GEORGE ELIOT: A BIOGRAPHICAL AND INTELLECTUAL STUDY

by

AVIVAH H. GOTTLIEB

of

GIRTON COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The information contained in this dissertation is derived mainly from *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Yale University Press, 1954-55), and from Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford, 1968). I have not availed myself to any significant extent of the work of others, although I have obviously read the major critical and historical works in the field. No part of the dissertation is the outcome of work done in collaboration.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE EARLY YEARS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RONOLA: 'OF THE HISTORIC IMAGINATION'</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLEMARCH: THE MORALITY OF THE WILL</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DANIEL DERONDA: &quot;A FINE EXCESS&quot;: FEELING IS ENERGY'</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I should like to express my warmest gratitude for the encouragement and advice of Mr. L. Salingar (Trinity) and Mrs. G. Beer (Girton), who supervised me at different stages of the writing of this dissertation.

I should also like to thank Girton College, Cambridge and the Department of Education and Science for their financial support over this period.
Notes on references


3. The place of publication in all references not otherwise specified is London.
Most of the vast critical apparatus that has sprung up around George Eliot over the last twenty years has rested on the fundamental assumption that the life of the woman and the intellectual development of the thinker and writer are interrelated in a particularly intimate and essential way. In 1933, when P. Bourlon wrote his important George Eliot: Essai de Biographie Intellectuelle et Morale, 1819-1854 (Paris), this insistence on George Eliot's dual nature was an object of demonstration, rather than an axiom: 'toute notre analyse établit que l'activité de la pensée a été, chez elle, étroitement liée à la sensibilité...'¹ In fact, in both Bourlonne's study and in F.R. Leavis's discussion of George Eliot (in The Great Tradition (1948)), it is the emotional development - or the emotional arrest - of the woman that is seen as the key to the intellectual attitudes of the philosopher and the novelist.

M. Bourlonne describes his own approach in this way:

'...l'un des résultats principaux de ce travail est de montrer comment on peut ramener la diversité et les variations de ses croyances à l'unité fondamentale de quelques dispositions affectives déterminées.'

The purpose of his study is to show that George Eliot's 'gravité... en face de l'existence' is a result of a kind of psychological arrest in a stage of adolescent intensities, caused by the moral and social repercussions of her liaison with Lewes. This surrender to emotional

¹ p. 8.
needs has, then, in M. Bourl'honne's account, determined and severely circumscribed the nature of her contribution as thinker and moralist.

F.R. Leavis, similarly, traces her weakness, not to the intellectual 'toughness and dryness,' with which she had traditionally been charged, but to an 'emotional quality...the direct (and sometimes embarrassing) presence of the author's own personal need.' This 'direct presence of the author' is uncompromisingly, if regretfully, to be 'stigmatised as weakness' - though the weakness (as in the case of Jane Austen) is closely connected with the essential 'vitality of her art...a matter of a preoccupation with moral problems that is subtle and intense because of the pressure of personal need.'

What is lacking in George Eliot's case is the alchemy of impersonalisation, worked on this raw sensibility of personal need: she falls time and again into the snares of self-pity and self-idealisation; 'intelligence,' 'self-knowledge,' 'maturity,' 'poised impersonality' - these are the artistic goals from which she is constantly deflected by her own personal need, her inner hungers.

Both Bourl'honne and Leavis, then, demonstrated, in 1933 and 1945 respectively, the radical importance of George Eliot's inner life, especially during the formative years preceding the first novels. This has become critical dogma, an assumption underlying even the increasingly specialised studies of the formal qualities of her art, such as W.J. Harvey's The Art of George Eliot (1961), and Barbara Hardy's The Novels of George Eliot (1957). Nevertheless, in spite

---

2 pp. 32-3.
of this general awareness of the pervasive importance of George Eliot's emotional and personal history to the novels, most studies in recent years have resolved themselves into one of three main categories.

There have been, firstly, the explorations, such as those just mentioned, by W.J. Harvey and Barbara Hardy, of George Eliot's use and control of form, and of her specific structural and imagistic patterns (such as Reva Stump's illuminating study of Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels (Seattle 1959)).

This close critical reading of the texts themselves has been supplemented by a second category of study, concentrating on the intellectual background of the novelist and her cultural milieu. Here, there is naturally, in her case, unusually fertile ground. George Eliot's pre-fictional experience as intellectual strong-woman of the Westminster, her thorough immersion in the currents of thought and feeling of her time, her close relationships with many of the leading philosophers, scientists and scholars of the period, and the creative cross-pollinisation of ideas that took place during her famous Sunday evenings at the Priory - all these are clear indications of an intellectual life both generous in scope and intense in quality.

Bernard J. Paris, in his Experiments in Life (Detroit, 1965), explores her ideas, both as representative of the thought of her age, and as central to an understanding of her novels: it is her quest for values in a Godless universe that he sees as her main preoccupation, emerging from a close reading of the novels, and from a study of the philosophic concerns and conclusions of both George Eliot herself and
her contemporaries. U.C. Knoepflmacher, similarly, in Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel (Princeton, 1965), focuses on the moral problems involved in the humanist position of George Eliot and fellow troubled spirits of the Victorian age. This approach is exemplified impressively, too, in Michael Wolff's unpublished dissertation, Marian Evans to George Eliot: The Moral and Intellectual Foundations of her Career (Princeton, 1958), where Marian Evans's early journalism is shown to be a seed-bed for the later novels, fertilised by the most advanced thinking of the age.

The third category of studies of George Eliot has been the biographical. Until Gordon S. Haight's recent and monumental George Eliot: a biography (Oxford, 1968), Laurence and Elizabeth Hanson's Marian Evans and George Eliot was the main source of information and perspective on the crucial question of the relationship between the woman and the writer---and not an entirely adequate source, as became abundantly evident on the publication of Haight's authoritative work in 1968. This biography, fruit of thirty years' interest in his subject, provides a detailed and illuminating account of the facts of George Eliot's life - the people, the places, the books, the letters. It is a kaleidoscope of great variety and fascination; and together with Professor Haight's edition of the Letters - must remain the basis for any study of her personality for a long time to come.

My own approach to this study begins with a biographical account of the young Marian Evans, up to the publication of her first novels; but my interest is more specific and limited than Professor Haight's. It lies in establishing, from the evidence of her early
letters, her journalism and her early novels, the emotional contours, as it were, of the personality. In this first section, I shall indicate the emotional and intellectual themes and preoccupations that came to fruition in artistic terms only later in the career of the novelist - often considerably later. This early period, from 1839 to 1857, served her as a gestation period, a time of development and deepening in her vision of herself, her relations to the world of people and things. This growth is reflected most personally in her letters, which reflect the continuing struggle to see herself clearly and yet compassionately with the specific vision for which, as novelist, she was to be revered. Her faculty for combining compassion with clear-sightedness was acquired over this period, on the most testing training-ground, her own personality. Her early writing, the translations of Strauss and Feuerbach, the reviews for the Westminster, constitute another source of evidence of the themes that preoccupied her during this gestation period: they express largely and overtly the intellectual side of her nature, but also and less obviously the distanced articulation of deep-lying emotional problems. And both aspects emerge into the daylight of artistic creativity, in more or less tentative forms, in the early novels, Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, and The Mill on the Floss. For this reason, I have approached this first section of my study from a biographical view-point: George Eliot's later moral and intellectual attitudes find their roots deep in the subsoil of her personality, of her sensibility.

Once these important emotional contours are sketched out, I proceed to examine three of the 'difficult' novels of the end of her career. The three that I have chosen - Romola, Middlemarch, and
Daniel Deronda - are those that have been most often accused of being drily and unassimilatedly intellectual. Even Middlemarch, which has always been treated with superlatives, since it first appeared, has had to withstand this particular charge of being too philosophical, cerebral, physiological: Henry James found a dozen passages in it that he marked 'obscure.' These three novels, the heaviest and most cerebral of George Eliot's canon, are the subject of the second part of my study: and my purpose is to show how deeply the roots of these apparently intellectual interests penetrate, into the subsoil of George Eliot's youthful preoccupations, which are always a mixture of the intellectual and the emotional.

My approach, therefore, is less theoretical than that of W.J. Harvey, aiming to show how emotional themes are transmuted into artistic terms. It is also unlike Barbara Hardy's formal approach, though naturally a study in form will establish the emotional patterns of the writer, and my conclusions are substantially similar to hers. The centre of my work is firmly placed within George Eliot's sensibility, and, for this reason, I am concerned with contemporary thinking, in the second part of my study, only in so far as this illuminates or contrasts with George Eliot's treatment of the same themes.

For it is precisely in these 'cerebral' novels, I would suggest, that the specific quality of her vision, of her sensibility, emerges most clearly. In these three novels, much of her early experience, with its peculiar blend of the emotional and the intellectual, comes

---

to artistic fruition. The tracing of relationships between the personal experience of the writer and the final artistic achievement is of course problematic, and fraught with dangers. An element of speculation is inevitable: and yet, in spite of this, it seems foolish to ignore clear parallelisms between the expressed personal feelings of the woman and the imaginative work of the writer. So long as one is conscious that a certain 'leap' is being made, it seems legitimate to notice and to draw conclusions from such parallelisms. For, first and last, George Eliot is placing her own extraordinarily large and deeply felt experience at our disposal, in her art. This is her artistic credo, her rationale for the activity of writing at all: 'My books are deeply serious things to me, and come out of all the painful discipline, all the most hardly-learnt lessons of my past life.'

---

4 What one wants to avoid, obviously, is the kind of unjustified parallel-finding in which early biographers of George Eliot delighted - see e.g. Matthilde Blind, *George Eliot* (1883).

5 *GE Letters*, 18 October 1859. (111, 137).
CHAPTER ONE
THE EARLY YEARS

With the publication in 1955 of Gordon S. Haight's edition of The George Eliot Letters, John Walter Cross's pious and emasculated image of his dead wife was finally obliterated from the imagination of the reading public. In place of the 'Madonna' figure, the 'Sibyl in the Gloom' of Victorian mythology, the sage serene, self-less and all-comprehending, there was sketched out the image of a woman with a strong sense of self, with a complex and often voracious emotional nature, a personality as far from immaculate and harmonious as her physical features. In later years she was to mellow, both physically and psychically, but the early period of struggle and disharmony remains the ground-soil for her later achieved persona.

My purpose in this and the following chapter is to trace the growth of Marian Evans's emotional and intellectual nature, the constant duality of her response to experience, through her early letters, through the gestation period of her non-fictional writings - translations and journalism - and through her first creative work, The Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss. My concern will be to focus on certain basic themes, the important contours of Marian Evans's emotional and intellectual sensibility, and to show how these are transmuted into art.

1 cf. the Pindaric ode in which F.W. Myers invited R.C. Jebb to meet George Eliot at Cambridge in May, 1873; For men say that there is a woman now, Man-named, anonymous, known of all, George Eliot, wiser than the wise... (Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: a biography (Oxford, 1966), 464; quoted from C.L. Jebb, Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb (Cambridge, 1907), 154).


3 See Eliza (Lynn) Linton, My Literary Life (1899), 96-8.
CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY YEARS

With the publication in 1955 of Gordon S. Haight's edition of The George Eliot Letters, John Walter Cross's pious and emasculated image of his dead wife was finally obliterated from the imagination of the reading public. In place of the 'Madonna' figure, the 'Sibyl in the Gloom' of Victorian mythology, the sage serene, self-less and all-comprehending, there was sketched out the image of a woman with a 'strong sense of self,' with a complex and often voracious emotional nature, a personality as far from immaculate and harmonious as her physical features. In later years she was to mellow, both physically and psychically, but the early period of struggle and disharmony remains the ground-soil for her later achieved persona.

My purpose in this and the following chapter is to trace the growth of Marian Evans's emotional and intellectual nature, the constant duality of her response to experience, through her early letters, through the gestation period of her non-fictional writings—translations and journalism—and through her first creative work, The Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss.

My concern will be to focus on certain basic themes, the important contours of Marian Evans's emotional and intellectual sensibility, and to show how these are transmuted into art.

1 cf. the Pindaric ode in which F.W. Myers invited R.C. Jebb to meet George Eliot at Cambridge in May, 1873;
   For men say that there is a woman now,
   Man-named, anonymous, known of all, George Eliot, wiser than the wise...


3 See Eliza (Lynn) Linton, My Literary Life (1899), 96-8.
The early novels, however, do not exploit more than a small proportion of this intense experience. It is significant and revealing of the workings of her creative process that so much of this experience lies dormant for many years and emerges to artistic fruition only in the later novels. The connections between the sensibility of the writer and the work of art are devious and complex: in the case of *Middlemarch*, for instance, she wrote in her Journal of 2 December 1870: 'It is a subject which has been recorded among my possible themes ever since I began to write fiction, but will probably take new shapes in the development.' This long hiatus between first conception and the moment of birth is characteristic of her artistic method. It becomes all the more important, therefore, to explore that long-dormant experience of the early years, and to trace the growth of an emotional and intellectual sensibility that was to 'explode' in such different ways, and at such different periods of her life, into artistic expression.

In this study of the configurations of Marian Evans's sensibility over the period 1839–57, I am, of course, constantly indebted to Professor Haight's authoritative work, *George Eliot: a biography* (Oxford, 1968), and also to Laurence and Elizabeth Hanson's earlier biography, *Marian Evans and George Eliot* (1952). Thanks to them, one can, to a great extent, assume knowledge of the basic facts of George Eliot's life, and focus on the geography of her inner world. For this, my references are made almost entirely to her letters, where, in spite of the obscuring thicket of Johnson-ese that she seems to have acquired from Rebecca Franklin, the often painful self-awareness of the young Marian Evans is clearly evident.

During this early period of her life, Marian Evans oscillated rather violently between two emotional poles. This oscillation, which one can see as fundamental to the rhythms of her inner life, she herself described in a letter to Sara Hennell in 1853, when its first harsh shocks had been absorbed:

'I begin this year more happily than I have done most years of my life. "Notre vraie destinée," says Comte, "se compose de résignation et d'activité" - and I seem more disposed to both than I have ever been before.'

Resignation and activity - she swings between these two extremes over the years of her adolescence and young womanhood. The sense of conflict, of paradox is, in general, prominent in her letters, and the sense of this particular conflict acts as a kind of insistent ground-bass to all the rest. It is expressed on several planes: firstly, and most basically, on the physical plane. Throughout the letters, and particularly in the early period, we find complaints of languor, inertia, a kind of drugged and helpless condition that is obviously psychosomatic in its nature. In mildly critical vein, Kathleen Tillotson points out how very often Marian Evans refers to her health, to the various petty ailments and discomforts that troubled her. Mrs. Tillotson excuses this hypochondriac tendency by placing it within the framework of an excessively health-conscious age; the Hansons, in their biography, attribute her symptoms to the fact that 'like most women of her day, she lived and dressed unwisely'.

6 Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies (1965), 73.
7 Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson, Marian Evans and George Eliot: a biography (1952), 21. Hereafter referred to as Hansons.
but there is more to be learned from a quite serious attention to
the nature of these aches and pains. 8

There are of course the crippling headaches which often form
the pretext for her elaborate apologies for letters incoherent, untidy,
illegible, or simply unwritten. (In this connection, it is interesting
to note that, in fact, these apologies are often not justified by the
fact— they seem to stem more from a subjective, psychological need
for self-abasement, perhaps as a mute plea for reassurance, than from
any objective failing.) But the most common type of complaint is of
a different kind:

'...my mind has been much clogged lately by languor of
body, to which I am prone to give way and for the
removal of which I shall feel thankful.' 9

'...my soul seems for weeks together completely benumbed,
and when I am aroused from this torpid state, the
intervals of activity are comparatively short.' 10

'...hardly myself owing to the insuppressible rising
of my animal spirits...considerable deal of froth.' 11

'no-one feels more difficulty in coming to a decision
on controverted matters than myself.' 12

'You will polish and sharpen me, will you not? Alas!
I need melting and remoulding.' 13

8 For a discussion of these as the occupational hazards of authorship,
see Frank Halstead, 'George Eliot: Medical Digressions in Middlemarch
and Eliot's State of Health,' Bulletin of the History of Medicine, XX,
(1946), 413-25.

9 GE Letters, 6-8 November 1838 (I, 12).

10 " 5 March 1839 (I, 19).

11 " 16 March 1839 (I, 21).

12 " 20 May 1839 (I, 25).

13 " 6 April 1840 (I, 48).
"...severed from...the semblance of a usefulness beyond that of making up the requisite quantum of animal matter in the universe."

"I begin to feel involuntarily isolated...and to have such a consciousness that I am a negation of all that finds love and esteem, as makes me anticipate for myself - no matter what." \(^{14}\)

These quotations clearly cover a variety of conditions - both purely physical lethargy and mental numbness. It seems obvious that she had to contend with a particular psychosomatic condition - a blanketing melancholy that swept over her in surges and left her quite drained of energy or purpose - even of the energy to think clearly, to imagine vividly. An inevitable concomitant was intense depression - 'mine is too often...a walled-in world.' \(^{15}\)

The most agonising manifestation of this disease, however (for this is what it appears to be), was its effect on her religious life. Her dedication in adolescence to Evangelical Christian ideals was clearly motivated by deeper needs than has been implied, for instance, by the Hansons, in their account of this phase of her adolescence. \(^{16}\)

Her piety is not, as they suggest, to be attributed entirely to personal attachment to Maria Lewis and the Misses Franklin. Emotional need of this kind - for human sympathy and solidarity - while basic to her nature, did not constitute its whole range: there is always, equally demanding, the intellectual rigour, the desire for moral stringency and consistency, the introverted concern precisely with the salvation of

\(^{14}\) GE Letters, 28 May 1840 (I, 50-1).

\(^{15}\) GE Correspondence, 27 October 1840 (I, 71).

\(^{16}\) op. cit. pp. 23-4.
her individual soul. Affectionate and clinging as she was, in her relations to those around her, this aspect of Evangelicalism attracted her with a kind of fearful fascination: the intense introspection, the unremitting and illusion-less scrutiny of mood and motive; the exclusively moral and ideal attitude to life. In the view of this religion, the true sphere of action lay not in the public arena, but within the individual soul, that transmuted all phenomena into vessels of God's glory. It was an intensely idealistic faith: the lesser subserved the greater; the concrete was a mere symbol, an indication of the ideal; the external, the physical required justification for its very existence in terms of the spiritual reality it aided men to attain.

There must have been in this vision of life something profoundly meaningful to the starved spirit of the young Marian. As Dinah Norris says of the sensitivity of the poor to God's word: 'We are just the sort of people that want to hear good news.' Unfulfilled, and unlikely ever to become fulfilled, as a woman or as an intellectual - above all, conscious of her helplessness when she was gripped by the physical and emotional torpor that subdued her for weeks on end, and that made the slightest action a heroic effort of will - she found a faith in terms of which she could, to some extent, justify her existence. Her introverted, passive nature, her lack of physical beauty, the daily frustration of housekeeping for her father - all these could be seen, no longer as crippling bonds to a personality that demanied a fuller, wider life, but as a deliberate providence, an aid to deeper spiritual introspection.

17 Adam Bede, ch. 2.
In this sense, Marian's Evangelicalism accorded with one need of her temperament. The essential passivity of the Christian ideal, inward-turned, concerned only with the individual soul, denying the ultimate reality of the temporal world of the senses - this did satisfy something in her nature. Even the fanaticism of which the Hansons accuse Evangelicalism had a certain attraction for her: often, in the early letters, we find the note of longing for the absolute, the desire for simplicity, for freedom from small concerns, from the complex, many-sided considerations that demand the 'tolerance' for which she is famous. She scourges herself continually for her own complexity of character, for her 'want of deep feeling in spiritual things.' 18 "I earnestly desire a spirit of child-like humility." 19

The inner harmony and homogeneity that she craves is constantly threatened by one or another importunate demand of her rebellious nature. She longs for the peace of passivity, in which the soul is utterly rapt in its God, and the spurious activity and hectic variety of the external world fades away into fantasy. 'Blessed state!' she apostrophises, '0 that I could attain it - and why not?' The question is not merely a rhetorical one: the answer comes with the crushing effect of truth: 'Because I am straitened not in Christ but in my own bowels.' 20

This realisation haunts her: the possibility that she is merely dignifying a personal weakness with an aura of pious purpose. In this self-indictment, she realises that to be concentrated in utter passivity

18 GE Letters, 6 February 1839 (I, 14).
19 " 5 December 1840 (I, 73).
20 " 20 July, 1840 (I, 59).
in the name of a spiritual ideal demands an intense activity, an energy and creative force certainly no less than that exacted by life in the external world. The crippling inertia to which she is subject spreads its tentacles through all aspects of her experience, even to the region of her faith. She is conscious of her religious lethargy, of her inability to rouse herself to full realisation of the truths that should galvanise her to a vivid inner life. Her 'pallid mind' and 'rickety body and chameleon-like spirits' denote her fulfilment even in this sphere.

Significantly, however, following on these waves of crippling lethargy there would come moods of violent joy and exhilaration, painful in their consciousness of the shadow from which they had emerged. There is often evidence of a great sensual awareness, almost voracious at times, that impinges on her more keenly than the spiritual values to which she tries to subjugate it.

Striking, for example, is the frequent, almost obsessive use of food imagery, which cannot be dismissed as a merely formal analogy.

21 GE Letters, 21 December 1840 (I, 76).

22 She compares herself to a 'little child, with my pudding... dispatching the part for which I had the least relish first.' (9 Sept. 1838). She is 'generally in the same predicament with books as a glutton with his feast, hurrying through one course that I may be in time for the next' - characteristically adding, as if to forestall criticism - 'not a very elegant illustration.' (6-8 November 1838). And she refers to people for whom 'nothing less than omnivorous reading...can satisfy their intellectual maw.' (16 March 1839). Perhaps the fullest sensuousness of her imagination appears in her juxtaposition of worldly arf spiritual delights: 'we inflate ourselves with wind and refuse the feast of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.' (13 March 1840).
Her vivid consciousness of the delights of the palate sometimes has an almost Dickensian flavour, as, for instance, in the passages in *Adam Bede*, describing the Harvest Supper and the sheer physical pleasure, immediate and vicarious, that it inspires:

'that table with Martin Poyser's round, good-humoured face and large person at the head of it, helping his servants to the fragrant roast beef, and pleased when the empty plates came again...'

This sensuousness emerges quite clearly too from the loving descriptions of comfortable interiors, of speckless cleanliness and buxom, house-proud women, the very salt of the earth. It is obvious that the human, sensual element in Marian Evans was always strong: the sheer delight in life for its own sake, quite apart from value, or higher significances. The external world did exercise a great fascination over her - one that in her youthful piety she branded as sinful, a distraction from the ruthlessly homogeneous world-vision that she sought to impose on the variety of experience.

It was not surprising that eventually after many years of tension between the constitutional lethargy that deadened her religious responses, and the intervening flashes of vivid desires and longings for the forbidden pleasures of the outer world, the breaking-point should be reached. Gradually, inevitably, the tension grows: in 1840, there are references to some infatuation that threatened the spiritual scheme of her life. She berates that 'traitor within, the love of human praise'; she tries to whip her 'rocky heart,' to rid herself of the disturbing image of the beloved, that disrupts her inner peace; but she admits the sight of him 'would probably upset all' her resolution. 'Cupid listens to no...

23 *GE Letters*, 26 February 1840 (I, 40).
24 " , 30 March 1840 (I, 46).
entreaties...we must deal with him as an enemy, 25 she writes a few
days later: this encroachment of the alien, outer world must be
repelled at all costs: the love of the creature would threaten the
absolute adoration of the Creator - 'possessing the fervent love of
any human being would soon become your heaven, therefore it would be
your curse,' she writes of herself to Martha Jackson - even friendship
is a rival to the exclusive love of God.

The conflict grows especially fierce, naturally, when the
rejected delights are especially dear to her. There is, for instance,
the notorious passage in which she discusses marriage:

'When I hear of the marrying and giving in marriage
that is constantly being transacted I can only sigh
for those who are multiplying earthly ties which
though powerful enough to detach their heart and
thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable
to be snapped asunder at every breeze.' 26 (my italics)

and the passage in which she ponders the permissibility of reading
fiction. The arts have always posed problems for the Puritan:
they remain tainted by the pagan culture that gave them birth, and,
if not actually harmful to his spiritual welfare, are, at best, of
negligible moral value - and therefore, in the uncompromising Puritan
view, unjustifiable. Marian Evans, like many other Puritans, is
struggling with an unmanageable susceptibility to the forbidden;
and the severity of the prohibition is naturally in proportion to
the susceptibility. She proscribes fiction for herself - not because
she does not enjoy it but, on the contrary, because it has too potent

25 GE Letters, 67 April 1840 (I, 48-9).
26 " 13 August 1838 (I, 6).
an effect on her. With typical honesty of reservation and qualification, she adds:

'I am I confess not an impartial member of a jury in this case for I owe the culprits a grudge for injuries inflicted on myself. I shall carry to my grave the mental diseases with which they have contaminated me.' (The fact that this sentence was omitted by Cross charges it with even greater significance.) 'When I was quite a little child I could not be satisfied with the things around me; I was constantly living in a world of my creation, and was quite contended to have no companions that I might be left to my own musings and imagine scenes in which I was chief actress.'

The two worlds, of reality and of fantasy, are at war: wish-fulfilment, or 'compensation,' as she was later to brand it, is pernicious, morally and spiritually - it is, in uncompromising Puritan terms, falsehood. There is to be no peaceful co-existence between the two worlds, no creative interaction; it is either/or - 'When a person has exhausted the wonders of truth, there is no other resort than fiction.'

This recognition of her peculiar susceptibility to just those feelings and tendencies that she decries is paralleled at several points - but never more clearly than in the question of personal attachment to other human beings. Love of the finite creature could never, for her, fit into its lawful niche in the pattern of all-embracing love of God. The world of creatures, of human relationship within the bounds of time and space, was an implicit threat to the inner, spiritualised world of her faith. Stringent measures were called for: perhaps others could afford to fraternise with the world of the senses; her defences, she felt, were too weak:

27 GE Letters, 16 March 1839 (I, 22).
'I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful enjoyments the world can offer and yet live in near communion with their God; who can warmly love the creature, and yet be careful that the Creator maintains His supremacy in their hearts; but I confess that in my short experience and narrow sphere of action I have never been able to attain this; I find, as Dr. Johnson said respecting his wine, total abstinence much easier than moderation. 128

Human affection, 29 alien ideas, 30 the influence of physical environment and circumstances 31 - these are all irreconcilable with her desired 'conscious union' 32 with God. This extreme idealism was bound to grow more rigid, in reaction to increasing pressure from outside: and, eventually, to crack. In this critical process of 'conversion (or perversion)' as Basil Willey describes it, her reading was clearly highly influential. ('A single word is sometimes enough to give an entirely new mould to our thoughts. 33) Taylor's Ancient Christianity and the Doctrines of the Oxford Tracts (1841), Bulwer's Devereux, 34 Scott's novels, Hennell's Inquiry concerning the Origins of Christianity, Bray's Philosophy of Necessity - these very different works all urged her to a position of almost pantheistic acceptance of and delight in the material world for its own sake.

Even before the meeting with the Brays, there are signs of a change of attitude from her previous uncompromising idealism. In a letter to Martha Jackson, written in March, 1841, there is a new note

28 88 Letters, 18 August 1838 (I, 6).
29 " , 30 March, 1840 (I, 46).
30 " 4, 4 September 1839 (I, 30).
31 " , 4 September 1838 (I, 9).
32 " 27 October 1840 (I, 71).
33 " , 30 March 1840 (I, 46).
34 See " , 30 March 1839 (I, 30).
of un-apologetic delight in her imaginings of the countryside -
'Towzer's nose pushes itself against my fingers, and then my fingers
wander about his rough coat as I write.' She then adds, with her
typical self-conscious humour, but with a rather lighter touch than
formerly:

'You will almost accuse me of valuing you as I do
some painters' figures - for the sake of the
landscape in which you are placed. Well! I
suppose we are all loved (or despised) a little
for the sake of our circumstances as well as for
our qualities...who will pretend that a woman who
is reached through a spacious entrance hall with
Indian matting can appear as utterly commonplace
as Miss Jackson seen through the open parlour-door
as you enter the passage?' (I, 85-6)

This letter might be seen as a tentative indication of her
own future theory of fiction. What makes it specially interesting
is the frank acknowledgment of the influence of external factors, not
merely as a framework for the independent reality of the human-being,
but as one of its conditioning factors. The demarcation-line between
the inner being and the outer world of all the petty circumstances
that make up physical and social conditions - this division is in the
process of disappearing. And this passage foreshadows her later
depiction of the fearful determining power that the web of circumstances
holds over the inner life and decisions of men.

Even before this meeting the Brays, then, the revolution in her
severely idealistic philosophy had begun: she had begun to come to
terms with that dichotomy of the ideal and the actual, the infinite
and the limited, that was never to cease to occupy her.

Her first reaction to the intoxication of contact with the
Brays was, as she later ruefully admitted, 'a crude state of free-thinking.'
Suddenly set free from the tyranny of dogma, she glories in the sheer sensuous delight of the actual, untrammeled world. After dropping the bombshell of her change of religious belief, and after the acquiescence in church-going with her father, for the sake of family peace, she is subjected to the attempts of her religious friends to bring her back from her spiritual aberrations. These force her to formulate her new position with a clarity that at first is exaggerated, in its rejection of the past and justification of her present moral position. She is still too vulnerable to accept any compromise; even Bray's observation that Evangelical religion may have a desirable moral effect must be rebutted as a threat to the new faith:

'I am influenced in my own conduct at the present time by far higher considerations, and by a nobler idea of duty, than I ever was while I held the evangelical beliefs.'

She protests too much: faced with the kindly assaults of the Fears's, the Sibrees, and the learned clergyman they delegate to convince her of her errors, she declares, 'Calvinism is Christianity...a religion based on pure selfishness.' Her present motives for moral virtue, she claims, are much higher than the religious imperative 'to save one's soul by making up coarse flannel for the poor.'

At the same time, the world beyond herself has a new and vital importance: 'How go you for society, for communion of spirit, the


36 There are no half-measures in her conversion; her advocacy of fiction, for example is as absolute as her prohibition had formerly been - 'they (novels) perform an office for the mind which nothing else can'; and as for Shakespeare, 'in educating a child, this would be the first book she would place in its hands,' reports Mary Sibree. (Hansons, p. 62).
drop of nectar in the cup of mortals?" And in her mood of almost delirious joy in the delights of the actual physical world, she writes to Rev. Watts, the clergyman who was trying to re-convert her to orthodoxy:

'I confess to you that I feel it an inexpressible relief to be freed from the apprehension of what Finney well describes, that at each moment I tread on chords that will vibrate for weal or woe to all eternity. I could shed tears of joy to believe that in this lovely world I may lie on the grass and ruminate on possibilities without dreading lest my conclusions should be everlastingly fatal.'

This is a classic description of the intoxication of freedom, of the liberation from the 'consciousness of Christian centuries.' The Puritan ethic of suppression and sublimation suddenly seems tyrannical and destructive: what she has gained in rejecting them is, to use her own word, 'spontaneity.' And, indeed, there is a surge of optimism in her letters at this point, a ringing assertion of the 'bliss and beauty' of life:

'I think there can be few who more truly feel than I that this is a world of bliss and beauty, that is, that bliss and beauty are the end, the tendency of creation, that evil is the foil to the jewel...'

But suddenly, less than two months after writing this ecstatic letter, she is plunged again in the fogs of melancholia:

'I...have thought my soul only fit for Limbo to keep company with other abortions, and my life the shallowest, muddiest, most unblesting stream.'

And she is once again hyper-sensitive to the affection of her friends,
touchingly grateful for any expression of friendship to 'one who must wonder by what strange hallucination fellow beings are attracted towards her.'

The change in Marian's beliefs and attitudes can be seen quite clearly, if we compare the letter she wrote to Sara Hennell on 15th March, 1843, to comfort her in Mary Hennell's fatal illness, with the similar letter of condolence that she had written three years earlier to Edith Kittermaster. Then, she had written a long and pious description of the spiritual value of bereavement, which teaches us to 'cease from man' and turn exclusively to God, as the only true source of comfort and joy:

'There is a degree of satisfaction even amidst this grief and anxiety, to which thoughtless freedom from pain can be nothing equal; it is the satisfaction of having partially set our feet on the firm foundation of truth...'

The value of bereavement, then, was that it turned man from the false outer world of human loves and ties, to the true inner one, where God reigns alone. Now, three years later, she writes to Sara Hennell:

'When the topmost boughs are lopped, a thousand shoots spring from below with all the energy of new life.'

Now, the consolation is, on the contrary, a renewed appreciation of all the small delights of life: the vision of man is forced downwards, by the loss of the beloved - down to all the unnoticed joys which are to be nourished into new blossom; and not upwards to some lofty ideal, that transcends the temporal conditions of life. Now all comfort, all

40 GE Letters, 10 April 1840 (I, 49).
reassurance is to be found in the actual world of human relationships and natural phenomena; not in a hypothetical state postulated from within man's mind.

