

**Classic Poetry Series**

**George Eliot**

**- 19 poems -**

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## **George Eliot (22 November 1819 - 22 December 1880)**

Mary Anne (alternatively Mary Ann or Marian) Evans, better known by her pen name George Eliot, was an English novelist, journalist and translator, and one of the leading writers of the Victorian era. She is the author of seven novels, including *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871–72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), most of them set in provincial England and well known for their realism and psychological insight.

She used a male pen name, she said, to ensure her works would be taken seriously. Female authors were published under their own names during Eliot's life, but she wanted to escape the stereotype of women only writing lighthearted romances. An additional factor in her use of a pen name may have been a desire to shield her private life from public scrutiny and to prevent scandals attending her relationship with the married George Henry Lewes, with whom she lived for over 20 years.

Her 1872 work, *Middlemarch*, has been described as the greatest novel in the English language by Martin Amis and Julian Barnes.

### Life

#### Early Life and Education

Mary Anne Evans was the third child of Robert Evans (1773–1849) and Christiana Evans (née Pearson) (1788–1836), the daughter of a local farmer. Mary Anne's name was sometimes shortened to Marian. Her full siblings were Christiana, known as Chrissey (1814–59), Isaac (1816–1890), and twin brothers who survived a few days in March 1821. She also had a half-brother, Robert (1802–64), and half-sister, Fanny (1805–82), from her father's previous marriage to Harriet Poynton (?1780–1809). Robert Evans, of Welsh ancestry, was the manager of the Arbury Hall Estate for the Newdigate family in Warwickshire, and Mary Anne was born on the estate at South Farm. In early 1820 the family moved to a house named Griff, between Nuneaton and Bedworth.

The young Evans was obviously intelligent and a voracious reader. Because she was not considered physically beautiful, and thus not thought to have much chance of marriage, and because of her intelligence, her father invested in an education not often afforded women. From ages five to nine, she boarded with her sister Chrissey at Miss Latham's school in Attleborough, from ages nine to thirteen at Mrs. Wallington's school in Nuneaton, and from ages thirteen to sixteen at Miss Franklin's school in Coventry. At Mrs. Wallington's school, she was taught by the evangelical Maria Lewis—to whom

her earliest surviving letters are addressed. In the religious atmosphere of the Miss Franklin's school, Evans was exposed to a quiet, disciplined belief opposed to evangelicalism.

After age sixteen, Eliot had little formal education. Thanks to her father's important role on the estate, she was allowed access to the library of Arbury Hall, which greatly aided her self-education and breadth of learning. Her classical education left its mark; Christopher Stray has observed that "George Eliot's novels draw heavily on Greek literature (only one of her books can be printed correctly without the use of a Greek typeface), and her themes are often influenced by Greek tragedy". Her frequent visits to the estate also allowed her to contrast the wealth in which the local landowner lived with the lives of the often much poorer people on the estate, and different lives lived in parallel would reappear in many of her works. The other important early influence in her life was religion. She was brought up within a narrow low church Anglican family, but at that time the Midlands was an area with a growing number of religious dissenters.

#### Move to Coventry

In 1836 her mother died and Evans (then 16) returned home to act as housekeeper, but she continued correspondence with her tutor Maria Lewis. When she was 21, her brother Isaac married and took over the family home, so Evans and her father moved to Foleshill near Coventry. The closeness to Coventry society brought new influences, most notably those of Charles and Cara Bray. Charles Bray had become rich as a ribbon manufacturer and had used his wealth in building schools and other philanthropic causes. Evans, who had been struggling with religious doubts for some time, became intimate friends with the progressive, free-thinking Brays, whose home was a haven for people who held and debated radical views. The people whom the young woman met at the Brays' house included Robert Owen, Herbert Spencer, Harriet Martineau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Through this society, Evans was introduced to more liberal theologies, and writers such as David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, who cast doubt on the literal veracity of Biblical stories. In fact, her first major literary work was translating into English Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1846), which she completed after it had been begun by another member of the Rosehill circle.

