(14) – not that of the shifting relation between passion and duty (*The Mill on the Floss*, book 7, chapter 2), but the question "where the duty of obedience ends, and the duty of resistance begins" (*Romola*, chapter 55). Obedience and resistance do not carry quite the same connotations as respectability and rebellion, and the insinuation of that Eliotean keyword, duty, into both sides of the equation reminds us just how Victorian both Eliots were – how "the *duty* of resistance" might not altogether satisfy our idea of a rebellious writer. George Eliot did indeed create her art out of "a cluster of rebellions, particularly against the reigning social, moral, and aesthetic conventions" (2), but they were not the rebellions of a rebellious person – a Maggie Tulliver.

I don't mean to suggest by all this that we should be asking, Dorothea-like, whether Eliot's fiction is our event only – whether anyone else, holding values different from our own, might also be present; simply that we are disadvantaged in not being able to see the landscape as the Victorians saw it. Eliot's attitudes appear to us as opposing, and apparently irreconcilable, points of view: is she feminist or anti-feminist (Kate Flint's contribution insightfully analyses the "number of ways one might seek to understand [Eliot's] reluctance, or inability, to deliver up unequivocally feminist messages" [161])? is she socially progressive or reactionary? Like Ruth Puttermesser and Rupert Rabeeno, we are copyists painstakingly recreating George Eliot from the evidence we have before us, but she is, and must be, more than an antiquarian's trophy – a great Victorian under glass. Nevertheless we should be sure what it is we are looking at – this landscape a hundred and something years later.

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Judith Johnston

In her fiction George Eliot understood and utilised the idea of a companion more than, perhaps, most other Victorian writers. Her dry, ironic narrator's voice,

suggesting interpretations, directing our thoughts, mocking her characters ("a mans' mind – what there is of it – has always the advantage of being masculine" (*Middlemarch*, chapter 2), perhaps even mocking her readers, has been the pleasant, clever, if somewhat demanding companion of many readers now for a century and a half. Each re-reading, of the novels, the journalism, the letters, the diaries, yields new aspects, new ideas, new interpretations, that make her that most satisfying of companions, someone whose company is a never-ending source of pleasure and intellectual profit.

This newest *Companion*, and there are several earlier ones, brings together a set of erudite and scholarly essays on a range of issues linked, not only to George Eliot's novels, but also to her poetry, journalism and translations. The list of contributors reads like a Who's Who of notable Eliot scholars, from the editor himself to Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Diana Postlethwaite and Alexander Welsh, among others. The contributors have all previously published innovative and often outstanding studies of Eliot and call on the expertise and knowledge generated by those studies. Given the range of expertise, what stands out in this particular *Companion* are the issues or topics addressed: philosophy, science, religion, politics, gender. Levine suggests that separating out these various topics might seem "artificial" (18). He is being too modest here. The separate categories offer the reader a fine way to explore the breadth and depth of Eliot's work. Moreover, the particular issue being addressed in one essay impacts on the next. At the end of the *Companion* Tanya Agathocleous has provided in the "Works Cited" and "Further Reading" an indication of just how eclectic George Eliot studies have become.

While the essays do not strike controversial positions or deprecate their subject, what they do offer, so successfully, are thoughtful, dispassionate studies on a range of key issues which combine sometimes new or at least authoritative assessments with reassessment and reconsideration of the various critical positions of the past. For instance, Levine argues in his opening essay, "George Eliot and the Art of Realism," that although Eliot is often accused of moral complacency and didacticism, she manages to disguise this, to compromise, to resist and to create her art "out of a cluster of rebellions"(2). He argues, indeed, that her realism is an act of rebellion, because it depends on reaction to what she thought of as misrepresentation (7).

The next three essays offer few surprises to the Eliot scholar but are invaluable to any scholar or student approaching Eliot studies for the first time. Bodenheimer's "A Woman of Many Names" is a logical, coherent narrative of Eliot's life making innovative use of the known facts and where surmise does come into play, clearly signalled as such. Josephine McDonagh's assessment of the early novels neatly turns around the issue of "nostalgia" to demonstrate effectively how the rural society, at the end of *Adam Bede* for instance, has made the shift into modernity. Moreover, McDonagh reminds us of Ruskin's view of Eliot's early works in which she is dismissed as a "common railroad-station novelist" (55); for Ruskin then, Eliot's

"fictional world is a modern one" (56). Alexander Welsh addresses the later novels and satisfactorily draws out all the complexity of the post-Romola group. In particular he explores the importance of the genesis of *Romola* as a transitional period in the novelist's career which developed Eliot's epic sense of history and allowed her to discover the way in which distance can enable a social critique much closer to home than post-medieval Florence. With *Felix Holt* she attempts this conceptualisation locally and this experimentation leads to the satisfying sophistication of *Middlemarch*. Late in the *Companion* Donald Gray's account of Eliot's publishing is, like these opening essays, a thorough, carefully researched account of the financial transactions and complicated arrangements which Lewes and Eliot made over the period of their working lives, with the occasional witty, edgy account of uneven exchanges, for instance when John Blackwood offers the Leweses accounts of golf and children and "Lewes and Eliot often reciprocated with accounts of their illnesses" (199).