After her first reaction, however, she tries to come to terms, if not with her rejected faith, then at least with those who still hold it. And there is an almost wistful note about her assertion that one should be in harmony with those 'who are often richer in the fruits of faith though not in reasons, than ourselves.' It is men of faith who, in a sense, create the world, who have the power of imposing their inner vision on the intractable material of reality. And it is this 'truth of feeling' that, for Marian, is the 'only universal bond of union': this is the real stuff of humanity, only 'melted into another mould' in her case, than the conventional, and mythical, Christian dogmatism. Even that 'wretched giant's bed of dogmas,' from which she is so thankful to be liberated, however, now seems to her less easily discarded than in her excessive enthusiasm she had at first thought: 'the intellectual errors which we once fancied were a mere incrustation have grown into the living body and... we cannot in the majority of cases, wrench them away without destroying vitality.' Dogmas, even false ones, may be the authentic expression of profound moral insights, for a particular generation, and should not be carelessly uprooted. She even uses the image from the New Testament of the wheat and the tares, to illustrate her point. So her missionary zeal for the spread of truth of opinion is tempered by her

41 GS Letters, 9 October, 1943 (I, 162). (Continued on page 25...
recognition of the total human framework, in which truth expresses itself; and, particularly, by her consciousness of the common basis, the ultimate reality of the 'truth of feeling,' that is greater than speculation and opinion.

This attempt to come to terms with adherents to all forms of belief is typical in its synthesising approach. But during the next few years, the fine strength and flexibility of these sentiments were to be severely tested. At this time, she was working on the translation of Strauss's Leben Jesu, which largely constituted for Marian an amplification of Hennell's Inquiry, and therefore brought her no novelty in the translation. In this undertaking, Marian again displayed the contradictory tendencies of her nature. On the one hand, she showed great zeal in the work - even learned Hebrew to aid her - and continued all her manifold social commitments, visiting the poor, teaching in Caroline Bray's infant school, looking after her father, besides attending lectures herself and giving German lessons to Mary Sibree. But on the other hand, she was increasingly visited by the spectre of melancholy and inertia. The work on Strauss was long, heavy, solitary.

Continuation of Note 41:

Even in her earlier convert's enthusiasm, she had written:

'I can rejoice in all the joys of humanity; in all that serves to elevate and purify feelings and action; nor will I quarrel with the million who, I am persuaded, are with me in intention though our dialect differ. Of course I must desire the ultimate downfall of error: for no error is innocuous, but this assuredly will occur without my proselyting aid...'

(23 January 1842). There is a tone of humane acceptance of the variety and primary reality of the human material, through which truth will manifest itself.

She can even accept her own egoism, now - the subject of so much anxiety and self-conscious apology in her earlier letters: 'Beautiful ego-ism! to quote one's own.' And proceed to justify it: 'But where is not this same ego...?' (16 February 1842) She also refers humorously to her 'I-ety' - 'An unfortunate lady wrote a note, one page of which contained thirty I's. I dare not count mine lest they should equal hers in number.' (16 September 1842).
and destructive. Strauss's Higher Critical approach destroyed the historical basis of the Gospels, and with Teutonic thoroughness demonstrated their mythical nature. Christ still remained an object of veneration, but it was rather an intellectual form of admiration: for Strauss, Christ embodied the profoundest teaching of the Hegelian philosophy, in that he symbolised the ultimate union of matter and spirit, phenomenal and noumenal, man and God. But Strauss's approach was too cold and analytical for Man's emotional nature: the implications of his work were devastatingly negative. Her habitual lethargy crippled her continually, a psychological escape-mechanism from the onerousness of the work. 'How I nauseate pen, ink, and paper,' she cries; and, with a grimacing kind of sense of humour, sees this cloud of perpetual depression as divine retribution for her apostasy: 'Heaven has sent "leaness into my soul" for reviling! the Christian saints.' The emptiness of a world disenchanted of faith fills her with gloom - 'Do you not feel,' she asks pathetically of Sara Hennell, 'how hard it is not [to] give full faith to every symbol?' This is the need for commitment, for absolute engagement, rearing its head again. Tolerance, rational qualification, critical analysis and recognition of the trivialities of life - these have lost the glow of novelty; and a yearning possesses her for the spiritual passion of faith that transforms all objects.

She is 'Strauss-sick' - in 'despair that life would ever be made precious to me by the consciousness that I lived to some good purpose.' Actual life, in all its pettiness, continually disappoints her; Strauss,  

43 G3 Letters, 31 October 1844 (I, 182-3).
44 " , September 1844 (I, 181).
as she herself points out, is only a symptom of her general malaise -
she is not really disgusted with Strauss: 'I only fancy so some-
times, as I do with all earthly things.' 45 It is a weariness of the
flesh that oppresses her; the finite world, in which she is confined,
is a wasteland, a mockery of her inner longings. 'The difficulties
that attend a really grand undertaking are to be borne,' 46 - but less
important things should go smoothly. 'It seems as if my affections
were quietly sinking down to temperate and I every day seem more and
more to value thought rather than feeling,' she writes to Sara Hennell,
and adds, significantly, 'I do not think this is man's best estate.' 47
It is certainly not her best state, this 'sinking down to temperate,'
this subsidence into passivity and lassitude, in which thought has
lost the emotion that is its life-blood. Marian Evans is now once
more imprisoned within herself, passive, capable only of suffering,
not of acting.

Very revealing is her approving quotation of a passage from
Harriet Martineau's *The Cottage Boys* - some lines 'that would feed
one's soul for a month.' 48 The passage speaks of 'a new and delicious
pleasure which none but the bitterly disappointed can feel - the
pleasure of rousing their souls to bear pain, and of agreeing with
God silently, when nobody knows what is in their hearts.'

This delicious pleasure' is, in fact, a return to the Puritan
ideal of passive acceptance of the sorrows of the external world:

45 *GE Letters*, 29 April 1845 (I, 190).
46 " , May 1845 (I, 191).
47 " , 13 June 1845 (I, 195).
48 " , 25 May 1845 (I, 192).
of retreat into the spirit, of inner acquiescence and peace, in
the will of God. Again and again, this polarity will recur in
Marian Evans’s thought, this continual oscillation between the two
worlds: ‘notre vraie destinée se compose de résignation et d’activité.’

Indeed, the outward swing is not long in coming. Already in
August, 1845, the prospect of finishing the Strauss translation rouses
her to lyricism: ‘leathery brain must work at leathery Strauss for a
short time before my butterfly days come. O how I shall spread my
wings and caress you with my antennae.’ These lines have a poignancy
in their whimsical self-deprecation. The two sides of her nature are
so clearly expressed: the ‘leathery brain’ and the butterfly; the
ponderous intellectualism and the feeling for impalpable beauty.
And when she does finally finish the translation, she grows light-
hearted, casts off, if only temporarily, the heavy Puritan earnestness
and quest for value, and bids the Brays come to her, ‘in a very
mischievous, unconscientious, theatre-loving humour.’

And again, with the whimsical note of realistic self-knowledge, she writes from
Clapton, where she is visiting Sara, that ‘everybody I see is very
kind to me and therefore I think them all very charming, and having
everything I want, I feel very humble and self-denying.’ One feels
that she is once again in tune with the world: the equilibrium has
been restored, for the time being at least.

The Strauss translation was, in fact, her first major literary
undertaking, in a career that was to move from translations to
critical essays, and finally to her fictional works. Each of these
types of work represents a stage in her evolution towards creativity.

l0 GE Letters, 1 June 1846 (I, 219).
In her translations of Strauss and Feuerbach (and, later, of Spinoza), she displayed her capacity for submission; her passive, sympathetic, mimetic habits of mind and feeling were drawn upon, in a surrender of her own personality to another's thought and sensibility.  

In her second 'phase,' as editress and contributor for the Westminster, the detached, active, critical, and often scathing aspect of her nature came to the fore. It was of this aspect that James was thinking, when he called her 'the victim of a first-class education.' But it was in the fusion of these contradictory impulses, of sympathy and detachment, submission and self-assertion, that her own characteristic tone was conceived. Both translations and reviews made these years, from 1845 to 1857 a valuable gestation period for her creative maturity.

With the Strauss translation completed, Marian was engaged in constant care for her sick father. At every spare moment, she used to read to him, especially from his favourite Scott. Chapman was in process of publishing her translation; and Charles Bray bought the Coventry Herald and persuaded Marian to contribute some reviews and articles to it. The 'Poetry and prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric' was her first published work - essays that appeared in the Herald from December, 1846 to February, 1847.

---


'She does not strike me as naturally a critic, less still as naturally a skeptic; her spontaneous part is to observe life and to feel it, to feel it with admirable depth. Contemplation, sympathy, and faith - something like that, I should say, would have been her natural scale.'

51 ibid.
Their interest lies, not merely in their foreshadowing of future achievements, but in the intrinsic value of many of their insights. The Introductory essay purports to be written at the grave-side of the author's friend, Macarthy - and is, in effect, a character-sketch of this imaginary friend. Laboured and self-conscious as the style of the essay is, the description of Macarthy's sensitivity of temperament is done with a perception and a vivid sympathy that seems to denote some degree of self-portraiture. It is a description of the eternal incongruity of the ideal and the actual, what is and what should be, that, as we have seen, is a leit-motif in Marian Evans's thought. She dwells on the 'morbid sensitiveness' of the dead man. For him, the facts of human degradation are 'positively painful elements in his experience, sharp iron entering into his soul.'52 The phrase is intensely felt: Marian herself was engaged in just this struggle to come to terms with the 'knots and blemishes' of actual daily existence. She too suffered from the over-heightened sensibility that was constantly aware of the frustrations, the sheer pettiness, that was much of life's response to her ideal demands.

The way in which Macarthy comes to terms with the disappointments of reality is by becoming a 'humourist - one who sported with all the forms of human life, as if they were so many May-day mummings, uncouth, monstrous disguises of poor human nature, which has not discovered its dignity. While he laughed at the follies of men, he wept over their

sorrows...' As a description of her own attitude in her novels, towards the commonplace 'poor human nature,' this could hardly be bettered - the rueful, realistic, but loving tone is the same as that which speaks of Amos Barton - that 'superlatively middling' clergyman, and of the ordinary, mediocre unheroic 'eighty out of a hundred' human beings who appear again and again in her novels. But it is not just this early statement of a life-long theme that is interesting, but rather the light it sheds on the complexity of reaction, out of which the later missionary simplicity evolved.

When considering George Eliot's advocacy of 'sympathy' and love to the least splendid or extraordinary of her fellow-morals, critics have tended to describe this as a kind of exaltation of the commonplace, a spontaneous hymn of praise to the rock-bottom level of common humanity. It is for this that she is celebrated by readers of socialist views: for the jovial pictures of bucolic country life, for the humane portrayal of the sorrows and struggles of undistinguished men and women, in the commonest walks of life. But the achievement is sometimes not seen within the framework of an intellect naturally aspiring to the heroic, to the extraordinary. It is a forced submission to reality that is part of the drama of Marian Evans's development - a constant tension, an oscillation between a longing for the ideal and a clear, remorseless insight into the actual mediocrity of things, between the inner vision of man's essential grandeur and its external travesty in pettiness and frustration. From this tension, George Eliot was eventually to work out some kind of synthesis, albeit, at times, rather a precarious one. But it would be an impoverishment of our understanding of her thought-processes, if we pounced too quickly on the synthesis, without dwelling
sufficiently on the polar elements that it eventually drew together.

The theme is continued in the piece on 'The Wisdom of the Child.' She declares here that true wisdom consists in a return to that purity and simplicity which characterise early youth. The sage and the child are at one, regarding the outer world with all the wonder and receptivity of a full inner life.

'It is, indeed, a similarity with a difference, for the wonder of a child is the effect of novelty, its simplicity and purity of ignorance; while the wonder of the wise man is the result of knowledge disclosing mystery, the simplicity and purity of his moral principles, the result of wide experience and hardly-attained self-conflict.'

The pattern here is clear: innocence leading to experience, culminating in a return to innocence in its enriched form. Or, in other words, a pilgrimage from the passivity of the inner world, to immersion in the activity of the external world, and ultimately to the crowning peace of inner fulfilment. Those whose progress is somehow interrupted at the intermediate stage, who find themselves in a cul-de-sac of reason-without-faith, fact-without-vision, who do not follow the clue to its destination, are described as 'philosophers... who have reached the stage of enlightenment in which virtue is another name for prudence, who give their sanctions to a system of morals, as they do to a system of Police...who would change their morals with their climate...' and these 'philosophers' are deemed inferior to the child who devoutly 'exercises faith and obedience to law.'

53 ibid., p. 20.
Thus, the non-rational and reverent faculties are exalted at the expense of the over-weening rationalism of the philosophers. It is impossible, of course, to remain a child, with a child's implicit faith, his projection of himself, his own fantasies and desires, on the world of fact. Man must progress outwards, must engage with the life outside him; but this, in turn, should only serve to enrich and confirm the purity of vision with which the child begins.

The dangers of too great a concern with the self are expressed in 'A little fable with a great moral,' the next of the pieces in the 'Notebook of an Eccentric.' The tale of the Hamadryads is told gently and whimsically; but both nymphs are clearly projections of contrary aspects of her own personality: on the one hand, the narcissistic, self-obsessed tendency, the self-distate, self-pity, and emotional hunger that tormented her; and on the other, the recognition that the only escape from this obsessive concern with self is concentration on others, on the world beyond the self. Also indicated here, is her later 'positivist' concern with the amelioration of the conditions of life, the growth of practical scientific knowledge: 'some of the thick forests had been cleared away from the earth, and men had begun to build and to plough...'

'From the Notebook of an Eccentric,' therefore represents a first statement of important themes, arising from her personal emotional experience and the evolution of her philosophical views. The increasing

\[54\] ibid., p. 22.
insistence on objectivity extends even to her own self-regard: her letters indicate the growth of an almost clinical detachment in her view of herself: she positively enjoys being 'removed to a distance from myself, when I am away from the petty circumstances that make up my ordinary environment. I can take myself up by the ears and inspect myself like any other queer monster on a small scale.' The need for freedom and clarity from the stultifying conditions of daily life emerges vividly from these sentences: she must sometimes be alone with herself, not in order to sink within herself, but, on the contrary, to attain a measure of detachment, to become both subject and object, scientist and specimen. The 'petty circumstances' of her life irk her almost unbearably at times: she has to escape to achieve that mixture of egoism and detachment, which characterises her at her best.

In 1848, she writes some extremely interesting letters to her friend, John Sibree, whose offer of marriage she had declined; she discusses, in more intellectual vein than with her female friends, (even Sara Henne]l) her central preoccupations, with the ideal and the actual, the possibilities for heroic action in a petty and increasingly circumscribed world. Especially interesting is her generalisation that the world has exhausted its heroic possibilities in literature:

'Great subjects are used up, and civilisation tends evermore to repress individual predominance, highly-wrought agony or ecstatic joy. But all the gentler emotions will be ever new - ever wrought up into more and more lovely combinations, and genius will probably take their direction."

55 OE Letters, 11 February 1848 (I, 247-8).
When we speak of George Eliot's preoccupation with these 'gentler emotions,' her exaltation of the small beauties of the commonplace, we should not be too hasty to add that she scorned the grand, the heroic: it is quite obvious that, like her own Macarthy on the contrary, she had a keen feeling for the monumental and the extraordinary, and that it is precisely this feeling that lent pathos and humour to her depiction of mediocrity.

In similar vein, she writes of her joy in the French Revolution. She commends John Sibree (together with Carlyle) for being able to 'glory in what is actually great and beautiful without putting forth any cold reservations and incredulities to save their credit for them... You are just as rash and sansculottish as I would have you.' The letter glows with enthusiasm: the urge for commitment to actual human, social achievement impatiently shrugs off the pedantic detachment of the philosophers. She quotes St. Simon's theory of the alternating periods of history - the critical epoch followed by the organic - and rejoices that she lives in an 'organic' age. The impulse to see the best expectations of her inner ideals embodied in reality is irrepressible: but realism forces her to look around her, and admit that

'I should have no hope of good from any imitative movement at home. Our working classes are eminently inferior to the mass of the French people. In France, the mind of the people is highly electrified - they are full of ideas on social subjects - they really desire social reform - not merely an acting out of Sancho Panza's favourite proverb, "Yesterday for you, to-day for me"...! Here there is so much larger a proportion of selfish radicalism and unsatisfied brute sensuality...than of perception or desire of justice, that a revolutionary movement would be simply destructive...'

---

56 GE Letters, 8 March 1848 (I, 254).
Here, simultaneously, we find the revolutionary fervour, the ardent idealism, and its corollary when faced by sordid reality - the reactionary apprehension and caution that she is later to elaborate in Felix Holt's anti-radical speeches.

During the last months of her father's life, the strain on Marian was overwhelming. Constantly at his bedside, subject to the unremitting yoke of petty housekeeping tasks, she yet cherished these occupations as her remaining opportunity of service to the one person in the world who really needed her. 'I am suffering perhaps as acutely as ever I did in my life,' she writes. 'My life is a perpetual nightmare.' The nightmare feeling emerges very clearly from a passage in a letter to Sara Hennell, with its acute sense of alienation, astonishingly close in detail to that described decades later by the Existentialists:

'Alas for the fate of poor mortals which condemns them to wake up some fine morning and find all the poetry in which their world was bathed only the evening before utterly gone - the hard angular world of chairs and tables and looking-glasses staring at them in all its naked prose. It is so in all the stages of life - the poetry of girlhood goes - the poetry of love and marriage - the poetry of maternity - and at last the very poetry of duty forsakes us for a season, and we see ourselves and all about us nothing more than miserable agglomerations of atoms - poor tentative efforts of the Natur Princip to mould a personality.'

The world divested of 'poetry' is suddenly seen as naked, hard, unfeeling. Lost in a harsh world of things, the soul bruises itself impotently: it is inert, incapable of that power of transformation,

---

57 G8 Letters, January 1849 (I, 274).
60 February 1849 (I, 276)
58 " , 4 June 1848 (I, 264).
that flow of idealism that transforms all objects to its will. It is the feeling of 'The world is too much with us...,' of 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more.' It is a mood that George Eliot often recaptures in her novels: at the climaxes of tragedy, when her heroines - Hetty, or Gwendolen - are suddenly divested of all their hopes and desires - it is the cold, immovable world of objects that reflects their grief - a looking-glass, a heap of jewels. But even this state Marian Evans tries to generalise, to forge into a mere link in the chain, a necessary stage in the eternal oscillations of fate:

'This is the state of prostration - the self-abnegation through which the soul must go, and to which it must again and again return, that its poetry or religion, which is the same thing, may be a real ever-flowing river fresh from the windows of heaven and the fountains of the great deep - not an artificial basin with grotto work and gold fish.'

What, in effect, she is saying is that these periods of barrenness, of 'self-abnegation,' are not only inevitable, but, in a sense, desirable. The flow of creative vision, from the innermost self, must be ever-fresh, must always retain the energy of pure need: it must flow towards a parched land. Every now and then, therefore, what Leavis calls the 'pressure of personal need' has to be experienced anew.

The idea is an arresting one: but it has, in a sense, the originality of despair. Marian's description of her state has all the horror of a nightmare: it reads like an entry in a modern psychiatric case-book:
I feel a sort of madness growing upon me - just the opposite of the delirium which makes people fancy that their bodies are filling the room. It seems to me as if I were shrinking into that mathematical abstraction, a point - so entirely am I destitute of contact that I am unconscious of length or breadth, and by the time you see me again, I shall have lost all possibility of giving you any demonstration of a spiritual existence - like a poor sprite metamorphosed into a pomegranate seed or some such thing.'

The puckish, whimsical, fantastic note of that last image - 'a poor sprite metamorphosed...!' is expanded a few months later to fill an entire letter, in which she humorously imagines the process of her creation. This very pathetic little fable, with its note of rueful tenderness, expresses all Marian's sense of disharmony - both with herself and in relation to the world. She can only account for herself as some kind of freak of nature: but the very real pain of feeling unequipped, physically and mentally, for the struggle of existence - this she manages to sublimate in the fantasy and grotesque humour of the story. Believing as she did that 'everything necessarily acts in accordance with its own nature,' there seemed no way out for her, from the fate of her ill-matched characteristics, her gangling form, her unwieldy intellect, and her possessive emotions. And now, the lethargy that had again overtaken her left her bereft of any power of fruitful contact with the world beyond herself. 'The enthusiasm without which one cannot even pour out breakfast well (at least I cannot) has forsaken me.'

The battle between idealism and realism takes an unexpected turn...

59 *GE Letters*, 23 November 1848 (I, 272-3).

60 ibid, 5 June 1848 (I, 265) (continued on page 39...).
in Marian's thoughts, in May, 1849 - shortly before her father's death. Thinking of F.H. Newman - 'our blessed Saint Francis,' she writes:

'There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase "too good to be true." The highest inspiration of the purest, noblest human soul is the nearest expression of the truth...Shall we poor earthworms have sublimer thoughts than the universe of which we are poor chips - mere effluvia of mind - shall be have sublimer thoughts than that universe can furnish out into reality?' 61

With a typical paradoxical flick, she has inverted the usual ideal/real relationship. The conventional argument of the Realist school is that any highly virtuous character would be untrue to life, a figment of the idealist's imagination. By juggling with her terms, Marian asserts the power of the 'universe' to provide realities exceeding man's greatest visions - a belief that should lead to a saner and calmer acceptance of the possibility of great virtue. Realism should not be a reductive view of possibilities but, on the contrary, should throw even the highest human ideals into proper perspective.

This piece of reasoning, rather muddling though it seems, has a significant effect on George Eliot's attitudes towards many of the characters in her novels. Far from swooning with admiration before her

---

Continuation of Note 60:

Only books still seem to have the power to rouse her to enthusiasm. Rousseau sends 'an electric thrill' through her; and as for George Sand, although 'I should never dream of going to her writings as a moral code or text-book' and 'I don't care whether I agree with her about marriage or not'..."I cannot read six pages of hers without feeling that it is given to her delineate human passion and its results...some of the moral instincts and their tendencies - with such truthfulness, such nicety of discrimination, such tragic power and withal such loving, gentle humour, that one might live a century with nothing but one's own dull faculties and not know so much as those six pages will suggest." (9 February 1849).

61 GE Letters, May 1849 (I, 282).
virtuous heroes and heroines, as so many Victorian novelists do, George Eliot remains relatively unimpressed and collected: she probes, analyses, approves, but ultimately regards the exceptional moral qualities she is depicting as, in one sense, a matter of course.

This balanced view is partly due to the deterministic light in which she sees her characters: to some extent, because of their inherent temperament and social situation, they can scarcely side-step their own virtuous inclinations. But equally powerful as an influence on this attitude is her experience of the demanding Evangelical perspective on life. For the Puritan, moral standards are absolute: and measured against them, even the most impeccable of human-beings is a sinner. accustomed to intense introspection, George Eliot knew that from the exacting viewpoint of their own ultimate ideals, they are found wanting. Thus, she can accept, quite calmly and honestly, the goodness of her good characters, she can depict courage, self-abnegation, near-saintliness, with neither a reductive scepticism, nor a sanctimonious awe. They are great souls, she acknowledges: but not 'too good to be true.'

The death of Marian's father marked a turning-point in her life. Strangely, the last days at his bedside brought her great emotional satisfaction. She is touchingly grateful for his 'thousand little proofs that he understands my affection and responds to it.'62 'These are very precious moments to me; my chair by father's bed-side is a very blessed seat to me.' And again, she writes to Charles Bray: 'Strange to say, I feel that these will ever be the happiest days of my

62 GE Letters, 10 May 1849 (I, 283).
life to me. The one deep strong love I have ever known has now its highest exercise and fullest reward - the worship of sorrow is the worship for mortals. This almost mystical sentence is counter-balanced by the deep fear and sense of loss, amounting to panic, that is reflected in the letter written to the Brays on the night of her father's death:

"What shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining influence." 63

It is as though her father had acted as a kind of emotional safety-valve for her, granting her some outlet for her affections, for her need of love and dependence - a lawful and 'purifying' outlet. Without this, she shuddered to think what she would do with all the passion of her nature.

However, the void left by her father's death was to some extent filled by her close friends, the Brays, Sara Hennell, and the D'Alberts, whom she came to regard as parent substitutes (even calling Mrs. D'Albert 'maman.' ) Her depression stayed with her, however, and Charles Hennell apparently spoke to Sara critically about Marian's melancholia: 'there is much that is morbid in your character...with a dwelling on yourself and a loving to think yourself unhappy,' 64 Marian humbly admits the truth of the charge, and promises to keep her depressions out of her

63 OE Letters, 30 May 1849 (I, 204).
64 , 20 September 1849 (I, 307). Marian is quoting from Sara Hennell's letter to her.
letters. Again, rather movingly but, one feels, quite truly, she claims: 'I want encouraging rather than warning and checking. I believe I am so constituted that I shall never be cured of any faults except by God's discipline - if human-beings would but believe it, they do most good by saying to me the kindest things truth will permit....' This basic need of her nature for encouragement and support was fortunately to be realised by Lewes, who supplied much of the need himself, and warned her publisher, Blackwood, likewise, never to criticise her work, unless it were absolutely essential.

Marian's apparently restrained, phlegmatic nature included, as we have seen, a fundamental admiration and enthusiasm for warm and ardent feelings, overflowing into action. She has all the wistful reverence of the introvert for the fine careless raptures of those who are fully adjusted to the world of action:

'I am beginning to lose respect for the petty acumen that sees difficulties. I love the souls that rush along to their goal with a full stream of sentiment, that have too much of the positive to be harassed by the perpetual negatives which are after all but the disease of the soul, to be expelled by fortifying the principle of vitality.'

It is this quality of vitality that she lacks: but she is acutely aware of the lack, and cherishes what amounts to a veneration for those who are endowed with this magic quality. Again and again, the vivid activity, the physical strength and beauty, the positive, unintellectual force of the characters in her novels are to be emphasised, with a kind of fascinated delight.

---

65 BB Letters, 24 October 1849 (1, 318).
Connected with this admiration for the active and the actual, in their best forms, is her declaration that 'the only ardent hope I have for my future life is to have given to me some woman's duty, some possibility of devoting myself where I may see a daily result of pure calm blessedness in the life of another.'66 This is not only a longing for an absolute emotional attachment to another human-being, but it is, in a sense, the desire to lose oneself in activity, to realise all the potential of the inner life in the limited and controllable minutiae of a practical 'woman's duty.' It is a desire for the 'simple life,' sharpened by the pressures of a complex personality.67.

The growing and painful awareness of the complexities of her needs as a woman and as an intellectual being was intensified at this period by her infatuation for Chapman; and experience clearly underlies her later portrayal, in The Mill on the Floss, of Maggie's passion for Stephen.

66 GE Letters, 4 December 1949 (I, 322).

67 cf. 'No wonder the sick-room and the lazaretto have so often been a refuge from the tossings of intellectual doubt - a place of repose for the worn and wounded spirit. Here is a duty about which all creeds and all philosophies are at one: here, at least, the conscience will not be dogged by doubt, the benign impulse will not be checked by adverse theory: here you may begin to act without settling one preliminary question...This blessing of serene freedom from the importunities of opinion lies in all simple direct acts of mercy, and is one source of that sweet calm which is often felt by the watcher in the sick-room, even when the duties there are of a hard and terrible kind.' (Janet's Repentance, ch. 24, pp. 270-271).
The physical fascination with a man morally and intellectually her inferior is depicted there with such complete realism, with such an absence of critical comment, that many readers have been repelled by this section of the book. At least, insists Dr. Leavis, George Eliot ought to have implied her own disapproval of Maggie's infatuation. Nowhere does she clearly seem to realise just what a nonentity Stephen is, what a tragedy it would have been for Maggie to be married to him, quite apart from the obvious moral issue. But the objection is made by a man. Probably any woman could understand and accept this kind of fascination. There is no need to emphasise the unworthiness of the object: that should be plain from the facts of Stephen's words and attitudes. What needs understanding is the irrational blinding power that such an attraction can have, perhaps primarily, over the morally and emotionally fastidious woman.

Marian's infatuation, acted out against a background of sordid squabbles and jealousies, exhausted her, and, eventually, exhausted itself. Her friendship with Spencer may have acted as a kind of antidote - this rather severe, refined, and hypochondriacal thinker, who appreciated her masculine mind and feminine gentleness, and supplemented them with his own intellectual energy and confidence. She also met Lewis during this period (1851), but, significantly, was repelled by his ugliness ("a sort of miniature Mirabeau," she calls him).

69 G.E. Letters, 8 October 1851 (I, 367).

Physical beauty affected her greatly, perhaps just because of her own lack of it. Even the Swedish authoress, Frederika Bremer, for whom she later came to feel a sincere admiration, at first repelled her by her ugliness.
The friendship with Spencer took a decidedly platonic turn: and Marian was painfully aware that it was her own lack of beauty that had once again foiled her longings for full appreciation and love. This was an emotionally exhausting time for her, and it is no wonder that she refused to write for Chapman on the 'Emotions' - 'for it is the grand wish and object of my life to get rid of them as far as possible, seeing they have already had more than their share of my nervous energy.  

As always at such periods of her life, Marian swings back to a sense of the meaninglessness of existence. Now, however, it takes a different formulation: in writing to Chapman she articulates her new philosophy: she rejects the belief in

'Free Will, in the Theism that looks on manhood as a type of the godhead, and on Jesus as the Ideal Man'

- in fact, all the most cherished convictions of her transition from Christianity; the pantheism and rational synthesis of Hennell and Strauss. Now, she proclaims her belief in

'necessity, that a nobler presentation of humanity has yet to be given in resignation to individual nothingness, than could ever be shown of a being who believes in the phantasmagoria of hope unsustained by reason.'

She is thrown back once more on passivity, on resignation and hopelessness. Nothing creative can be done with the world: the individual is a mere plaything of the ruthless forces of necessity. The only wisdom is to submit; the only strength to recognise one's impotence. * In her novels, George Eliot often was to illustrate this inner fortitude of passivity, of resignation, the Christian virtue of

---

70 GE Letters, 21 July 1852 (II, 46).
71 " 24-5 July 1852 (II, 49).
self-repression, and to celebrate it with a sympathy born of experience. Seth Bede, to mention one example, reacts to Dinah's refusal of his offer of marriage in this way:

'...instead of bursting out into wild apostrophes to God and destiny, he is resolving, as he now walks homeward under the solemn starlight, to repress his sadness, to be less bent on having his own will, and to live more for others, as Dinah does.'

Living for others is the one permissible outlet for man's energies: only in this way, can be seek some satisfaction of his will to achieve, to act. Like the Hamadryad in her Notebook of an Eccentric, he must submit to his own decay, and focus his concern on the world beyond the self.

The emotional dryness and isolation of Marian's state increasingly depressed her. The 'common yearning of womanhood' grew in her, as its fulfilment became less and less likely. Then, one evening, Lewes, till then a casual friend, or rather Spencer's friend, turned to her for sympathy in his loneliness, and all at once the 'woman's duty,' for which she had longed, was placed before her. Lewes, with his rather scandalous reputation, his monkey-like appearance, and his 'Frenchified' air, had not at first made a very favourable impression on Marian. But the wreck of his marriage, his own need for love, and the fact that he was on the verge of nervous and physical breakdown, appealed now to her, in a way that all his brilliance and wit had not been able to do.

As literary and dramatic critic, he had an excellent reputation: and his weekly book-review in the Leader was one of the talking-points.

---

72 Adam Bede, ch. 3.
in London intellectual circles. But he also masqueraded as 'Vivian' - the urbane gossip-columnist; and had the doubtful honour of being the author of two rather delicate novels, which shocked even so imperturbable a reader as Jane Welsh Carlyle.\(^7\)\(^3\) This vulgar side of his nature, however, does not seem to have repelled Marian, as much as, at first, his physical ugliness had done. His respect for the depth of her intellect, his emotional need of her sympathy, provided her with what seemed now the only valid purpose in living - dedication to another, justification by works. To be found lovable by another human-being seemed to authenticate her own existence: and in his eyes, 'to know her was to love her.'\(^7\)\(^4\) And he, in turn, had a stimulating effect on her:

he embodied that vitality that she regarded with such wistful admiration - 'an airy loose-tongued merry-hearted being, with more sail than ballast,'\(^7\)\(^5\) Jane Welsh Carlyle called him; and since, in many ways, she had ballast enough for two, his dynamism and volatility seemed a sheer blessing to her.

The effect of this relationship on Marian was overwhelming. The tone of her letters changes instantly: even before the decision to live together publicly, she has shouldered much of his work, to spare his ill-health; physically, she is over-stressed, labouring for two. But the contentment that being needed has brought her is immediately reflected in her attitudes: even Essie Parkes notices the new softness in her: she writes to her friend, Barbara Smith:

\(^7\)\(^3\) See Hansons, p. 153.

\(^7\)\(^4\) G\&L Journal 23 January 1859; quoted in Hansons, p. 158.