When Evans began to question her religious faith, her father threatened to throw her out, although that did not happen. Instead, she respectfully attended church for years and continued to keep house for him until his death in 1849, when she was 30. Five days after her father's funeral, she travelled to Switzerland with the Brays. She decided to stay in Geneva alone, living first on the lake at Plongeon (near the present United Nations buildings) and then at the Rue de Chanoines (now the Rue de la Pelisserie) with François and Juliet d'Albert Durade on the second floor ("one feels in a downy nest high up in a good old tree"). Her stay is recorded by a plaque on the building. She read avidly and took long walks amongst a natural environment that inspired her greatly. François painted a portrait of her.

#### Move to London and editorship of the Westminster Review

On her return to England the following year (1850), she moved to London with the intent of becoming a writer and calling herself Marian Evans. She stayed at the house of John Chapman, the radical publisher whom she had met at Rosehill (near Coventry) and who had printed her translation. Chapman had recently bought the campaigning, left-wing journal *The Westminster Review*, and Evans became its assistant editor in 1851. Although Chapman was the named editor, it was Evans who did most of the work in running the journal, contributing many essays and reviews, from the January, 1852 number until the dissolution of her arrangement with Chapman in the first half of 1854.

Women writers were not uncommon at the time, but Evans's role at the head of a literary enterprise was. She was considered to have an ill-favoured appearance, and she formed a number of embarrassing, unreciprocated emotional attachments, including that to her employer, the married

Chapman, and Herbert Spencer.

#### Relationship with George Lewes

The philosopher and critic George Henry Lewes met Evans in 1851, and by 1854 they had decided to live together. Lewes was married to Agnes Jervis, but they had agreed to have an open marriage, and in addition to the three children they had together, Agnes had also had four children by Thornton Leigh Hunt. Since Lewes was named on the birth certificates as the father of these children despite knowing this to be false, and was therefore considered complicit in adultery, he was not able to divorce Agnes. In July 1854, Lewes and Evans travelled to Weimar and Berlin together for the purpose of research. Before going to Germany, Evans continued her interest in theological work with a translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, and while abroad she wrote essays and worked on her translation of Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*, which she completed in 1856, but which was not published in her life-time.

The trip to Germany also served as a honeymoon as Evans and Lewes now considered themselves married, with Evans calling herself Marian Evans Lewes, and referring to Lewes as her husband. It was not unusual for men and women in Victorian society to have affairs; Charles Bray, John Chapman, Friedrich Engels, and Wilkie Collins all had affairs, though more discreetly than Lewes and Evans. What was scandalous was their open admission of the relationship.

#### First Publication

While continuing to contribute pieces to the *Westminster Review*, Evans had resolved to become a novelist, and she set out a manifesto for herself in one of her last essays for the *Review*, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856). The essay criticised the trivial and ridiculous plots of contemporary fiction by women. In other essays she praised the realism of novels written in Europe at the time, and an emphasis placed on realistic storytelling would become clear throughout her subsequent fiction. She also adopted a new nom-de-plume, the one for which she would become best known: George Eliot.

In 1858 (when she was 39) *Amos Barton*, the first of the *Scenes of Clerical Life*, was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* and, along with the other *Scenes*, was well received. Her first complete novel, published in 1859, was *Adam Bede* and was an instant success, but it prompted an intense interest in who this new author might be. *Scenes of Clerical Life* was widely believed to have been written by a country parson or perhaps the wife of a parson. With the release of the incredibly popular *Adam Bede*, speculation increased markedly, and there was even a pretender to the authorship, one Joseph Liggins. In the end, the real George Eliot stepped forward: Marian Evans Lewes admitted she was the author. The revelations about Eliot's private life surprised and shocked many of her admiring readers, but this apparently did not affect her popularity as a novelist. Eliot's relationship with Lewes afforded her the encouragement and stability she so badly needed to write fiction, and to ease her self-doubt, but it would be some time before they were accepted into polite society. Acceptance was finally confirmed in 1877, when they were introduced to Princess Louise, the daughter of Queen Victoria. The queen herself was an avid reader of all of George Eliot's novels, being so impressed with *Adam Bede* that she commissioned the artist Edward Henry Corbould to paint scenes from the book.

After the popularity of *Adam Bede*, she continued to write popular novels for the next fifteen years. Within a year of completing *Adam Bede*, she finished *The Mill on the Floss*, inscribing the manuscript: "To my beloved husband, George Henry Lewes, I give this MS. of my third book, written in the sixth year of our life together, at Holly Lodge, South Field, Wandsworth, and finished 21 March 1860."

