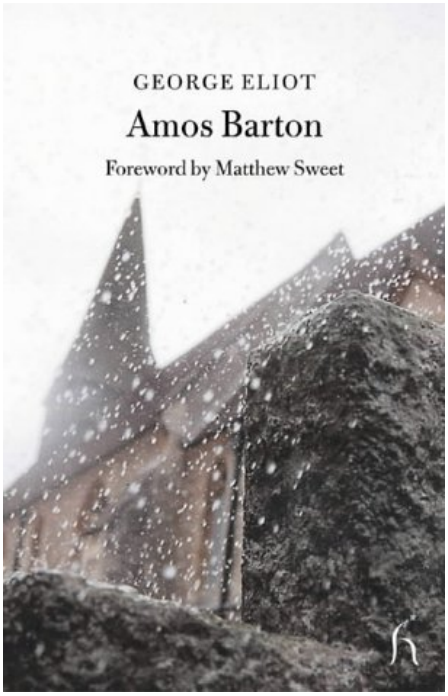

Amos Barton

George Eliot , Matthew Sweet (Foreword by)

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Published as part of George Eliot's fictional debut, *Amos Barton* is an honest and expressive work, displaying the same warm irony and keen observations that distinguish so many of her later novels. Parson Amos Barton is responsible not only for the spiritual welfare of his flock, but also for his extensive family. Burying himself in the works of the Evangelical greats, he may find food for thought for his parishioners, but the family's poverty only worsens. For all his learning, it seems not even the Parson can contain their inevitable tragedy. Victorian novelist George Eliot is the author of a number of remarkable works, including *Middlemarch,* her masterpiece.

Amos Barton Details

Date	:	Published June 1st 2003 by Hesperus Press (first published 1857)
ISBN	:	9781843910510
Author	:	George Eliot , Matthew Sweet (Foreword by)
Format	:	Paperback 112 pages
Genre	:	Classics, Fiction, European Literature, British Literature, Literature, 19th Century, Literary Fiction, Historical, Victorian

From Reader Review Amos Barton for online ebook

Dr.J.G. says

For an early work this story has amazing insight into human nature and behaviour, along with a detailed description of the place and time, and also usage of the language far more extensive than what one is used to during 20th century even before the sms era.

Even if one knows nothing of the author it is easy to suspect post finishing the book that this is an autobiographical tale, and it mainly at heart is a very deeply loving daughter's heartbreaking tribute to her very beautiful and universally loved mother who was also a very good person, along with the outward story that is a factual exoneration of her father of a false blame and suspicion harboured by silly neighbours of the parish who could not imagine a beautiful woman taking an extensive stay with a family of a man of cloth even if his own wife was beautiful, much loved by all including himself, and very much present on premises.

Why the author could not show details of the family post the departure of the mother is what one immediately questions after finishing this abruptly ending tale - along with such questions as what happened to other children (only two are mentioned, did the rest die as children did of decease and starvation in poverty in Europe those days?) and why Patty did not marry. That can be only explained by the surmise that this is the story of Mary Ann Evans who took the pen name of George Eliot in order to be able to write in peace and publish at all (- misogyny was not so violent then as now what with crimes against women being more violent and explicit by the day, but women were not seen as people who could think and were certainly not allowed to write and publish, and being an exception was a harsh struggle, so Bronte sisters had male names to publish too as did Madam Sand -) and that she did not marry due to the horror and pathos of the marriage of her mother who died so early in her life, compounded by the fact that there was no dowry for Patty or Mary Ann Evans to help her marry with security of a middle class life, since her father was a poor man of cloth with several children to feed and clothe and shelter.

One cannot but help compare here, since it is very pertinent and relevant - Barton in all his poverty and ordinary Englishman's life and persona of someone who has been to university and is involved day to day in matters intellectual and religious (for Barton approaches religion and sermons within strictly the intellectual realm and bores his parish stiff, enabling them to distance themselves until they sympathise with his loss of his wife) and little or none of the luxuries or power in his life or riches for that matter, is nonetheless no different from the Mongol (Mughal is Persian for Mongol, and the close relatives of Kublai Khan that settled in India routed via Persia bringing that nomenclature) emperor Shah Jahan who built that extravagant mausoleum for his wife on top of the revered temple of the majority religion of the country, achieving two shots in one; both the women were worn out by extensive childbearing beyond their health capability and died due to this " excessive love from the husband", a husband who was incapable of forbearing his sexual appetite even when the consequences endangered the wife's health to the point of death.