For me the most engaging essays of the collection are the central five, which the editor has rightly placed at the heart of the collection. Suzie Anger's discussion of Eliot's philosophy focuses on morality, knowledge and truth, which she neatly draws together. Her summary of the philosophies of Comte and Feuerbach in particular is written with useful clarity. And Eliot's theological hermeneutics are shown clearly both within their nineteenth-century context and in relation to modern critical studies. As with all the essayists, however, Eliot herself is often given the last word. An apposite quotation from *Felix Holt* (ch. 46) that the "bare discernment of facts [. . .] must carry a bias" (92) reveals to a nicety the sharpness of Eliot's mind. This quotation resonates in Diana Postlethwaite's account of Eliot and science as does the discussion of truth from Anger's essay. Eliot is appealingly summed up by Postlethwaite as a "fiction-writing, truth-telling, 'natural historian'." The whole complex notion of "truth" and what I think of as its concomitant, "sympathy," are returned to throughout the *Companion*, as recognisable key elements in Eliot's writing and thinking. Postlethwaite argues convincingly that the two opening chapters of *The Mill on the Floss* demonstrate that Eliot "is not abandoning her keen-eyed 'natural history'; but [. . .] dramatically signals she will be expanding her definition of the concept" (112). Finally, Postlethwaite, using scientific terms, shows how *Middlemarch* is a dissection of a social organism, "far beyond the simple empiricism of *Adam Bede*."

Barry Qualls's "George Eliot and Religion" is a natural "companion" to the preceding essay. Science and Religion are fraught narratives of the Victorian age and the history of Eliot's engagement with religion is, argues Qualls, "a history of Victorian England's engagement with God and the Bible" (120). Where Angers gave us Comte and Feuerbach, in this essay Eliot's engagement with Strauss is discussed in detail. Indeed, the *Companion* offers Eliot's translations of Strauss and Feuerbach the kind of detailed assessment they have long needed. Their impact, says Qualls, was to put sophisticated ideas into circulation in England. Turning from

religion to politics is a natural turn, as anyone who has read Anthony Trollope recognises. Nancy Henry argues that Eliot was not directly politically aware in the way that Trollope was and resolves politics into three key issues for Eliot: war, colonialism and nationalism. Henry addresses *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* as a key document here. *Impressions* has always been less-known and, dare I say, less accessible than most of Eliot's oeuvre. Henry determines ultimately that the politics about which Eliot cared most were the "politics of culture" (157). Of course the politics of culture was and is a gendered one and in "George Eliot and Gender" Kate Flint launches immediately into the key feminist debate, which asks why Eliot's heroines renounce opportunities for a free life. As Flint points out, this is a question Mathilde Blind was posing as long ago as 1883 in her study *George Eliot.* Flint's response is to suggest that Eliot was more interested in the individual than she was in gender and warns that it may be misguided "to assess George Eliot by late twentieth-century – or, indeed, by nineteenth century-feminist standards" (163). Flint concludes that questions about women's power, status and so on cannot be resolved in isolation, rather they are part of a "wider, organically conceived, and hence frequently contradictory whole" (179).

Finally, Kathleen Blake laments, in her overview of Eliot's critical heritage at the end of the *Companion*, that post-seventies ideological and political criticism "has found it very hard to appreciate George Eliot" (222). Perhaps. But not even the most inveterately opposed critic could deny that Eliot's writing generates and continues to generate a lively engagement, and ongoing fascination that has culminated in over 2,000 studies since 1981. And if a range of critics has failed to "appreciate" Eliot, they have still contributed to the appreciation of the value of Eliot scholarship as a useful approach to the social, political and cultural life of that most fascinating of eras, the Victorian age.

Andrew H. Miller

Suddenly, our entrance into the company of canonical authors has become richly attended, the doorways into literary study crowded with guides and companions, as if we were tourists contemplating the sculpture of the past, the ruins of Rome, the galleries of the Uffizi. If the genre of "companion" implies that writings of the past have achieved the status of impressive artifacts, requiring the attendance of an instructive guide, the work at hand sets itself against its own generic expectations. George Levine closes his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* by saying that "the object of this volume is to help lift George Eliot from the frozen condition of literary monument, to make the resistant richness of her art more clearly visible, and to make her superb intelligence and imagination more accessible to readers who have begun to recognize the power and originality of her art" (19). On these terms, *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* amply succeeds.