Her last novel was *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876, whereafter she and Lewes moved to Witley, Surrey; but by this time Lewes's health was failing

and he died two years later on 30 November 1878. Eliot spent the next two years editing Lewes's final work *Life and Mind* for publication, and she found solace with John Walter Cross, a Scottish commission agent whose mother had recently died.

#### Marriage to John Cross and Death

On 16 May 1880 Eliot courted controversy once more by marrying a man twenty years younger than herself, and again changing her name, this time to Mary Anne Cross. The legal marriage at least pleased her brother Isaac, who had broken off relations with his sister when she had begun to live with Lewes, but now sent congratulations. John Cross inexplicably jumped or fell from their hotel balcony into the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy during their honeymoon. Cross survived and they returned to England. The couple moved to a new house in Chelsea but Eliot fell ill with a throat infection. This, coupled with the kidney disease she had been afflicted with for the previous few years, led to her death on 22 December 1880 at the age of 61.

Eliot was not buried in Westminster Abbey because of her denial of the Christian faith and her "irregular" though monogamous life with Lewes. She was interred in Highgate Cemetery (East), Highgate, London in the area reserved for religious dissenters or agnostics, next to George Henry Lewes; Karl Marx's memorial is nearby. In 1980, on the centenary of her death, a memorial stone was established for her in the Poets' Corner.

Several key buildings in her birthplace of Nuneaton are named after her or titles of her novels. For example The George Eliot School (Previously George Eliot Community School) and Middlemarch Junior School. In 1948, Nuneaton Emergency Hospital was named George Eliot Hospital in Eliot's honour. George Eliot Road, in Foleshill, Coventry was named in her honour. Nuneaton motor cycle manufacturer John Birch named his motor cycles after her.

A statue of Eliot is in Newdegate Street, Nuneaton, and Nuneaton Museum & Art Gallery has a display of material related to her.

#### Literary Assessment

Throughout her career, Eliot wrote with a politically astute pen. From *Adam Bede* to *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, Eliot presented the cases of social outsiders and small-town persecution. *Felix Holt, the Radical* and *The Legend of Jubal* were overtly political, and political crisis is at the heart of *Middlemarch*, in which she presents the stories of a number of denizens of a small English town on the eve of the Reform Bill of 1832; the novel is notable for its deep psychological insight and sophisticated character portraits. The roots of her realist philosophy can be found in her review of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* in *Westminster Review* in 1856.

Readers in the Victorian era particularly praised her books for their depictions of rural society, for which she drew on her own early experiences, and she shared with Wordsworth the belief that there was much interest and importance in the mundane details of ordinary country lives. Eliot did not, however, confine herself to her bucolic roots. *Romola*, an historical novel set in late 15th century Florence and touching on the lives of several real persons such as the priest Girolamo Savonarola, displays her wider reading and interests. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, Eliot made a foray into verse, creating a work whose initial popularity has not endured.

The religious elements in her fiction also owe much to her upbringing, with the experiences of Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss* sharing many similarities with the young Mary Anne Evans's own development. When *Silas Marner* is persuaded that his alienation from the church means also his alienation from society, the author's life is again mirrored with her refusal to attend church. She was at her most autobiographical in *Looking Backwards*, part of her final printed work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. By the time of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's sales were falling off, and she faded from public view to some degree. This was not helped by the biography written by her husband after her death, which portrayed a wonderful, almost saintly,

woman totally at odds with the scandalous life people knew she had led. In the 20th century she was championed by a new breed of critics, most notably by Virginia Woolf, who called *Middlemarch* "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people". The various film and television adaptations of Eliot's books have re-introduced her to the wider reading public.

#### Works:

##### Novels

Adam Bede, 1859  
The Mill on the Floss, 1860  
Silas Marner, 1861  
Romola, 1863  
Felix Holt, the Radical, 1866  
Middlemarch, 1871–72  
Daniel Deronda, 1876

##### Poetry

The Spanish Gypsy (a dramatic poem), 1868  
Agatha, 1869  
Armgart, 1871  
Stradivarius, 1873  
The Legend of Jubal, 1874  
Arion, 1874  
A Minor Prophet, 1874  
A College Breakfast Party, 1879  
The Death of Moses, 1879  
From a London Drawing Room  
Count That Day Lost  
I Grant You Ample Leave