Perhaps the only difference is that Barton (or Evans) had no harem to satisfy his needs elsewhere while preserving the loved wife's health and life, and Shah Jahan did but wore out the one loved nevertheless. Amelia Barton died after giving birth to seven children (or is it eight?) and Mumtaj Mahal to fourteen, but then the latter had servants galore to do all her work and take care of her as well, and no lack of physicians or food or remedies of any sort available around in half the known world.

Milly Barton was poor, overworked, starving, worrying about her children being fed and clothed, and paying the bills in all honour.

This says two separate and related things to any aware reader - one, those involved in intellectual and spiritual line of work are likely to be poor as a rule, whether vicars and curates of England or Brahmans of India or rabbis of Jewish diaspora anywhere for that matter, and especially more so when they have families of their own to support and are not allowed to make money by using any skills since they are men of cloth or are Brahmans as indeed they are not by tradition allowed in most of these cases. And two, the only difference in the various traditions mentioned here is that in the older ones the Brahman or the rabbi is at least nominally most respected member of the society while a curate or a vicar is not accorded that social respect without backing of independent wealth, which in fact gets him a better living too.

Positions of vicar, curate, etc might be obtained by anybody and are not hereditary, but that in practice merely means that the positions are either bought by someone for the person appointed or are doled out as a favour to someone for some reason for the favour; as a consequence those richer get higher positions and those from poor background get less paid ones if at all, in church as well in trade or military or any other sphere of work.

On thinking it over, men inheriting their father's trade is not so far off this buying of positions, since most poor in the world are limited to what knowledge their parents can provide them as heritage; and women all over the world are limited even now with everyone seeing them as reproductive functionaries and food preparing and other services providers, to be browbeaten and blackmailed and threatened into it irrespective of time, place, relationship, occasion, whatever.

Indeed the only women that escape it might be born princesses and queens regina of Europe, if any. Others may fight back, but this merely makes life unpleasant, and this is the choice offered them socially as a weapon to force them to submit - until they do submit they are constantly attacked. I have heard a supposedly educated scientist from space agency of Europe questioning sexual capacity of a very famous high profile chief of a computer firm only because he heard about her being appointed in that position, and he went worse from that point. Till date I suspect most people hold him innocent in the huge quarrel we had and of course he probably does not mention his wrongs if indeed he is aware of them, but then even if he did they would not seem wrong to most people but only humour, not to be taken seriously or pointed out the wrongs of seriously. He in fact said it was different if he made racist jokes, which he would not, and was very angry when informed it was not different at all.

His wife wanted to discuss caste system of India, and was nonplussed when pointed out that her not requiring her sons or husband to help her in the kitchen but requiring or expecting any woman around irrespective of age, including any casual visitor or invited guests or new acquaintances, was caste system.

Most men and probably most women too would think this is harsh against Barton and against someone who spent twenty years and millions of public fund to build the most famous mausoleum in the world, since men's sexual needs are held not only incontrollable but sacrosanct, with rape considered natural and of no consequence and in fact the woman's fault for being raped (why was she there, what did she were, did she not encourage it and want it and if so how does anyone prove it, what difference does it make unless it is a damage to her husband or father's honour) through most of the world even now when law is changing and some lip service to a woman's right to be not assaulted is paid at some places around the world.

But fact is, these women died of their husbands "love" for them, thoughtless as it was and driven by the physical needs of the husbands, and what difference does a tombstone or a mausoleum make to the one that

is dead?

If that is not convincing, consider what a man - any man anywhere in the world - would say offered the same alternative, of repeated usage and death in youth with a handsome mausoleum as a memento to the "love". It is a no brainer - men would club anyone suggesting this to death, with no memorial.

Lizzy says

And Eliot manages to make me cry AGAIN.

Jules says

It took me a while to get into this book but a morning hanging around in the hospital outpatients department put paid to that & I read half this book in one sitting! It was an odd little book, quite unlike most of the classics. In truth not a lot happens in the book but the unusual writing style makes up for it. The author almost invites us into the Bartons lives, we feel like an eavesdropper on their family affairs.

