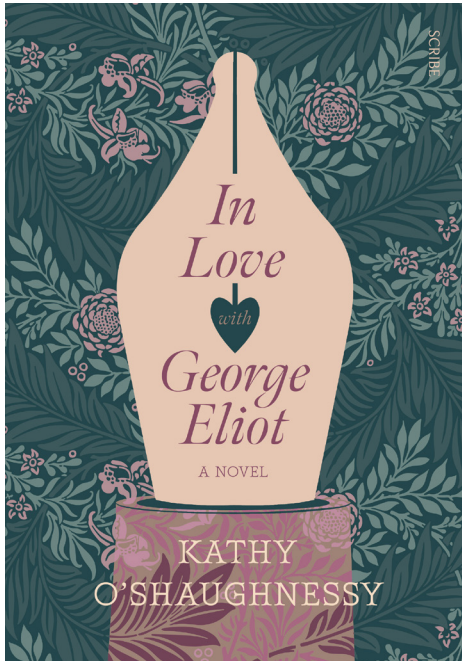


# In Love with George Eliot

KATHY O'SHAUGHNESSY



**BOOK DETAILS**

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Kathy O'Shaughnessy has reviewed books for *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *Independent*, *The Observer*, *TLS*, *New Statesman*, *The Spectator*, and others. She has worked as Deputy Editor on the Literary Review, Arts & Books Editor of *Vogue*, Literary Editor of *The European*, and Deputy Editor of *The Telegraph Arts & Books*. Her stories have been published in Faber's *First Fictions*, and she edited and introduced Drago Stambuk's poems, *Incompatible Animals*.

Who was the real George Eliot? *In Love with George Eliot* is a glorious debut novel which tells the compelling story of England's greatest woman novelist as you've never read it before.

Marian Evans is a scandalous figure, living in sin with a married man, George Henry Lewes. She has shocked polite society, and women rarely deign to visit her. In secret, though, she has begun writing fiction under the pseudonym George Eliot. As *Adam Bede's* fame grows, curiosity rises as to the identity of its mysterious writer. Gradually it becomes apparent that the moral genius Eliot is none other than the disgraced woman living with Lewes.

Now Evans' tremendous celebrity begins. The world falls in love with her. She is the wise and great writer, sent to guide people through the increasingly secular, rudderless century, and an icon to her progressive feminist peers — with whom she is often in disagreement. Public opinion shifts. Her scandalous cohabitation is forgiven. But this idyll is not secure and cannot last. When Lewes dies, Evans finds herself in danger of shocking the world all over again.

Meanwhile, in another rudderless century, two women compete to arrive at an interpretation of Eliot as writer and as woman ...

Everyone who has thrilled at being shown the world anew by George Eliot will thrill again at her presence, complex and compelling, here.

## REVIEWS

'I devoured this, and it made me happy and excited. It reminded me of Toibin's *The Master*: its representations of the psychology of the characters, their shifting ground, variegated moods, seemed to work in something like the same way, and with the same fineness. It's really beautifully tender, subtle, imaginative, saturated authentically (to my mind anyway) in another time and thought-world.'

— **TESSA HADLEY, AUTHOR OF *LATE IN THE DAY***

'*In Love with George Eliot* is a clever, unconventional approach to the great novelist's life; it is easy to imagine that Marian Evans herself would have approved of the playful thoughtfulness with which Kathy O'Shaughnessy brings the private person behind George Eliot's public success alive.'

— **DR RUTH SCURR, AUTHOR OF *JOHN AUBREY: MY OWN LIFE***

'Classy, beautifully written and richly imagined — a novel that opens a door onto the past.'

— **NICCI GERRARD, AUTHOR OF *THE TWILIGHT HOUR***

'*In Love with George Eliot* is a feverishly intense and beautifully rendered first novel, especially in its detail and sensitivity, that brings to life the woman and the legend.'

— **MARIE MATTESON, READINGS**

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. *In Love with George Eliot* is a novel, yet it's based on biographical fact, and uses letter and diary excerpts from the period. How does this interplay of fact and fiction affect your experience of reading the book?
2. At a certain point, Barbara Bodichon comments that Lewes was like a wife to Marian. Do you agree with her?
3. How far does the theme of women's ambition inform the book, in both the Victorian and the modern story?
4. Explore the concept of female friendship, with reference to the different ways in which this theme is played out in the book, in both Victorian and modern story.
5. In the modern thread, academics Kate and Ann have different allegiances to Marian and Edith Simcox. What do these allegiances tell us about Kate and Ann's characters?
6. When Edith Simcox kisses Marian's feet, Marian is uneasy. What is the source of this unease? Can you relate it to the climactic honeymoon scenes in Venice?
7. After Lewes has died, Marian finds herself starting to care for Johnny Cross — in spite of her grief for Lewes. Did she have a choice? How far was she herself instrumental in bringing the romance about?
8. Marian dreads the reaction of her friends and the world to news of her marriage to Johnny Cross. Why does she dread it? What does this tell us about her?
9. How important are society's attitudes to women in the book?
10. What did Marian mean when she said to her stepson Charles Lewes, "I couldn't have written my books if I hadn't been human".

## *In Love with George Eliot*

KATHY O'SHAUGHNESSY

'Henry James was but one of many beguiled by Marian Evans (aka George Eliot) ... In lucid, unshowy prose, O'Shaughnessy brings them all to life.'  
— ROSE SHEPHERD, SAGA

- I1. George Eliot began writing *Middlemarch* in the summer of 1869, with her hero Lydgate in place. It took her 18 months to find Dorothea, and another three months before she realised Dorothea's story belonged to *Middlemarch*. During that time Eliot wrote various poems. What does this delay in finding Dorothea tell you about the process of creative writing?
- I2. In the early section of the book, Maria Congreve notices the figure of Icarus on the teapot. How far does Icarus's ascent and then dive seem like an appropriate warning to Marian about her own future rise? Was she guilty of hubris?
- I3. While they are honeymooning in Venice, Johnny Cross loses his sanity. Is there a connection between the mad Johnny Cross and the sane Johnny Cross? Do you feel you understand why he went mad?
- I4. In the final scene Marian overhears Caroline Jebb's remarks on the difference in age between Marian and Johnny. Do those remarks have any validity in your view, or do they belong to a past era that is no longer relevant?
- I5. How does reading this novel affect your perception of George Eliot, the writer and her books?



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