lish; the introduction includes an annotated outline of the work by Adelgundis Führkötter, an editor of the 1978 Latin edition of *Scivias*, which is authoritative and enormously helpful in sorting out the complexity of Hildegard's visions and interpretations. There is no doubt that the work is difficult. *Scivias* undertakes to describe the whole history of creation, from the fall of Lucifer to the Day of Judgment. Monumental as this project may seem, there is no hint of pride on Hildegard's part; nor does she linger over the "am I worthy?" question. To her the proposition is straightforward: she has been sent, and commanded to pass on, these revelations, an epic, encyclopedic series of images explaining such mysteries as the nature of the Persons of God, humanity's relation to the divine, the larger order of creation as a whole.

Begun in 1141, *Scivias* was ten years in the writing; composition of the *Book of Divine Works*, described in the volume's introduction as her "most cosmological work," also occupied a decade, from 1163-73. This work is similarly comprehensive: the first two visions, for example, are entitled 'On the Origin of Life,' and 'On the Construction of the World;' not to be outdone, the ninth and tenth visions, 'Completion of the Cosmos' and 'On the End of Time' round out the history of creation. In between, along with images illuminating such puzzles as 'Human Nature' and the 'Meaning of History,' is the crucial sequence revealing the significance of the incarnation in the process of salvation. The tenth, and by far the longest, *visio* includes an account of the coming of the Antichrist — Satan's earthly agent — of his attempts to corrupt mankind by false preaching, and of his final defeat which recapitulates the original fall of Lucifer into the "sulfur and pitch," but this time ensures that "the old serpent" has finally lost his sway over humanity.

The vastness of Hildegard's scope is only one of the many extraordinary aspects of her work. Another is a quality which might be called synthetic, or integrated (or, for that matter, holistic). Each individual is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm that is God; each body contains the four elements, as does the creation; the body and soul should not be in opposition, but should work together; nature is at the service of human beings so that they, in turn, can work with nature; as the world is round, the Godhead is like a wheel and the creation like a cosmic egg; the natural world images God: as God is known through faith, so the sun's circumference is perceived by the eye. The Old Testament is seen to prefigure the New: Abraham's obedience foreshadows Mary's, the ram in the thornbush looks forward to Christ in her womb. The decline of the world (leading up to the coming of the Antichrist and the end of time) is represented in terms of a loss of *viriditas*, "greenness;" the time of Christ is seen as the summer of the world.

Despite its potential for harmony, however, Hildegard's universe is emphatically not one in which evil is simply perceived as loss of order, or the absence of good. Lucifer's fall has set the whole business of creation in motion — the tenth choir of angels must be restored — and his final defeat is its goal. Hildegard's positive images are in tension with negative counterparts: light is opposed by darkness, the luminous fire by black fire (elsewhere the gloomy fire, by the purest air); a figure representing Love stands upon a dreadful monster and a serpent, who is biting the monster's ear: so Satan "fastens his jaws in strife." A multitude of torches burning with "serene brightness" is opposed by a menacing lake with a mouth that emits "burning smoke with a great stink."

Of course the presence of active evil in Hildegard's universe does not suggest a shaky faith. Indeed, the sin most repugnant to her seems to be one she calls "lukewarmness," which renders people "useless," too weak to do any good. Lucifer's might, the power and longevity of his malice, and his ultimate trouncing, only serve to illustrate the more convincingly God's unalterable omnipotence.

The volume containing the *Book of Divine Works* also includes forty-two of Hildegard's Letters and ten of her Songs (both words and music); each deserves a separate essay, so let it only be said that her genius inspires them both, in particular and appropriate ways, and that the translations, as in the *Book*, continue to be clear and effective. The book of Hildegard's illuminations provides an unparalleled chance to experience these creations first hand; twenty-five of them are reproduced here in glorious colour, and they are simply breathtaking. Matthew Fox has prepared a commentary to accompany them which is brimming over with his own evident enthusiasm, but unfortunately leaves the reader unable to determine where Hildegard leaves off and Fox begins. This can be frustrating; on the other hand, it seems clear that his passion for this extraordinary woman has provided much of the impetus behind Bear & Company's effort. So let's be grateful, and hope that the rest of her works are soon to follow.