Kate says

N.B.: I did not read this edition. Amos Barton is the first of three tales collected under the title *Scenes from Clerical Life*. The picture on the cover of the Hesperus edition perfectly sums up the atmosphere of this short tale of one man's terrible luck. Any spiritual solace eluded to by the church steeple is swallowed up by the cold, grey sky. Eliot seems to be treading on Hardy's territory: Life is short, it is bleak, and you die.

Ana Rînceanu says

original read: 2013

I clearly like this book, but I don't understand why Amos is the protagonist. I wanted more of Milly and the Countess.

Emily Dybdahl says

Amos Barton is a bumbling, gullible man who is not totally aware of his impression on others. He is off-putting to his parishioners and makes life harder for himself and his poor family. He is a well-meaning guy, but I felt so sorry for his wife and children. It's hard for me to read stories from this time period where a wife was constantly going through dangerous deliveries of babies upon babies. Even with her failing health, Mrs. Barton gets pregnant with a seventh baby. Not to mention the dire financial strains the family is enduring. And yet they consent to receive the vain Countess Czerlaski with all her demands and not a penny to offer them in return. It was frustrating to read. Of course it all compounds in tragedy and makes for a good story

that reminded me of a couple of Hardy's novels in theme and setting. The conclusion to the story could probably have been done without, since it wasn't that satisfying anyway and Eliot could have just left the sad ending by itself.

Jane says

Towards the end of 1856, Mary Ann Evans, a well-regarded intellectual and essayist, submitted three stories to ‘Blackwood’s Magazine’. They were accepted, they were published over three issues during the following year, and towards the end of that year they were published as a single volume, entitled ‘Scenes of Clerical Life’.

It was George Eliot’s first published work of fiction, and it was recognised, in the words of ‘Saturday Review’, as ‘the production of a peculiar and remarkable writer.’

I must confess that it was a book that passed me by, back in the day when I fell in love with George Eliot’s writing and rushed to read every word of hers that I could find. This year though it called me; I was reading Patricia Duncker’s new novel, ‘Sophie and the Sibyl’, which was inspired by an episode in George Eliot’s life. I loved it, and I was so taken with her portrayal of the author that I had to pick up one of her books.

I remembered that I had ‘Scenes of Clerical Life’ in three little volumes; published by the Hesperus Press a few years ago.

I didn’t mean to start reading straight away, I meant to finish the book I was reading, but I was so taken with ‘Scenes of Clerical Life’ that I had to keep reading, slowly and steadily so that I could appreciate everything that it had to offer.

I loved the voice of the author from the start; she was an omniscient narrator, talking to her reader and wandering wherever she chose to illuminate the people, the places, the events, that she was choosing to share. It reminded me a little of Trollope, but her voice was distinctive and it was full of warmth and intelligence, and her love of writing and everything she wrote about shone.

She her first story by recalling going to church as a child; to the same church where, in the first of her stories, Amos Barton was curate. She captured the sensations of being a small child in a big church; an environment like no other, where adults behaved – and dressed -not quite as they did outside church.

She remembered deep pews, elaborate carvings and a choir master who clearly relished his moments centre stage; she made me think of the angels with lovely long dresses that I loved on our church’s reredos, and Mr Otto, who would swing the thurible in a full circle as the servers proceeded down the aisle.

She is equally at ease with her characters and their world; so obviously a world that she knew and loved. She could sum them up in one telling phrase and she made them live and breathe.

When we left church she steered me to a tea party. Had there not been gentlemen present I might have thought that I was in Cranford. The new curate, Amos Barton, was discussed, and sadly his parishioners had not warmed to him:

“The Rev. Amos never came near the borders of a vice. His very faults were middling—he was not very

ungrammatical. It was not in his nature to be superlative in anything; unless, indeed, he was superlatively middling, the quintessential extract of mediocrity."

He was sadly lacking in empathy with other people, he didn't understand what might be achieved by sweetening pills, and when troubled his response was to withdraw and to study his bible. To put it simply, he lacked the qualities that a parish priest needs.

The curate was flattered by the attentions of an one parishioner, Countess Caroline Czerlaski, who promised to put in a good word for him with the Dean. But, before she could do that, her brother seduced her maid and promised her marriage. The Countess was horrified, and she left home in protest, descending on her dear friends, the Bartons.

It was too much for Milly Barton. She struggled to raise her brood of children and to keep house as her husband expected on his meagre stipend. She could make over clothes, but shoes were always a problem. She didn't trouble her husband with those things though and she didn't complain; because she was proud of him, and of the work he had been called to do.