##### Other

Digital facsimile of manuscript "Quarry for Middlemarch", MS Lowell 13, Houghton Library, Harvard University  
Translation of "The Life of Jesus Critically Examined" Volume 2 by David Strauss, 1846  
Translation of "The Essence of Christianity" by Ludwig Feuerbach, 1854  
"Three Months in Weimar", 1855  
"Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", 1856  
"The Natural History of German Life", 1856  
Scenes of Clerical Life, 1857  
The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton  
Mr Gilfil's Love Story  
Janet's Repentance  
The Lifted Veil, 1859  
Brother Jacob, 1864  
"The Influence of Rationalism", 1865  
Impressions of Theophrastus Such, 1879  
Review of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* in *Westminster Review* April 1856.

## **Ay De Mi**

O bird, that used to press,  
Thy head against my cheek  
With touch that seem'd to speak,  
And ask a tender 'yes' -  
Ay de mi, my bird:  
Ay de mi, my bird, my bird -  
Ay de mi, my bird.

O tender downy breast,  
And warmly beating heart,  
That beating seem'd a part  
Of me who gave it rest -  
Ay de mi, my bird:  
Ay de mi, my bird, my bird -  
Ay de mi, my bird.

George Eliot

## **Blue Wings**

Warm whisp'ring through the slender olive leaves  
Came to me a gentle sound,  
Whis'pring of a secret found  
In the clear sunshine 'mid the golden sheaves:

Said it was sleeping for me in the morn,  
Called it gladness, called it joy,  
Drew me on 'Come hither, boy.'  
To where the blue wings rested on the corn.

I thought the gentle sound had whispered true  
Thought the little heaven mine,  
Leaned to clutch the thing divine,  
And saw the blue wings melt within the blue!

George Eliot

## **Bright, o bright Fedalma**

Maiden crowned with glossy blackness,  
Lithe as panther forest-roaming,  
Long-armed Naiad when she dances  
On a stream of ether floating,  
Bright, o bright Fedalma!

Form all curves like softness drifted,  
Wave-kissed marble roundly dimpling,  
Far-off music slowly winged,  
Gently rising, gently sinking,  
Bright, o bright Fedalma!

Pure as rain-tear on a rose-leaf,  
Cloud high born in noonday spotless  
Sudden perfect like the dew-bead,  
Gem of earth and sky begotten,  
Bright, o bright Fedalma!

Beauty has no mortal father,  
Holy light her form engendered,  
Out of tremor yearning, gladness,  
Presage sweet, and joy remembered,  
Child of light! Child of light!  
Child of light, Fedalma!

George Eliot

## Brother and Sister

### I.

I cannot choose but think upon the time  
When our two lives grew like two buds that kiss  
At lightest thrill from the bee's swinging chime,  
Because the one so near the other is.

He was the elder and a little man  
Of forty inches, bound to show no dread,  
And I the girl that puppy-like now ran,  
Now lagged behind my brother's larger tread.

I held him wise, and when he talked to me  
Of snakes and birds, and which God loved the best,  
I thought his knowledge marked the boundary  
Where men grew blind, though angels knew the rest.

If he said 'Hush!' I tried to hold my breath;  
Wherever he said 'Come!' I stepped in faith.

### II.

Long years have left their writing on my brow,  
But yet the freshness and the dew-fed beam  
Of those young mornings are about me now,  
When we two wandered toward the far-off stream

With rod and line. Our basket held a store  
Baked for us only, and I thought with joy  
That I should have my share, though he had more,  
Because he was the elder and a boy.

The firmaments of daisies since to me  
Have had those mornings in their opening eyes,  
The bunched cowslip's pale transparency  
Carries that sunshine of sweet memories,

And wild-rose branches take their finest scent  
From those blest hours of infantine content.

### III.

Our mother bade us keep the trodden ways,  
Stroked down my tippet, set my brother's frill,  
Then with the benediction of her gaze  
Clung to us lessening, and pursued us still

Across the homestead to the rookery elms,  
Whose tall old trunks had each a grassy mound,  
So rich for us, we counted them as realms  
With varied products: here were earth-nuts found,

And here the Lady-fingers in deep shade;  
Here sloping toward the Moat the rushes grew,  
The large to split for pith, the small to braid;  
While over all the dark rooks cawing flew,

And made a happy strange solemnity,  
A deep-toned chant from life unknown to me.