\(^7\)\(^5\) Hansons, p. 155.
Larianli: van's finally made up her mind to love me. The odd mixtu re of truth and fondness in Larian is so great...she seems able to see faults without losing tenderness."

This perceptive comment indicates the harmony that Larian had now established between some of the paradoxical aspects of her nature: truth and fondness; objective realism and the spontaneous outflow of love. And shortly after her thirty-fourth birthday, she epitomises this harmony in the quotation from Comte (a writer who had interested her earlier, but whom she had laid aside - significantly - because of Spencer's unfavourable opinion), which we cited earlier:

'I begin this year more happily than I have done most years of my life. "Notre vraie destinée," says Comte, "se compose de résignation et d'activité" - and I seem more disposed to both than I have ever been before.'

'More disposed to both' indicates the newly discovered sense of reconcilement and peace: somehow the conflict has ceased and co-existence seems possible at last.

By this time, her success as critic and editress of the Westminster had reached gratifying proportions. The reputation of the periodical had soared and her articles had been acclaimed by the leading English thinkers of the day, who accepted her as their equal. From childhood, she had been particularly susceptible to applause, a weakness that she could now recognise quite equably in her own nature.

---

76 GE Letters, 12 February 1853 (II, 87).
77 " , 25 November 1853 (II, 127).
78 When four years old, 'in order to impress the servant with a proper notion of her acquirements and generally distinguished position,' she had given a piano-recital without being able to play a note! (Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot; a biography, p.5; quoting J.W. Cross, ed. George Eliot's Life (1885), I, 14.)
The pleasure of fame and intellectual respect was, in fact, one of the main considerations that spoke against her projected 'elopement' with Lewes. In openly living in adultery with him, she would be placing herself beyond the pale in respectable society; and, perhaps most importantly, she would frustrate her hopes of becoming a power for the good in the wider world. Thus, both egoistic and altruistic considerations were opposed to this union: in its favour, there was simply the 'pressure of personal need' of both herself and Lewes - a need that was providentially justified in the intellectual area in which she was at this time working.

This was her translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, commissioned by Chapman. Both Comte and Feuerbach were to have a profound influence on her. According to Comte, 'Love is naturally the one universal principle.' In his *Philosophie Positive*, the blueprint of his social system, he places woman in the central position: the Positivist marriage is divine, and women are objects of worship. Marriage is, however, unbreakable - and even marriage with an 'unbeliever' is seldom allowed to be dissolved.

Feuerbach, on the other hand, had a much more practical and human attitude. He agrees that marriage is divine: but his emphases are all on the human nature of that divinity. The divine is a characteristic of humanity: the true marriage will express this essential quality. But if the marriage is no longer the incarnation of the ideals it is meant to express - then its 'raison d'être' has vanished, and the marriage is at an end. The implication for Marian's own situation is clear. In July, 1854, the Feuerbach translation was published, and Marian left with Lewes for Antwerp.
Feuerbach's philosophy, however, had effects on Marian in a much wider sphere. His rejection of the Hegelian idealistic philosophy, and his concentration on the world of actual fact, of matter and sense-data, made its impact on the delicate balance that Marian had always been trying to achieve between the claims of the ideal and the real. In his Preface, Feuerbach declares his manifesto:

'I unconditionally repudiate absolute, immaterial, self-sufficing speculation, - that speculation which draws its material from within...for my thought, I require the senses...I do not generate the object from the thought, but the thought from the object; and I hold that alone to be an object which has an existence beyond one's own brain.' His Idealism is 'only faith in the historical future, in the triumph of truth and virtue; it has for me only a political and moral significance; for in the sphere of strictly theoretical philosophy, I attach myself, in direct opposition to the Hegelian philosophy, only to realism, to materialism in the sense above indicated.' He is 'nothing but a natural philosopher in the domain of the mind'; and his philosophy lies, paradoxically enough, 'in the negation of philosophy, i.e., it declares that alone to be the true philosophy which is converted in succum et sanguinem, which is incarnate in Man.' This is, in fact, the crux of the matter: his principle is 'no abstract, merely conceptional being, but a real being, the true Ens realissimum - man.'

The attempt to establish philosophy on purely scientific grounds, to define all things in and by their effects on man, in historical and not in speculative terms, is elaborated throughout this analysis of Christianity, its terminology, its dogmas and its rituals. This, to Feuerbach, is the essence of Christianity: the worship of man, of humanity, in its purest and loftiest character. As he himself admits, much of his work is destructive - but only of the 'un-human' elements of theology.

In dealing with the Incarnation, for example, his method is clearly demonstrated. 'Love determined God to the renunciation of his divinity' - a love of precisely the kind that human-beings experience towards each other. Therefore, 'as God has renounced himself out of love, so we, out of love, should renounce God; for if we do not sacrifice God to love, we sacrifice love to God, and, in spite of the predicate of love, we have the God - the evil being - of religious fanaticism.' Thus, starting from what is most characteristically Christian, the concept of the Incarnation, Feuerbach, with his own paradoxical logic, proceeds to cut away the very roots of Christianity.

The highest values man can know are, then, purely human ones. 'God is love' means nothing more than 'love is divine, is sublime.' God is merely an objectification of the highest needs of humanity. Therefore, to sacrifice those needs to the concept of God, is seen as a perverse and barbaric proceeding. Feuerbach deals at length with the Christian attitude to marriage, to the satisfaction of human needs on the physical and emotional planes. Ruthlessly, he lays bare the essential 'monachism' of Christianity - its preoccupation with God, with spirituality: the human-being vis-à-vis himself, cut off from fruitful contact with the world, with his fellow-men. The ideal of this religion is devotion to God - 'But God is absolute subjectivity - subjectivity separated from the world...' It involves intense introspection: even the social duties of benevolence that the Christian does fulfil are 'essentially only an activity for God.'

80 ibid., p. 53.
81 ibid., p. 161.
The absolute exclusiveness of the Christian ideal is remorselessly driven home, and supported by many learned quotations from the New Testament and the Church Fathers. The conclusion is uncompromising: 'Where the heavenly life is a truth, the earthly life is a lie; where imagination is all, reality is nothing.'

Marriage and other earthly satisfactions are, in the Christian scheme, concessions at best. To Feuerbach, it is quite clear that the only true Christians, who follow the implications of their belief to their logical conclusion, are the ascetics: 'If death is the condition of blessedness and moral perfection, then necessarily mortification is the one law of morality.' The modern worldly form of Christianity, with its policy of 'to have as though we had not,' with regard to the pleasures of the world, is hypocrisy - polygamy, as Feuerbach, with his habitual shock-tactics, puts it.

In his claim, then, to distil the pure 'essence' of Christianity, Feuerbach has, in fact, shown that in its very elements, it is hostile to the forces of life. Christianity as such, however, Marian had long discarded: even the belief in God, by now, did not require much battering. Where Feuerbach affected her most crucially was in this unremitting emphasis on reality, on the supreme criterion of objective facts, as experienced by the senses - on the ultimate importance of humanity, in its full meaning. Man needs man: the formula is reduced to this simplicity. The Christian, the introvert, 'in his excessive, transcendental subjectivity, conceives that he is, by himself,

82 ibid., p162.
a perfect being. But the individual alone is not perfect: man needs woman, and human-beings need each other. There must be a constant interaction between the individual and the society around him: idealistic philosophers, by artificially exalting man-alone, act against the nature of things. The results of subjectivity in the actual world are vicious and unnatural: Feuerbach quotes Montesquieu - 'La dévotion trouve, pour faire de mauvaises actions, des raisons, qu'un simple honnête homme ne saurait trouver.'

'Un simple honnête homme' becomes the new standard of reality. The influence on the George Eliot of the 'Schemes of Clerical Life, and Adam Bede is obvious: the emphasis that she is constantly to place on the objective reality of her human-beings, is an essential feature of her theory of fiction. What is, and not what ought to be - this is the criterion of her writing, expressed in theory, as well as in practice. ('I become...less daring to adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience.')

Feuerbach's rejection of Idealism, his deification of human nature and needs, was perhaps the strongest influence on her, intellectually and emotionally, at this period. At this crisis of her personal life, she became aware, to an unprecedented extent, of the difficulties of her own experience as a woman and as a creative writer, seen in a larger context of the experience of women-writers in general.

---

83 ibid., p. 167.
84 ibid., p. 315.
85 'With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree.' (OE Letters, 29 April 1854 (II, 153).
Her own particular organisation served her as a basis for generalisation about the special problems of feminine creativity. From Weimar, she wrote the article on 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé,' in which she emphasises the primary importance of a woman writer's being feminine in her approach to literature - not merely striving to emulate masculine achievement. The importance of sexual differences in temperament and approach is stressed: and this difference in literature, the 'action of the entire being,' should express.

Then, rather audaciously, though with her usual prefatory re-assurances of orthodox morality, she claims that the prevalence of adulterous liaisons among the French can actually have a beneficial effect on their women. The intrigue, the passion that goes into these affairs, can 'convert indolence into activity, indifference into ardent partisanship, dulness into perspicuity': it can 'arouse the dormant faculties of woman.' She is of course referring, quite specifically, to the highest society of the seventeenth century, and to the scintillating women-intellectuals, mistresses of 'salons' and writers of exquisite letters, of the period. Obviously, neither 'gallantry and intrigue' nor 'embroidery and domestic drudgery' apply, in the first place, to any more immediate case. But, in this description of the effects of a mature union, 'with its power to 'convert indolence into activity,' we are surely justified in discerning a reflection of her own state during these months.

The companionship and devotion of Lewes stimulated her, as she had never been stimulated before. She has all the gratitude of an

86 Pinney, p. 56.
apparently phlegmatic nature, now sparkling with discovered life. And at this point, it seems, the problems of creative writing, as opposed to merely critical or translating work, begin to concern her. In her discussion of the physiological differences between the French and the Teutonic types, her own difficulties in terms of creative energy are clearly at the basis of the more generalised argument.

She writes:

'...the larger brain and slower temperament of the English and Germans are, in the womanly organisation, generally dreamy and passive. The type of humanity in the latter may be grander but it requires a larger sum of conditions to produce a perfect specimen...The woman of large capacity can seldom rise beyond the absorption of ideas; her physical conditions refuse to support the energy required for spontaneous activity; the voltaic pile is not strong enough to produce crystallisations; phantasms of great ideas float through her mind, but she has not the spell which will arrest them, and give them fixity...'

The attempt to categorise feminine literary ability in this way, to place it on a firm basis of physiological fact, and to generalise from there, is characteristic of George Eliot. It is an attempt to make psychology scientifically respectable: the images and analogies

---

87 She seems to have been granted a new lease of energy: while Lewes wrote his book on Goethe, she industriously translated Spinoza's Ethics - 'I think it is impossible for two human-beings to be more happy in each other,' she wrote. (12 November 1854). And later, in 1857, she wrote explicitly: 'I am very happy - happy in the highest blessing life can give us, the perfect love and sympathy of a nature that stimulates my own to healthful activity.' (6 June 1857) (my italics).

88 Finney, pp. 55-6.
that she uses - biological and geological - are significant. And
the tendency is obviously connected with the intense interest in
phrenology, that was felt by many thinking people of the time -
Bray and, of course, George Combe. What is specially interesting
in this passage, however, is the extent to which Marian Evans is
characterising her own temperament. The description of the difficulties
that the Teutonic temperament finds, before it can bring itself to
the act of creation, is not a merely abstract notion. The lack of
energy and vitality, the immense mass of material to be infused
with life, the physiological lethargy that she has always suffered -
these might, indeed, have frustrated her desire to 'rise beyond the
absorption of ideas.' The 'spell' that she needed was provided by
the love and energy of Lewes: it is scarcely possible to exaggerate
his importance to her as a creative writer, as well as in her private
life.

Lewes indeed had apparently always had a particular sympathy
for the problems of women-writers. In his article, 'The Lady Novelists,'
in 1852, he had dealt with women's specific contributions to literature.
His argument, based on the dogma of realism ('only that literature is
effective...which has reality for its basis...and effective in
proportion to the depth and breadth of that basis.'), insisted on

89 George Eliot herself mocked at a too credulous faith in the relation-
ship of 'eyelashes and morals' (Every man under such circumstances is
conscious of being a great physiognomist. Nature, he knows, has a
language of her own, which she uses with strict veracity, and he
considers himself an adept in the language.') (Adam Bede, ch. XV).

90 Westminster, LVIII (July 1852), 129-41.
the 'peculiarly emotional' experience of women as their authentic source for artistic expression. Moreover, by using the striking analogy of an oyster-pearl, he described the act of creativity as a form of compensation for personal suffering: women being subject to special and frequent misfortunes feel an acute pressure in their personal lives that often drives them to the relief of artistic expression. And the pearl that is thus produced owes its existence to the suffering that brought it into being. All literature is an 'unconscious, unavowed' transference of emotion, a sublimation of frustrated needs: women's literature has an explosive intensity usually unparalleled by that of men.

This generalisation fits Marian's case perfectly, as she herself often admits. She is continually longing for some kind of 'justification by works' - to be involved in some grand achievement that shall make her life worthwhile. This need of her nature was not to be completely fulfilled by the 'women's duty,' for which she had pleaded. Her enthusiasm on re-reading Hennell's *Inquiry*, for example, expresses her longings:

...'if I had written such a book, I should be invulnerable to all the arrows of all the spiteful gods and goddesses. I should say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself," seeing that I have delivered such a message of God to men.'

And the sense of destiny, of the pearl that justifies all the oyster's torment, is again reflected in her letter of 6th June, 1857, written while she was working on the *Scenes of Clerical Life*:

---

91 *BE Letters*, 16 September 1847 (I, 237).
'I feel too that all the terrible pain I have gone through in past years, partly from the defects of my own nature, partly from outward things, has probably been a preparation for some special work that I may do before I die.'

What amounts almost to a faith that the accumulated ore of painful experience will be mined and justified by 'some special work' is reflected not only in her letters but, in increasing clarity and conviction, in her formal accounts of the function of literature, in her essays and reviews of the period. From her own close knowledge of a difficult and inharmonious sensibility, she came to regard the extension of sympathy as the moral function of art. Hence, naturally, the crucial importance of realism: of an unsentimental portrayal of the ugly, the mediocre, the actual, as the most fitting object of sympathy. Thus there runs through many of the reviews of this period (1853-58) an insistence on a realism that we may divide into three categories: artistic, social, and moral.

Her artistic credo is found at its clearest in the following well-known passage from her essay on Riehl:

'The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalisations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment... Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life... It is serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-men, should be perverted, and turned to a false object instead of the true one.'
Here, the three categories converge: art, in its proper function, banishes moral insularity, leads men to see each other more clearly and yet to understand and sympathise more vividly—which in turn has social repercussions in the practical sphere.

To begin with the last point: social amelioration is possible only on a basis of accurate and unsentimental appraisal of the existing condition of victimised classes. She therefore commends Dickens for his realistic portrayal of the external traits of town-people: psychologically, however, she finds him miserably melodramatic and unrealistic, and what is more, morally destructive;

'this preternaturally virtuous poor children and artisans, his melodramatic boatmen and courtesans, would be as noxious as Eugene Sue's idealized proletaires in encouraging the miserable fallacy that high morality and refined sentiment can grow out of harsh social relations, ignorance, and want; or that the working-classes are in a condition to enter at once into a millennial state of altruism, wherein everyone is caring for everyone else, and no one for himself.'

The relation with Felix Holt's political sentiments is obvious: the insistence on a slow, organic development and improvement of physical conditions, before the proletariat can realise its full potential. She does not want the peasantry idealised: on the contrary, that would be to spoil their case. She wants the misery of their moral condition clearly recognised as the result of their physical oppression: only then will these conditions be ameliorated, and 'equality,' the ideal of the demagogues, come within reach. It is truth and clear-sightedness that are needed in fiction, as in

93 ibid., pp. 271-2.
scientific observation⁹⁴: 'the natural history of our social classes' - what we now call sociology - is the subject that needs development and clarification.

The argument is similar to the one she uses in her article on the feminists, 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft.' She quotes with approval Margaret Fuller's views on the 'folly of absolute definitions of woman's nature and absolute demarcations of woman's mission'⁹⁵: and she comments on the fact that in the books under review,

'there is no exaggeration of woman's moral excellence or intellectual capabilities; no injudicious insistence on her fitness for this or that function, hitherto engrossed by men; but a calm plea for the removal of unjust laws and artificial restrictions, so that the possibilities of her nature may have room for full development...''⁹⁶

She sees 'idealism' of all kinds as destructive: the imposition of self-generated views and images on the free and various forms of reality.

⁹⁴ 'The Natural History of German Life' was written in the summer of 1856, after her holiday with Lewes in Ilfracombe, where he had worked on his 'Sea-Side Studies' (1858); she had thus been intimately involved in scientific research, and, inevitably, been affected by the integrity and objectivity of scientific observation. Her journal, the 'Recollections of Ilfracombe,' was carefully compiled in this spirit - 'to escape from all vagueness and inaccuracy into the day-light of distinct, vivid ideas,' And they are, in fact, largely modeled on the approach of Ruskin, whose 'doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature,' she had praised in her review of Modern Painters III (Westminster, LXV, April 1856).

⁹⁵ cf. Dinah Morris's serene justification of a woman's right even to be a preacher, when the spirit moves her:

'It isn't for men to make channels for God's Spirit, as they make channels for the water-courses, and say, 'Flow here, but flow not there.'" (Adam Bede, ch. 8).

⁹⁶ Finney, p. 200.
Such a realistic appraisal is the basis for any constructive plan to ameliorate woman's social conditions: she insists that, in their present condition, women are often weak, stupid, and frivolous. She rejects the view of 'many over-zealous champions of women,' who 'assert their actual equality with men - nay, even their moral superiority to men - as a ground for their release from oppressive laws and restrictions. They lose strength immensely by this false position. If it were true, then there would be a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we should have an argument for the continuance of bondage...'

To idealise woman, in her present state, then, is to play into the hands of the enemy - those men who say of women:

'Let them be idols, useless absorbents of precious things, provided we are not obliged to admit them to be strictly fellow-beings, to be treated, one and all, with justice and sober reverence.'

The pre-requisite for all social and moral improvement, is an unflinching honesty and realism: to recognise both the inevitable power of women over their menfolk, and the equally inevitable misuse of that power in the hands of women who are under-developed human-beings. Similarly, the degrading effect of physical and social conditions on the poor must not be minimised - the dependence of moral qualities on external factors. Otherwise, one falls into the 'miserable fallacy '

97 'Take a woman's head, stuff it with a smattering of philosophy and literature chopped small, and with false notions of society baked hard, let it hang over a desk a few hours every day, and serve up hot in feeble English, when not required.' ('Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' in Finney, p. 310).

98 Finney, p. 205.
that high morality, and refined sentiment can grow out of harsh
social relations, ignorance, and want... - the fallacy that she
so deplores in Dickens.

A rigorous realism is her criterion for judging both systems of
morality and works of art. The moral act, she insists, is autonomous,
justified by its own immediate impulse: religious palliatives, the
promise of immortality, of reward or punishment, any 'sublimation' of
human feelings or compensation for human evil - all these are anathema
to her. One of the principal charges she levels against the
Evangelical preacher, Dr. Cumming, is that he is unscrupulous and
dishonest in his arguments: she must be, Marian ruthlessly alleges,
because of that

'intellectual and moral distortion of view, which
is inevitably produced by assigning to dogmas,
based on a very complex structure of evidence, the
place and authority of first truths.'... 'in pro-
portion as religious sects... believe themselves to
be guided by direct inspiration, rather than by a
spontaneous exertion of their faculties... their
sense of truthfulness is misty and confused.'

Intellectually, then, no statement of a person possessed of a religious
bias, can be accepted at face-value. Adjudging the credulity of Methodists
to the most incredible miracle-stories, she declares that the religious

'require no other passport to a statement than that
it accords with their wishes and their general
conception of God's dealings.'

The intellect, with them, becomes 'the mere servant-of-all-work to a
foregone conclusion.'

99 Finney, p. 166.
Religious dogma is here made responsible for the empirical dishonesty she condemns. Generalisations, abstractions divert man from the natural, individual human feelings for his fellow-man that must remain the basis of truth. Feuerbach is omnipresent in these reviews: she indicted those who 'sacrifice love to God,' who regard 'salvation as a scheme rather than an experience.' Religious motives replacing instinctive human emotions she sees as a struggle between the forces of life and the artificial tyranny of inanimate matter:

'all these natural muscles and fibres' (of affection and moral sentiment) 'are to be torn away and replaced by a patent steel-spring - anxiety for the "glory of God."...The idea of God is really moral in its influence - it really cherishes all that is best and loveliest in man - only when God is contemplated as sympathising with the pure elements of human feeling, as possessing infinitely all those attributes which we recognise to be moral in humanity.'

This conclusion is pure Feuerbach; as is much of her attack on Young, the poet of her 'youthful predilections and enthusiasm.'

'Virtue or religion as it really exists' is to be found'in the emotions of a man dressed in an ordinary coat, and seated by his fire-side of an evening, with his hand resting on the head of his little daughter...'

---

100 There is a note of resentment, almost of violence, in this article that does not accord well with the tolerance for which she is so often praised. There is still a poison of reaction in her system, that requires working out: in the article on Dr. Cumming, and in the essay, two years later, on the poet Young - 'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness' - she purges herself of some of this venom - with the result that in 1859, she is able to write to Monsieur D'Albert-Durade: 'When I was at Geneva, I had not yet lost the attitude of antagonism which belongs to the renunciation of any belief... I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves...' (DL Letters, 6 December 1859 (III, 230-1)).

102 Pinney, p. 371.
Virtue if it exists at all, exists in the actual relations of man and man. And she asserts that it does exist, even independently of a belief in immortality (or even because of a disbelief in immortality):

'The fact is, I do not love myself alone...it is a pang to me to witness the suffering of a fellow-being, and I feel his suffering the more acutely because he is mortal - because his life is so short, and I would have it, if possible, filled with happiness and not misery.'

This insistence of the supreme value of the actual, the physical limited life of man, as opposed to an idealistic general theory, imposed from above (or from within), is an obvious reaction to the dogmatic

\[103\] Finney, pp. 373-4. This is a rebuttal of Young's position:

'If it were not for the prospect of immortality, he considers, it would be wise or agreeable to be indecent, or to murder one's father; and, heaven apart, it would be extremely irrational in any man not to be a knave.'

Of the three concepts, God, Immortality, and Duty, she 'pronounced with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable it was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third.' The independence of the moral life from all 'sugar-plum' palliatives is a formidably ascetic belief, and yet - as Kyers goes on to stress - it carries for George Eliot great implications of gentleness and sympathy: he quotes a letter of condolence that she wrote in 1875 - 'to know what the last parting is seems needful to give the utmost sanctity of tenderness to our relations with each other.'

period of her youth: to the intense introspection and self-discipline that had cut her off, in some essential way, from the realities of the world beyond herself. Now, the highest achievement is that genuine love, which cherishes things in proportion to their nearness, and feels its reverence grow in proportion to the intimacy of its knowledge.104

The trivialities and pettiness of life are no longer to be scorned; no longer to be regarded as travesties of the ideal inner life. Now, the love and reverence for the ideal, all the contemplative forces of her nature, are to be focussed on these external realities, are to discover within their mediocrity a germ of the ideal.

For this, self-suppression in a different sense is necessary. The didactic, formal impulse must be stifled, in order that the full flow of response to reality may be allowed an outlet.

Love does not say, "I ought to love" - it loves. Pity does not say, "it is right to be pitiful" - it pities...we think experience, both in literature and life, has shown that the minds which are predominantly didactic...are deficient in sympathetic emotion.105

That Marian had herself a tendency to didacticism is undeniable; perhaps for that very reason, she now, in her reaction from subjectivity, regards didacticism as the unforgivable sin.

The reverence for the commonplace, for reality even in its least venerable forms, appears again and again in the articles and

104 Finney, p. 385.

105 Finney, p. 379.
letters of the period. "I wish less of our piety were spent on
imaginary perfect goodness, and more given to real imperfect
goodness," she writes of Harriet Martineau, at the beginning of
1856.\textsuperscript{106} Writing to Sara, she sympathises with the latter's aches
and pains. Ill-health, she knows from experience, can have a ruinous
effect on temperament and disposition, even the minor annoyances that
attract no sympathy: "Those are just the troubles that people pass
by so carelessly - "she is not very well", "not strong," which generally
means that life is very hard work." This ready sympathy for the small,
undramatic evils that beset the human organism, is the fruit of bitter
experience. Life had been such hard work for her, as a result of them,
that she could not dismiss them as petty, as merely physical discomforts.
Her own nagging ill-health may thus have indirectly had a deep effect
on her more far-reaching sympathy with the unheroic travails of
humanity. "For a long while to come," she writes, "I suppose human
energy will be greatly taken up with resignation rather than action."\textsuperscript{107}
And in 1865, she writes to Bessie Parkes: "The calm acceptance of a
lot and faithful devotedness to whatever may come, seems to me quite
as noble as the energetic creating of a lot."\textsuperscript{107a}

It is the half-shades, the mezzo-tints, of life that become
charged with the burden of full significance and truth. And it is
because of her innate tendency to the dogmatic, the neatly-ordered
imposition of mind over matter, of inner vision over rebellious
reality that, in her conversion to the materialism of Feuerbach, she

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{106\textit{OE Letters}, 25 February, 1856 (II, 230).}
\footnote{107\" , 23 November 1863 (IV, 115).}
\footnote{107a\" , 22 June 1865 (IV, 196).}
\end{footnotes}
insists on the essentially a-moral nature of life. She rejects the 'sugar-plum' morality of primitive religions: she refuses to recognise the 'compensation' theory of more sophisticated moralists. The moral life is recalcitrant and, to the human intellect, largely anarchic: reward does not follow virtue with the unfailling regularity of tract-ist poetic justice. The external, physical world refuses to mould itself to the moral scheme of life engendered in the brains of silly lady novelists. It has its own, often savage, logic: morality must proceed on independent premises, it must be satisfied with rewards of a purely spiritual nature:

'The notion that duty looks stern but all the while has her hand full of sugar-plums, with which she will reward us by-and-by, is the favourite cant of optimists, who try to make out that this tangled wilderness of life has a plan as easy to trace as that of a Dutch garden.'

The moral principle she is here attacking is exemplified in Geraldine Jewsbury's novel, Constance Herbert: that obedience to duty, however harsh, will always bring its own reward, on the same plane as the sacrificed desire - 'Nothing they renounce for the sake of a higher principle, will prove to have been worth the keeping.' This, to Marian Evans, is not 'moral heroism,' but simply 'a calculation of prudence.' True moral heroism lies in a full and candid recognition of the value of the sacrifice, of the continuing pain of loss; and in a submission of that value to the higher motive that rules out its attainment. It is the 'immediate impulse of love or justice, which alone makes an action truly moral'; that 'keen sympathy with human misery,' for example, that makes one willing to sacrifice one's own
joy for the good of another. No external reward, on the material plane, no neat logical twist of poetic justice is needed: the 'immediate impulse' bears its own power, is its own justification.  

Thus morality itself is seen as a form of natural, spontaneous life, as its highest form. The impulses of justice or love demand satisfaction, in the same way as an appetite does. They are part of the factual reality of life: and therefore require no extrinsic justification or reward. ('Love does not say, "I ought to love" - it loves.')

Neat copy-book morality, then, Marian Evans rejects: dogmatism and didacticism fade into irrelevance in the daylight of the multitudinous forms and varieties of life. Easy distinctions and formalisations are worse than irrelevant: they are morally destructive. In this vein, she approves of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, as a realistic presentation of life: on Wordsworth's principle, quoted by Lewes in his Life of Goethe, that (speaking of 'Tam o' Shanter') 'though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.' True morality is demonstrated by those few people who

'are taught by their own falls and their own struggles, by their experience of sympathy, and help and goodness in the "publicans and sinners" of these modern days, that the line between the virtuous and vicious, so far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is itself an immoral fiction.'  

---


109 Pinney, p. 147. Here, the antipathy to dogma has itself become a dogma: like Feuerbach's, her thought 'places philosophy in the negation of philosophy, i.e. it declares that alone to be the true philosophy which is converted in succum et sanguinem, which is incarnate in Man.' (Preface, Essence of Christianity.)
joy for the good of another. No external reward, on the material plane, no neat logical twist of poetic justice is needed: the *immediate impulse* bears its own power, is its own justification.  

Thus morality itself is seen as a form of natural, spontaneous life, as its highest form. The impulses of justice or love demand satisfaction, in the same way as an appetite does. They are part of the factual reality of life: and therefore require no extrinsic justification or reward. ('Love does not say, "I ought to love" — it loves.')

Neat copy-book morality, then, Marian Evans rejects: dogmatism and didacticism fade into irrelevance in the daylight of the multitudinous forms and varieties of life. Easy distinctions and formalisations are worse than irrelevant: they are morally destructive. In this vein, she approves of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, as a realistic presentation of life: on Wordsworth’s principle, quoted by Lewes in his *Life of Goethe*, that (speaking of *Tam o’ Shanter*) ‘though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.’ True morality is demonstrated by those few people who

‘are taught by their own falls and their own struggles, by their experience of sympathy, and help and goodness in the “publicans and sinners” of these modern days, that the line between the virtuous and vicious, so far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is itself an immoral fiction.’

---


109 Pinney, p. 147. Here, the antipathy to dogma has itself become a dogma: like Feuerbach’s, her thought ‘places philosophy in the negation of philosophy, i.e. it declares that alone to be the true philosophy which is converted in succumb et sanguinem, which is incarnate in Man.’ (Preface, *Essence of Christianity*.)
The extremes of black and white, so beloved to moralists, are so rare as to be treacherous standards for humanity. It is the 'ray of sunlight falling on the dreariest sandbank,' that often makes the best picture: the beauty is all the more striking for the ugliness of the background. The ability to accept that ugliness, together with the beauty that graces it, is Goethe's greatness - his 'large tolerance.' But the history of 'falls and struggles,' of experience of sympathy, is quite obviously her own history, a development from the tensions of struggle to a certain equilibrium of acceptance.

This acceptance of life, in all its harshness and, on the moral plane, chaotic meaninglessness, is asserted repeatedly in the novels. No palliative is desired or permitted: consequences follow actions with the rigid remorselessness of a reality entirely divorced from human wishes and desires. Adam Bede repudiates Bartle Massey's consolation that "there may come good out of this that we don't see." (ch. 46) Evil is remorseless in its train of consequences:

Arthur's downfall is caused by his unwillingness to recognise this (ch. 12), and even after Hetty's tragedy, Adam perceives in Arthur's gestures of penitence that 'notion of compensation...which most of all roused his indignation.' 'There's a sort o' damage, sir, that can't be made up for.'" (ch. 48) In 1856, George Eliot wrote to Chapman:

'I have long wanted to fire away at the doctrine of Compensation, which I detest, considered as a theory of life.'

110 GE Letters, 5 July 1856 (II, 258).
And that the 'compensation' to which she refers is not a mere superficial and materialistic 'sugar-plum' theory, is indicated in a passage in Theophrastus Such:

"At one time, I dwelt much on the idea of compensation; trying to believe that I was all the wiser for my bruised vanity, that I had the higher place in the true spiritual scale... But I presently perceived that this was a very odious sort of self-cajolery."

Even on the moral plane, then, the attempt to wring out a drop of spiritual comfort from unhappiness or frustration is condemned as 'self-cajolery,' as an evasion of the stern facts. In effect, she never carried this philosophy to its logical conclusion, or she would have incurred the opposite charge of nihilism. The characters in her novels do grow wiser and deeper through suffering: there is an aspect from which the destruction of the seed leads to the growth of a new harvest.

And even in her own life, as we have seen, she regarded her art as some kind of 'compensation' - a justification by works - for the personal suffering that fed it: as a kind of good being born of evil; the pearl produced from the oyster's torment. This belief is, however, far from a facile compensation-theory: it hinges on the depth and sincerity of the personal experience, the unsentimentalised knowledge which alone can produce true art. Idealist, 'escapist' fiction is vigorously castigated by both Lewes and George Eliot herself. Lewes, in his article of 1853, 'Realism in Art,' begins by scathingly declaring that the idealistic notion of the function of Art is the

---

111 'Looking Inward,' Theophrastus Such, I, 11.
'natural refuge of incompetence to which men fly, impelled by the secret sense of their inability to portray reality so as to make it interesting.' He concludes trenchantly: 'Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism.'

But lest realism should degenerate into a mere photographic mimicry of reality, the intense sympathy of the artist must transform his material. It is this sympathy that saves realism from sordidness and despair: as in the example Lewes gives of the Jews' quarter in Prague, where the ugliness and poverty roused in him only a 'squalid curiosity,' which was suddenly transformed by the sight of a flower in a window, of a Jew fondling a baby: these constituted 'the secret of human life there.' It is this secret that the artist must at all costs communicate.