Her husband was oblivious, and so was her house guest – the most demanding and imperious of house guests.

I loved Milly, and I wished I could do something or say something to try to sort the situation out.

The children's nurse felt as I did and she tried to do something, even though it wasn't her place. She succeeded, but it was too late. Milly had fallen ill, and she and the child she was expecting both died.

Her husband realised that he had failed her.

Amos Barton's parishioners had been unsympathetic to him as their minister; they had suspected that the Countess was his mistress and gossiped about them; but when they saw him grief stricken at the loss of his wife they felt for him, and they did everything they could to support him and his family:

"There were men and women standing in that churchyard who had bandied vulgar jests about their pastor, and who had lightly charged him with sin, but now, when they saw him following the coffin, pale and haggard, he was consecrated anew by his great sorrow, and they looked at him with respectful pity".

This is a simple story, but it is profound. And its world, its characters were so real, so wonderfully well realised, that I could quite easily believe that the narrator was telling me the story of a previous incumbent of her own parish.

She wrote so well, and, though this was a sad story, there were some lovely moments of wit and humour. I have to recommend reading, and reading slowly to appreciate everything that this novella holds

This isn't George Eliot at the height of her powers, but I found it easy is see many of the things that would make her a great writer, some already in bloom and some growing nicely. And I have to say that this really is very fine first fiction.

Kereesa says

[even though I'm pretty sure I cried at it last night in spite of the fact I knew it was coming (hide spoiler)]

Abbi says

Favorite tidbits:

That is a deep and wide saying, that no miracle can be wrought without faith - without the worker's faith in himself, as well as the recipient's faith in him.

Thank heaven, then, that a little illusion is left to us, to enable us to be useful and agreeable - that we don't know exactly what our friends think of us - that the world is not made of looking-glass, to show us just the figure we are making, and just what is going on behind our backs!

Every man who is not a monster, a mathematician, or a mad philosopher, is the slave of some woman or other.

But what is opportunity to the man who can't use it?

Ashley says

The prose itself is beautiful. George Eliot is an accomplished writer, no doubt. She has a wonderful way with words. But the story just isn't for me. It was dull and boring, until the end. And that was simply tragic. The VERY end was lovely though.

Anthony Bello says

The text feels like it is half story and half editorial commenting on the story as it progresses. It reminds you that Eliot spent her early career reviewing more fiction than she wrote. The story has its finer points, but it feels more like a standup routine that Eliot wants to give at the expense of the gossips and clergy; unfortunately, parochial English life is better suited to Eliot's more ambitious works than it is to the brief shtick in this text. Ultimately, the most interesting aspect of the story comes from how it tracks the author's development as opposed to the plot's development

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Widad Zawaneh says

It is so much easier to say that a thing is black , than to discriminate the particular shade of brown , blue , or green , to which it really belongs "

" Thank heaven , then a little illusion is left to us , to enable us to be useful and agreeable - that we don't

know exactly what our friends think of us - that the world is not made of looking-glass , to show us just the figure we are making , and just what is going on behind our backs !! "

George Eliot , Amos Barton

Aj Sterkel says

This is a strange little book. It is the story of a poor Reverend in a small English town who causes a scandal when a spoiled Countess moves into his house. The book is more like a collection of incidents than a cohesive story, especially in the beginning.

I didn't enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed George Eliot's other works. Like all of Eliot's books, the plot of this one takes a long time to get going. Unfortunately, the book is so short that it's over as soon as it gets interesting. The beginning was very tedious for me. There's not much of a story, and there are a ton of unimportant minor characters who are described in excruciatingly boring detail. The end of the story is way better than the beginning.

My favorite parts of the book are when the narrator talks directly to the reader. Even the narrator admits that the characters are boring.

Terris says

This was a short book (112 pgs), and I think it was one of her first (1857). It is about the Reverend Amos Barton and his rural life that just keeps going downhill, and just doesn't get better.
I like her writing style and sense of humor, but this is a very sad book. So, I'm glad I read it because I want to add to my George Eliot reading experience. But it's really not one I'd recommend.

Nikki says

I love Eliot's writing and this short book was not a disappointment. My favorite parts are at the beginning of each chapter where Eliot makes certain observations to the reader before continuing with the plot. A very moving portrayal of the regret that can occur when we don't fully love (and appreciate those who love us).