GEORGE ELIOT

Gillian Beer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

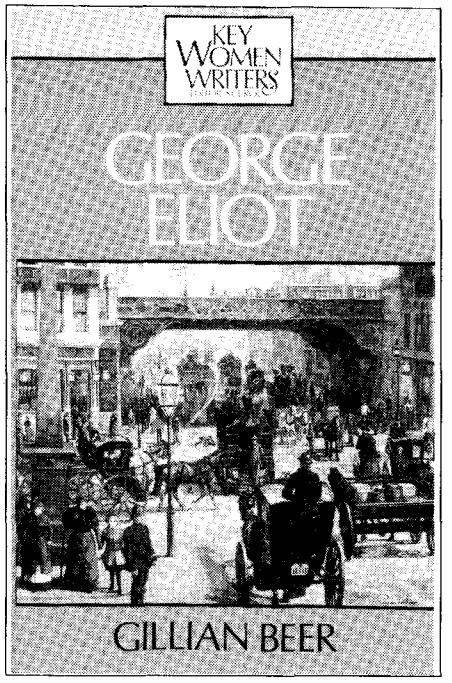
By Deborah Heller

Unquestionably one of the greatest English novelists — and, in the view of many, the greatest woman novelist in our tradition — George Eliot has nonetheless posed something of a problem for feminist critics. Despite her own exceptional learning and achievement, Eliot's fictional heroines, though often gifted with remarkable sensibilities and wide-ranging (if ill-focused) desires, never achieve much of anything, at best partially fulfilling themselves only through the unexceptional "happy end" typically envisioned for women in Victorian society: a loving marriage and children (eg. Dinah Morris, Esther Lyon, Dorothea Brooke). Eliot's fictional alternatives to this ordinary destiny are inevitably crueller, bleaker, and, at the least, less satisfying (eg. Maggie Tulliver, Romola, Mrs. Transome, Gwendolen Harleth). Also, while the splendid metamorphosis of Marian Evans into George Eliot was in part made possible by her courageous decision to live openly with a married man, in her novels sexual 'irregularity' is always punished. Moreover, she sought acceptance in conventional terms for her unconventional choices, calling herself — and expecting to be called — Mrs. Lewes, and consistently referring to her unsanctified union as a marriage. And, although she lived during a period of sustained feminist debate and activity, Eliot's own role in the woman's movement was, as Gillian Beer writes in her generous, new assessment of it, "peripheral and equivocal."

In her intellectually vigorous and engaging study of George Eliot for the "Key Women Writers Series" undertaken by the Indiana University Press, Gillian Beer (author of *Darwin's Plot: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*) presents her task at the outset "as being the study of the novels in the light of their being written by a woman." From this perspective she examines, among other issues, the treatment of George Eliot by recent feminist critics,

George Eliot's treatment of women in her own fiction and in the writings of other women, and Eliot's complex relation to the women's movement of her time. Rejecting Ellen Moers' "flat assertion that George Eliot was 'no feminist,'" Beer sees no corresponding "need to convert her into a radical feminist: it would be pointless to pretend to do so." In exploring the flexible space between these two equally inappropriate labels (no feminist *vs.* radical feminist), Beer demonstrates that she has learned from George Eliot's own work, which she repeatedly presents as subverting and undermining fixed polarities and stereotypes (including those of gender); in place of restrictive categories, Beer argues, Eliot's writing expands outward, making new connections and discovering new ways of knowing.