Norian's sensitivity to just this transforming power of the 'secret of human life,' is apparent in all her novels: in her Journal of 8 May - 26 June, 1856, her 'Recollections of Ilfracombe,' she describes the ugliness of the place, and adds:

'but what is it that light cannot transfigure into beauty? One evening, after a shower, as the sun was setting over the sea behind us, some peculiar arrangement of clouds threw a delicious evening light on the irregular cluster of houses and merged the ugliness of their forms in an exquisite flood of colour - as a stupid person is made glorious by a noble deed.'

The analogy, the affection and clarity combined in her approach, makes this little incident an epitome of much that she is aiming to do in her novels.

112 'Realism in Art,' Westminster LXX (October 1858), 493.

A commonplace scene, suffused by a ray of sunlight - this could be an emblem for George Eliot's realism in her own fiction - and in her demands on other writers. Moral and social issues of the greatest significance are involved in this criterion, as we have seen. As in the case of Cumming and Young, it is 'untruthfulness,' or, in Lewes's terms, 'falsism,' that she attacks. She criticises Charles Kingsley, in her review of Westward Ho! in 1855, for his inability to limit himself to a realistic range of character-depiction:

'Mr. Kingsley's necessity for strong loves and strong hatreds, and his determination to hold up certain persons as models, is an obstacle to his successful delineation of character, in which he might otherwise excel. As it is, we can no more believe in and love his men and women than we could believe in and love the pattern-boy at school...'

And in her devastating article, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' she lashes out at the various species of 'feminine fatuity' displayed by irresponsible women-writers:

114 Finney, pp. 123-9. Yet in 1848, she had declared of 'Sir Charles Grandison' - 'The morality is perfect.' And Sir Charles, whatever saving vices may be darkly hinted at, in his hard-conquered 'passions' and his youthful predilection for duelling, was clearly intended precisely as a 'pattern-boy,' as a living demonstration of the power and attractiveness of virtue. There is a curious dichotomy here, between a native longing to believe the best of humanity ('There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase "too good to be true"' (May, 1849) and a consciousness that 'perfect goodness' can only be imaginary, that the function of the artist is to depict 'real imperfect goodness.' And it is just in the tension between her idealism and her realism, in the pitiful inadequacy of human-beings to realise the potential greatness of humanity that the peculiar quality of her writing lies.
"... as a general rule, the ability of a lady novelist to describe actual life and her fellow-men, is an inverse proportion to her confident eloquence about God and the other world, and the means by which she usually chooses to conduct you to true ideas of the invisible is a totally false picture of the visible."  

It is the falseness of these sentimentalised, idealised pictures that irritates her. And she vents her wrath particularly on the 'White Neck-cloth School,' where the social snobbery and unreality of the writers appears at its worst.

This literature is aimed at an Evangelical audience, at the middle classes - 'a medicinal sweetmeat for Low Church young ladies.' But its world is not that of the middle classes; it panders to their snobbish interest in 'Society,' and thus vitiates any hope it might have of achieving the status of real literature. Evangelicalism, says Marian Evans, 'has abundance of fine drama for anyone who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it,' but the drama lies among the middle and lower classes. Religious life in England she finds to be poorly served by its fictional presentation (though in one respect, she finds the 'white neck-cloth school' writers 'meritoriously realistic their favourite hero, the Evangelical young curate, is always rather an insipid personage'). And she pleads, two weeks before herself beginning on 'Amos Barton,' 'Why can we not have pictures of religious life among the industrial classes in England, as interesting as Mrs. Stowe's pictures of religious life among the negroes?'

---

115 Finney, p. 311.
116 Finney, p. 319.
On the verge of her career as a creative writer, therefore, she was clearly much exercised by the moral, social and aesthetic imperatives of realism. She had a well-defined aesthetic position, a perception of what was needed, in terms of uncompromising moral vision, empirical clarity of description, and irradiating influence of sympathy. The article on 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' can be seen as a Preface to Scenes from Clerical Life, which Lewes described to Blackwood as unlike anything attempted in English literature since The Vicar of Wakefield and Jane Austen - they represented 'the clergy like any other class with the humours, sorrows, and troubles of other men.'\footnote{Letters, 6 November 1856 (II, 269).} And Marian herself had written, in Wordsworthian mode:

```
My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings, in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy...I cannot stir a step from what I feel to be true in character...alas! inconsistencies and weaknesses are not untrue.\footnote{Letters, 18 February 1857 (II, 299).}
```

This defence of her artistic conscience was in reply to a letter of Blackwood's suggesting that she make Caterina a little less openly devoted to Wybrow, and give a little more dignity to her character. The defence of inconsistency as a realistic human trait is an article of her artistic credo; 'mixed human beings' are to be the material of her work.

To another criticism of Blackwood's - concerning the Bishop, who is satirised in 'Janet's Repentance' - she replies:
Art must be either real and concrete, or ideal and eclectic... I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are.  

The choice of the 'real and concrete' function of art is reflected everywhere in her novels. The analysis of Mr. Tryan, for example, merges into a more general discussion of the 'real heroes' of the world:

The blessed work of helping the world forward, happily does not wait to be done by perfect men;... The real heroes, of God's making, are quite different: they have their natural heritage of love and conscience which they drew in with their mother's milk:... but the rest is dry barren theory, blank prejudice, vague hearsay...  

The insistence on realism is again formulated in Chapter XVII of Adam Bede - 'In which the Story pauses a little.' The sense of mission, of obligation to tell the truth, is apparent throughout the letters and novels:

'Writing is part of my religion, and I can write no word that is not prompted from within.'

She expresses her belief in the importance of perfectionism in small, everyday matters:

"Conscience goes to the hammering in of nails" is my Gospel. - a direct preface to Adam Bede's declaration:

"there's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times - weekday as well as Sunday - and i' the great works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics."  

---

120 Janet's Repentance, ch. 10, pp. 164-5.
121 GE Letters, 19 August 1857 (II, 377).
122 " , 30 October 1857 (II, 396).
123 Adam Bede, ch. 1, p. 10.
And in a particularly revealing passage, she writes:

' The part of the Epicurean gods is always an easy one; but because I prefer it so strongly myself, I the more highly venerate those who are struggling in the thick of the contest.' \(^{124}\) (my italics)

It is because she feels in herself the tendency to the grandiose and the pontifical, that she lays so much stress on the value of small jobs well done, of housewifely tasks, done with dignity and conscientiousness - Dinah's dusting and sweeping and porridge-making, Mrs. Foyser's house-pride, Milly Barton's hardiness with a needle and thread. These are not to be despised: but Marian Evans is conscious of a tension of impatience with the pettiness of such tasks, that leads her to celebrate them all the more.

Often, a falseness of tone results. It is not that Marian Evans is really in her element in the world of darning socks, and children's prattle. She must constantly see it against a larger background, and her efforts to glorify it sometimes bear the signs of strain. Mrs. Barton's early-morning sock-darning, for example, is introduced on a rather insistently sanctimonious note:

'But about half-past five o'clock in the morning, if there were any angels watching round her bed - and angels might be glad of such an office - they saw Mrs. Barton rise up quietly...' \(^{125}\)

There is a Dickensian tone, a kind of obstinate sentimentality about this, that betrays a basic unease. Similarly, her humour is at times rather ponderous and self-conscious: a heaviness again deriving from

\(^{124}\) GE Letters, 30 October 1857 (II, 396).

\(^{125}\) Amos Barton, ch. 2, p. 30.
the strain of a double vision - in this case, the child's view of
life seen within a pedantic and incongruous framework:

"Every morning, he (Dickey) was allowed...to run
loose...and to put difficult questions to the
groom as to the reasons why horses had four legs,
and other transcendental matters."126

Very often, however, both the humour and the pathos do succeed -
even the ponderousness adding to the ironic effect. Mr. Barton's
syntax, his sermon to the inmates of the work-house ('Mr. Barton this
morning succeeded in carrying the pauper imagination to the dough-tub,
but unfortunately was not able to carry it upwards from that well-known
object to the unknown truths, which it was intended to shadow forth.'),127

the description of the paupers - Mrs. Brick and her snuff, Miss Fodge

"who, in spite of nature's safeguards against that
contingency, had contributed to the perpetuation of
the Fodge characteristics in the person of a small
boy..."128

- these are signs of acuteness and mastery.

This picture of the work-house inmates is almost unique in
George Eliot's novels, for sheer unsympathetic realism. The sharp
character-sketches, unsoftened by any kind of human dignity, are the
products of a refusal on the author's part to identify herself with
them, in any sense at all. She sees them as objects, as Dickensian

126 Amos Barton, ch. 9, p. 117.
127 ibid., ch. 2, p. 39.
128 ibid., ch. 2, p. 36. This rather cruelly recalls Jane Welsh
Carlyle's ironic comments on George Eliot:
'A marvellous teacher of morals, surely, and still more
marvellous in the other character, for which nature had
not provided her with the outfit supposed to be essential.'
(Hansons, p. 234).
grotesques.

And, in general, in this first of the Scenes, George Eliot holds grimly to her determination to depict none but 'mixed human beings,' to omit none of the 'moral pimples'\(^{129}\) in all ranks of society. Even Milly is credited with a weakness: and here again, George Eliot's desire both to limit her colour-range to the nondescript, to the mezzo-tints of the narrative palette, and then, anxiously, to justify whatever faults she has forced herself to attribute, leads her to a certain falseness of tone:

"For Milly had one weakness - don't love her any the less for it, it was a pretty woman's weakness - she was fond of dress... You and I, too, reader, have our weakness, have we not? which makes us think foolish things now and then..."\(^{130}\)

Otherwise, the characters are all seen with an ironic yet sympathetic eye - Mr. Brideshead who

'studied conversation as an art. To ladies he spoke of the weather, and was accustomed to consider it under three points of view...';\(^{131}\)

Nanny, chuckling 'over her outburst of "sauce" as the best morning's work she had ever done.'; Mrs. Hackit, with her parsimoniousness, her sharp tongue, and her ready kindness in time of trouble. In the rather pontifical statement of aims in Chapter V, George Eliot sets up her chosen canons:

"...these commonplace people - many of them - bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right... Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance - in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share?"\(^{132}\)

---

129 Amos Barton, ch. 5, p. 63.
130 ibid., ch. 3, p. 48.
131 ibid., ch. 3, p. 49-50.
132 ibid., ch. 5, p. 67.
The pathos of the commonplace, then, lies not only in the sparks of beauty that it contains, but in its contrast with the ideal, the glorious, the rare achievements of humanity that she has voluntarily rejected as material for her art. It seems obvious that she does not lack interest in heroism and idealism: that indeed, she is admitting the need for a framework within which the poignancy of the commonplace will be most keenly felt. And, even in this tale, the most 'insignificant' perhaps of all her fictional attempts to embody her principles, Milly is, to all intents and purposes, the angel of inspiration, the finger pointing upwards, that Amos betrays through his lack of awareness and love.  

The moral point of Amos Barton is quite clear: the mediocrity that pervades human life, the inadequacy of human beings to the tasks that are allotted to them, even to the small daily requirements of human relationships:

133 If Milly bears some resemblance to Agnes Wickfield, then one might extend the analogy and point out the Dickensian sentimentality of some of the child-descriptions. Dickey, for example, stroking his mother's soft white hand (is this realism?) is a stock figure of child-pathos.(ch. 5, p. 70) Here, even the starchy comment of the author, and the way in which the scene is referred back to Mrs. Hackit's consciousness, does not save it from sentimentality. Compare, however, the functionally effective portrait of little Totty (in Adam Bede) - mirror-image of Hetty's egotism, and foil to Dinah's selfless spirituality - effortlessly 'placing' them both.
'Oh the anguish of that thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stinted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their plaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know.'

This reverence for the human-being, in all his finiteness, is infinite in its demands:

'...now he re-lived all their life together, with that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives, and he felt as if his very love needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness.'

But even this realisation, brought by death, of what true love should be, fades from Amos with time. Even in grief, he cannot be heroic, he is bound by the limits of his very earthly nature. He is sad to part from Milly's grave:

'for Amos was one who clung to all the material links between his mind and the past. His imagination was not vivid, and required the stimulus of actual perception.'

And when he visits the grave before leaving Shepperton, he has already lost the urgency of pain, the immediate sense of reality:

'He stood a few minutes reading over and over again the words on the tombstone, as if to assure himself that all the happy and unhappy past was a reality. For love is frightened at the intervals of insensibility and callousness that encroach by little and little on the dominion of grief, and it makes efforts to recall the keenness of the first anguish.'

This insensibility that fleshes over the naked nerves of life is a recurrent theme in the novels. It is, of course, a saving mercy:

134 Amos Barton, ch. 9, p. 115.
135 ibid., ch. 10, p. 122.
136 cf. Betty's 'hard,' 'cold' heart which Dinah prays to God to melt: "My heart went like a stone." (ch. 45, p. 252).
but to the demands of a selfless and dedicated love, it seems callous and frightening.

The effect of time on the fineness and strength of human nature is again a recurrent theme in 'Mr. Gilfil's Love Story.' The juxtaposition of the old and the young Mr. Gilfil becomes a paradigm for the fate of all 'poor mortals': and even in youth, even in his own love-story, Mr. Gilfil plays a very background role - the faithful, steadfast lover, ignored and slighted by Caterina, in her passion for Mybrow. So that, in one sense, even the title of the story has an ironic under-tone, and yet in a deeper sense, there is no irony at all, but an immense tenderness and sadness for all the frailty and aspiration of humanity. The young Mr. Gilfil, attractive, strong and devoted, and the old Mr. Gilfil, eccentric and unimpressive, are shown as one: on the final page, they are drawn together, and the effects of time and experience put into loving perspective:

"the Mr. Gilfil of those late Shepperton days had more of the knots and ruggedness of poor human nature than there lay any clear hint of in the open-eyed loving Haynard. But it is with men as with trees: if you lop off their finest branches, into which they were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over with some rough boss, some did excrecence; and what might have been a grand tree expanding into liberal shade, is but a whimsical misshapen trunk..."

Henry James considered 'Mr. Gilfil' a failure - a break with the portrayal of middle- and lower-class life, to which she had devoted herself. It is true that there is much dead wood in the

137 Epilogue, p. 37.
tale: the long descriptions of Cheverel Manor are tedious, the portraits of Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel, of Captain Wybrow, lack the vividness and three-dimensional reality of her best characters. But even here, there is a spark of George Eliot's specific vision. Sir Christopher is shown as bearing within him the seeds of his own downfall: he is benevolent, good-natured, but his fatal flaw is a self-willed obstinacy - an obstinacy, that, combined with 'something of the fervour of genius,' results in the magnificent architectural achievement of Cheverel Manor; but that proves also to be his Achilles' heel. Inflexibility of will is a tragic trait, for George Eliot; the self-willed who will not bend, will be broken on the inexorable wheel of divine law. This dominating, active type of personality must learn submission: 'notre vraie destinée se compose de résignation et d'activité': the secret of life is to find the correct balance, and in each of the novels, there are characters who will not temper their excess in one direction or the other, and who must be disciplined by life.139

Janet's Repentance is, in length and in content, the most considerable of the Scenes. The depiction of Milby life is at its fullest and most realistic: the effect of Evangelicalism on the small

---

139 Sir Christopher can be seen as an early sketch of Harold Transome: he is of the same domineering, good-natured, and morally uneducated English type. If they represent the 'active' type at its most presumptuous, then Mr. Brooke in Middlemarch stands at the opposite pole: when he is faced with the prospect of cutting off the entail on his property, after Dorothea's second marriage, he procrastinates until Sir James relents. (Finale, 462).
town is shown with a satirical but tolerant pen. The struggle between Anglicans and Evangelicals is referred to by George Eliot in a letter to Blackwood:

"The collision in the drama is not at all between "bigotted churchmanship" and evangelicalism, but between irreligion and religion... Everything is softened from the fact, so far as art is permitted to soften and yet to remain essentially true. The real town was more vicious than my Milby; the real Dempster was far more disgusting than mine; the real Janet alas! had a far sadder end than mine, who will melt away from the reader's sight in purity, happiness and beauty."

This latter part was written in reply to Blackwood's doubts about the 'harsher Thackerayian view of human nature' contained in the first chapter. The scene in the 'Red Lion,' with Mr. Dempster holding forth on Evangelicalism, does indeed have a harshness and satirical scorn, almost unredeemed, that is reminiscent of the work-house description in Amos Barton, in its tone. The provincialism, the religious and moral sluggishness of the place, the petty jealousies and rivalries occupy the foreground of the scene: there is a characteristic paragraph of palliation, but it comes almost as an afterthought:

"Assuredly Milby had that salt of goodness which keeps the world together, in greater abundance than was visible on the surface... To a superficial glance, Milby was nothing but dreary prose... But the sweet spring came to Milby notwithstanding: the elm-tops were red with buds; the churchyard was starred with daisies..."

Into this scene of religious apathy, Evangelicalism irrupts - 'a murrain or blight all the more terrible, because its nature was

---

140 GE Letters, 11 June 1857 (II, 347).
141 Janet's Repentance, ch. 2, pp. 64-5.
but dimly conjectured.' The fears of the population as the 'disease' spreads are presented with a shrewd penetration. It is a distrust of moral tyranny that grips the people: of a creed that demands of its adherents some sacrifice of their pleasures, some extension of their moral natures.

"That's not the worst," said Mr. Dempster; "he preaches against good works;... You see it in all these canting innovators: Depend upon it, whenever you see a man pretending to be better than his neighbours, that man has either some cunning end to serve, or his heart is rotten with spiritual pride." 142

Here, it is quite obvious that the struggle is waged between irreligion and religion: not merely between two versions of one faith. But it is interesting to note that George Eliot puts into Dempster's mouth some of the arguments of her own reaction against Evangelicalism: Dempster's speech could be a vulgarised version of some parts of her own article on 'Dr. Cumming.' Hypocrisy, sanctimoniousness, ambition and egoism parading as piety, exclusiveness - these are charges that she herself had brought against religion. Here, she has set herself to examine the other side of the coin: in Janet's Repentance, a hearing is once again given to the claims of the inner voice; the personal vision, determining reality, is once more shown to have power.

We might summarise the struggle, as Mr. Dempster does, as that between faith and good works: in the Evangelical belief, good works alone are insufficient, the external physical world and all its activities are unredeemed, if they are not illumined by the spark of

142 ibid., ch. 1, pp. 47-8.
faith. Man, in his unredeemed nature, is corrupt and damned: only by the gift of grace can he be saved. This is the doctrine that Marian Evans attacked so vigorously in the article on 'Dr. Cumming': asserting categorically her belief in the 'disinterested elements of human feeling'; that pity and love and justice are essential characteristics of man's nature. Man can be saved by works alone; he is a moral being who is fully equipped to work out his own redemption on an ethical, practical plane. This optimism, however, is no longer so clear in Janet's Repentance. Janet, despite all her natural goodness, is lost before Mr. Tryran and his Evangelical belief comes to her aid. Personal effort, act of will, even a clear perception of her own degradation - none of these can save her. It needs an external force to redeem her from disaster: a gift of grace, a faith-insured vision that will transform the facts of her life.

The conversation among the Evangelical ladies in Chapter 111, though satirical in presentation, makes the point quite clearly.

They are discussing Janet, and Mrs. Pettifer is standing up for her:

"Pride or no pride," said Mrs. Pettifer, "I shall always stand up for Janet Dempster...there's great excuses for her...you and me might do the same, if we were in her place."

"Speak for yourself, Mrs. Pettifer," said Miss Pratt. "Under no circumstances can I imagine myself resorting to a practice so degrading. A woman should find support in her own strength of mind."

"I think," said Rebecca, who considered Miss Pratt still very blind in spiritual things, notwithstanding her assumption of enlightenment, 'she will find poor support if she trusts only to her own strength. She must seek aid elsewhere than in herself." 143

---

143 ibid., ch. 3, p. 188.
In spite of the ironical aside on Rebecca's spiritual perspicacity, one feels that there is much truth in what she says. Both she and Miss Pratt are caricatures, of course, of the strong-minded spinster, and the pietistic one. But the disagreement between them is basic: between salvation by works alone and the need for some irradiating faith to inspire the will. And as events show, it is the latter view that is vindicated: 'She must seek aid elsewhere than in herself.'

The moral perspective of the novel is characteristically stringent and uncompromising. George Eliot does not take the view that might seem only human, that Janet is justified in the little relief she can obtain from the pressure of her unhappiness. Courageous and sunny-natured as she often is, her moments of bitterness and despair are shown as symptoms of moral deficiency; there is a backbone of judgment in all the pity with which the author treats her heroine:

"But there was one person who heard all the plaints and all the outbursts of bitterness and despair which Janet was never tempted to pour into any other ear; and alas! in her worst moments, Janet would throw out wild reproaches against that patient listener..."

From a purely human point of view, Janet may seem entitled to some outlet for her despair: but there is something of the ideal, demanding perfectionism of the Evangelical about George Eliot here, and in all her novels. She is not satisfied with a compromise in moral attitudes. Janet, even with the greatest of excuses and justifications, is lacking in her reaction to life: her confrontation

\[\text{\textsuperscript{144}}\] ibid., cit. 3, p. 188.
with Mr. Tryan is a 'repentance': she has something, beyond the superficial sin of her persecution of the Evangelicals, of which to repent.

This kind of exacting sin-consciousness never leaves George Eliot, even when it is translated into secular terms. In Janet, the sin is a rebelliousness of nature - a self-will that does not know how to submit to life, that has not learnt to accept chastisement with the inner fortitude, the resignation, that is the bitterest lesson for an active nature. She has all the passion, the vividness and energy of the pagan ideal: what she lacks is the Christian virtue of submission, the essential passivity that bends before the storm, and survives the storm.

This passivity is the fruit of suffering. It is this that she recognises in Mr. Tryan: a sadness and pain that does not surge over into passionate declamations, but remains deep within, grooving channels of sympathy with the sufferings of all men. He is, to her, the Christ-figure, suffering in his own body, so that others may be saved. This gift of creative passivity is what she wants to learn: a way of absorbing the shocks of life, if she cannot avoid them. Without him, without such a gift of grace, she feels, with all her pagan strength and beauty, utterly helpless:

"I feel sure that demon will be always urging me to satisfy the craving that comes upon me, and the days will go on as they have done through all those miserable years. I shall always be doing wrong, and hating myself after - sinking lower and lower and knowing that I am sinking. Oh, can you tell me any way of getting strength..." [145]

ibid., ch. 18, p. 224.
Mr. Tryan's answer is the answer of faith. By her own inner strength alone, she can achieve nothing. It is, on the contrary, by an admission of weakness, that she can summon God to her aid — the external force that will save her:

"When once we feel our helplessness in that way, and go to the Saviour, desiring to be freed from the power as well as the punishment of sin, we are no longer left to our own strength..." 146

This is the classic antinomian prescription for salvation: a turning away from the world, from the cycles of desire and fulfilment, ambition and development, that make the life of the world: movement, activity, progress. It is a concentration on the life within, on a kind of sedulous inner vacancy that is the 'perfect peace' for which Janet longs:

"That is what I want," said Janet; "I have left off minding about pleasure. I think I could be contented in the midst of hardship, if I felt that God cared for me, and would give me strength to lead a pure life..." 147

The ideal here is purity, peace, a death before death. This is what Janet has to learn, this annihilation of the self. Her real sin was the blasphemy of thought, that "God was cruel to send me trials and temptations worse than others have." This 'spirit of rebellion' is to be quenched; this reaching outwards for the things of the world:

'There is nothing that becomes us but entire submission, perfect resignation.'

Resignation and activity, the balance between them is precarious: it is continually being upset, and re-sought, in one after the other of

146 ibid., ch. 13, p. 231.
147 cf. Feuerbach on Christian world-denial: 'if death is the condition of blessedness and moral perfection, then necessarily mortification is the one law of morality.' (Essence of Christianity, p. 161.)
George Eliot's novels. The point of equilibrium varies: there is no dogmatic answer to the problem. In Janet's Repentance, the solution offered is an almost absolute resignation. The progress towards 'perfect peace' is a process of inner extinction: the quenching of all hopes and desires in the world; again and again, the flames of life leap up in her, and are forcibly extinguished: 148 till, after Mr. Tryan's death, her own process of mortification is complete:

'Janet felt a deep stillness within. She thirsted for no pleasure; she craved no worldly good. She saw the years to come stretch before her like an autumn afternoon filled with resigned memory. Life to her could never more have any eagerness; it was a solemn service of gratitude and patient effort...' 149

In a far more significant sense than the merely social or political one, Evangelicalism is re-examined and vindicated in this story. It is not just that Milby is won over to a recognition of Mr. Tryan's goodness; not just that he, as a loving, sympathetic human-being, saves her from disaster; not even that the moral effects of the religion are shown, despite all dogmatic irrelevancies, to be beneficial:

'No man can begin to mould himself on a faith or an idea without rising to a higher order of experience: a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into his nature; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires, and impulses.' 150

148 e.g. ch. 21, p. 248.
149 ch. 26, p. 316.
150 ch. 10, p. 163.
Even this moral effect is not the full extent of George Eliot's tribute to Evangelicalism. In Janet's Repentance, she returns, at least by a suspension of disbelief, to her youthful perspective on life: to the supremacy of the inner vision, a rigorous denial of life, in the vigour and variety of its forms. Redemption here is shown to be gained by negation of desire, by resignation, the quenching of the natural forces in the perfect peace of submission. So far, the story is a sincere tribute to the spiritual effect of Evangelicalism on a human soul. George Eliot does not attempt to legislate for all mankind, as a tract-writer might have done. Janet's mother is happy and satisfied in a less extreme form of religion: a religion of works, of active extroverted faith - 'she had no well-defined views on justification.' She is a naturally, and simply, religious soul, tending to the extremes of neither excessive passion nor excessive mortification. She admits, however, "your wants are different, my dear, and we are not all led by the same road." 151

This admission signifies a certain movement of reconciliation on Marian Evans's part towards the faith of her youth. She is willing to concede that some souls will not be satisfied by anything less than a complete 'spiritualisation' of life. And, in this story at least, she allows her heroine to subside into this perfect peace of nullity, to resign from the struggle of life - to 'melt away from the reader's sight in purity, happiness and beauty.' 152

151 ch. 20, p. 240.
152 GE Letters, 11 June 1857 (II, 347).
That this is not a final solution, however, is clear from Marian's letter to Blackwood, quoted above. The real Janet, she wrote, 'alas! had a far sadder end than mine...' In real life, far more complex issues have to be faced: escape into passivity is rarely possible. And Marian Evans, of all people, could not allow the balance to remain weighted so heavily on the side of resignation. This period of her life was, in a sense, her real youth - a time of growth and energy, of, at least, a partial liberation from the lethargy and despair of her early years - 'the long years in which I have been inert and suffering.' So far from dying unto life, she was just beginning to feel the full joy of living:

'People talk of the feelings dying out as one gets older - but at present my experience is just the contrary... I find the least bit of real human life touch me in a way it never did when I was younger.'

In her middle age, she suddenly seems to herself as if revived from a long death: in 1852, while still in its shadow, she had written:

'It is a help to read such a life as Margaret Fuller's. How inexpressibly touching that passage from her journal - "I shall always reign through the intellect, but the life! the life! O my God! shall that never be sweet?" I am thankful, as if for myself, that it was sweet at last.'

This poignant and generous self-identification with another woman was realised, in fact, in the eventual sweetening of her own life.

---

153 GE Letters, 2 January 1858 (II, 416).
154 ibid., 14 June, 1858 (II, 465).
155 ibid., 27 March, 1852 (II, 15).
In spite of all discomforts and embarrassments, in spite of the extreme fastidiousness of her nature, that shrank before the scandal of her union with Lewes, there can be no doubt that the love and devotion of Lewes was to her an infusion of that 'life' that she yearned for. And at such a time, happy in 'the perfect love and sympathy of a nature that stimulates my own to healthful activity,' it was inevitable that she should try, in her subsequent novels, to redress the balance between resignation and activity, to suggest a more satisfying harmony of the two extremes.

156 "Lettres, 6 June 1857 (II, 343)."
CHAPTER TWO

ADAM BEDE AND THE MILL ON THE FLOSS:

RESIGNATION AND ACTIVITY

Following on this extended, though, of necessity, highly selective study of George Eliot's early pre-fictional career, personal and intellectual, and of the first-fruits of her characteristic creativity, the Scenes of Clerical Life, I shall in this chapter discuss some important themes already touched upon, as they appear in her first two full-length novels, Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss. These novels I shall treat with a brevity bearing no relation, naturally, to their artistic importance: my interest will be simply to indicate some of the modes in which George Eliot's intimate experience and conflicts inform her early fiction, the shifting balance in what I have seen as a basic polarity in her psychic life, between resignation and activity.

Basic to her conception of her role as a novelist is a conscious awe that at some periods of her life, indeed, proved incapacitating. Her first full-length novel begins on this note of wonder at the magical power of art: 'With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorceror undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader.'\(^1\) The quasi-religious sense of the "sperrit o' God"\(^2\) working through her casts a sacredness over her past emotional and intellectual experience, which is to nourish her art. As Adam again says, at the end of the novel:

\(^1\) Adam Bede, ch. 1, p. 3.

\(^2\) ibid., ch. 1, p. 10.
"The more knowledge a man has, the better he'll do's work; and feeling's a sort o' knowledge." 3 The 'knowledge' of many kinds that Marian Evans had accumulated was to be channelled, now or later, into her work; the 'transformation of pain into sympathy' 4 was to be the goal of her moral and artistic life. And it was from this acute sense of the sacredness of her calling, that her characteristic tone as narrator evolved, with its unique combination of sympathy and detachment: the fusion of the elements separately 'exercised' already in her writing life, in her translations and her critical reviews.

This view of her art had not, as we have seen, been arrived at quite painlessly. In her early letters she had painfully tried to mould the totality of her experience - sensuous, intellectual, social - within the matrix of an Evangelical world-view. On this basis of a profoundly spiritual attitude to all aspects of life - everything seen, as it were, in the magnifying mirror of eternity - the arts in general had fallen into a decidedly second-rate position - and if second-rate, then, according to the uncompromising rigour of Evangelical logic, irrelevant and, possibly, to be suppressed.

There are various references in the early letters to the conflict in her mind on this subject, to the attempt to define her own reaction, for instance, on listening to an oratorio:

'...would it be consistent with millenial holiness for a human being to devote the time and energies that are barely sufficient for real exigencies on acquiring expertness in trills, cadences, etc.?'

3 ibid., ch. 52, p. 336.
4 ibid., ch. 50, p. 302.
5 GE Letters, September 1838 (I, 9).
This expresses the problem in its barest form, as it appeared to the young Evangelical. 'Millennial holiness' and 'real exigencies' seem to confront the arts like a massive Goliath towering over a puny, and rather ludicrous David. This objection to the validity of aesthetic activity is quite beside the more common one - that art positively militates against morality, that it tends to cultivate the sensuous, insubordinate energies, to glorify indulgence and licentiousness, in its expression of the unbridled passions of men.

Shakespeare, for example, presents a real problem to the young Marian Evans. Granting his genius and the benefit to be gained from reading him, she is troubled by the difficulty of having 'to suck nothing but honey from his pages' - a difficulty raised by the presence of less wholesome savours in those same pages.

Again, 'nothing,' she writes, 'can justify the using of... Scripture as a rope dancer uses his rope... alone to elicit admiration...'

Here, it is the exhibitionism involved in any artistic enterprise that dismays her; the very act of artistic expression, of organising experience for display, she brands with the mark of showmanship.

These are problems that sincerely trouble Marian Evans in her youth. And, in spite of her sloughing off, as it were, of the skin of Evangelical dogma, these considerations remain an integral factor in her evolving attitude towards the arts, in general, and the novel-genre in particular. The doubt as to the basic usefulness of the writer's function remains with her, through her most fervid assertions of the sacredness of her calling. Her assumption of the writer's role involved much heart-searching and the vanquishing of many giants of doubt.
and despair; and for that very reason, its value is enormously enhanced; the struggle exposes the strengths and weaknesses of both sides as no facile compromise can do.

The ascetic attitude towards worldly learning - and the ascetic justification for it - constitutes one of Marian Evans's earliest attempts to deal with her problem. She mentions how deeply she is impressed by an English translation of Aimé-Martin's treatise, 'L'éducation des mères de famille' - 'Woman's Mission'; and she quotes with especial approval Aimé-Martin's verdict on the relation of the intellectual and the moral:

"Learning is only so far valuable as it serves to enlarge and enlighten the bounds of conscience."  

and she comments:

'This I believe it eminently does when pursued humbly and piously and from a belief that it is a solemn duty to cultivate every faculty of our nature so far as primary obligations allow.'

In this context, she also quotes St. Paul: '... whatsoever things are honest... if there be any virtue and if there be any praise think on these things...' The purpose and justification of all human endeavour, then, must be a spiritual one; both in inception and in aim, duty must clothe and sanctify the secular nakedness of human culture.