IV.

Our meadow-path had memorable spots:  
One where it bridged a tiny rivulet,  
Deep hid by tangled blue Forget-me-nots;  
And all along the waving grasses met

My little palm, or nodded to my cheek,  
When flowers with upturned faces gazing drew  
My wonder downward, seeming all to speak  
With eyes of souls that dumbly heard and knew.

Then came the copse, where wild things rushed unseen,  
And black-scathed grass betrayed the past abode  
Of mystic gypsies, who still lurked between  
Me and each hidden distance of the road.

A gypsy once had startled me at play,  
Blotting with her dark smile my sunny day.

V.

Thus rambling we were schooled in deepest lore,  
And learned the meanings that give words a soul,  
The fear, the love, the primal passionate store,  
Whose shaping impulses make manhood whole.

Those hours were seed to all my after good;  
My infant gladness, through eye, ear, and touch,  
Took easily as warmth a various food  
To nourish the sweet skill of loving much.

For who in age shall roam the earth and find  
Reasons for loving that will strike out love  
With sudden rod from the hard year-pressed mind?  
Were reasons sown as thick as stars above,

'Tis love must see them, as the eye sees light:  
Day is but Number to the darkened sight.

VI.

Our brown canal was endless to my thought;  
And on its banks I sat in dreamy peace,

Unknowing how the good I loved was wrought,  
Untroubled by the fear that it would cease.

Slowly the barges floated into view  
Rounding a grassy hill to me sublime  
With some Unknown beyond it, whither flew  
The parting cuckoo toward a fresh spring time.

The wide-arched bridge, the scented elder-flowers,  
The wondrous watery rings that died too soon,  
The echoes of the quarry, the still hours  
With white robe sweeping-on the shadeless noon,

Were but my growing self, are part of me,  
My present Past, my root of piety.

VII.

Those long days measured by my little feet  
Had chronicles which yield me many a text;  
Where irony still finds an image meet  
Of full-grown judgments in this world perplex.

One day my brother left me in high charge,  
To mind the rod, while he went seeking bait,  
And bade me, when I saw a nearing barge,  
Snatch out the line lest he should come too late.

Proud of the task, I watched with all my might  
For one whole minute, till my eyes grew wide,  
Till sky and earth took on a strange new light  
And seemed a dream-world floating on some tide -

A fair pavilioned boat for me alone  
Bearing me onward through the vast unknown.

VIII.

But sudden came the barge's pitch-black prow,  
Nearer and angrier came my brother's cry,  
And all my soul was quivering fear, when lo!  
Upon the imperilled line, suspended high,

A silver perch! My guilt that won the prey,  
Now turned to merit, had a guerdon rich  
Of songs and praises, and made merry play,  
Until my triumph reached its highest pitch

When all at home were told the wondrous feat,  
And how the little sister had fished well.  
In secret, though my fortune tasted sweet,  
I wondered why this happiness befell.

'The little lass had luck,' the gardener said:  
And so I learned, luck was with glory wed.

IX.

We had the self-same world enlarged for each  
By loving difference of girl and boy:  
The fruit that hung on high beyond my reach  
He plucked for me, and oft he must employ

A measuring glance to guide my tiny shoe  
Where lay firm stepping-stones, or call to mind  
'This thing I like my sister may not do,  
For she is little, and I must be kind.'

Thus boyish Will the nobler mastery learned  
Where inward vision over impulse reigns,  
Widening its life with separate life discerned,  
A Like unlike, a Self that self restrains.

His years with others must the sweeter be  
For those brief days he spent in loving me.

X.

His sorrow was my sorrow, and his joy  
Sent little leaps and laughs through all my frame;  
My doll seemed lifeless and no girlish toy  
Had any reason when my brother came.

I knelt with him at marbles, marked his fling  
Cut the ringed stem and make the apple drop,  
Or watched him winding close the spiral string  
That looped the orbits of the humming top.

Grasped by such fellowship my vagrant thought  
Ceased with dream-fruit dream-wishes to fulfil;  
My æry-picturing fantasy was taught  
Subjection to the harder, truer skill

That seeks with deeds to grave a thought-tracked line,  
And by 'What is,' 'What will be' to define.

XI.

School parted us; we never found again  
That childish world where our two spirits mingled  
Like scents from varying roses that remain  
One sweetness, nor can evermore be singled.

