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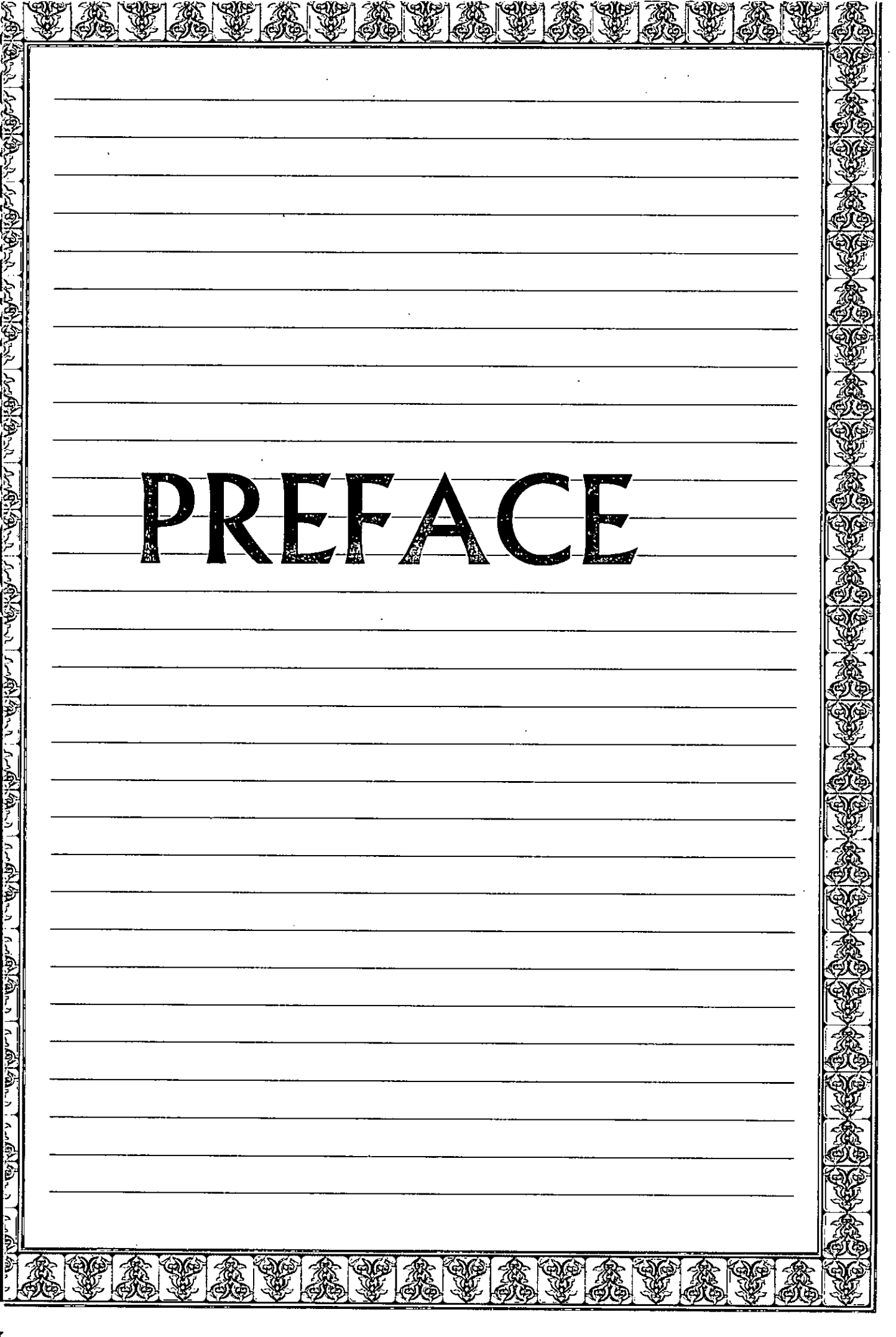
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PREFACE

Preface

It is a given fact that realism is considered one of the literary movements that started in the nineteenth century and went right into the twentieth century. Realism started in France through the works of Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert. French realism was based upon science and deductions from it. George Eliot used this word for the first time in 1856. George Eliot was a highly intellectual author and a realistic writer. She was contemporary to such early victorian novelists as Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Mrs Gaskell. They were all novelists in the tradition of Henry Fielding. George Eliot follows the tradition in many aspects, but she also modifies and alters that tradition as David Cecil points out:

