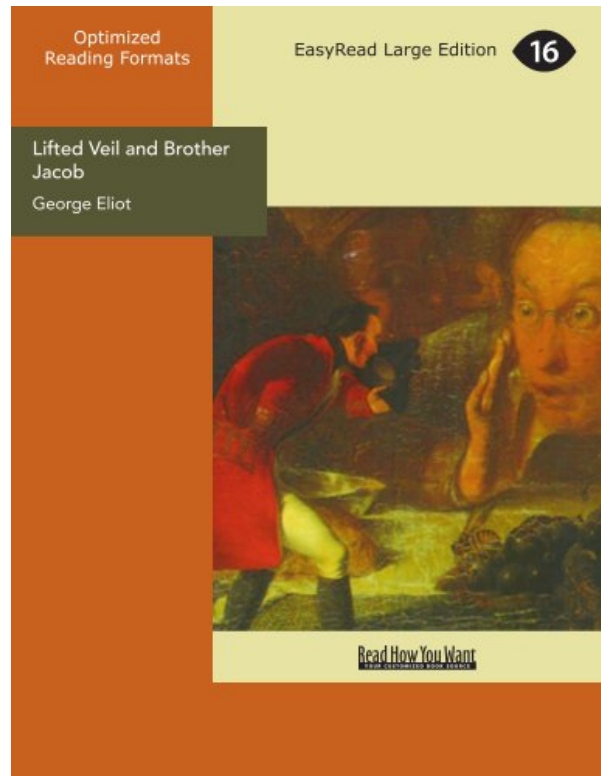


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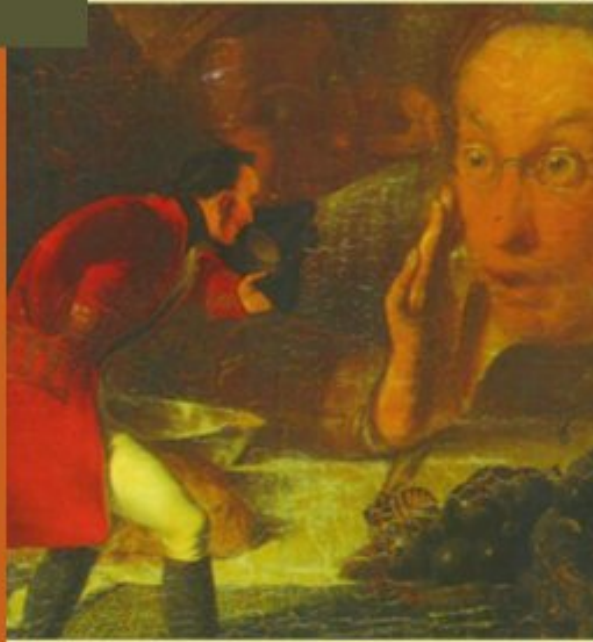
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About the Author

Mary Ann Evans, one of the most brilliant of Victorian novelists, published under the pen name 'George Eliot, she said, because she wanted her works to be taken seriously and to distance herself from the women novelists whom she considered silly. She was the assistant editor of the left - leaning Westminster Review, to which she contributed many literary essays. From 1854 on, she lived with G. H. Lewes. By 1859, she was celebrity novelist, and she wrote popular novels for the next 15 years.

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These Victorian fables by Eliot give simultaneous revelation of egoism and humanity. Despite being short both stories are masterpieces in themselves. "Lifted Veil" is about the significant altering affects of psychic powers and "Brother Jacob" describes the selfishness and conceit common to mankind.

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The dark Hyde to Eliot's more familiar, 'warm' Jekyll works.

By darragh o'donoghue

My previous experience of reading George Eliot (admittedly about a decade ago) had been unhappy - her celebrated humanism seemed like so much fussy interference; 'Silas Marner' was too cosy, and I could not get past the infuriating first chapter of 'Middlemarch'. I've always felt a bit guilty about abandoning 'the greatest English novelist', and this volume of two short tales was a perfect opportunity to see whether my tastes had matured.

'The Lifted Veil' is a dark masterpiece, part-Gothic tale, written in the stilted style of famous horror stories like 'Frankenstein', in which inexplicable horror is described with unnervingly inappropriate articulacy; part-Henry James study of an idle, wealthy man tormented by the unknowability of a woman and her faithfulness (shades of Proust too, who worshipped Eliot).

As Gothic, its influence on cinema has been slight, although the narrator who narrates his own death looks to 'Sunset Boulevard', while a character who can see others' minds was recently enacted in 'What Women Want'. The story begins with one of the best, most shocking openings in English literature, as the hero Latimer, blighted with the gift of 'prevision', gives a detailed account of the way he will die, alone in a crumbling mansion, abandoned by careless servants.

At times, the story reads like a textbook psychological study with a solipsistic hero who lost his beloved mother at a young age, whose father resented him as inadequate, and whose brother's fiancée he loves. The

various previsions he has are full of those details Freudian critics enjoy. But those previsions are described in ominous tableaux, and the switch from 'real life' into these states has a genuinely disorienting effect on the reader.

The text has always been seen as valuable as a rare instance of Eliot in effect denying or questioning the humanist principles of her most characteristic work and her interest in progressive science - its narrative is hermetic, anti-humanistic, circular: conflating time to an eternal, hellish present.

'Brother Jacob' is more like the Eliot I remembered, the story of a confectioner's apprentice who steals from his mother to emigrate to Jamaica where he intends to be given his fortune. Although it is a (sour) moral fable, with every character emerging badly, rather than warmly humanistic, the novels' irritations are here - the bossy, intrusive narration; the portrait of a growing, bourgeois community, lifelessly focusing on their obsessions with status and money, where every metaphor is inextricably linked with commerce and consumption. Each character is a caricature: the 'humour' is smug, smart-alecky, sarcastic and sneering. The tale is full of the details English Literature critics enjoy - colonialism, mental defectives, assumed identities etc.

The volume is worth reading for Sally Shuttleworth's exhaustive introduction, which discusses the stories in the context of Eliot's life and work (both are seen as negative allegories for writing and the writer), British Imperialism, laissez-faire economics, gender, the growth of science and progressive philosophy as the new religion etc.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Creepy

By HH

As usual with Eliot, she takes so long -- pages upon pages -- to get anywhere with her story. This is certainly the case in "The Lifted Veil". The story of a young, love stricken clairvoyant, Eliot takes us on a coming-of-age-type journey all leading up to the best part of this novella: the last 3 pages. Of course there are a few beautiful bits along the way, such as Eliot's descriptions of Geneva and Prague, but they are few and far between. Eliot's realism in her use of settings is here, and the scientific aspects make for "Frankenstein"-like plot twists. As for "Brother Jacob", it's awful. It's amazing (in a bad way) how the Miss Evans character can have such a way with words one minute and the next you find yourself re-reading sentences trying to make sense of it all.

6 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Between Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll

By A Customer

A little-read story of George Eliot's "The Lifted Veil" is a lovely example of the intersection between humanities and science in 1859: it ends with a revivification scene worthy of Mary Shelley. Written just before Eliot admitted to being the author of *Adam Bede*, the emasculated protagonist, Latimer, mirrors Eliot herself in his desire for solitude. Exceedingly well-crafted Victorian writing. (I don't know the other story *Brother Jacob* well: it espouses that the wages of sin are embarrassment and ostracization.)

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