Yet the twin habit of that early time

Lingered for long about the heart and tongue:  
We had been natives of one happy clime  
And its dear accent to our utterance clung.

Till the dire years whose awful name is Change  
Had grasped our souls still yearning in divorce,  
And pitiless shaped them in two forms that range  
Two elements which sever their life's course.

But were another childhood-world my share,  
I would be born a little sister there.

George Eliot

## **Came a pretty maid**

Came a pretty maid  
By the moon's pure light . . .  
Loved me well, she said,  
Eyes with tears all bright,  
A pretty maid.

But too late she strayed,  
Moonlight pure was there . . .  
She was nought but shade,  
Hiding the more fair,  
The heav'nly maid.

George Eliot

## Count That Day Lost

If you sit down at set of sun  
And count the acts that you have done,  
And, counting, find  
One self-denying deed, one word  
That eased the heart of him who heard,  
One glance most kind  
That fell like sunshine where it went --  
Then you may count that day well spent.

But if, through all the livelong day,  
You've cheered no heart, by yea or nay --  
If, through it all  
You've nothing done that you can trace  
That brought the sunshine to one face--  
No act most small  
That helped some soul and nothing cost --  
Then count that day as worse than lost.

George Eliot

## **Day is dying**

Day is dying! Float, o song,  
Down the westward river,  
Requiem chanting to the Day,  
Day, the mighty giver!

Pierced by shafts of Time he bleeds,  
Melted rubies sending  
Through the river and the sky,  
Earth and heaven blending.

All the long-drawn earthy banks  
Up to cloudland lifting:  
Slow between them drifts the swan  
'Twixt two heavens drifting,

Wings half open like a flower.  
In by deeper flushing,  
Neck and breast as virgin's pure  
Virgin proudly blushing.

Day is dying! Float, o swan,  
Down the ruby river,  
Follow, song, in requiem  
To the mighty Giver!

George Eliot

## God Needs Antonio

Your soul was lifted by the wings today  
Hearing the master of the violin:  
You praised him, praised the great Sabastian too  
Who made that fine Chaconne; but did you think  
Of old Antonio Stradivari? -him  
Who a good century and a half ago  
Put his true work in that brown instrument  
And by the nice adjustment of its frame  
Gave it responsive life, continuous  
With the master's finger-tips and perfected  
Like them by delicate rectitude of use.  
That plain white-aproned man, who stood at work  
Patient and accurate full fourscore years,  
Cherished his sight and touch by temperance,  
And since keen sense is love of perfectness  
Made perfect violins, the needed paths  
For inspiration and high mastery.

No simpler man than he; he never cried,  
"why was I born to this monotonous task  
Of making violins?" or flung them down  
To suit with hurling act well-hurled curse  
At labor on such perishable stuff.  
Hence neighbors in Cremona held him dull,  
Called him a slave, a mill-horse, a machine.

Naldo, a painter of eclectic school,  
Knowing all tricks of style at thirty-one,  
And weary of them, while Antonio  
At sixty-nine wrought placidly his best,  
Making the violin you heard today -  
Naldo would tease him oft to tell his aims.  
"Perhaps thou hast some pleasant vice to feed -  
the love of louis d'ors in heaps of four,  
Each violin a heap - I've naught to blame;  
My vices waste such heaps. But then, why work  
With painful nicety?"

Antonio then:  
"I like the gold - well, yes - but not for meals.  
And as my stomach, so my eye and hand,  
And inward sense that works along with both,  
Have hunger that can never feed on coin.  
Who draws a line and satisfies his soul,  
Making it crooked where it should be straight?  
Antonio Stradivari has an eye  
That winces at false work and loves the true."  
Then Naldo: "'Tis a petty kind of fame  
At best, that comes of making violins;  
And saves no masses, either. Thou wilt go  
To purgatory none the less."

But he:  
"Twere purgatory here to make them ill;  
And for my fame - when any master holds  
'Twixt chin and hand a violin of mine,  
He will be glad that Stradivari lived,  
Made violins, and made them of the best.  
The masters only know whose work is good:  
They will choose mine, and while God gives them skill  
I give them instruments to play upon,  
God choosing me to help him.

"What! Were God  
at fault for violins, thou absent?"

"Yes;  
He were at fault for Stradivari's work."