Gradually, however, a more integrated approach emerges from the conflicts and tensions of Marian Evans's mind. Somehow, a

6 GE Letters, 3 September 1841 (I, 107).

7 cf. Jane Austen's observation:

'It was the misfortune of poetry to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly.' (Persuasion, ch. 11).
synthesis is achieved that subsumes the rival claims of the aesthetic and the moral, in a fused vision that, though impressive and original, rarely seems quite to lose the hectic tension of the elements that strainingly compose it. Her way of synthesising the aesthetic and the moral views of life is through a conception of the sensibility, as the centre of man's being. True artistic sensibility, she would argue, so far from militating against moral values, in fact implies a kind of central fastidiousness of the nervous system, that radiates to all the nerve-ends of experience - sensuous, intellectual, and moral.

Repeatedly, in her letters, her reviews, and her novels, we find this insistence that man's sensibility is, or should be, a unity. The idea, for example, of senses 'preternaturally sharpened' - with results in spheres other than the sensuous - recurs several times. The earliest example, perhaps (if we except the numerous references in her early letters to the correspondence between her physical and nervous states, and her moral equilibrium), is the sketch, in 'From the Notebook of an Eccentric,' of 'my friend Macarthy,' with his 'preternaturally sharpened vision, which saw knots and hemishes, where all was smoothness to others. The unsightly condition of the masses - their dreary ignorance...the absence of artistic harmony and beauty in the details of outward existence, were with him not merely themes for cold philosophy, indignant philippics, or pointed satire; but positively painful elements in his experience, sharp iron entering into his soul.'

---

8 Pinney, p. 15.
This sensitivity appears here as a doubtful blessing, it is true. But what concerns us now is the fact that it is not a merely localised sensibility that Macarthy displays: that his 'feeling of the beautiful' irradiates all the relations and contacts of his life, allowing no artificial gaps between the areas that men usually think of as conveniently islanded apart. The senses of vision, of touch, with their attendant pains and violations, have a not merely metaphorical extension into the realms of intellectual and moral awareness.

To be stripped of some of the normal protective skins that shield humanity from too immediate a consciousness of realities of all kinds - this is a fate that obviously fascinates George Eliot: to hazard a guess at painful personal experience of her own would not, one feels, be too presumptuous. There is, particularly, the case of that *jeu de mélancolie*, which William Blackwood found it so 'strange that George Eliot should have written'.

In this story, *The Lifted Veil*, written in 1859, after the tremendous success of *Adam Bede*, Latimer, the hero, is afflicted with a similar, 'preternaturally sharpened vision' to that of Macarthy, only in a still more heightened form. It is a 'superadded consciousness,' from which he suffers, so that he is excruciatingly aware of all the evil to which other men are happily blind and deaf. This awareness, on the moral level, is explicitly compared to an over-acuteness of the senses: a 'microscopic vision' that thrusts asunder the specious

---


10 *The Lifted Veil*, ch. 1, p. 295.
civilities of social life to expose chaos and rottenness.

This curse of hyper-refined sensibility lifts all veils from the ugliness of men's inner selves. For Latimer, it is a continual torment to be thus exposed to the 'naked skinless complication' of human evil. His marriage to the serpentine Bertha, is also determined by this faculty - or rather, by its breakdown in her case:

'It was like a preternaturally heightened sense of hearing, making audible to one a roar of sound where others find perfect stillness.'

Insensibility, unawareness - in this bizarre story, these become conditions for human happiness: Latimer's tragedy is complete, when the veil protecting Bertha is also finally lifted - 'no matter how empty the adytum, so that the veil be thick enough.' And, again, the sense of coerced awareness is conveyed, with all the immediacy, the involuntariness of acute physical vision:

'The terrible moment of complete illumination had come to me, and I saw that the darkness had hidden no landscape from me, but only a blank prosaic wall: from that evening forth, through the sickening years which followed, I saw all round the narrow room of this woman's soul...'

Latimer is, obviously, a pathological study, but the abnormality he represents is, in George Eliot's presentation, abnormal only in its intensity. The essential connectedness of Latimer's awareness on the physical, moral and emotional levels is something that runs through the very texture of George Eliot's psychological theory. There is no incongruity for her in comparing moral callousness, for instance, to stupidity, as the term may be used of a defective intellect, or to sensuous bluntness:

11 ibid., ch. 1, p. 301.
12 ibid., ch. 1, p. 323.
That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.\textsuperscript{13}

The explicit analogy of physical and moral sensitivity is, as we have said, echoed throughout George Eliot's work. One more example will pick up the tactile reference of the last quotation: Bulstrode's gradual deadening to all possibility of moral reproach is conveyed in an image that clearly implies that the 'sensibility' mentioned is fully analogous to the free play of the senses:

"Mentally surrounded with that past again, Bulstrode had the same pleas - indeed, the years had been perpetually spinning them into intricate thickness, like masses of spider-web, padding the moral sensibility...\textsuperscript{14}

What emerges from even a cursory glance at George Eliot's idea of the central sensibility is an effortless hallowing of sensuous perception - that is, not the painfully parsonical attempt to baptise the pagan, but a natural organic respect for the refinement of the senses, as an essential symptom of a total refinement of response.

Ruskin, whom she in general greatly admired,\textsuperscript{15} expresses in Modern Painters, in somewhat more abstract style, this concept of the ideal equivalence of the aesthetic and the moral sensibilities. Speaking of Truth' in painting, he combats the

\textsuperscript{13} Middlemarch, Ch. 20, pp. 297-8.
\textsuperscript{14} ibid., ch. 61, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{15} "I think he is the finest writer living." (GE Letters, 11, 255).
nearly universal error of belief among the thoughtless and unreflecting, that they know either what nature is, or what is like her; that they can discover truth by instinct...the truth of nature is a part of the truth of God; to him who does not search it out, darkness, as it is to him who does, infinity.'

True vision, for Ruskin, is not a merely physical faculty. There are different degrees of acuteness in seeing what is before one's eyes, and one's vision can be improved, like any physical skill, by cultivation. All the same,

'With this kind of bodily sensibility to colour and form is intimately connected that higher sensibility which we revere as one of the chief attributes of all noble minds...acuteness of bodily sense...associated with love...as it embraces divine and human and brutal intelligences, and hallows the physical perception of external objects by association, gratitude, veneration, and other pure feelings of our moral nature.'

Having established the organic connection between physical and moral sensibility, Ruskin declares that while the discovery of truth is a purely intellectual activity, yet perception and judgment are so sharpened and brightened, and so far more swiftly and effectively used, when they have the energy and passion of our moral nature to bring them into action...that, practically, a man of deadened moral sensation is always dull in his perception of truth.

Here, in Ruskin's language, then, we have an idea identical with the one that George Eliot develops through her set of 'experiments in life.' Moral sensitivity is necessary for even an intellectually just assessment of truth. And, as corollary, this correct use of the

17 cf. Piero's gift of vision (Romola, ch. 4, p. 63); briskly, professionally, he sees Tito through and through at first meeting.
18 Modern Painters, op. cit., p. 51.
intellect and of the senses, is a powerful stimulus to the moral virtues. All these aspects that George Eliot subsumes under the heading of 'sensibility,' are organically linked. And a failure in one aspect cannot be blocked off, as with a tourniquet, without interfering with the precious blood-flow to all the others.

The case of Lydgate in Middlemarch illustrates this doctrine. His 'spots of commonness' represent such a 'blocking-off'in an otherwise refined sensibility. In the practical and emotional areas of his life, he is on a level with the 'coursing celebrity,' Mr. Chichely—in their shared preference for a Rosamond over a Dorothea, for example.20 His error is fatal: a case of that 'stupidity' that for George Eliot constitutes vice: that obtuseness, that gradual obfuscation of awareness and sympathy that pads the moral sensibility.21 The poison of vulgarity in Lydgate does not remain local: his tragedy is an exemplum of the organic unity of the human sensibility: one 'spot' can gangrene the whole organism.

By the time that George Eliot embarked on her fictional career, therefore, she was already armed with a strong and hard-won sense of her art as the expression of all aspects of her experience: emotional and intellectual, moral and aesthetic. Her concept of a unified

20 *Middlemarch*, ch. 10.

21 Lydgate himself recognises stupidity as the characteristic of the morally degenerate: after Laure's placid confession of her murder, he sees her 'amid the throng of stupid criminals.' (my italics). She is no diabolical Lucrezia: she killed her husband out of boredom: she is simply 'cow-like,' deadened to normal human response.
sensibility extracted the Puritan guilt from her artistic endeavour: it justified her and released her from a basic dilemma.

The persona that emerges does not bear her own face: it is a complex and public construct. The voice is intimate yet impersonal: in her translations, she had submitted her own personality to that of others; in her journalism, she had been the anonymous, trenchant and knowledgeable reviewer of the works of others; and in her first novels, she wrote under a nom de plume, which deepened yet further the gulf between assumed persona and what might have approximated to her natural voice. For of course it is a male persona that she assumes and quite seriously wants to maintain at this stage. This fact conditions the tone of the George Eliot voice in the early novels, an effect that is carried over into the later novels, when the practical necessity for a disguised voice had disappeared: she quite deliberately adopts the voice of a male narrator - and so successfully as to deceive most of her readers (though - interestingly - not Dickens, who wrote to the author of Scenes of Clerical Life, 'If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself, mentally, so like a woman, since the world began.'\(^22\))

In Adam Bede, the maleness of the narrative voice is emphasised at several points. George Eliot is at pains to indicate the masculine experience of her central consciousness: and this emerges particularly in her treatment of love. Repeatedly, she assumes the masculine sensibility: 'We are apt to be kinder to the brutes that love us than

\(^{22}\) GE Letters, II, 42304.
to the women that love us. Is it because the brutes are dumb?\textsuperscript{23} - a remarkable transformation of view-point from that expressed in Janet's Repentance: 'an unloving, tyrannous, brutal man needs no motive to prompt his cruelty: he needs only the perpetual presence of a woman he can call his own.'\textsuperscript{24} The description of Hetty's sensuous appeal, though she claims that it is 'made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women,' yet has something of the aggressive baffled note of male admiration ('a beauty... that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you.')\textsuperscript{25}

Again, and more explicitly, love is described from the male point of view in the portrayal of Adam's growing passion: 'Love is such a simple thing when we have only one-and-twenty summers and a sweet girl of seventeen trembles under our glance, as if she were a bud first opening her heart with wondering rapture to the morning.'\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, the account of Adam's love for Hetty is a specifically masculine experience: 'It was to Adam the time that a man can least forget in after-life, - the time when he believes that the first woman he has ever loved betrays by a slight something - a word, a tone, a glance, the quivering of an eye or an eyelid - that she is at least beginning to love him in return.'\textsuperscript{27} - as is the generalisation, 'a man never lies with more delicious languor under the influence of a passion, than

\textsuperscript{23} ch. 4, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{24} ch. 13, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{25} ch. 7, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{26} ch. 12, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{27} ch. 20, p. 331.
when he has persuaded himself that he shall subdue it to-morrow.\textsuperscript{28} - where 'man' refers not simply to the whole human race, but to a specifically male awareness. Most blatant of all these misleading references, however, is of course the moralistic - and retrospectively comic - expostulation at the end of the formidably realistic account of Hetty's tragedy: 'God preserve you and me from being the beginners of such misery!'\textsuperscript{29}

This male aspect of George Eliot's narrative persona is of course not all-pervasive, although she quite deliberately cultivated it while her nom de plume remained unassailed. There is sufficient evidence for an acute and instinctive reader (such as Dickens) to fasten upon, of a woman's specific experience: passages such as that describing Hetty's awakening: 'the anxieties and fears of a first passion, with which she was trembling, had become stronger than vanity, had given her for the first time that sense of helpless dependence on another's feeling which awakens the clinging deprecating womanhood even in the shallowest girl that can ever experience it, and creates in her a sensibility to kindness which found her quite hard before.'\textsuperscript{30} This 'sensibility to kindness' is a direct expression of Marian Evans's personal - and characteristically feminine - emotional hunger, which emerges in her novels in the essential vulnerability even of apparently proud and self-assured characters, such as Janet, Maggie, and Esther.

Nevertheless, the male timbre in the narrative voice affects

\textsuperscript{28} ch. 26, p. 436\textsuperscript{28}.
\textsuperscript{29} ch. 37, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{30} ch. 20, p. 332.
George Eliot's relationship to her readers. From the beginning of her career, it establishes her as the universal, sexless, or rather androgynous\textsuperscript{31} sage, possessed of a range of experience, actual and imagined, far beyond that of the ordinary woman-writer, and of a sympathetic wisdom that knows no barriers of sex.

Indeed, it seems that this male element in her narrative persona is not merely a result of her practical need for anonymity, but is an essential aspect of her own sensibility. Here, we are on rather perilously conjectural ground; but it is possible to see George Eliot's empathy with the male experience of love and of feminine beauty as a result of her own lack of self-confidence as a woman, especially in her youth: this basic anxiety led her to a slightly obsessive preoccupation with physical beauty, its power to win love, the reactions of men to women more attractive to herself, and the male attitude to love in general. As we have noticed, her first reactions to Lewes, and to the Swedish novelist, Frederika Bremer,\textsuperscript{32} were unfavourable, because of their physical ugliness; and her friendship with Spenser was prevented from developing by her own lack of beauty which became a subject of masochistic self-reviling at that period.\textsuperscript{33} In her novels, she is not, as some critics have suggested, antagonistic to beauty in women, but, on the contrary, rather excessively fascinated by it. There is a dazzled awe in her descriptions of Hetty, of Tessa, of Rosamond, and of Gwendolen, of the heroines whose beauty is facile, sensuous, and unconnected with spirituality.

\textsuperscript{31} cf. Virginia Woolf's discussions in \textit{A Room of One's Own} and \textit{Orlando}, of the ideal androgynous nature of the writer - and of the experiencing human being in general.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{GE Letters}, I, 366-7.

\textsuperscript{33} Gordon S. Haight, \textit{George Eliot; a biography}, p. 115.
George Eliot’s male persona extends, of course, over a much wider field than the subjects of love and beauty. Her nom de plume and, in a large measure, her own natural bent led her to adopt a general tone as of a man speaking to men, drawing upon a range of experience not available to the genus of women-writers.

In *Adam Bede*, she deals once more with her central theme of activity and passivity: in the person of Adam, she explores once more the possibilities and limitations of the active will. With his solid, prosaic, vigorous nature, uncrippled by fanaticism or idealism, his doctrine of work, which ‘gives you a grip hold o’ things outside your own lot,’ his ‘habitual impatience of mere passivity,’ his carpentering, which seems to symbolise his conscientious but rather wooden type of creativity, and his study of mathematics — Adam is the archetype of the active man in the world. He represents the practical will, extroverted, unacquainted with weakness, in himself and others. He and Dinah at first stand at opposite poles in this basic question of temperament and philosophy; and the novel is largely a study of their individual development through suffering and sympathy to a point where fusion of the opposing principles they represent becomes possible.

---

34 *Adam Bede*, ch.11, p. 171.

35 cf. Henry James's criticism of Adam: 'My chief complaint with *Adam Bede* himself is that he is too good. He is meant, I conceive, to be every inch a man; but, to my mind, there are several inches wanting. He lacks spontaneity and sensibility, he is too stiff-backed. He lacks that supreme quality without which a man can never be interesting to men, - the capacity to be tempted...' (quoted in *A Century of George Eliot Criticism*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, p. 149).
Adam's fundamental spiritual problem is indicated at the very beginning of the novel, in the scene in the workshop. Seth puts it indulgently: "You know Adam will have his way. You may's well try to turn a waggon in narrow lane."\(^\text{36}\) Like Sir Christopher in 'Mr. Gilfil's Love Story,' he has to be educated to modify his overweening will. Without such an education, the egoistic will can grow into the grotesque proportions of Mr. Featherstone's death-bed obsessive querulousness: "I shall do as I like."\(^\text{37}\)

Henry James objects that he is perfectly righteous from the beginning of the story, and that therefore he is a static figure. But it is just his righteousness that is to suffer alteration; his progress is towards new sympathy and understanding for weakness. At first, he is blind in his strength: there is a hardness in his replies to Arthur's questions about his firmness of will. His attitude is mathematical in its rigidity:

"I've seen pretty clear, ever since I could cast up a sum, as you can never do what's wrong without breeding sin and trouble more than you can ever see."\(^\text{38}\)

His moral view of life, of the inexorable laws of nature, is to be seen as correct and in accord with the 'nature of things.' But there is a lack of flexibility, of sympathy for human weakness in Adam's reply, that does not at all help Arthur.

---

\(^{\text{36}}\) ch. 1, p. 7.

\(^{\text{37}}\) Middlemarch, ch. 33, p. 69.

\(^{\text{cf.}}\) Adams own recognition of his problem: ch. 18, p. 303; ch. 19, p. 316.

\(^{\text{38}}\) Adam Bede, ch. 16, p. 250.
Besides this pragmatic realism, however, Adam has in his nature another strain: he is not only an artisan but also a peasant. When he hears the willow-wand tapping at the house-door, he shudders at the superstitious omen. In all his rationalism and good sense, he had that mental combination which is at once humble in the region of mystery, and keen in the region of knowledge: it was the depth of his reverence quite as much as his hard common-sense, which gave him his disinclination to doctrinal religion, and he often checked Seth's argumentative spiritualism by saying, "Eh, it's a big mystery; thee know'st but little about it." 39

It is this mystical strain in Adam, this humility that is developed in the course of the story. 40 He comes finally to a certain measure of agreement with the Methodist approach, the spiritualised, inward-looking humility of faith. He looks back on his argumentative, logical youth, and recognises its limitations; remembering the Wesleyan leader who replied to all his intellectual quibbles:

"Young man, it's the devil making use of your pride and conceit as a weapon to war against the simplicity of the truth."

It is to simplicity, reverence, sympathy that he is increasingly drawn: his hard, active nature, his anger, pride, and desire for revenge - all are tempered by the softer, passive virtues that Dinah represents.

The shock that is given to his whole system of values is similar to that suffered by Sir Christopher. A rigid schematic approach to life is discomfited: all Adam's dreams and illusions about the 'fittingness' of things are disrupted, all his pre-conceptions exploded. The relation between 'eyelashes and morals,' between

39 ibid., ch. 4, p. 70.
40 See ch. 17, p. 274.
Arthur's position and his moral character—suddenly melts before his eyes. As in Janet's Repentance, the suffering involved in such a disruption of familiar patterns of thought is described in Christian terms: it is 'a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state.'

And, in the end, the reconciliation with Arthur is a victory over himself: a victory in the Christian, introspective tradition:

'...he rose from his seat and turned towards Arthur. Arthur heard the movement, and, turning round, met the sad but softened look with which Adam said - "It's true what you say, sir: I'm hard - it's in my nature. I've known what it is in my life to repent and feel it's too late: I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent.'

Adam's spiritual odyssey, therefore, is a movement towards humility, the recognition of human limitation, a subduing of the aggressive will.

Dinah, on the other hand, stands at the opposite pole in the resignation-activity antithesis. Lisbeth defines a real similarity between Seth and Dinah: they have 'the same look'—the kind of inner peace that demands nothing for the self from the physical world. Lisbeth traces his 'look' to the fact of their both being Methodists: a false conclusion, as Henry James very perceptively points out:

'There is in Dinah Morris too close an agreement between her distinguished natural disposition and the action of her religious faith. If by nature she had been passionate, rebellious, selfish, I could better understand her actual self-abnegation. I would look upon it as the logical fruit of a profound religious experience. But as she stands, heart and soul go easily hand in hand.'

---

41 ch. 48, 273-4.
42 ch. 10, p. 164.
43 'The Novels of George Eliot,' (1866); reprinted in A Century of George Eliot Criticism, p. 49.
This is the crux of the matter: Dinah and Seth have no struggle with their natures: their temperaments are docile, obedient, selfless. Dinah's insistence on returning to the harshness of Stoniton, her clear-sighted compassion for Hetty—these are expressions of a nature free of egotism, unstrainingly embodying the Christian ideal of Agape. Her religion is a kind of paraphrase of her natural instincts—"divine guidance" only leads her where her own heart would have her go. This psychological perception, often exploited by George Eliot to negative ends—in the portrayal of Mr. Bulstrode, for example, or in the articles on Dr. Cumming and the poet Young—or even in Mrs. Poyser's words ("When there's a bigger maggot than usual in your head you call it "direction."!)—is sometimes shown as a positive expression of human goodness:

"Yes," said Dinah, careful not to oppose any feeling of Lisbeth's, for her reliance, in her smallest words and deeds, on a divine guidance, always issued in that finest woman's tact which proceeds from acute and ready sympathy."44

George Eliot contrives very subtly to present an authentic picture of the inner religious life, without in any way upsetting her own Feuerbach-ian views. Dinah's religion is simply the expression of the best of her nature: not a moral pressure exerted on her by an external authority. James's criticism thus makes an acute psychological point—one that would not apply, for instance, to Janet's Repentance. In the earlier story, as we notice, it is the troubled, inharmonious spirits—Janet and Mr. Tryan—who find in an ascetic form of religion,

44 ch. 10, p. 165.
laying all its stress on the action of grace, the power of faith, and conquest of human desire, a release from the complexities of the importunate self. The emotional climate of Janet’s Repentance is altogether darker and shot through with more violent implications of human hunger and despair than is Adam Bede: and in the world of Milby, Evangelicalism is a dynamic force acting on intransigent passions and needs.

The mortification that emerges as an ultimate in the earlier novel is qualified considerably in Adam Bede. In her first full-length novel, George Eliot develops some of the themes stated or suggested in Scenes of Clerical Life, and - equally significantly - leaves to lie fallow for many years other themes, returning to them with artistic intent, only later in her career. In the first category, is the unsentimental social realism in dealing with the mediocrity, physical, emotional, and moral, of her characters. The tragicomedy of ordinary life, with its over-riding imperative of sympathy, moves from Amos Barton, the workhouse inmates, the old Mr. Gilfil, the ugly town of Milby, and the sordidness of domestic warfare and alcoholism to the less repulsively tranche de vie realism of the placid pastoral of Hayslope, where the beauty of the 'Dutch interiors' is not obscured by their prosaic homeliness.

The positive values of the novel are largely Feuerbach’s values: particular, limited, prosaic and ungeneralised. Mrs. Poyser embodies these values: she is a kind of middle-aged Ceres; all her thoughts and images are in terms of natural, wholesome, organic growth. She heartily approves of Mr. Irwine: he is ‘like a full crop of wheat,
or a pasture with a fine dairy o' cows infit."

Repeatedly, George Eliot advocates a natural extrovert approach to life, against idealism and over-spiritualism. In the chapter 'In which the Story pauses a little,' she satirises just that type of sensibility that cannot find satisfaction in the trivialities of actual existence. This moral fastidiousness that she mocks so acidly is a part of her own experience: and she laughs its pretensions ruthlessly out of court, by epitomising it in the figure of Mr. Gedge, the landlord of the Royal Oak, who finds all human-beings, 'a poor lot, sir, big and little.' It takes a certain greatness and experience for the idealist to come to terms with the actualities of life, to come to recognise 'that human nature is lovable.'

The attainment of such a love is valuable, indeed, precisely because of its difficulty. For although the prosaic, limited characters of the novel, such as Mr. Irwine and Mrs. Poyser, are much more sympathetic than Amos Barton or the self-righteous Milby spinsters, they are nevertheless placed under limiting judgments. In this, Dinah acts as catalyst: through their judgments of her, they are themselves defined.

---

45 ch. 8, p. 137; ch. 17, p. 275. Irwine joins Arthur in his dislike of 'isms' (ch. 5, p. 94) - cf. Feuerbach who claims that his philosophy lies in the negation of philosophy (Preface). The existence of insignificant people is shown to have 'very important consequences' on the life of the epicurean, theologically lax clergyman, who makes such a different impression when he is known personally, from his image 'as an embodied system or opinion.'

46 ch. 17, p. 278.
It is symptomatic of Mr. Irwine that he resorts to the conventional male rationalisation for Dinah's spirituality: "...you mustn't find fault with her for that, Mrs. Poyser; you forget, she's got no husband to preach to." 47 His urbane sagacity is not the final word on this subject: his perception is, after all, limited, and he does fail Arthur at the crucial moment, through his very tolerance and indulgence.

Mrs. Poyser has all the irritable briskness of a Mrs. Cadwallader, who reacts to Dorothea's quixotic idealism with the aphorism: 'a girl who would have been requiring you to see the stars by daylight.'

'...But as for Dinah, poor child, she's never likely to be buxom as long as she'll make her dinner o' cake and water, for the sake o' giving to them as want. She provoked me past bearing sometimes:" 48

But neither Mrs. Poyser nor Mr. Irwine has the definitive word in this implicit conflict. Strong as is the case for the active, natural virtues, there remains something that Dinah has to offer, that lies beyond the grasp of the mere natural man. Mrs. Poyser herself recognises this: puzzled as she is by Dinah's recalcitrance, she ultimately cannot resist a feeling of awe in the face of her niece's steadfastness. It is almost a superstitious feeling that comes over her:

"I begun to be frightened to think o' the set-downs I'd given her; for it comes over you sometimes as if she'd a way o' knowing the rights o' things more nor other folks have." 49

And in the end, Mrs. Poyser comes to a kind of submission to that unearthly quality in Dinah:

---

47 ch. 49, p. 292.
48 ch. 18, p. 286-7.
"An' she makes one feel safer when she's in the
house; for she's like the driven snow: anybody
might sin for two as had her at their elbow." 49

Mrs. Poyser acknowledges Dinah as a kind of feminine Christ-figure,
exculpating, exonerating, by her very existence.

The sense that human nature is limited, therefore, underlies,
and even nourishes the sense that it is lovable. George Eliot's
personal struggles with the prosaic and the ideal are expressed here
at a point of equilibrium: the actual is 'placed' and accepted.
The sharpness of extremes is planed down in this novel. The religious
apathy of Milby becomes the good-humoured pagan indifference of Hayslope.
The petty circumstances that determine Janet's decision to marry Dempster
become much less significant in the story of Arthur's downfall than
the weakness in his own moral fibre: it is not possible to claim
that his tragedy is caused by a broken arm and a lamed horse; even
though 'Ships, certainly, are liable to casualties, which sometimes make
terribly evident some flaw in their construction, that would never have
been discoverable in smooth water.' 50 And the mediocrity of feeling
that is mercilessly exposed in Amos Barton, even in the very midst of
the clergyman's grief for his dead wife, becomes in Adam Bede the herd's
mingled passion for Hetty and for 'calculations as to the cheapening
of bricks per thousand by water-carriage.' 51

In Adam Bede, George Eliot aims for the first time at a
harmonious work of art, a synthesis of opposing concepts and values.

49 ch. 52, p. 339.
50 ch. 12, p. 186.
51 ch. 33, p. 100.
The theme of the possible torment within a marriage, which seems to have had a peculiar mythic fascination for her, is absent from Adam Bede. It is taken up again later, in The Lifted Veil, in Romola, Felix Holt, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda; but for her first full-length novel, she focuses on her central preoccupation, the two modes of existence, activity and passivity, the passionate will and the ethic of renunciation.

In Scenes of Clerical Life, George Eliot had already indicated her theme: in Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, Sir Christopher's inflexible and presumptuous will is thwarted, and he comes finally to recognise realities outside his own desires; and in Janet's Repentance, both Janet and Mr. Tryan reach finally an inner death-in-life, a ruthless extinction of all personal desire. There, as we have seen, the Christian, and specifically the Evangelical ethic is vindicated: Feuerbach and a humanistic morality are bypassed. In Adam Bede, the ethic of mortification is modified considerably, although, since Mrs. Poyser and Mr. Irwine are not, as we have seen, central in their judgments, it is not rejected entirely. In a sense, as I have suggested, the novel can be seen as a study in the two modes of life represented by Adam and by Dinah, and ultimately fused in their marriage.

It is clear that the terms in which I am considering the characterisation of Adam Bede bypass rather than counter the obvious critical objections to the portrayal of Dinah, in particular. It is a paradox (but a familiar one in George Eliot's case) that on the score of realism Dinah should be so evidently deficient: George Eliot's native and irrepressible idealism surges forth in her saint-like
The theme of the possible torment within a marriage, which seems to have had a peculiar mythic fascination for her, is absent from *Adam Bede*. It is taken up again later, in *The Lifted Veil*, in *Romola*, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*; but for her first full-length novel, she focuses on her central preoccupation, the two modes of existence, activity and passivity, the passionate will and the ethic of renunciation.

In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot had already indicated her theme: in *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*, Sir Christopher's inflexible and presumptuous will is thwarted, and he comes finally to recognise realities outside his own desires; and in *Janet's Repentance*, both Janet and Mr. Tryan reach finally an inner death-in-life, a ruthless extinction of all personal desire. There, as we have seen, the Christian, and specifically the Evangelical ethic is vindicated: Feuerbach and a humanistic morality are bypassed. In *Adam Bede*, the ethic of mortification is modified considerably, although, since Mrs. Poyser and Mr. Irwine are not, as we have seen, central in their judgments, it is not rejected entirely. In a sense, as I have suggested, the novel can be seen as a study in the two modes of life represented by Adam and by Dinah, and ultimately fused in their marriage.

It is clear that the terms in which I am considering the characterisation of *Adam Bede* bypass rather than counter the obvious critical objections to the portrayal of Dinah, in particular. It is a paradox (but a familiar one in George Eliot's case) that on the score of realism Dinah should be so evidently deficient: George Eliot's native and irrepressible idealism surges forth in her saint-like
characters, male and female, from Milly Barton to Daniel Deronda. It is, however, Dinah's function as an allegorical figure that I am here considering. What, in realistic terms, was a weakness, becomes in terms of an allegorical pastoral a positive strength: the simple, massive lines with which the figure is carved, the way in which she and Adam move towards one another through the course of the novel, the thematic necessity of their union at its end. Seen in these terms, Dinah is far from static: she, like Adam, is chastened and matured by experience - but the significance of this movement lies not in its psychological realism, but rather in its allegorical reconciliation of polarities in George Eliot's vision.

Mrs. Poyser compares Dinah to 'the driven snow'; and purity, a kind of nullity is what she stands for throughout most of the novel. Even in appearance, she has this nun-like quality: unsleepconsciouss, simple, direct, sexless, in her blind and universal love. Constantly, it is this neat, controlled perfection that is stressed: her 'small oval face, of a uniform transparent whiteness, with an egg-like line of cheek and chin...nothing was left blurred or unfinished.' 52 Her typical expression is 'of unconscious placid gravity - of absorption in thoughts that had no connection with the present moment, or with her own personality: an expression that is most of all discouraging to a lover. Her very walk was discouraging: it had that quiet elasticity that asks for no support.' 53

She seems to be the incarnation of the Christian ideal that

52 ch. 2, p. 30.
53 ch. 3, p. 45.
Feuerbach so deplored: 'In his excessive, transcendental subjectivity the Christian conceives that he is, by himself, a perfect being.'

This is how she appears, and yet, from the beginning, there are hints of a dormant human passion that, as yet, does not even require restraint.

It is she, for instance, who realises that, though she and Seth have 'the same look,' indeed, just because they do, they cannot marry ('our marriage is not God's will.' ) And when she first meets Adam, the immaculate shell of her completeness is pierced: 'Dinah, for the first time in her life, felt a painful self-consciousness... A faint blush came, which deepened as she wondered at it.'

She recovers herself quickly, but with a conscious effort of control.

In the course of the novel, however, Dinah changes and grows. By the very fact of her juxtaposition with the prosaic working-day attitudes of Mrs. Poyser, the genial easy-going rationalism of Mr. Irwine, the sheer animal suffering of Hetty, and the very human weakness of Arthur, her purity and selflessness is made to seem, to some extent, a spiritual luxury. In spite of her pity and distress for Hetty, even she somehow fails her. In the scene in the bed-chamber, the contrast between the two girls is so extreme that any real relation between them becomes impossible. In their adjoining bed-chambers, in fact, they are clearly spiritual descendants of Marian Evans's two Hamadryads in her Notebook of an Eccentric: one gazing narcissistically at her own reflection, and the other at her window, with its 'wide view

---

54 The Essence of Christianity, p. 167.

55 ch. 11, p. 173.

56 See Pinney, pp. 21-2.
over the fields. By force of her spiritual love, Dinah does try
to achieve this communication. She mis-judges Hetty's reaction, which
is just a childish fear and timidity:

'It is our habit to say that while the lower nature
can never understand the higher, the higher nature
commands a complete view of the lower. But I think
the higher nature has to learn this comprehension,
as we learn the art of vision, by a good deal of hard
experience...'

This judgment on Dinah is crucial: her innocence and purity
are found inadequate for the real tests of life. Through lack of
worldliness, of shrewdness, through too great a concentration on her
own spiritual vision, she cannot throw a rope to the drowning girl.
They have no common language: it is this language of the world that
Dinah has to learn.

Her form of suffering, the breach of her self-sufficiency, is her
love for Adam. In the chapter at the end of the book, after Hetty has
been deported, this breach, this revelation of her own human need,
widens and deepens: both Seth and Lisbeth notice the change in her:
the 'current of emotion' that has shaken her. And when she talks with
Adam about Arthur, the generosity of her nature is infused with a new
heart-felt sympathy, a quality more personal and involved than the
generalised Agape of the old days:

"He's of a rash, warm-hearted nature, like Esau, for
whom I have always felt great pity," said Dinah.
"That meeting between the brothers, where Esau is so
loving and generous, and Jacob so timid and distrustful,
notwithstanding his sense of the Divine favour, has
always touched me greatly. Truly, I have been tempted
to say that Jacob was of a mean spirit."