She was something very unlike the typical Victorian novelists, She was an "intellectual" writer. Her mind was always active; experience it immediately and instinctively analyzing and generalizing, to discovering why and how things happened. And when she turned her attention to the world around her it was this analysis that started her creative imagination working.(1)

Accordingly, realism is the dominant feature of her fiction. The early novels of George Eliot, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner are realistic in the presentation of the life of the Midland countries of Warwickshire and Drbyshire which she had intimately known. In these early novels, as also in Middlemarch, she presents a faithful pictures of the English Midlands, and of the life and character of the people who live in the Midlands, and with whom she had lived and moved in her childhood and girlhood.

Definitely, her realism is also psychological and emotional, which is more important than factual realism of the ordinary novelist. George Eliot uses a convincing, dynamic psychology in presenting her characters. Therefore, she was the first Victorian novelist to depict a character from inside. She looks into the heart of things, like a romantic, and reveals the beauty and grandeur of the familiar and commonplace. But there is a difference between the romantic approach and the realistic approach. The romantic approach presents life as it should be. The realistic approach presents life as it is. George Eliot writes that her strongest effort is to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in her mind.

In her fiction, George Eliot drew on scenes and memories from her childhood. She translated her feelings and emotions into great novels. Most of her characters are common such as farmers, artisans, clergymen and doctors. She broke new ground in the history of the novel by representing such common place figures in their daily occupations as suitable material for writing novels. She doesn't idealize her farmers or her artisans. On the contrary, she expresses her realistic views on peasant life in one of her famous critical essays. She studies the natural places where her novels happened, for example, she and G.H. Lewes visited Gainsborough when she was writing The Mill on the Floss.

George Eliot is concerned with society. She is also one of the first to treat the relation between the individual and the society thoroughly. She saw no contradiction between realism and the role of imagination in art. Her own life is considered the best material for writing novels as John Purkis demonstrates:

George Eliot's doctrine of realism is a coming together of different interests which had been with her for many years, perhaps related in origin, to her father's attitude to work certainly what emerges is a

logical extension of Feuerbaeh's Religion of Humanity, and at this stage of her career it provides a lever with which she is poised to move the earth. (2)

This thesis aims to shed light on George Eliot's realism and the characteristics that distinguish her from her contemporaries and give her a unique position among them. To realize this aim, her major novels Middlemarch, Silas Marner, and The Mill on the Floss will be studied. This thesis is divided into three chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter discusses autobiographical elements in Eliot's novels. This chapter is divided into three parts. First, a brief history of realistic movement and its general features are treated. The second part sheds light about George Eliot's life, then the third part deals with autobiographical elements in her novels especially The Mill on the Floss. It is considered a recreation of George Eliot's own childhood and family. George Eliot shows herself frankly into Maggie's position. The novelist had put more of herself in this novel than in the other novels. It is her spiritual autobiography and the history of Maggie Tulliver is the history of Mary Evans.

The second chapter is intended to study society. We have to speak of George Eliot's concern with society, or her sociological interest. This chapter falls into three major sections. The first section presents George Eliot as a social novelist. The second section deals with different types of characters which constitute the whole society. The third discusses her major novels especially Middlemarch. It is an example survey of many aspects of English social life during the Victorian period. This novel has a subtitle, a study of provincial life. The novel gives us a realistic, vivid and comprehensive picture of provincial life of England. The Mill on the Floss also uses the working of society to define and objectify characters. The Mill on the Floss suggests many sociological

insights. Middlemarch, Silas Marner, and The Mill on the Floss will be discussed in this chapter.

The third chapter deals with artistic realism. We get in her work beautiful descriptions of rural life and a number of characters drawn from that life. She presents English country life, relishes the truth and freshness of her childhood scenes. She was familiar with the scenes and sights of the English Midlands and the customs and mannerisms of the rustic colour. The English Midland, the humble rustics, their daily life, are the setting, the background, and the character, she writes about.

The conclusion is devoted to general appreciation and evaluation of her work.