"Why, many hold Giuseppe's violins  
As good as thine."

"May be: they are different.  
His quality declines: he spoils his hand  
With over-drinking. But were his the best,  
He could not work for two. My work is mine,  
And, heresy or not, if my hand slacked  
I should rob God - since his is fullest good -  
Leaving a blank instead of violins.  
I say, not God himself can make man's best  
Without best men to help him.

'Tis God gives skill,  
But not without men's hands: he could not make  
Antonio Stradivari's violins  
Without Antonio. Get thee to thy easel."

George Eliot

## **I Grant You Ample Leave**

"I grant you ample leave  
To use the hoary formula 'I am'  
Naming the emptiness where thought is not;  
But fill the void with definition, 'I'  
Will be no more a datum than the words  
You link false inference with, the 'Since' & 'so'  
That, true or not, make up the atom-whirl.  
Resolve your 'Ego', it is all one web  
With vibrant ether clotted into worlds:  
Your subject, self, or self-assertive 'I'  
Turns nought but object, melts to molecules,  
Is stripped from naked Being with the rest  
Of those rag-garments named the Universe.  
Or if, in strife to keep your 'Ego' strong  
You make it weaver of the etherial light,  
Space, motion, solids & the dream of Time --  
Why, still 'tis Being looking from the dark,  
The core, the centre of your consciousness,  
That notes your bubble-world: sense, pleasure, pain,  
What are they but a shifting otherness,  
Phantasmal flux of moments? --"

George Eliot

## **In a London Drawingroom**

The sky is cloudy, yellowed by the smoke.  
For view there are the houses opposite  
Cutting the sky with one long line of wall  
Like solid fog: far as the eye can stretch  
Monotony of surface & of form  
Without a break to hang a guess upon.  
No bird can make a shadow as it flies,  
For all is shadow, as in ways o'erhung  
By thickest canvass, where the golden rays  
Are clothed in hemp. No figure lingering  
Pauses to feed the hunger of the eye  
Or rest a little on the lap of life.  
All hurry on & look upon the ground,  
Or glance unmarking at the passers by  
The wheels are hurrying too, cabs, carriages  
All closed, in multiplied identity.  
The world seems one huge prison-house & court  
Where men are punished at the slightest cost,  
With lowest rate of colour, warmth & joy.

George Eliot

## Mid My Gold-Brown Curls

'Mid my gold-brown curls  
    There twined a silver hair:  
I plucked it idly out  
And scarcely knew 'twas there.  
Coiled in my velvet sleeve it lay  
And like a serpent hissed:  
"Me thou canst pluck & fling away,  
    One hair is lightly missed;  
But how on that near day  
When all the wintry army muster in array?"

George Eliot

## **Roses**

You love the roses - so do I. I wish  
The sky would rain down roses, as they rain  
From off the shaken bush. Why will it not?  
Then all the valley would be pink and white  
And soft to tread on. They would fall as light  
As feathers, smelling sweet; and it would be  
Like sleeping and like waking, all at once!

George Eliot

## **Spring comes hither**

Spring comes hither  
Buds the rose . . .  
Roses wither  
Sweet spring goes . . .  
O ja là  
O ja là . . .  
Would she carry me.

Summer soars  
Wide-wing'd day . . .  
White light pours  
Flies away . . .  
O ja là  
O ja là . . .  
Would he carry me.

Soft winds blow  
Westward borne . . .  
Onward go  
Towards the morn  
O ja là  
O ja là . . .  
Would they carry me.

Sweet birds sing  
O'er the graves  
Then take wing  
O'er the waves  
O ja là  
O ja là . . .  
Would they carry me.

George Eliot

## Sweet Endings Come and Go, Love

"La noche buena se viene,  
La noche buena se va,  
Y nosotros nos iremos  
Y no volveremos mas."  
-- Old Villancico.

Sweet evenings come and go, love,  
They came and went of yore:  
This evening of our life, love,  
Shall go and come no more.

When we have passed away, love,  
All things will keep their name;  
But yet no life on earth, love,  
With ours will be the same.

The daisies will be there, love,  
The stars in heaven will shine:  
I shall not feel thy wish, love,  
Nor thou my hand in thine.

A better time will come, love,  
And better souls be born:  
I would not be the best, love,  
To leave thee now forlorn.