---

57 ch. 15, p. 234.
58 ch. 15, p. 240.
59 ch. 50, pp. 297-8.
This dichotomy between Jacob and Esau is personally meaningful to Dinah: it symbolises her own increasing 'humanisation,' her new sense of qualities that she lacks. Esau, with his vivid, passionate nature, has for her a power that, in her passive virtue, she lacks. It is Adam who represents this power to her: his strength and vitality, his sheer lovable humanity. And this human love seems to be a threat to the all-consuming spiritual love of previous years. It disturbs her, where she was peaceful: it scatters her energies and will, it violates her equanimity. At the very sound of his voice, unexpectedly, her reaction is instantaneous:

'It was as if Dinah had put her hands unawares on a vibrating chord; she was shaken with an intense thrill and for the instant felt nothing else.'

Old Lisbeth, querulously affectionate, regrets that she 'couldna ha' one o' the lads.'; but she comes close to the truth when she realises that, like as Dinah and Seth are, marriage between them would not do:

'"But happen, thee'dst like a husband better as isna just the cut o' thyse'n; the runnin' brook isna athirst for th' rain."'

The natural wisdom of the old woman just describes Dinah's case. She needs something different: but to her, as to Mr. Tryan, the two loves, the human and the divine, seem incompatible. Her love for Adam would be bound to obsess her, to the extent of diminishing her wholeness with God. The natural man, in Christian belief, is the enemy of the spiritual man: a man cannot have two masters. This is the Christian attitude that Feuerbach analyses and condemns. There is,

60 ch. 30, p. 308.
however, some emotional truth in the feeling that Dinah expresses:

"'I fear I shall forget to rejoice and weep with others; nay, I fear I should forget the Divine presence, and seek no love but yours.'" 61

With the Christian consciousness of centuries, Dinah feels that passion is the arch-enemy of God: the anti-Christ in human life.

For Adam, there are no problems. With his moralistic, practical approach to life, he finds it clear that what fulfils human nature must be what God wants. His feeling for Dinah has always been fundamentally religious: to see her when he was thinking of Hetty was 'like dreaming of the sunshine, and awaking in the moonlight.' 62 His need for her is partly a need for spiritual liberation, with its roots deep in his past suffering: there is a devoutness and a single-mindedness about it that is absent from Dinah's feeling for him: "'It's like as if it was a new strength to me," he said to himself, "to love her, and know as she loves me...it's a feeling as gives you a sort o' liberty, as if you could walk more fearless, when you've more trust in another than y'have in yourself."' 63 And his plea to Dinah is basically religious: "'how can there be anything contrary to what's right in our belonging to one another, and spending our lives together? Who put this great love into our hearts? Can anything be holier than that?'" 64

Typically, Adam argues from the human to the divine: God must be in accord with the highest of human desires; holiness must be just this experience of great love. This is George Eliot's creed, expressed

61 ch. 52, p. 333.
62 ch. 11, p. 372.
63 ch. 54, pp. 365-6.
64 ch. 52, p. 333.
in her letters and articles: it is the only kind of religion she will admit: a religion that only objectifies what already exists in human terms. But Dinah's contrary feeling is given a sympathetic hearing. The possibility of a real conflict between spiritual and human fulfilment is acknowledged. For a life so completely dedicated to one end, the service of God, earthly happiness may be illegitimate:

"...I felt before that my heart was too strongly drawn towards you, and that your heart was not as mine; and the thought of you had taken hold of me, so that my soul had lost its freedom, and was becoming enslaved to an earthly affection, which made me anxious and careful about what should befall myself. For in all other affection I had been content with any small return, or with none; but my heart was beginning to hunger after an equal love from you. And I had no doubt that I must wrestle against that as a great temptation; and the command was clear that I must go away."[65]

This is, in a sense, a more dignified and appealing account of the conflict that obsessed the Evangelical Marian Evans - the sense of incompatibility of human and divine love. The voice has here a greater grace and even conviction than are to be found in those ponderous early letters: but its resonances echo back over the years between her lived girlhood experience and the created world of her art. The sense of conflict in Dinah is real, and not merely sanctimonious: her vision of a world where sacrifice of the lower to the higher is called for carries conviction.

Nevertheless, this either-or attitude is finally rejected. In the final synthesis, Dinah's vision is repudiated: her love for Adam is not to be 'an idol in the temple,' but a part of the Divine scheme of

---

[65] ch. 52, pp. 334-5.
things. When she finally agrees to marry him, and they meet on the hill, he calls her name, and before she realises it is he, she accepts the voice as a spiritual one. When she realises who has called, she remains calm and serene: as though the two voices really are one now in her mind, the two desires harmonised into unison.

The synthesis that is reached in this conclusion is epitomised in the Epilogue. After eight years of marriage, Dinah has changed little - she is 'only a little fuller'; she has two children, and she has given up preaching, though 'she's not held from other sorts of teaching.' She has become more of this earth; her spiritual influence is concentrated now in private talking to people in their homes. Her spirituality and asceticism is tempered and humanised; while Adam's harshness and obstinacy is softened. The chapter is tuned in a minor

66 The parallel with Jane Eyre is striking: in both cases the heroine fears that the experience of passion will make her forget God, and she gives up her chance of happiness with the man she loves, because of some higher motive; in both cases, she refuses the offer of marriage of a spiritual, lofty-minded man; and in both cases she is called back to her lover by a spiritual voice uttering her name, authorising, in a sense, their union. Of Jane Eyre, Marian Evans had written:

'All self-sacrifice is good, but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase.' (GE Letters, 11 June 1843)

One might conclude from this that George Eliot considered Dinah's intended sacrifice of her love to the love of God, as 'a somewhat nobler cause' - that she gave full weight to Dinah's argument, and that Adam's ultimate victory, in the name of humanity and fulfilment, was not the only possible dénouement.
key, it is true: as in the romantic climax of the novel, joy is veined through with the experience of pain and death: 'What greater thing is there for two human souls, than to feel that they are joined for life - to strengthen each other in all labour, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting?' Nevertheless, resignation and activity have met in a point of equilibrium; there is promise and vitality in the children of this marriage.

This point of equipoise, however, was followed in George Eliot's personal emotional life by a period of melancholy and apprehension almost parallel to the grinding depression of her Evangelical years. A heavy consciousness of her responsibility as a writer was only aggravated by the extravagant acclaim that greeted Adam Bede. Disbelief in herself is a constant theme in her letters - shading off into the mood of emotional inertia, of a tortured and conscious spiritual flaccidity that we have noted as a hallmark of her sensibility. The Liggins affair was a

---

67 ch. 54, p. 369.

68 See GE Letters, 24 February 1859 (III, 22-3)
   17 March 1859 (III, 34)
   5 May 1859 (III, 64)
   6 May 1859 (III, 66)
   8 June 1859 (III, 79)
   5 July 1859 (III, 111)
   31 October 1859 (III, 170)
   3 April 1859 (III, 285)
   2 November 1859 (III, 357)
   13 November 1859 (III, 358-9)
   28 November 1859 (III, 360)
   26 December 1859 (III, 366)
catalyst for a revulsion of distaste for mankind, paralysing her creativity.\textsuperscript{69} Lewes, understanding her peculiar vulnerability to adverse opinion, her need for constant encouragement, instituted his lifelong policy of household censorship of letters and reviews of her novels.\textsuperscript{70} But her depressions continued, with their usual concomitant of physical \textit{malaise}. Her crippling self-consciousness was at its worst: her letters are rarely free of the strain of maintaining her 'self-created Self.' And that \textquoteleft jeu de mélancolie\textquoteright, \textit{The Lifted Veil}, is a natural fruit of this period: the macabre and tormented consciousness of the hero is an extended development of a theme of her own emotional life.

\textit{The Mill on the Floss}, too, was born out of this prolonged period of despair and disenchantment. In this, the most autobiographical of her novels, she for the first time confronts the religious problems of her youth: the problems attendant upon an 'ecstatic' religious faith, with its roots deep in an intense emotional need. (\textquoteleft "We are just the sort of people that want to hear good news."\textquoteright) In \textit{Maggie}, George Eliot depicted the conflicting impulses that had led her in a single early letter to exult over both the power and passion of George Sand and the 'cool air as of cloisters' of Thomas à Kempis.\textsuperscript{71}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{69} ibid., 10 April, 1859 (III, 44). 19 September 1859 (III, 155-7).  
\textsuperscript{70} ibid., 8 March 1859 (III, 31) 30 June 1859 (III, 106) cf. Joseph Jacobs in his Introduction to \textit{Essays and Reviews from the "Atheneum" (1891)}, xv.  
\textsuperscript{71} GE Letters, 9 February 1849 (I, 278).}
'My books are deeply/things to me, and come out of all the painful discipline, all the most hardly-learnt lessons of my past life. The essential, almost haggard seriousness with which she approaches her creative task is emphasised repeatedly. Indeed, contemporary attitudes to the novel-form in general did threaten her envisaged role: she later found it necessary, for example, to instruct D'Albert-Durade, on the title of the French edition of The Mill on the Floss: 'Only resist to the death anything of the same (genre as) "Amour et Devoir."' And in fact her right to treat fiction in this unprecedently solemn manner was challenged - by the critic in the Saturday Review, for example. He deplored the 'light, trifling, and inadequate discussion of great subjects' which he judged inevitable, given the form and scope of a novel.

'The conduct of the story,' he wrote, 'always affords an opening to escape from the responsibility of definite thought'; the interest in the externals of plot and physical detail distracts from the central unresolved problem. And he doubted, in principle, whether 'spiritual doubts and conflicts are a proper subject for a novelist.' Added to this general point is his regret that a 'novelist powerful enough to become the example and excuse of lesser writers exhibits ascetic religion as a temporary phase in a young woman's career...'

---

72 ibid., 18 October 1859 (III, 187).

This criticism is evidently quite radical in its nature: it allows to George Eliot all the purely novelistic talents; but it sets limitations on the legitimate scope of those talents: by the very nature of her art, she is banned from the highest reaches of human thought. The ultimate issues are beyond the sphere of fictional treatment: this is the view that George Eliot found it necessary to combat, in explicit statement and in the very tone and range of her novels.

The religious aspect of The Mill on the Floss, to which the reviewer objects, is, in fact, no mere 'temporary phase' in Maggie's career. The problems and paradoxes posed by 'ascetic religion' epitomise that conflict between the inner life of unity, order and heroic simplicity, and the outer realities, chaotic, inchoate, prosaic, complex that constitutes the central concern of George Eliot's work. To Sara Hennell she writes, trying to reconstruct memories of her girlhood: 'I was then strongly under the influence of Evangelical belief, and earnestly endeavouring to shape this anomalous English-Christian life of ours into some consistency with the spirit and simple verbal tenor of the New Testament.'

This search for form and significance is also Maggie's search in The Mill on the Floss. Like her creator, she is born slightly 'different' from her surrounding society: there is something of the changeling about her, that is apparent all through her gawky childhood: her talents, and her passions, set her apart, and in her isolation her quest for an inner meaning and unity to life is intensified.

---

74 GE Letters, 7 October 1859 (III, 174).
Marian Evans as a self-conscious girl spun the rueful myth of her creation by an amateur sprite, experienced only in making toads, lemurs and marmosets. Similarly, in describing little Maggie, she uses quaint natural imagery:

"It's no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over-cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep..." 75

'Maggie ("this small mistake of nature") was incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark, heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes - an action which gave her much the air of a small Shetland pony." 77

'...on the watch, with gleaming eyes, like a Skye terrier suspecting mischief..." 78

'...whirling round like a Pythoness..." 79

With all her intensity of passion and self-will, Maggie, like Marian Evans, is temperamentally 'not fitted to stand alone.' Her need of affection makes her dependent in the extreme, can reduce her to submission with unexpected ease: in comparing the physiognomies of Tom and Maggie, George Eliot takes pleasure once more in showing that 'Nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness... Under these average boyish physiognomies that she seems to turn off by the gross, she conceals some of her most rigid, inflexible purposes, some of her most unmodifiable characters; and the dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink-and-white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features." 80

75 ibid., 23 November 1848 (I, 273).
76 Bk. 1, ch. 2, p. 12.
78 Bk. 1, ch. 3, p. 18.
79 Bk. 1, ch. 4, p. 38.
80 Bk. 1, ch. 5, p. 45.
Set apart, then, both in her passions and in her need for affection, Maggie is forced by the suffering of her life to seek some ultimate solution to her many problems. 'Every affection, every delight the poor child had had, was like an aching nerve to her.' Music, poetry, romance - even these, passionately loved as they are, are found wanting:

'Sometimes Maggie thought she could have been contented with absorbing fancies; if she could have had all Scott's novels and all Byron's poems: then, perhaps, she might have found happiness enough to dull her sensibility to her actual daily life. And yet...they were hardly what she wanted. She could make dream-worlds of her own - but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life...she wanted some key that would enable her to understand, and, in understanding, endure the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart.'

This passage is reminiscent of George Eliot's own youthful struggles to find 'some key that would enable her to understand,' and of her own rejection of 'dream-worlds,' as escape-routes from pain. Maggie's search for a 'key' leads her to dream of fleeing from home to 'some great man - Walter Scott perhaps' who would help her in her quest. What distracts her from her frustrated broodings is merely the voice of her father asking for his slippers:

'The voice pierced through Maggie like a sword: there was another sadness besides her own, and she had been thinking of turning her back on it and forsaking it.'

---

81 Bk. 4, ch. 3, p. 28.
82 cf. Romola's decision: 'to go to the most learned woman in the world, Cassandra Fedele, at Venice, and ask her how an instructed woman could support herself in a lonely life there.' (Romola, ch. 36).
83 Bk. 4, ch. 3, p. 31.
The living voice of another's need temporarily breaks her fantasy, but at the time, it does not present itself as a solution to Maggie's problem. After her religious 'phase,' and when she is broken by her love-affair with Stephen, she returns to this one insight, as the only one her life has offered her: at the moment before the waters lap her knees, she has reached her apotheosis of resignation and dedication:

'O God, if my life is to be long, let me live to bless and comfort..." 84

To bless and comfort others in their suffering, to bring the fruits of one's own pain to a comprehending sympathy with the pain of others - this is the utmost guidance that the novel has to offer: not exactly the glorious 'key' for which Maggie was seeking; rather an admission that life is irredeemably sad, and that the only wisdom is submission, the only positive value companionship in suffering.

The little book of Thomas à Kempis that offers her her first revelation, a transforming, unifying vision of life, initially promises her a kind of joy: but the narrator discounts this hope as the illusion of an immature child:

'She had not perceived - how could she until she had lived longer? - the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it.' 85

This, I suggest, is the central theme of the book - the true nature of renunciation. It can be seen as a development of Janet Dempster's solution to the problem of suffering: her renunciation,

84 Bk. 7, ch. 5, p. 391.
85 Bk. 4, ch. 3, p. 35.
The living voice of another's need temporarily breaks her fantasy, but at the time, it does not present itself as a solution to Maggie's problem. After her religious 'phase,' and when she is broken by her love-affair with Stephen, she returns to this one insight, as the only one her life has offered her: at the moment before the waters lap her knees, she has reached her apotheosis of resignation and dedication:

'0 God, if my life is to be long, let me live to bless and comfort...'\(^84\)

To bless and comfort others in their suffering, to bring the fruits of one's own pain to a comprehending sympathy with the pain of others - this is the utmost guidance that the novel has to offer: not exactly the glorious 'key' for which Maggie was seeking; rather an admission that life is irredeemably sad, and that the only wisdom is submission, the only positive value companionship in suffering.

The little book of Thomas à Kempis that offers her her first revelation, a transforming, unifying vision of life, initially promises her a kind of joy: but the narrator discounts this hope as the illusion of an immature child:

'She had not perceived - how could she until she had lived longer? - the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrows, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it.'\(^85\)

This, I suggest, is the central theme of the book - the true nature of renunciation. It can be seen as a development of Janet Dempster's solution to the problem of suffering: her renunciation,

\(^84\) Bk. 7, ch. 5, p. 391.

\(^85\) Bk. 4, ch. 3, p. 35.
her resignation from a personal part in life's drama, is the note on which *Janet's Repentance* ends. There, a trance-like tone expresses Janet's abdication from life and the frettings of desire. A kind of inner death possesses her:

'Janet felt a deep stillness within. She thirsted for no pleasure; she craved no worldly good. She saw the years to come stretch before her like an autumn afternoon, filled with resigned memory. Life to her could never more have any eagerness; it was a solemn service of gratitude and patient effort...'86

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie provides a kind of detail to this theme of renunciation, demonstrating in the passion and sorrow of her life exactly what is involved in the death-of-the-self to which Janet is so simply guided by the love of Mr. Tryan. The full austerity of this solution is cloaked in Janet's case by that supremely elevating agency, in George Eliot's canon, the influence of a superior and loving human being. In Maggie's case, there is no such human mentor to guide her steps, to act as exemplar and ideal, as father-figure or potential lover. Philip, gentle and sympathetic as he is, does not fill this role for her: he rejects at root the attempt she is making to crush her own impulses, to kill egoism and desire. He diagnoses Maggie's early sketches at resignation, as mere stupefaction.

So far, there is justice in Philip's diagnosis, as Maggie realises. All the same, the 'double impulse' in Philip's rouses in her the 'deeper consciousness that, for any immediate application it had to her conduct, it was no better than falsity.' Philip cannot really help her in her struggle, because his philosophy is one of

86 Ch. 11, p. 316.
'rational satisfaction' of the emotional, sensuous, aesthetic needs of her nature. There is some further need in her that he does not understand: at any rate, he, like her, is still torn by desires and ambitions, has not acquired the stability, the impersonal sympathy that denotes self-knowledge.

Dr. Kenn perhaps comes nearest to providing the guidance, the deep, constructive understanding which Maggie needs, and without which she is almost bound to fail. In the scene at the bazaar, when Dr. Kenn speaks to her for the first time, this craving of hers is generalised into one of George Eliot's most moving expressions of the need of human beings for one another, and particularly of the need of the passionate and the immature for those who have attained some kind of wisdom in life.

And when Maggie returns in disgrace after being 'Borne along by the Tide,' it is Dr. Kenn who alone understands 'the great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty.' He alone 'entered with all the comprehension of a man who had known spiritual conflict, and lived through years of devoted service to his fellow-men, into that state of Maggie's heart and conscience which made the consent to the marriage a desecration to her...

But even Dr. Kenn can only provide Maggie with some confirmation in the choice of her conscience: he cannot be the guide and inspiration that when she is in her trouble she desperately needs. What wisdom and insight she has gained into the true nature of renunciation has been

87 Maggie, in her desperate unaided scrabbling for moral redemption, is George Eliot's most bleakly solitary adventurer: her later heroines, Romola, Esther, Dorothea, Gwendolen, are granted the aid of a 'priest' figure, who mitigates the harshness of their quest.
88 Bk. 6, ch. 9, pp. 263-5.
89 Bk. 7, ch. 2, pp. 361-2.
hardly earned, at the expense of much pain and error, and rigorously acquired self-knowledge. She has had to live through the fulfilment of Philip's prophecy:

"You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite." 90

The violence of her needs does indeed startle her: her renunciation, shining-eyed as it was, was facile and not born of knowledge. She has renounced life and its pleasures, before she knew what she was giving up: conscious only of the turbulent strength of the desires within her, and of the impossibility of pruning them to moderation. Philip said to her, in their debate on this subject:

"Why should you starve your mind in that way? It is narrow asceticism - I don't like to see you persisting in it, Maggie. Poetry and art and knowledge are sacred and pure." 91

Her reply:

"But not for me - not for me...Because I should want too much..." 91

is reminiscent of Marian's own early letter in which she defends the ascetic path she has chosen to tread:

"I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful enjoyments the world can offer and yet live in near communion with their God: who can warmly love the creature, and yet be careful that the Creator maintains His supremacy in their hearts; but I confess that in my short experience and narrow sphere of action I have never been able to attain this; I find, as Dr. Johnson said respecting his wine, total abstinence much easier than moderation." 92

90 bk. 5, ch. 3, p. 97.
91 bk. 5, ch. 1, p. 60.
92 GE Letters, 9 September 1838 (I, 6).
Maggie's egoistic longings for beauty and love and pleasure, for satisfaction for her heart and her senses - these have not been quenched nor sublimated by the habits of selflessness and resignation. While showing, however, that ultimately an extreme asceticism may be no shield against passion, George Eliot paints Maggie with an additional dignity, in the phase of her intense religious life. When one examines the passages of conflict between Philip and Maggie on the opposing virtues of self-expression, the restless search for self-fulfilment, and of self-conquest, self-repression - it is not altogether clear that Philip is expressing the author's view. He would have Maggie as

"a brilliant woman - all wit and bright imagination. And it flashes out in your face still until you draw that veil of dull quiescence over it." 93

But the narrowness of an intense religious life becomes Maggie; it gives her a beauty of inner richness that George Eliot is at pains to point out. Maggie's regime of self-conquest includes the filling of her mind with hymns and sacred texts - the way of the Evangelical - indeed, of all adherents to a formalised faith. Armed with these weapons, she defends herself, at least to some extent, against her desires and vanities:

"She wondered if he (Philip) remembered how he used to like her eyes; with that thought Maggie glanced towards the square looking-glass which was condemned to hang with its face towards the wall, and she half-started from her seat to reach it down; but she checked herself and snatched up her work trying to repress the rising wishes by forcing her memory to recall snatches of hymns,..." 94

93 Bk. 5, ch. 3, p. 96.
94 Bk. 5, ch. 1, p. 46.
'She read so eagerly and constantly in her three books, the Bible, Thomas à Kempis, and the "Christian Year" (no longer rejected as a "hymn-book"), that they filled her mind with a continual stream of rhythmic memories; and she was too ardently learning to see all nature and life in the light of her new faith, to need any other material for her mind to work on....'

'...Maggie was a sight anyone might have been pleased to look at. That new inward life of hers, notwithstanding some volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions, yet shone out in her face with a tender soft light that mingled itself as added loveliness with the gradually enriched colour and outline of her blossoming youth."

The 'slow resigned sadness of the glance from which all search and unrest seem to have departed...' gives her a certain maturity: the narrator admits only to a 'sense of uneasiness in looking at her - a sense of opposing elements, of which a fierce collision is imminent...'

In Maggie, the opposing values of passion and resignation, activity and passivity meet in deadlock. The balance between the two is always precarious: she feels the claims of both ways of life keenly, so that the struggle is never merely a formal one, but a real oscillation between the opposing demands of her nature. For Maggie, the 'simple rule of renunciation' as a guide-line to the noblest life she desires is as compelling and torment-filled as the image of the Crucified was for her creator:

'...she had thought it was quiet ecstasy; she saw it face to face now - that sad patient loving strength which holds the clue of life - and saw that the thorns were forever pressing on its brow.'

95 Bk. 4, ch. 3, pp. 39-40.
96 Bk. 5, ch. 1, pp. 48-9.
This final image is, after all, the central one in George Eliot's 'religion' - the climactic Christian image: the image of the statue that Marian Evans kept over her desk, even as she laboured over the translation of Strauss; the image that Tito tries to 'bury... in a tomb of joy, away from Romola's eyes. It is an epitome of strength in passivity - the Christian ideal of acceptance, resignation to the will of God.

She insists, however, on the purely human nature of this image: the love radiated by the tormented Christ is for his fellow-men, not for a transcendent God. And the pain of his thorns is physically felt on his brow, a persistently experienced fact - no 'quiet ecstasy' of sublimation. This distinction excludes George Eliot, according to William James's definition, from the ranks of religious writers:

---

97 Thorwaldsen's Risen Christ; see Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: a biography, p. 58.
98 Romola, ch. 20, p. 304.
99 Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), p. 51:

'...in those states of mind which fall short of religion, the surrender to the laws of the universe is submitted to as an imposition of necessity, and the sacrifice is undergone at the very best without complaint. In the religious life, on the contrary, surrender and self-sacrifice are positively espoused: even unnecessary givings-up are added in order that the happiness may increase. Religion thus makes easy and felicitous, what in any case is necessary...'}
this element of enthusiasm, of joyous acceptance, is, to him, an essential element of the religious experience. This kind of spiritual elan is conscientiously censored from George Eliot's prescription: an open-eyed, sober submission is the attitude towards which Maggie progresses under the guidance of what R.H. Hutton critically described as 'the weariness of a great speculative intellect which can find no true spring of elasticity and life."

The 'great temptation' of Maggie's flight with Stephen is also a study in passivity: in a dream-like acquiescence, 'borne along by the tide,' she drifts away from family-ties, and loyalties, and memories, from all the framework of her past- 'without any act of her own will.' But this passivity is not one of strength, of comprehension - it is a fantasy, the self-surrender of weakness and need. Above all, it is not real: it is a kind of witchcraft, with constant images of a 'strong, mysterious charm,' of 'fatal intoxication,' 'the partial sleep of thought.' 'All yielding,' comments the author, 'is attended with a less vivid consciousness, than resistance.' This is the crux: Maggie is lessened, deadened in these hours of surrender. The description of a state of moral and physical enervation is extraordinary: all Marian Evans's experience of accidie, of spiritual paralysis, lies behind these pages, one feels. The tranced state of the lovers is described with an acuteness and subtlety that misses none of the shades of a consciousness momentarily petrified:

'Behind all the delicious visions of these last hours, which had flowed over her like a soft stream, and made her entirely passive, there was the dim consciousness that the condition was a transient one, and that the morrow must bring back the old life of struggle - that there were thoughts which would presently avenge themselves for this oblivion...'

100 Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith (1887).
101 Bk. 6, ch.13, pp. 511-20.
This passivity of unreality, of dream, then, is pernicious. Stephen, the following day, 'became more and more uneasy as the day advanced, under the sense that Maggie had entirely lost her passiveness.'\textsuperscript{102} The success of his plan depends on Maggie's remaining in her hypnotic state: he dreads to 'waken' her, to rouse the fire of moral activity within her. The images betray the author's stand-point: Maggie, in submitting to Stephen, has forsaken her tru~self - she is, morally, asleep. And her renunciation of Stephen, negative as it is, is morally an active exertion of her whole nature: a strength in sacrifice.

This pattern of temptation and renunciation is repeated with a difference at the end of the novel. Here, renunciation is seen at its nadir of actual dreariness and misery: there is no possibility even for a gesture, for personal assertion, through action. She must simply submit - submit to the pain of her own longing, and also to the calumny and mockery of the townspeople. Languor overcomes her: she shrinks from the life-prospect before her. (Again, the description of torpor that tallies so well with the many passages in Marian Evans's own letters.) And this time, the great temptation is to break out of this paralysis: the action of writing to Stephen, "Come!" is an escape from a passivity that may be torment but that signifies the submission that Maggie has to achieve. This time her victory is a retraction from activity:

\textsuperscript{1} But close upon that decisive act, her mind recoiled, and the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness came upon her like a pang of conscious

\textsuperscript{102} Ek. 6, ch. 14, p. 325.
degradation. No - she must wait; she must pray; she should feel again what she had felt, when she had fled away, under an inspiration strong enough to conquer agony - to conquer love: ... She sat quite still far on into the night: with no impulse to change her attitude, without active force enough even for the mental act of prayer - only waiting for the light that would surely come again...

This is the climax of her spiritual life: unlike Dorothea's analogous 'Dark Night of the Soul,' it culminates in a mood of perfect passivity, of deliberate evacuation of all thoughts and desires, of all exertion of the personality. This is the nullity that in Christian mysticism leads to God. In Maggie's case, it leads only to a conscious acceptance of suffering, an assent to endurance. Maggie's death-in-life is not so serene as Janet Demptster's. The remote, gentle quality of Janet's 'repentance' is not paralleled in Maggie's agonised struggle towards acquiescence. She faces the prospect of long years of self-repression, of greyness and endurance, with a resolution that does not fail. Her last thought before the 'Coda' of the flood, and the deaths of Tom and herself, is phrased in the form of a question: the truth that the author has to convey is presented through the suffering and never facile conviction of a soul in anguish:

'...Surely there was something being taught her by this experience of great need; and she must be learning a secret of human tenderness and long-suffering, that the less erring could hardly know?'

The entire last section of 'The Final Rescue' can be seen as a final reconciliation, not only between Tom and Maggie, but between the forces of activity and passivity. Maggie, 'weary, beaten,' sits in the

103 Bk. 7, ch. 5, p. 390.
boat, looking 'with eyes of intense life' at Tom, who, for once, is 'pale with a certain awe and humiliation.' This is a reversal of their usual relation, which has normally found Maggie submitting, because of her sensitivity and her need for love, to the confident activity of her brother. Now, however, in this climactic scene, Maggie acts with an energy and fearlessness that impresses on Tom at last the true temper of his sister:

'More and more strongly the energies seemed to come and put themselves forth, as if her life were a stored-up force that was being spent in this hour, unneeded for any future."

Tom is overcome by a revelation that transcends his normal values of convention and superficial judgment:

'...the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force - it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear - that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other...'

His normal mode of rationality, of simple belief in cause and effect, question and answer, the scientific version of truth - gives place to the instinctive, intuitive mode, of unvoiced, unarticulated human comprehension and love. This moment of mute vision, with just the single dumb cry - 'the old childish - "Magsie!"', is the moment of fusion, when the basic discord of the novel is resolved.

There is a mythical simplicity in this resolution - its speechless naïveté, its instinctive return to the childish state of unity and love. But this reconciliation, powerful and moving as it is,
on its own level, is not allowed to bring the novel to a conclusion of transcendent fulfilment. Unlike the muted rich tones on which Adam Bede ends, the closing paragraphs of The Mill on the Floss set the reconciliation of brother and sister, and the indestructible bounty of Nature, in a framework of unwavering realism and sadness.

'Nature repairs her ravages' - concedes the sad authorial voice - 'but not all... To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair.' '...every man and woman mentioned in this history was still living - except those whose end we know.'

The irrevocable fact of death is a kind of deep ground-bass to all the richness and resource of Nature bountiful. This is never fully palliated, not by the restoration of the land and the trees and the population in general. The individual grief remains, as a fact that defies oblivion. And even the Biblical quotation on which the novel ends does not much relieve the impression of melancholy, the profound consciousness of pain. 'In their death they were not divided,' in the context of the novel, of all that has gone before, must be read with a stern emphasis on the word 'death.'

In their lives, Maggie and Tom were divided, divided in the tragic sense that the closest of human-beings suffer division. This sense is not to be palliated by any facile compensation: and the final words, borrowed from the Lament for the deaths of Saul and Jonathon, have an echo of profound, subtle irony - a reflection of the destiny that grants unity only in death.

106 Conclusion, p. 401.
The melancholy, and consciousness of human imperfection that underlies the whole novel is, then, not mitigated in its conclusion. The sense of life's essential sadness never leaves George Eliot: we remember the many references in her letters to the tears she shed over Maggie and Tom's fate.\(^{107}\) And the declaration:

"My books are deeply serious things to me, and come out of all the painful discipline, all the most hardly learnt lessons of my past life."\(^{108}\)

The basic melancholy of the novel, with its pre-occupation with the need and nature of renunciation in a baffling world - this is a reflection of Marian Evans's life-experience, in the years 1859-60. Never was she further from the kind of rapture, that Maggie learns to deny herself, and that Marian Evans had, at least apparently, outgrown since the time, in her thirtieth year, when she had written:

"I love the souls that rush along to their goal with a full stream of sentiment, that have too much of the positive to be harassed by the perpetual negatives, which after all are but the disease of the soul, to be expelled by fortifying the principle of vitality."\(^{109}\)

The 'principle of vitality' was at its feeblest at this time and the 'disease of the soul,' with which she was congenitally afflicted, easily overcame all resistance at this moment of her creative life.

The early novels that we have discussed up to this point are clearly rooted in the local emotional and intellectual conditions of Marian Evans's world. We have attempted to show the contrapuntal

---

107 e.g. GE Letters, 6 March 1860 (III, 271) 3 April 1860 (III, 285) and Lewes's letters: 5 March 1860 (III, 269) 6 March 1860 (ibid.)
108 ibid., 18 October 1859 (III, 187).
109 ibid., 24 October 1849 (I, 318).
Up to this point, we have attempted to indicate the contrapuntal weavings of the twin themes of passivity and activity in the early thought of George Eliot. Tracing them back to their origins in the nature of the woman, we have seen some of the shifting emphases which they underwent in the work of the writer - the journalist and the novelist. The transformation of the earnest, introspective, idealistic Marian into the fearless, insistently objective humanist of the Westminster is not as absolute or inexplicable as it may seem. Marian Evans bore within her from the beginning the seeds of many paradoxes - "Without contraries, there is no progression!" - and if the mature development of her thought was towards empiricism and 'materialism,' as the demand of a thoroughly logical and honest intellect, her early yearning for an idealistic transforming vision, through which life becomes what one would have it - this never entirely faded. It persists at least as a kind of dim halo to the limitations and narrowness of the actual life that she has set herself to depict.

