Lewes and four from Eliot, that came to light too late to be included in the chronological sequence; furthermore, a note directs the reader to 13 Eliot letters and one from Lewes that were published in John Beer's *Providence and Love: Studies in Wordsworth, Channing, Myers, George Eliot, and Ruskin* (1998), just as volume 3 of the GHL letters was in final proof. The addenda include a summary of these letters. One hopes that the University of Victoria Press will continue to support the collecting of letters by George Eliot and George Henry Lewes in this accessible and inexpensive format, for there are undoubtedly more that will come to light in future.