George Eliot

## **Sweet Springtime**

It was in the prime  
Of the sweet springtime  
In the linnet's throat  
Trembled the love note,  
And the love-stirred air  
Thrilled the blossoms there.  
Little shadows danced,  
Each a tiny elf  
Happy in large light  
And the thinnest self.

It was but a minute  
In a far-off spring,  
But each gentle thing,  
Sweetly wooing linnet,  
Soft thrilled hawthorn tree,  
Happy shadowy elf,  
With the thinnest self,  
Live on still in me.  
It was in the prime  
Of the past springtime!

George Eliot

## The Choir Invisible

Oh, may I join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence; live  
In pulses stirred to generosity,  
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end with self,  
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,  
And with their mild persistence urge men's search  
To vaster issues. So to live is heaven:  
To make undying music in the world,  
Breathing a beauteous order that controls  
With growing sway the growing life of man.  
So we inherit that sweet purity  
For which we struggled, failed, and agonized  
With widening retrospect that bred despair.  
Rebellious flesh that would not be subdued,  
A vicious parent shaming still its child,  
Poor anxious penitence, is quick dissolved;  
Its discords, quenched by meeting harmonies,  
Die in the large and charitable air,  
And all our rarer, better, truer self  
That sobbed religiously in yearning song,  
That watched to ease the burden of the world,  
Laboriously tracing what must be,  
And what may yet be better, -- saw within  
A worthier image for the sanctuary,  
And shaped it forth before the multitude,  
Divinely human, raising worship so  
To higher reverence more mixed with love, --  
That better self shall live till human Time  
Shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky  
Be gathered like a scroll within the tomb  
Unread forever. This is life to come, --  
Which martyred men have made more glorious  
For us who strive to follow. May I reach  
That purest heaven, -- be to other souls  
The cup of strength in some great agony,  
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,  
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,  
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,  
And in diffusion ever more intense!  
So shall I join the choir invisible  
Whose music is the gladness of the world.

George Eliot

## **The Radiant Dark**

Should I long that dark were fair? Say, O song.  
Lacks my love aught that I should long?  
Dark the night with breath all flow'rs  
And tender broken voice that fills  
With ravishment the list'ning hours.  
Whis'prings, wooings,  
Liquid ripples, and soft ring-dove cooings,  
in low-toned rhythm that love's aching stills.

Dark the night, yet is she bright,  
For in her dark she brings the mystic star,  
Trembling yet strong as is the voice of love  
From some unknown afar.  
O radiant dark, O darkly foster'd ray,  
Thou hast a joy too deep for shallow day.

George Eliot

## **The World Is Great**

The world is great!  
The birds fly from me;  
The stars are golden fruit  
Upon a tree  
All out of reach  
My little sister went and I am lonely.

The world is great!  
I tried to mount the hill  
Above the pines  
Where the light lies so still,  
But it rose higher.  
Little Lisa went and I am lonely.

The world is great!  
The wind comes rushing by.  
I wonder where it comes from.  
Sea-birds cry  
And hurt my heart.  
My little sister went and I am lonely.

The world is great!  
The people laugh and talk,  
And make loud holiday.  
How fast they walk!  
I'm lame, they push me.  
Little Lisa went and I am lonely.

George Eliot

## Two Lovers

Two lovers by a moss-grown spring:  
They leaned soft cheeks together there,  
Mingled the dark and sunny hair,  
And heard the wooing thrushes sing.  
O budding time!  
O love's blest prime!

Two wedded from the portal stept:  
The bells made happy carolings,  
The air was soft as fanning wings,  
White petals on the pathway slept.  
O pure-eyed bride!  
O tender pride!

Two faces o'er a cradle bent:  
Two hands above the head were locked:  
These pressed each other while they rocked,  
Those watched a life that love had sent.  
O solemn hour!  
O hidden power!

Two parents by the evening fire:  
The red light fell about their knees  
On heads that rose by slow degrees  
Like buds upon the lily spire.  
O patient life!  
O tender strife!

The two still sat together there,  
The red light shone about their knees;  
But all the heads by slow degrees  
Had gone and left that lonely pair.  
O voyage fast!  
O vanished past!

The red light shone upon the floor  
And made the space between them wide;  
They drew their chairs up side by side,  
Their pale cheeks joined, and said, "Once more!"  
O memories!  
O past that is!

George Eliot