This innate appreciation for ideal greatness lends pathos to her portrayals of the less-than-great, and even, strangely enough, a kind of dignity to man, in his blind, groping aspirations. For her, man's actual mediocrity is always shadowed by the vision of his potential achievement; and it is from the tension of these two elements, the actual and ideal, that the pathos, the all-pervading sympathy is generated. This is a continuous dialectic, in which both voices are sustained; and not the form of realism that quite frankly wallows in the less glorious aspects of life.

The external world, in its physical, limited manifestations, must be accepted: man must break through the cocoon of a passive,
self-bred idealism. But, on the other hand, the Marian Evans who had written: 'There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase "too good to be true"' continued to insist that the possibilities of reality itself are endless; that, in fact, even the ideal imagination is only a shadow of what truth can furnish forth. Realism, then, need not mean a degradation of values and expectations: for Marian Evans, it becomes a continuous interaction of the private vision and the objective fact, a ceaseless searching for equilibirum. The polar elements must somehow be interfused; this is what, on one level, the marriage of Adam and Dinah is to achieve: the union of the active, pragmatic pole with the introspective, passive one; the pagan with the Christian; the moral with the spiritual. But the union is an uneasy one; and in the following novels, new balances, new relations of resignation and activity, new emphases are offered, in the shifting light of George Eliot's own development.

In the novels of 1857-60, the fundamental themes that preoccupied her throughout her tormented youth converge creatively; this period culminates in her most clearly autobiographical novel; and the very fact that she felt herself equipped to venture on such a delicate task as fictional autobiography, together with the generally impressive control of her material that she displays there, indicates that she had reached, in spite of intense depression, amounting almost to enervation, a certain maturity of poised vision. From this point on, she begins to leave her local, immediate experience and move outwards, reflecting to an increasing extent the life of her intellectual milieu, as it catches up certain of her own basic intellectual and moral
preoccupations. Her work becomes more consciously of its time, taking serious account of contemporary concerns, though always it is irradiated by her specific sensibility, nourished from deep in the subsoil of her characteristic patterns of thought and feeling.
In this and the following chapters, I shall be approaching George Eliot's later novels in their historical and cultural setting, and taking more account than previously of contemporary reactions to her work, and of the climate of opinion and feeling in which they were conceived. This will naturally involve a broadening of my terms of reference - a broadening demanded in fact by the parallel movement in George Eliot's own creative activity. The three novels I shall be discussing represent a growing expansiveness in her concerns, till in Daniel Deronda she takes the largest historical processes as her canvas, as more than simply background for the focussed lives of her dramatis personae. All three novels were much criticised by her contemporaries, precisely because of their deviation from the local and personal concerns of the early novels. I hope to show, however, the ways in which the resources of her early personal experience, at all levels, informs these 'difficult' novels; the ways in which both intellectual ideas and emotional pressures take on increasingly supple artistic forms.

From the time of the serial publication of Romola in the Cornhill Magazine,¹ both the general reading public and literary critics and reviewers have found George Eliot's Florentine romance the least easily digestible of her novels. Recurrent throughout the accounts of the novel is the tone of regret and bewilderment at the plethora of historical props with which the stage is cluttered, at the detailed

¹ Cornhill, July 1862 - August 1863.
painstaking scholarship that George Eliot displays on every page. On reading *Romola*, critics have found this factor of its historical setting - and its treatment - exhausting and distracting: the attempt to re-create a past world, in all its strange richness of detail often finds both author and reader panting with the effort of breathing life into dry bones.

The critic in the *Saturday Review*, for example, while granting the 'salient curiosities' of Florentine life, which 'catch and delight a studious English eye,' yet regrets that the 'authoress of *Adam Bede* should occupy herself with these trifles: 'A lesser hand might have been employed to collect these simple treasures. However instructive it may be, it is not without a tax on our patience that we read long accounts of Florentine antiquities, and translations of sermons by Savonarola, and extracts from chronicles of processions. Sometimes the antiquarian quite drowns the novelist.' The reviewer proposes a diagnosis of George Eliot's case: 'The authoress of *Romola* has already published four tales of English life, and four tales of English life are quite enough to use up the experience and exhaust the reflections even of a mind so acute, so observant, and so meditative. She has only to look at her contemporaries and notice with dismay the effects of continuing to write after the well of thought has run dry...'

She belongs to that 'order of minds, which is really creative and original, but which is always driven into the same groove...Stripped of their Florentine covering, and divested of those touches of variety which the genius of the writer imparts to them, several of the characters of *Romola*, and some of the chief events, are old...they involve the same moral problems, and cause or encounter the same difficulties in

---

The main theme that emerges from *Romola* concerns 'the consequences that flow from the weakness of men' - and this, as the reviewer points out, is a perennial theme, by which 'the authoress seems to be haunted.'

The *Westminster Review*, on the other hand, hotly contests the *Saturday Reviewer*'s implication that George Eliot's creativity had ebbed: 'we have seen it insinuated that the circle of the author's powers had been already filled, and that the recourse to a foreign background for her fable was a sign of weakness and exhaustion. This is an inexcusable criticism...' - the absence in the novel of the usual 'homely entourage' is merely a demand for 'habits of reflection but little cultivated by most novel-readers.' Even in his defence of George Eliot's choice of background, however, this reviewer has to admit his doubt of 'whether the selection of a foreign and historical background for her fable was judicious... The strong hold which George Eliot lays on the intellectual and ethical side of all that comes before her mind, and the predominant critical tendency of her mode of thought, make it more necessary with her than with other authors that she should have the direct support of personal experience for the external circumstances in which she places her characters.' 'By departing so far from the life around her she enters into a more full command of her whole material, which forces her to rely upon her imagination for those parts of her fable which the character of her mind strongly leads her to neglect.'

Therefore, this reviewer, too, comes to the conclusion that 'it is to be regretted that *Romola* is an Italian story, and a story of
the fifteenth century... No care and labour have been spared to give an objective character to the portraiture of ancient Florence, but this care has resulted only in an accumulation of details.' Passion and villainy are 'sicklied over with the pale cast of thought,' and 'in all that concerns the surroundings of her characters there is an evident sign of labour.' In all, the historical background affects us like a medieval painted window, in which the action has to be disentangled from the blaze of colour and overwhelming accessories.'

These aesthetic disadvantages resulting from the historical setting are augmented, according to this reviewer, by considerations of sheer historical accuracy. The characters are modern characters, lifted bodily and set down in a picturesque setting. He finds himself wishing that Romola had been a modern Englishwoman, she having so much more the character of one than that of an Italian lady of four centuries since.' Tito, also, seems 'to smack more of the intellectual strength and moral weakness of the nineteenth century than of the strong faith and equally strong passions of the age of Caesar Borgia and Machiavelli.' In Tito's position, the reviewer implies, a thwarted husband of the fifteenth century would have found the quiet assassination of a recalcitrant wife the simplest solution.

If we turn next to R.H. Hutton's appreciative and perceptive review in The Spectator, we find the same impatience and regret at

---

3 Westminster, 80 (October 1863), 344-47.
4 ibid., p. 348.
George Eliot's historical and foreign setting. Although Romola seems to Hutton 'probably the author's greatest work,' yet he does not care about the light Florentine buzz with which so great a part of the first volume is filled...She has Sir Walter Scott's art for revivifying the past - but not Scott's dynamical force in making you plunge into it with as headlong an interest as into the present.' And he finds it 'marvellous that, in spite of these disadvantages, the wide and warm imaginative power of the writer should have produced a work which is likely to be permanently identified with English literature.'

Edith Simcox finds it a defect that 'the realism, the positive background of fact...has necessarily some of the character of an hypothesis.' Henry James, comparing Romola to The Spanish Gypsy, declares the creative vision to be obscured by pedantry: 'we see the landscape, the people, the manners of Spain as through a glass smoked by the flame of meditative vigils, just as we saw the outward aspect of Florence in Romola'...they gleam in an artificial light.' And later, writing of Middlemarch, he regrets the disappearance of simplicity from her novels: but then she 'lost hers some time since; it lies buried (in a splendid mausoleum) in Romola.' And Leslie Stephen perhaps crystallises the general dissatisfaction in his diagnosis: 'The masses

---
7 Henry James, Spanish Gypsy, North American Review, 107 (October 1868) p.634.
of information have not been fused by a glowing imagination. The fuel has put out the fire.  

'The fuel has put out the fire': the tendency among critics over the decades has been simply to ignore this 'fuel' aspect of the novel. Barbara Hardy finds that Romola is undoubtedly a book which it is more interesting to analyse than simply to read, and she proceeds to analyse it on the same moral and theoretic grounds as those on which she treats the other novels. The Florentine setting is merely a back-drop, in such a critical treatment. And this approach can be seen at its clearest, perhaps, in one of the early reviews, a French article on 'Une Histoire Florentine de George Eliot,' by Emile D. Forges, in the Revue des Deux Mondes. This eminent admirer of George Eliot's character-portrayal treats the novel almost solely on this basis: as a study of character and temperament, the 'développement hostile de ces deux natures profondément antipathiques' - Tito and Romola. He thinks it more charitable simply to ignore the 'recherche excessive' that George Eliot has devoted to her romance; this painstaking pedantry is a mistake, a clumsiness; what really matters is her thorough success in depicting 'ces traits de nature qui appartiennent à tous les temps et à tous les pays.'

This approach remains very much the staple one in dealing with Romola. The study of humanity, in its unchanging essence, in its...

9 Leslie Stephen, in the Cornhill, 43 (February 1881), p. 164.
basic forms, is to all the accidents of place and time, as the living body is to the costumes that drape it - without any organic, necessary relation. And yet - even after we have been presented with the very formidable case for the prosecution, represented by the critics we have cited, even when it seems proven beyond all reasonable doubt that George Eliot has erred in seeking out exotic settings and remote epochs for her realistic fables - even yet, the complacent resource of simply ignoring the historical and foreign elements of the novel seems highly inadequate. It does less than justice to the immense and deliberate labour that George Eliot dedicated to her 'Histoire Florentine,' to the long anxiety and torment that it caused her in its conception and birth, to the many explicit references in her correspondence - references that shadow forth an acutely conscious vision of the brain-child she was to bring forth.

The early references to the projected novel occur during her first visit to Florence in May, 1860. Originally, the idea seems to have come from Lewes: the entry in his Journal for 21-22 May runs:
'This morning while reading about Savonarola it occurred to me that his life and times afford fine material for an historical romance. Folly at once caught at the idea with enthusiasm. It is a subject which will fall in with much of her studies and sympathies; and it will give fresh interest to our stay in Florence.'

The rest of that visit and the whole of their next one (in May, 1861) were spent in research and assiduous note-taking by both Marian and Lewes: she, working in the Maglibecheian Library, reading Savonarola's biography, his poems, and contemporary records; Lewes visiting the inner sanctum of the San Marco monastery which was inaccessible to women -
including Savonarola's cell; and both of them going to see the
Baptistery and the early Tuscan paintings in the Accademia della
Bella Arte - chiefly to study the portrait by Fra Bartolommeo of
Savonarola.

On 28 August, 1860, after her first visit to Florence, she
announced her plan to Blackwood in characteristically apprehensive
style: 'When we were in Florence I was rather fired with the idea of
writing a historical romance - scene, Florence- period, the close of
the fifteenth century, which was marked by Savonarola's career and
martyrdom.' She had been encouraged by Lewes to 'do something in
historical romance rather different in character from what has been
done before.' She planned first to write an 'English story' (Silas
Marner), and then to publish Romola in Blackwood's; but not under
her own name, since 'you know well enough the received phrases with which
a writer is greeted when he does something else than what was expected
of him.'

Blackwood, knowing his author very well by now, of course replied
in enthusiastic vein: 'Savonarola and his times is a splendid subject
for you, and you have such a power of imparting reality to everything
you write that your Romance will not read like Fiction...'

But the point that strikes one here is the full consciousness that
George Eliot had, even at this early stage of her gargantuan task, of
the dubious reception that would be accorded to her new novel, in its

12 GE Letters, 31 August 1860 (III, 340).
strange Florentine setting. If, indeed, as critics with complacent
duty have implied, the setting in place and time is an unfortunate
irrelevancy, then George Eliot, at the very beginning of a period of
labour and frustration of which she later wrote that 'I began it a
young woman, - I finished it an old woman', and that it had been
written with my best blood, at the very outset of her long struggle
with her native diffidence and pessimism, she realised that, as far as
the majority of her readers were concerned, all this scholarly effort
was in vain. What would be appreciated, if anything at all, would be
the human insights, the subtle character-portrayals, that she might,
at infinitely less cost to her own health and well-being, have set in
the rural or provincial England that earlier novels had so successfully
and painlessly represented.

It was Italy, and the Italy of Savonarola's time that, in her
own understated terms, 'rather fired' her. It was specifically
historical romance that she aimed to write - an innovation in historical
romance. We know that Scott had always been one of her favourite
authors, from the days when his novels had provided most of the reading
material with which she amused her dying father in his last months.
The vein of romance, of rapture in the heroic, the sublime, the glamour
of past ages, never quite ran dry in her: nevertheless, this was not
her vocation in the world, as she had very articulately defined it.
The tenets of realism ruled her literary life - almost militantly, at
the beginning. Her ultimate aim in writing was to affect the daily lives

14 GE Letters, 30 January 1877 (VI, 335-6).
of her readers, to enlarge their sympathies, to refine their sensibilities to human and ethical problems that confronted them all. This being so, what was it, one might well ask, that she found so attractive in Renaissance Italy, that it induced her to undergo the physical and mental exhaustion of two years' thankless research into an age long past, and lacking apparent relevance to contemporary problems?

As we have noticed, the kindest of her reviewers simply toss aside the props and costumes and seize hold of what is eternal, basically human in the novel. Emile D. Forgues declares the characters more modern than medieval, in any case.\textsuperscript{15} And Carole Robinson, in her more recent 'Romola: A Reading of the Novel,'\textsuperscript{16} treats it as an 'essay in uncertainties.' 'Philosophic uncertainty is the key-note of the novel' - and the problems are those of the Victorian intellectual, not those of fifteenth century Florence: in Carole Robinson's analysis, the novel deals with contemporary Victorian anxieties, the fear of social upheaval, the political apprehensions and tensions between classes, the nervous attitude towards the Church as a social bulwark, in an unstable era. Obviously, many such parallels can be traced between George Eliot's account of fifteenth century Florence and the England of her own day. But all this does not explain why she had to spend so long 'buried in old quartos and vellum bound literature,' which even the assiduous Lewes 'would rather not read.'\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} "Une Histoire Florentine de George Eliot" in the \textit{Revue des Deux Mondes} (15 December 1863), pp. 943-67.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Victorian Studies}, 6 (1962-1963), pp. 29-42.

\textsuperscript{17} From Lewes to Blackwood, \textit{GE Letters}, 28 June 1861 (III, 430).
Is the whole historical basis, the Italian setting, indeed merely a lavish touching-in of local colour behind the essential timeless figures of George Eliot's world? And even if, as we would argue, the Italy of the fifteenth century represented for her far more than this, what exactly was this powerful attraction that induced her to undertake the gigantic labour of breathing life into scenes and events that she had never known? 'Any real observation of life and character must be limited,' she had written to Blackwood, 'and the imagination must fill in and give life to the picture.'

Surely she was increasing the difficulty of the imaginative task a hundred-fold, when her real observation of life and character must in this case be negligible?

The original germ of the novel came, as we have noticed, from Lewes. His influence was always powerful with Marian; his intellectual interests usually became hers, by adoption, even where they had not already long numbered among her own passions. Italian had been one of the many languages to which, as the self-taught girl-prodigy of Nuneaton, she had devoted herself. But Lewes's knowledge of, and interest in Italian literature can be gauged by an article by him that appeared in Fraser's Magazine, as far back as 1848. His subject then had been Leopardi, the melancholy Italian poet, whose yearnings for national unity and freedom expressed the nostalgia of an Italian people divided and suppressed. As early as 1848, then, Lewes's knowledge of the Risorgimento movement had been beyond the ordinary.

---

18 ibid., 15 June 1861 (III, 427).
19 Fraser's, 38 (December 1848), 659-69.
And it is this aspect of Italy, as the centre of political idealism in Europe, as the just cause for which humanitarians and the cultural élite could struggle - combined with the status of Italy as the cradle of European civilisation, the tragic ruin of past glory - that can give us some clue to the fascination that it exerted over Victorian intellectuals of the 1850's and early 1860's.

The first fact to be noticed is the effect of the Risorgimento, an internal, political movement, on poetry and general cultural attitudes in England. A cursory glance, for example, to take our inquiry at its most superficial level, at the Westminster Review for 1861 (the period of the writing of Romola) will take in a series of articles on the 'Italian question' in its political aspects, and one on the Count de Cavour. In the Cornhill Magazine, there is a review of a personal account by Count Arrivabene, the correspondent of the Daily News, of Italy under Victor Emmanuel - covering the events of 1859-61, and reporting on the great figures of the Italian movement.

Italy, as G.M. Trevelyan points out in two articles (his Introduction to English Songs of Italian Freedom and 'Englishman and Italians'), increasingly represented to the English an image of heroic idealism: the revolt of an oppressed nation with a history of cultural achievement, of wisdom and beauty, to which Europe owed much of its civilisation. The poem called The Prisoner of Spezzia, which appeared in the Cornhill in 1862, is clearly representative of the prevailing

20 Vol. VI (July - December 1862), p. 275.
21 G.M. Trevelyan, English Songs of Italian Freedom (1911).
22 In Proceedings of the British Academy, IX (1919-1920).
climate of sympathy and idealisation of the Italian cause. The poet celebrates the political prisoner languishing in his dungeon as a hero and martyr, as a beacon, a 'calm, strong light' bringing romance and asserting truth to a prosaic world:

Thank God for Spezzia's prison gloom!
This dim world, as it onwards rolls,
Needeth the light of martyr-souls,
Clear-shining in their hour of doom.

During the period following the failure of the Risorgimento in 1848, and the restoration of the ancien régime, Italian desperation under the heavy boot of the Austrian had increasingly affected the mood of English intellectuals, so that, as we can see from the poem just quoted, there is no longer any ambiguity in the popular mind as to the rights and wrongs of the case. In the next volume of the Cornhill,\textsuperscript{24} the grim, suicidal conspiracies of this period are portrayed in a short story, The Dark Church in Vienna - in which an Italian secret society sees its members killed one by one, treachery is avenged by the hand of Heaven, and the sense of implacable purpose, of absolute self-immolation before the ideal of Italian liberty is evoked through an atmosphere of despair and doom.

The dream of restoring Italy to her greatness had been expressed by Mazzini in his \textit{Manifesto of Young Italy} in 1831. "The Mazzinian cult," writes Professor Trevelyan,\textsuperscript{25} was less a political programme than a religious and ethical movement, compelling men to a new life of self-

\textsuperscript{24} Vol. VII (Jan.-June, 1863), p. 326. (It is, incidentally, illuminating to read Romola in its original serialised form, in the context of contemporary concerns, in the Cornhill.)

\textsuperscript{25} Introduction to \textit{English Songs of Italian Freedom} (1911).
sacrifice. Young men everywhere offered themselves for the cause: it was a 'process nothing short of conversion, for it was moral even more than intellectual.' Many English poets paid their tribute to Italian idealism - Shelley, Byron, Swinburne, Clough, Landor, and Elizabeth Browning. Meredith's novel, Vittoria, was focussed on this movement towards liberty, and was based on personal knowledge of both patriots and Austrian officers. English sympathy swelled to a universal chorus during the decade 1848-59, and was a main cause of the fall of the Derby cabinet in 1859. The popularity of the Italian opera was its highest in England; Italian was learnt as second language in English schools; Englishmen travelled more and more in Italy, witnessing the tragedy and humiliations of the present superimposed on the ruins of past glory. And the literature, modern and classical - Leopardi, Dante, and Vergil - of Italy, the immense cultural debt that England owed to both Renaissance Italy and Ancient Rome - all these factors created an attitude towards that martyred country of reverence, gratitude, and pity. And this, in turn, created a wide-sweeping vogue for everything Italian - novels, poetry, biographies, even the craze for English copies of Italian paintings that kept many artists in employment, especially in Rome. (An insight into this lucrative trade is given us in T.A. Trollope's novel, La Beata, which we shall glance at later.)

George Eliot's own attitude to this purely political aspect of the Italian movement seems, as so frequently with her political sympathies, rather ambiguous. She was friendly with Mrs. Peter Alfred
Taylor, a supporter of various radical causes - including feminism, and, especially, Italian nationalism. Mrs. Taylor's husband was a friend of Mazzini, and chairman of the Society of the Friends of Italy, one meeting of which George Eliot had attended on 24 March, 1852. Mazzini had addressed the meeting, and F.W. Newman had presided at this conversazione, as George Eliot called it; but further than reporting her attendance, she does not comment on her impressions, or her thoughts on the subject. In April, 1852, an article by Mazzini, entitled 'Europe: Its Condition and Prospects,' appeared in the Westminster Review - George Eliot being instrumental in commissioning the article ('We are trying Mazzini to write on Freedom v. Despotism'), but again refraining from any more revealing comment on the article or the cause.

If we trace through the references to Mazzini in George Eliot's correspondence, we find the next one in 1865, when he lay under an uncancelled sentence of death and, on his election to the Italian parliament, refused to take the oath of allegiance to the King. In her letter to Mrs. Taylor, George Eliot regretfully refuses to contribute to a Mazzini Fund, although she would have liked to do so, had it been intended specifically for his personal use. The fear that it would be devoted to the 'promotion of conspiracy,' prevents her from contributing: conspiracy is sometimes sacred, but often hopeless, needless, and unjustifiable. Nevertheless, 'both Mr. Lewes and I have a real reverence for Mazzini...' This very mild tribute

---

26 GE Letters, 27 March 1852 (II, 15).
27 Westminster, 57 (April 1852), 442-467.
28 GE Letters, 21 January 1852 (II, 5).
29 GE Letters, 1 August 1865 (IV, 199).
was sufficient apparently to bring down rebuke on her head from Lord Acton: her tolerance of Mazzini was a 'grave delinquency...a crucial matter,' in his eyes. But one can hardly help feeling that she had covered her tracks very securely, even in her 'reverence' for the man, through her disclaimer of support for the movement. And indeed, her final tribute to him is a miracle of vagueness, of unspecific admiration: on his death, she wrote to Mrs. Taylor: 'Such a man leaves behind him a wider good than the loss of his personal presence can take away.

The greatest gift the hero leaves his race, Is to have been a hero.

I must be excused for quoting my own words, because they are my credo, I enter thoroughly into your sense of wealth in having known him. The typically circumlocutory, quasi-religious tone of this tribute is a symptom, one feels, of the unsatisfied piety that George Eliot, in Feuerbachian style, increasingly unloaded onto her human heroes, in default of a divine object of her adoration - though always with a sense of the inadequacy of the specific human 'cause' involved. Her admiration of Mazzini (and, presumably, of the 'process nothing short of conversion,' for which he stood) seems to have co-existed with a thorough detachment as to his political aims in themselves. Indeed, during her first visit to Italy in 1860, she is rather impatient and ironic at all the paraphernalia of nationalism and chauvinism that are continually flaunted before her disenchanted gaze. This is her account

---

31 GE Letters, 17 March 1872 (V, 253).
of the height of political triumph in Naples and Tuscany: 'This news
Lewes's improved health] is naturally more important to us than the
politics of Sicily, and so I am apt to write of it to our friends,
rather than of Garibaldi and Tuscan filibusters; but things really look
so threatening in the Neapolitan kingdom that we began to think ourselves
fortunate in having got our visit done. Tuscany is in the highest
political spirits for the moment, and of course Victor Emmanuel stares
at us at every turn here, with the most loyal exaggeration of moustache
and intelligent meaning. But we are selfishly careless about dynasties
just now, caring more for the doings of Giotto and Brunelleschi, than
for those of Count Cavour.'

The tone is again typical: the irony directed not less at her-
self and her physical limitations on idealism, than at the idealism
itself. It is an ambiguous, unresolved tone: poised uneasily between
scepticism and wistful yearning for idealism - for the easy swift
reaction of the revolutionary literal, which the inescapable vulgarity
of the 'loyal exaggeration of moustache' cuts off from her. This
saddened, ambivalent, and somehow defeated attitude with regard to
political movements is just the reverse of the jubilant triumph expressed
in that early letter to John Sibree, when she rejoiced in the French
Revolution of 1848. 'You and Carlyle,' she wrote them, '...are the
only two people who feel just as I would have them - who can glory
in what is actually great and beautiful without putting forth any cold
reservations and incredulities to save their credit for wisdom...

32 ibid., 18 May 1860 (III, 294).
33 ibid., 8 March 1848 (I, 252-3).
I feared that you lacked revolutionary ardour. But no - you are just as sans-culottish and rash as I would have you...

'Cold reservations and incredulities' do lie behind the 1860 letter, one fears: and the ironic reference to the 'most loyal exaggeration of moustache' is a far cry from the impulsive and girlish optimism of 'I hope that beautiful face given to him [Lemartine] in the pictorial newspaper is really him, it is worthy of an aureole,' in the same early letter to John Sibree. There, too, she had referred to St. Simon's theory of alternating epochs in history - a critical, negative period and an organic, constructive one, 'controlled by a spirit of association and devotion.'

George Eliot's mental history is equally an uneasy oscillation between the two attitudes; and 1860 finds her swinging rather decidedly in the critical, negative direction.

In general, then, we can say that George Eliot's attitude to the political situation in Italy was by no means fully committed, though she probably shared the general admiration for the heroism and idealism of leaders like Mazzini. Something of the universal fever of sympathy for the Italian cause did affect her. But the direction that this interest took in her was very different from that of sheer political enthusiasm. Something of her attitude can be seen from the next few sentences of the 1860 letter, from which we have already quoted:

'On a first journey to the greatest centres of art, one must be excused for letting one's public spirit go to sleep a little. As for me, I am thrown into a state of humiliating passivity by the sight of the great things done in the far past - it seems as if life were not long enough to learn, and as if my own

34 ibid., see Note 3.
activity were so completely dwarfed by comparison that I should never have courage for more creation of my own. There is only one thing that has an opposite and stimulating effect: it is, the comparative rarity even here of great and truthful art, and the abundance of wretched imitation and falsity. Every head is wanted in the world that can do a little genuine, sincere work.34a

Here in one paragraph are condensed the conflicting impressions that Florence made upon her on her first visit, and that she was to transmute to the pages of Romola. What struck her in Florence was the co-existence of the two worlds, of past and present. She felt acutely the richness, the fertility and splendour of past achievements, of all the artistic treasures shored up in museums and galleries and public monuments; all the crushing weight of this fecund creativity threatened to stifle her, to reduce her to the 'humiliating passivity' to which she was always prone, to the 'indolence and the despondency' of which she accused herself, to the 'distressing diffidence' that 'paralyses her,' in Lewes's phrase.35

Florence, in the political ferment of its contemporary state, had a certain fascination for her. But it was out of the challenge that it presented to her as an artist, the threat that it offered to her creativity, that Romola was born. Her sensibility was almost morbidly alive to the 'dwarfed' sensation of standing in the clearing-house of Renaissance Europe. But, nevertheless, she was 'stimulated' by the fact that even here, 'great and truthful art,' 'genuine, sincere work,' was all too rare: that the kind of task that she felt herself 'called' to perform had not been completed; that she could acknowledge

34a ibid., 18 May 1860 (III, 294).
35 ibid., 14 December 1861 (III, 474).
and assimilate all the multifarious achievements of the past, and yet subserve them to her own unique vision.

This was the gargantuan task that she set herself. And, as usual, in her characteristic and moralistic concerns, she did not underestimate the challenge that she was facing. The past had to be dealt with, surmounted: but first it must be justly known, acknowledged for all that it had bequeathed, artistically and intellectually to the present. It is this, perhaps, that she means by the rather cryptic reference in her Journal to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem on the events of 1848 in Florence: 'I have lately read again with great delight Mrs. Browning's Casa Guidi Windows. It contains amongst other admirable things a very noble expression of what I believe to be the true relation of the religious mind to the Past.'

Mrs. Browning's poem deals, in its first part, with the optimism of 1848, the liberalising events that led to the formation, with the Grand Duke's permission, of a civic guard, and procession, watched by Mrs. Browning (from the Casa Guidi windows), to celebrate this democratic achievement. She wrote it in exultation at the granting of a constitution to Tuscany. But by the time she came to write Part Two of the poem, the Grand Duke had fled before a mild revolution in 1849, had returned with an army of grim Austrian soldiers at his back, and even the revolutionaries had proved themselves spineless and anarchic, incapable of organising an ordered revolt:

36 ibid., 17-19 February 1862 (IV, 15).
We chalked the walls with bloody caveats
Against all tyrants. If we did not fight
Exactly, we fired muskets up the void,
To show that victory was ours of right

We proved that all the poor should be employed,
And yet the rich not worked for anywise.

We proved that Austria was dislodged, or would
Or should be, and that Tuscany in arms,
Should, would, dislodge her, in high hardihood!
And yet, to leave our piazzas, shops, and farms,
For the bare sake of fighting, was not good.37

The tone is ironic and bitter: deeply disillusioned in her
heroic dreams of three years before, Mrs. Browning castigates everyone
concerned in this un-heroic tragedy: each actor in the drama is either
a knave or a fool - even Mazzini himself, for trusting too much in the
Pope. And, in her introduction to the poem, she explains the reason
for leaving Part One unaltered, in the light of later disenchantment:
she 'takes shame upon herself that she believed, like a woman, some
royal oaths, and lost sight of the probable consequences of some
obvious popular defeats. If the discrepancy should be painful to
the reader, let him understand that to the writer it has been more so.
But such discrepancy we are called upon to accept at every hour by
the condition of our nature...the discrepancy between aspiration and
performance, between faith and dis-illusion, between hope and fact.'38

This contrast, realistic and untampered-with, between the two
parts of the poem, is probably one of the 'admirable things' that
George Eliot found in re-reading - since this theme of disillusion,

38 ibid., 'Advertisement,' p. vi.
disenchantment, the shattering of a dream-world, was so basic to her, as well. But it was another aspect of the poem that George Eliot singled out on this occasion — the 'true relation of the religious mind to the Past.' This observation remains rather enigmatic, even after examining the poem. But perhaps what George Eliot found significant is contained in lines like these:

Void...are all images
Men set between themselves and actual wrong
To catch the weight of pity, meet the stress
Of conscience, though 'tis easier to gaze long
On personating masks, and effigies,
Than to see live weak creatures crushed by strong. 39

It is the 'murmur for the future' that rises above all the songs of the past — all the laments for Italy's fallen greatness, evoking melancholy and despair. Mrs. Browning rejects the obscuring sentiment of nostalgia — the songs, the image of Niobe, with 'woe wrapt in beauty from offending much.' Pity, benevolent human emotion, is not to be dissipated by maudlin reverence before the past, before the formalisations of art — 'personations, masks, and effigies.'

For me who stand in Italy to-day,
Where worthier poets stood and sang before,
I kiss their footsteps, yet their words gainsay. 40

The religious spirit, the impulse to justice, to human piety, must acknowledge the past, but, with all its force, assert the present — 'kiss their footsteps, yet their words gainsay.' The past must not be allowed to smother the present, neither in art, nor in religion, nor in politics. The image of the singing 'hopeful child, with leaps to

39 ibid., p.47.
40 ibid.
catch his growth,' that begins and ends the poem, represents 'Posterity ...smiling at our knees.' And the final note is one of modified hope for the future: 'This world has no perdition, if some loss' - this even after the disillusion of Part Two, the shattering of early optimism.

One can well imagine what fired George Eliot's admiration in all this. The resolute realism, the stoical refusal to despair, above all, the refusal to be overawed by the past - all this harmonised with George Eliot's own attitude at the time of writing Romola. In her case, the challenge was artistic and intellectual, rather than political: Florence presented to her, in her role as artist, in her conscious attempt to embrace and subdue it, a series of paradoxes and conflicts, an incrustation of chaotic richness and colour that threatened to subdue her.

One of these paradoxes is reflected in the very nature of the Renaissance, as it was seen by anxious Victorian eyes. The issue involved here was complex and far-reaching: how was one to view the Renaissance contribution to learning, to architecture, and painting, to the general moral and spiritual tone of Italy (and, by extension and influence, of Europe)? During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the answer was clear. The very name accorded to the epoch signified congratulation and hope, a sense of revival after a long coma. The Dark Ages, with their crude architecture and irregular sculptures, based narrowly on the stories of the Bible (and, very largely, on the Old Testament), their scholastic philosophy, basing itself on tradition and authority, their rigidly circumscribed world-view, whose teaching was monopolised by the Church, and upheld by divine sanction, in this world and the next - those centuries of obscurantism were swept away by the freedom
and light of the New Learning. In sculpture and mythology, the treasures of classical Greece and Rome replaced the gloomy piety of biblical morality; inductive scientific method took over from the authoritarian and metaphysical mode of inquiry - man came into his own at last.