Beer's study addresses not only George Eliot's abiding concern with "the nature of women" and the social constraints under which they have been forced to develop. It considers as well — and this is one of the book's most impressive contributions — the various ways in which George Eliot's novels were engaged with many of the same issues that were currently being raised by the women's movement, often adopting the vocabulary of contemporary debate. Beer reminds us, too, that almost all of George Eliot's close women friends from the mid-1850's were active in the women's movement, and that Eliot subscribed to their periodicals, even if she did not contribute to them. But Eliot consistently chose to show how women's problems and issues were part of the texture of human problems and issues, frequently, as Beer notes, making the woman's situation stand as the representative one for both men and women. She chose to emphasize "likeness," "not difference, which was taken for granted and used to circumscribe women."



Beer's readings of the novels often gain focus from her consideration of now-forgotten works by Eliot's women contemporaries that offer situations we notably do *not* find in Eliot: studies of female friendship, resolutions that present "an image of a woman happy in her own resources and independent." Through these intertextual readings which enable us to "see the text as containing and resisting other writings by which it was surrounded," Beer argues that Eliot's interest in interdependence rather than independence, in the relations between women and men, was not unconsidered but deliberate; and she distrusted the "bland pastoralism" of fictional resolutions that "disguised [the] appalling loss" of "sexual love."

In her fiction George Eliot regularly confined herself to representations of the ordinary lot of women. She was not prescribing, but describing. An exceptional woman herself, "George Eliot early recognized that the exceptional changes nothing...it is the ordinary case that tests the true state of affairs." (As we may still observe: Mrs. Gandhi's many years as powerful Prime Minister have had no bearing on the continued practice of burning alive young widows on their husbands' funeral pyres in India today.) Through her multi-textured writing, with its comprehensive range and its masterful control, George Eliot achieved a fullness and fulfillment that is denied to her characters and that we, the readers, may temporarily share as we participate in the writer's privileged vision. On the level of our participation in the plot, however, "We are not exonerated from ordinary conditions."

Beer's book is rich in knowledge and insight, exploring the familiar novels and the less familiar essays and poetry with equal assurance. She has something fresh and enlightening to say about everything she discusses. The imaginative skill, for example, with which she relates George Eliot's use of metaphor and generalization to her distinctive way of knowing and teaching, her discussion of Eliot's narrative voice(s) or the meaning of Antigone for Eliot's imagination, are some of the many high points of this rewarding book. Beer is equally adept in pursuing literary critical, biographical and historical approaches, and in integrating the insights gleaned from each. Our experience of reading — and rereading — George Eliot will be the deeper for this book, as should our thinking about men and women, writing and history.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR: A REREADING

Judith Okely. London, Virago Press, 1986.

By Pat Desjardins

This book is very original in both its intent and methodology. Judith Okely has set out to explain Simone de Beauvoir's inspiration for women of *her* generation to women of *my* generation. She does this through a method of 'personal anthropology,' a method which I feel justifies a 'personal book review.'

Okely begins the book with a chapter called "Epoch and Inspiration." In it she describes her personal situation in the early 60s, first as a young Englishwoman studying in Paris, and afterwards as a member of a women's college at Oxford. Because of her white, middle-class, English boarding school background, she was incredibly inexperienced and naive about men, her options in life, her privileges and disadvantages. She provides such a description "to show the kind of soil upon which de Beauvoir's words were to fall." Through the remainder of the book we catch glimpses of a committed feminist growing from seeds sown by de Beauvoir. Okely uses her personal experience, and those of friends and other "devotees," to recreate that epoch, stating that such experience "is not simply idiosyncratic; its very minutiae can help us to throw light on a specific class of women at a certain epoch."

Okely realizes that a younger generation of feminists, women now in their twenties, do not respond to de Beauvoir in the same way as did women of her generation. On this score I am definitely part of the audience that Okely intends her book to reach. While I enjoyed de Beauvoir's fiction, I had little patience with the *Second Sex*. I found de Beauvoir to be Eurocentric in her outlook and full of urban, middle-class biases. I recall being genuinely confused because I could not reconcile de Beauvoir's reputation as a major feminist thinker with much of what I read in the *Second Sex*. According to Okely, it is "perfectly correct to scrutinize and reject some of her [de Beauvoir's] arguments in the light of subsequent condi-