

In a London Drawingroom

By George Eliot

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 was born Mary Ann Evans in rural Warwickshire and was unusually well-educated for a woman of her time. A controversial figure during her life, Eliot published translations as well as prose and poetry, all but one under her adopted pseudonym. Among her themes are music; art as an activity of unfathomable human worth; the notion that the past shapes the present; and the conflict in a woman's life between great duty and the prospect of a happy marriage. Her prose masterpiece was the psychologically insightful *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871).