This, of course, is a farcically over-simplified account of the effect of the Renaissance on Europe - even as viewed by its most unquestioning admirers. But as caricature, it can perhaps stand, to represent the attitude of what we may call the pre-Ruskinite era. In the sphere of architecture, for example, we can take the outraged, heavily ironic tone of a review of The Stones of Venice, as symptomatic of a general reaction to that heretical work: 'If Mr. Ruskin be right,' wrote the reviewer soon after the publication of this revolutionary manifesto, in 1853, 'all the architects, and all the architectural teaching of the last three hundred years, must have been wrong.'

Unabashed, Ruskin, in a reply in a later edition, refused to acknowledge this as hyperbole: 'This is indeed precisely the fact, and the very thing I meant to say, which indeed I thought I had said over and over again. I believe the architects of the last three centuries to have been wrong; wrong without exception; wrong totally and from the foundation. This is exactly the point I have been endeavouring to prove, from the beginning of this work to the end of it.' No sinner could have been less repentant: and the emphasis that Ruskin lays on his defiance can be taken as a measure of the sway that the belief in the Renaissance held over popular and informed opinion.

41 Quoted from the Introduction to The Stones of Venice, ed. J.G. Links (1960).
Ruskin and the pre-Raphaelite painters introduced a new concept of judgment into the minds of the Victorian public. For the first time, a seed of doubt was insinuated into their placid acceptance of Renaissance values and forms of beauty. Perhaps the effect of Greece and Rome upon European art and thought had not been as entirely salutary as had for the past three centuries been believed? A new ambivalence wrought itself into the texture of general opinion. And George Eliot, in treating the Florence of the late fifteenth century, found herself confronted with this ambivalence at one of its most crucial points.

George Eliot was far from complete agreement with Ruskin's rejection of 'this pestilent art of the Renaissance': the sensuous, pagan beauty of Florentine sculpture of the period did not leave her cold. But Ruskin's detailed analyses in The Stones of Venice of 'The Nature of the Gothic,' and of 'The Pride of the Renaissance,' are bound to have radically affected her attitude - so that in Romola we find crystallised this historical moment of equipoise, between the two eras, this ambiguity of response that troubled George Eliot's contemporaries and that she saw bodied forth at the moment and spot in history, in which she chose to situate her romance.

Although there seems to be no direct reference in George Eliot's journals and correspondence to The Stones of Venice,⁴¹a something of Ruskin's architectural values (so closely allied, for him, with moral

⁴¹a Her intelligent appreciation of Ruskin's ideas on art is indicated in her review of Modern Painters, II. however. (Westminster, 65 (April 1856), 626).
and spiritual standards) does infiltrate into Romola, in the form of a complexity of response to the learning and art, the world-view, of fifteenth century Florence. Renaissance architecture at its best, Ruskin damns with very faint praise: he acknowledges that 'there is no imperfection in them [early Renaissance palaces] and no dishonesty.' But yet - 'That there is no imperfection is indeed, as we have seen above, a proof of their having been wanting in the highest qualities of architecture.' The qualities of perfection, immaculacy, smoothness, symmetry, scientific precision, exquisite finish - these, for Ruskin, are symptoms of decadence - in art as in life. In these, nature is lost, the truth, variety, tenderness, inventiveness, ruggedness of Gothic architecture. Ruskin expounds at some length the abhorrence he feels for this imposition of Greek and 'heartless' forms over the human, God-aspiring structures of the Gothic period - 'It is the moral nature of it which is corrupt.'

Two basic sins he sees in the Renaissance mentality - 'Pride and Infidelity.' Pride he treats under three sub-headings: Pride of Science, Pride of State, and Pride of System. And these characteristics, together with the fourth one - Infidelity - he sees as typical of the Renaissance world. It is illuminating to examine, in the light of Ruskin's analyses and strictures, the densely detailed world presented to us in George Eliot's romance.

To take first Ruskin's discussion of the Pride of Science: in this, the main characteristic is the search for accurate knowledge in every pursuit - a search that Ruskin condemns as not only irrelevant,

---

42 Stones of Venice (1853), Vol. III, p. 25.
but even inimical to art (the truths of art are to be ascertained 'evidently and only by perception and feeling'), and that he ridicules as that 'unhappy and childish pride in knowledge' which is the 'first constituent element of the Renaissance mind.'

That phrase, the 'unhappy and childish pride in knowledge,' immediately evokes some of the impressions left by Romola. This Florentine world is shot through with the values of Greek learning, of a pedantic and exacting classical culture. Tito, a friendless Greek castaway, is able to climb to the highest circles of influence in Florentine society - by the ladder of his scholarship, of his commercially valuable art-objects (one a jugus naturae), and of his personal beauty which is itself like that of an art object. Baro, blind and poor, clings tenaciously to his belief in the lasting value of the humane learning stored in his mind: feels it no imposition on his daughter to use her constantly as amanuensis for his critical and scholarly notes; only hazily does he conceive of her having other needs and desires. And, of course, the justification, the pride of his life, in which he has invested all his self-regard and his hope for posterity, is his library, the collection of precious manuscripts that, kept together under his name, is to be one of the largest in the world.

Baldassare, too, in his bewildered senility, keeps a book by him, which, in Tessa's naive words, he 'keeps looking at...ever so long, as if he were a Padre. But I think he is not saying prayers, for his lips never move.' The irony of the comparison is subtle, but clear

---

43 ibid., p. 37.
44 ch. 34, p. 23.
in its implications: Baldassare's forgotten learning leaves a void at the very centre of his life - it represents to him a touchstone, a vademecum, invested with all the trembling hope and fear of a religious symbol. And the loss of this centre of self represents a tragic fading-out of identity, of all claim to esteem, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of his world. This, to repeat, is the touchstone: at the dramatic moment when all the incoherent markings on his manuscript suddenly speak to him again, the historical narrative arouses 'innumerable vibrations of memory,' and instantly he is restored once more to vigour, mental and physical. 'The glow of conscious power' penetrates him, so that all his schemes and intentions, and especially his desire for revenge on Tito, are imbued with confidence and purpose. And, conversely, at the supper in the Rucellai Gardens, when all Baldassare's claims and charges against Tito hang in the balance, the 'positive test' that is to justify or damn him in the eyes of civilised society is to trace a Homeric reference: his pathetic relapse into senility at this crisis represents his failure of identity, his decisive ostracism from Florentine society. And from this can be gauged something of the almost superstitious reverence in which classical scholarship was held in Renaissance Florence.

Even a very cursory glance, then, at the attitudes towards learning portrayed in Romola reveals the unquestioning respect that attached to the scholar; pagan culture was treated with all the awe and almost obsessive pre-occupation of a life-pervading religion. Bardo, Baldassare, Tito - not to speak of minor points like the farcical 'learned squabble' between Bartolommeo Scala and Politian, with its fiddling pedantries and elaborately courteous insults - all these indicate the position that
classical scholarship held in this world of Renaissance Florence. But it is George Eliot's own attitude to this world that is interesting and ambivalent, reflecting as it does the Victorian hesitation between the Ruskin-ite viewpoint and the more traditional admiration for the Renaissance temper. A certain admiration she does evince for 'that laborious erudition, at once minute and copious, which was the chief intellectual task of the age': Bardo's long disquisitions are set down as, at least on one level, rather fascinating glimpses of this complete and satisfying world of erudition. But the admiration is by no means untinged by the scathing tone of Ruskin's criticism of that 'unhappy and childish pride in knowledge.'

We are allowed, for example, to see Bardo, his values and aspirations, through the eyes of Dino, his ascetic run-away son. To the dying monk, Bardo and all that he stands for, the entire elaborate structure of Renaissance culture, is 'like one busy picking shining stones in a mine, while there was a world dying of plague above him.' And, less explicit, but never very far beneath the surface of Bardo's

---

45 See Hutton's comment in his review in the Spectator (18 July 1863), 2265-2267. 'Nothing is more striking and masterly in the story than the subtle skill with which the dominant influence of this scholarship ["the mighty simplicities of the age of Greece"] over the imagination of the elder generation of that time...is delineated in the pictures of Bardo and Baldassare'; and his perception that the younger generation - Dino, Tito, Romola - find these values inadequate, attempting, in different ways, to replace, exploit, or supplement them. (George Eliot incidentally agreed with Hutton's comments on Bardo and Baldassare - see Letters IV, p.97.)

46 Romola, ch. 12, pp. 181-2.

47 ibid., ch. 19, p. 236.
long expositions, there is a kind of murmur of 'Vanity of vanities...'
-an implicit criticism of the tediousness and futility that is more than
the individual characterisation of a boring old man. What is impugned
here is the entire value-system for which Bardo lives. In so far as
it represents an ideal beyond himself, an ideal for which egotism is
transcended, and renunciations are made, it has, like all such ideals,
George Eliot's reverence and approval; but, intrinsically, it is
inadequate. This complicated pedantry, based on a pagan mythology, is
without power radically to purify man's nature, to be of effect in a time
of plague and disaster. It is very well in its way: its intellectual
mazings and the sheer aesthetic completeness of the literary world
it encompasses hold a certain fascination; but, ultimately, George Eliot's
attitude to Bardo's life-work, to Baldassare's hectic intensity focussed
on the pages of an ancient history, to the supremacy of the Pride of Science
in the value-systems of her Renaissance Florentines, is not far from
Ruskin's description of this pride as 'unhappy and childish.'

If we pass on to Ruskin's analysis of the second characteristic
of the High Renaissance - Pride of State - as it is reflected in the
architecture of the time, we find another forthright defiance of
traditional opinion: 'in those meagre lines there is indeed an
expression of aristocracy in its worst characters...It is rigid, cold,
inhuman; incapable of glowing, of stooping, of conceding for an instant.'
'The Gothic had fellowship with all hearts, and was universal, like
nature: it could frame a temple for the prayer of nations, or shrink
into the poor man's winding stair. But here was an architecture that
would not shrink, that had in it no submission, no mercy.' (III, p. 59).
Pride of State in Romola is portrayed most obviously in the figure of Bernardo - but almost entirely in its positive aspect. His conscious dignity is never shadowed, not even at the moment of his death, which he meets with the stoical firmness of an ancient Roman. The coldness and inhumanity of which Ruskin speaks are, however, among the acquired characteristics of the once-so-impressionable Tito. His original qualities of smoothness, immaculate finish, harmony - Ruskin's symptoms of a decadent art and a decadent morality - are gradually congealed, as it were, into a hardness, an icy impassivity, against which all opposition is vain. His first experience of this new 'shell' around himself is with Romola: his native fastidiousness and placidity make him recoil from actively trying to win her over to selling her father's library; here, they have the contrary effect of making him seek the shortest and least troublesome way to his goal. He puts himself beyond all argument, beyond all possibility of concession, withdrawn from the disagreeable arena of conflict and activity into the impenetrability of the 'fait accompli': 'he must taken another course and show her that the time for resistance was past. That, at least, would put an end to further struggle...48 Nothing can prevail against such impassivity: he is clothed in fear - "this fear - this heavy armour," at which Romola has already shuddered: "I could fancy it a story of enchantment - that some malignant fiend had changed your sensitive human skin into a hard shell," she had cried when he had first put on the chain armour to protect him against Baldassare.

48 ibid. ch. 32, p. 437.
49 ibid., ch. 27, 383.
This new impenetrable metallic surface, insensible and inhuman, is a kind of final varnish to the portrait of Tito as epitome in the novel of the culture and ethos of the Renaissance. In him is crystallised all the decadence, the heartlessness, that Ruskin saw in the neo-classical movement - as well as the sheer physical perfection, the ease, the immaculate harmony that for Piero, the true artist, are a fitting cloak for treachery. In him is pictured that 'perfection,' of which, even at its most honest, Ruskin was suspicious. And on his arrival in Florence, he is greeted with a mixture of admiration and suspicion by the more rugged and heterogeneous Florentines, who still retain some of Ruskin's 'Gothic' qualities - Rudeness, Changefulness, Naturalism, Grotesqueness, Obstiniacy, Generosity. George Eliot's attitude is not, of course, a black-and-white opposition: the Florentines themselves are a mixture of old and new; and, besides, George Eliot's ticketing of the two elements is not as clear and uncompromising as Ruskin's. But, to some extent, Tito can be seen as an incarnation of the new culture seen through at least mildly Ruskin-tinted glasses.

It may even be possible to view Romola herself, within the framework of reference provided by Ruskin. On the surface, her history seems to exemplify what Ruskin sets up against Pride of State - that Gothic characteristic that 'had fellowship with all hearts, and was universal, like nature,' and that could 'shrink into the poor man's winding stair.' But in spite of the emphasis on Romola's activity as a Visible Madonna, bringing sustenance and healing to the least among humanity, in spite of all the exercise of her pity and self-sacrifice, both in Florence itself and in the plague-village to which she 'drifts
away,' we are left with a certain sense of something inflexible and unmoved in her character. R.H. Hutton, in the review from which we have already quoted,\textsuperscript{50} was quick to detect the 'soupçon of hardness' in Romola: but George Eliot's own attitude to this quality is slightly ambiguous. Mostly, she calls it dignity; but from the beginning, in her first portrait of Romola (for which Frederick Leighton's illustration in the \textit{Cornhill}\textsuperscript{51} is specially interesting, since George Eliot considered Romola's attitude in it 'perfect',\textsuperscript{52} the ambiguity is present: full approval and admiration are withheld. Like her father, Romola carries pride and reserve to the very brink of coldness:

'\begin{quote}
\begin{quotation}
There was the same refinement of brow and nostril in both, counter-balanced by a full though firm mouth and powerful chin, which gave an expression of proud tenacity and latent impetuosity...It was a type of face of which one could not venture to say whether it would inspire love or only that unwilling admiration which is mixed with dread...
\end{quotation}
\end{quote}

In her love for Tito, the ambiguity is resolved: the warmth and affection of her nature appear quite clearly. But always, she retains that essential nobility, that 'proud erectness' of stature, that frightens Tito, and leaves him under no illusions as to her reaction, if she were to discover his treachery.

This rectitude is, undoubtedly, a positive virtue in George Eliot's canon. But is there not, after all, something excessive in the \textit{absoluteness} of Romola's dignity? Perhaps one would go too far in classing it as 'rigid, cold, inhuman; incapable of glowing, of stooping,
of conceding for an instant. But we are told that Romola 'loved homage'; there is an arrogance in her inherited 'silent ignoring of any claims the Church could have to regulate the belief and action of beings with a cultivated reason' - in her attitude to 'that actual life of the mixed multitude.' She stands as 'rigidly aloof' from the indignity and irrationality of the mixed multitude, as from her brother's passionate asceticism. And even in her submission, to Savonarola, and to a life of human service, in some very menial forms, she never loses a certain austerity, a remoteness that sets her apart from common humanity, as surely as though she were indeed a Visible Madonna.

Especially in her attitude to Tito is this certain hardness in evidence. When Tito first fears that she has been told of his treachery by Dino, it is notable that there is no question in his mind of her reaction to such news: 'He had never for a moment relied on Romola's passion for him as likely to be too strong for the repulsion created by the discovery of his secret; he had not the presumptuous vanity which might have hindered him from feeling that her love had the same root with her belief in him. But...he fell into wishing that she had been something lower, if it were only that she might let him clasp her and kiss her before they parted.'

53 Romola, ch. 15, 234.
54 ibid., ch. 17, 268-9.

cf. George Eliot's expressed personal attitude to a similar situation: she cannot approve of Trollope's Emily Hotspur, who remains in love with a man she knows to be immoral: 'It is one thing to love because you falsely imagine goodness - that belongs to the finest natures - and another to go on loving when you have found out your mistake...' (GE Letters, 2 January, 1871)(V, 132).
This integrity of Romola is idealised, set on a pedestal: the obvious implication is that the love that has 'the same root with... belief' is the highest and best. Love is strictly commensurate with approval: and when Tito, in their first - and decisive - quarrel, reveals his plan to sell Bardo's library and leave Florence, 'she felt his caress no more than if he had kissed a mask. She was much too agitated by the sense of the distance between their minds to be conscious that his lips touched her.'\(^{55}\) The image that is used of her response to this 'revelation' of Tito's real nature is both vivid and subtle: she 'sat with her hands clasped before her, cold and motionless as locked waters.'\(^{56}\) It is true that her 'energies of strong emotion' are continually emphasised, and that part of the effect of the image is to imply that this very strength is a cause of the intense restraint and recoil. But in her uncompromising rectitude, the instant withdrawal of her love from an unworthy object, she shows herself something more than human; she is guiltless of any slightest conflict between her love and her highest aspirations - unlike weaker women, she cannot even conceive of a situation where her 'woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness' would not rush 'together in an undivided current.'\(^{56a}\) And admirable though all this is, one can just sympathise with Tito's feeling 'horribly cowed'\(^{57}\) - with his reaction: 'such power of dislike and resistance as there was within him was beginning to rise against a wife whose voice seemed like the herald of a retributive fate' -

\(^{55}\) ibid., ch. 32, 433.
\(^{56}\) ibid., ch. 32, 436.
\(^{56a}\) Felix Holt, Ch. 46, 313.
\(^{57}\) Romola, ch. 32, 441.
even with his growing preference for the sweet and unquestioning Tessa.

Such a sympathy may, of course, be merely personal and perverse; it may be simply one reader's recoil from the untouchable perfection of Romola's dignity. But the question here arises whether George Eliot herself did not feel a certain ambiguity towards this idealised heroine of hers? Her attitude to this creature of her pen can best be seen from a comment in one of her letters to Sara Hennell:

'You are right in saying that Romola is ideal - I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made. My own books scourge me.'

There is an admiration amounting to awe here; but equally clear is the fact that Romola is distanced, as it were, from George Eliot's 'own soul.' And when George Eliot writes of Romola's absolute impenetrability to the appeals of her former love for Tito, of her entire freedom from any yearning, any attempt (before Savonarola's intervention) to establish real contact with Tito, her heroine's spiritual pride and aristocratic dignity are not backed by the weight of the author's personal experience.

Even when she submits to Savonarola's command, and returns to the 'bond of a higher love,' it is with no new overflow of undemanding Agape that she returns to Tito: she can only be 'submissive and gentle...repress any sign of repulsion.' Her mode is always passive: her attitude to Tito a minimal obedience to

---

58 GE Letters, 23 August 1863 (IV, 103-4).
Savonarola's command: 'Make your marriage-sorrows an offering too, my daughter: an offering to the great work by which sin and sorrow are being made to cease.' And her return is not so much to a relationship, as to 'her place' - to a concept of static dignity and order, the maintenance of 'bonds,' the payment of 'debts,' the fulfilment of 'duties.' ("Come, my daughter, come back to your place!")

'Romola in her Place' - Chapter-heading to Chapter XLII).

Under all this, there is much obvious authorial support and approval; but also, perhaps, a hint of alienation from an ideal so remote. In the Christian form of Savonarola's own words, his own experience, this ideal still generates a certain warmth - it has its own passion of vision and dedication. But as Romola lives out this ideal, the Christian fervour is lost: and what remains is something impassive - just a tinge of what is implied in Ruskin's description of the Renaissance ideal: 'rigid, cold, inhuman; incapable of glowing, of stooping, of conceding for an instant.' To some slight extent, George Eliot may have shared Ruskin's recoil from the noble classical ideal, even in the very midst of her awe before her proud heroine.

Besides Pride, Ruskin's other cardinal Renaissance sin is Infidelity - the 'double creed' that he finds in the art and architecture of the time - 'Christianity confessed and Paganism beloved.' He would prefer an outright paganism to living 'through the whole of life naming one God, imagining another, and dreading none.' This is the 'fatal result

59 Romola, ch. 40, 310.
60 Ibid.
of an enthusiasm for classical literature...heightened by the mis-
direction of the power of art.' And he sees the degeneration of
Western Christianity as dating from this time: 'gradually the mind
of Europe congealed into that state of utter apathy...which permits
us to place the Madonna and the Aphrodite side by side in our galleries...
the ruin which was begun by scholarship, was completed by sensuality.'

'The Madonna and the Aphrodite side by side': the confusion
and anarchy implicit in the phrase is spelled out at full length in
Romola. The Florence that George Eliot paints is in the very grip
of this experience of 'Christianity confessed and Paganism beloved.'
The superstition, the macabre processions, the depredations of the
Piagnone, the stark figure of Savonarola himself, are inextricably
woven among clashing strands of blatant sensuality and coarseness.
The conversation at the barber's shop, or in the market-square is a
fantastic conglomeration of Christian and pagan references: to take
one at random, it is with a fine sense of impartiality that Nello
recommends alternative characters in which Piero may paint Tito:

"Ask him...to turn his eyes upward, and thou may' st make a Saint
Sebastian of him that will draw troops of devout women; or, if
thou art in a classical vein, put myrtle about his curls and make him
a young Bacchus, or say rather a Phoebus Apollo..."

George Eliot treats this kind of happy insouciance with,
for the most part, tolerant amusement. She simply lets these minor
characters talk, stupefy us with the inconsequence of their ideas
and values. But the hollowness of the professed Christianity of
these worldly Florentines is implicitly condemned: the unreasoning

62 Romola, ch. 4, p. 63.
hatred with which the public turn against Savonarola at the end leads to riot, to the final masque of all - the Masque of the Furies. And the humour that pervades the description in the Proem of the Florentine Spirit returned to his home city has a sharp cutting-edge. The Spirit has inherited the fifteenth century's 'strange web of belief and unbelief': his culture predominantly pagan, his values those of the ancient world, of classical learning, patriotism, family pride, his interests focussed on politics, trade - 'he had learned to distrust men without bitterness; looking on life mainly as a game of skill...

But he had not for all that, neglected to hang up a waxen image or double of himself under the protection of the Madonna Annunziata...

For the Unseen Powers were mighty. Who knew - who was sure...? a liberal scholar must entertain all speculations. But the negatives might, after all, prove false.' As for the Frate Savonarola, his denunciations of the evils of the time were greeted by the Spirit 'not without a mixture of satisfaction' - though ' the Frate carried his doctrine rather too far for elderly ears.'

The long internal monologue of the Spirit, a part of which we have just sketched out, represents George Eliot's ironic perception that even in its more intellectual and ambitious forms, the 'human soul is hospitable, and will entertain conflicting sentiments and contradictory opinions with much impartiality.' The dizzying thought-swerves of her Florentine Spirit indicates the dilemma of a man caught between two worlds. The ambiguity, the reluctance to commit oneself, the uneasy, conscious scepticism - these George Eliot catches unerringly: they are a part of her own habit of mind, of her inner history.
Similarly, when she deals, in the first chapter, with these ambivalences in the lower classes, the tone of the market-place is vividly reproduced. Florence emerges as a hotbed of controversy: the use of language here is of primary importance, the art of rhetoric, the pithy epigram, the outrageously shrewd proverb. Language and tone are colourful and worldly-wise: there is a supreme complacency about these Florentines, in all their discussions, about trade, politics, or religion - a conscious cosmopolitanism, crystallised in Bratti's rhetorical understatement - 'one may never lose sight of the Cupola and yet know the world I hope.' And with all this is mingled the uneasy attitude towards religion: a kind of anxious obsequiousness, for example, in the crowd's reception of the news, that Lorenzo did, after all, send for the Frate on his death-bed ('Never took his eyes from the holy crucifix.') - but an obsequiousness that is constantly modulated to a jesting semi-cynicism, personified particularly in Iullo, the barber.

This ambivalence is seen as characteristic of fifteenth century Florence, with its position, which the novelist exploits, as both an arbitrarily chosen site, a 'certain historical spot,' on which, 'instead of following the dim daybreak, our imagination pauses,' and at the same time the very nub of civilisation, a kind of massive clearing-house for the ideas and values of the Western world. Here, in Ruskin's phrase, 'the Madonna and the Aphrodite are side by side': and ultimately, for all her humorous tolerance, George Eliot is bound to convey her sense of unease at their incongruity.

Ruskin's uncompromising view of the Renaissance and its almost unmitigatedly evil influence is not, then, fully shared by George Eliot:
but certain of his insights find flesh-and-blood expression in *Romola*. In her attitudes to the highly complex world of culture that she has concentrated into her novel, the Pride and the Infidelity of the Renaissance, and perhaps even the attributes of the 'false Grotesque,' as described by Ruskin, do find their place, and do contribute finally to the impression of a world - rich and complex - yet somehow over-ripe, ready for decay.

The lack of central seriousness through which Tito falls is seen in less concentrated form throughout Florentine society. The mental agility and shrewdness, the carnival humour, the monkeys and mock-marriages, can be seen as an example of Ruskin's 'false Grotesque': 'The true grotesque being the expression of the repose or play of a serious mind, there is a false grotesque opposed to it, which is the result of the full exertion of a frivolous one.' At its core, the ethos of George Eliot's Florence is frivolous, even in its very richness of art and culture; and Tito's fall is a kind of symbolic acting-out of the tendencies to corruption implicit in that richness.

The aesthetic and moral criteria preached in *The Stones of Venice* are echoed, then, in milder and more tolerantly accepting tones, in *Romola*. And in the light of this comparison, her reasons for choosing to treat of Renaissance Italy become clearer. The dilemmas, the ambivalences of the Victorians could be objectified in this other age of crisis: objectified in much richer colours, all elements gaining much greater vividness than they seemed to have retained in nineteenth century England. In Italy, and particularly the Italy of four centuries previously, both pagan and Christian values stood out
in clear relief: there was a greater freshness, a naïveté in their very worldliness. In that setting, George Eliot's vision of the dilemma of her own generation could be embodied with fullness and clarity; and the pre-Raphaelites, with their desire to return to the 'Gothic' virtues, in art and in life, have a subtle but perceptible effect on her sensibility.

There is one further point to be noted, however, in this question of George Eliot's attraction to Renaissance Italy. We mentioned the contemporary outpourings of novels, biographies and paintings on Italian subjects. Just before Romola, for instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental melodrama, also set in fifteenth century Florence, Agnes Sorrento, was being serialised in the Cornhill. But of closer relevance to George Eliot's novel was the appearance in May 1861 of T.A. Trollope's Florentine novel, La Beata; and this provides much fruitful ground for comparison and contrast.

Thomas Trollope, who knew Florence thoroughly, had been an invaluable guide to the Lewes's, on their two visits there; he had sent Marian notes on some finer points of Italian linguistics; and she was always to be a loyal friend and sympathiser in his not-very-successful literary career. Lewes wrote to the Trollopesc, on 9 December, 1861:

'I lend about La Beata in all good quarters, and always hear "golden opinions from all sorts of people."' There are several references in George Eliot's correspondence to Trollope's first novel - warm, friendly, but somehow, on the strictly artistic score, non-committal: "Have you read "Beata" yet - the first novel written by his [Anthony Trollope's] brother at Florence who is our especial favourite? Do read it when you can, if the opportunity has not already come."

63 To Sara Hennell. GE Letters, 14 January, 1862 (IV, 9).
'I am gratified by your having felt "Beata": it was originally a shorter story written for "All the Year Round," and rejected (for reasons one can imagine under the necessities for circumspection in the editor of a "family" periodical). The rejection was a very fortunate one, for it caused the writer to expand the story into a book, and the public has recognised its merit.'

Nowhere in her letters does she discuss analytically the novel's artistic merits - which, retrospectively, is a pity, since La Beata bears, in several respects, a close resemblance to George Eliot's own Florentine novel. The most striking resemblance is that of plot:

La Beata is the story of the beautiful and innocent Nina, who imagines herself indissolubly attached to her artist-lover, Pippo, and who finally dies of a broken heart, after Pippo has forsaken her to make an opportunistic marriage to Beppina, the wax-chandler's daughter. Thus, it is immediately obvious that the Pippo-Nina-Beppina triangle is at least similar to the Tito-Tessa-Romola plot. There is no evidence that Trollope's story was the source of George Eliot's plot: but the fact that she read it, and read it with the attention of a friend and sympathiser, during the time that her own novel was 'simmering,' is bound to have affected her own view of this classic romantic triangle - if only for contrast. And it is, essentially, the subtleties and shadings of her own version of the rather crude sentimental situation that emerges most revealingly from a comparison of the two versions.

Tina (or Nina, or La Beata, as she is variously called) is the archetypal 'innocent betrayed.' In her, absolute ignorance is united

---

64 To Sara Hennell, GE Letters, 27 March, 1862 (IV, 23).
with absolute virtue: she simply does not realise the illicit nature of her relations with Pippo. Trollope here examines the invincible innocence of the young girl, to whom love is the sole ratification of union:

'A loveless union, brought about by any kind of consideration or temptation whatever, would have seemed to her imagination simply impossible, and altogether out of the question; while the absence of such union when mutual affection existed would have appeared equally unintelligible. So sadly ignorant was La Beata!' 65

Trollope's discussion of Tina's ignorance displays an ambivalence of attitude. On the one hand, he cannot fully condone her unsanctified love, writing as he does for a Protestant and puritanical audience; and he therefore lays the responsibility for her behaviour on the Catholic mentality, on the differences of moral attitude - in Tina's society, such unions are known as 'disgrazie' and not 'disgraces.' But on the other hand, Tina's very sins are her virtues: her lack of prudence, of worldly calculation, her boundless and self-sacrificing love for Pippo, her incapacity for looking to her own interests - these are what create and sustain her irregular situation, and what eventually bring about her disaster. And, naturally enough, Trollope cannot slate her for these failings: he placates his audience - his own moral qualms - with a general criticism of the prevailing attitude in Catholic countries, and thenceforth can indulge in unrestrained admiration and pity for La Beata.

65 La Beata (1862), p. 22.
His analysis of her character and her reactions is partly, as we have indicated, conventional and classical. Her limitations of intellect and of worldly knowledge are exalted into virtues: and her inarticulate qualities of heart and soul triumph over the selfish sophistication of Pippo. In this idealisation of simplicity and innocence, Trollope is in the good sentimental tradition of Dickens\(^6\) and of Patmore's *The Angel in House*.\(^7\) Tina's refusal to understand Pippo's full treachery, until it is absolutely forced home upon her, her uncomplaining acquiescence, her utter selflessness - these are the classic traits of *Virtue Betrayed*, in English fiction. Interesting, however, is the fact that Trollope feels the need to explain, to justify Tina's heroic qualities of devotion, as quite compatible with such a lack of knowledge and awareness. The sentimental character-cliché is now used self-consciously, the idealisation is deliberate and analytical, and, to some extent, imaginatively realised. La Beata is dowered with a convincing inner life, with thoughts and reactions, and developments of attitude - though within the given

\(^6\) *Little Nell* represents the tradition in its least alloyed form. The first description of her - 'alone in the midst of...lumber and decay and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams' remaing emblematic throughout the novel. (*The Old Curiosity Shop* (London, 1861), p. 14.)

\(^7\) '...all the wisdom that she has
Is to love him for being wise.'
range prescribed by purity and simplicity. There is a certain dignity in her absolute surrender to Pippo till the very end, in her lack of resentment, in her physical weakness, and her temperamental meekness. And for all her limitations, she remains a figure of pathos and some power.

A brief comparison with Tessa in Romola is illuminating. George Eliot's contadina is also simple, ignorant, utterly trusting in her faithless lover. Thus far, the situation is exactly parallel. But the treatment of this simplicity is very different. George Eliot never idealises it, never exalts it into a virtue in its own right. Moreover, her virtues, such as they are—kindness, womanly love—are severely limited in their effectiveness, by this unquestioning simplicity. She is treated throughout as a child: she enters with the insouciance and ineffectiveness of a child into the lives of the main protagonists. She has no deep, intense inner life: she and her babies form a serene unit of natural life that keeps 'open the fountains of kindness' in Tito. But she suffers absolutely no development: she is not deemed worthy of finally knowing the truth of anything at all, even of her own marriage, of the real nature of her husband. Her pains and sorrows are those of a child, keen, but easily assuaged—based mainly on the need to be taken care of. The final scene of the novel finds her being protected and instructed by her own children, as she sits in her home like an oversized doll, fat and placid.

In George Eliot's attitudes towards Tessa's ignorance and unawareness, there is, so far from any idealisation, a real tinge of contempt. She allows her no measure of rationality, or of spiritual life. Partly this attitude can be seen as consistent with George Eliot's
explicitly stated theories about women and women's evolution and education. In her essays on 'The Natural History of German Life', and on the early champions of female emancipation, Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft, she had made, with reference to the very different problems of the depiction of the lower classes in literature and the arguments for the education and cultivation of women, a point that lies at the very foundation of her moral and aesthetic realism. To claim sympathy for the peasant and working classes, to demand improved status and education for women, on the grounds of their actual nobility and superiority of nature strikes her as illogical and self-defeating; she condemns it as the 'miserable fallacy that high morality and refined sentiment can grow out of harsh social relations, ignorance, and want..." ('Natural History of German Life.') The only convincing argument, on the contrary, rests upon the fact of the present degradation resulting from the victimised state; and any attempt to idealise that state automatically cuts the ground from under the reformer's feet.

She sees clearly the undesirable qualities that women manifest, their ignorance and childish vanity; she describes, as acidly as any disapproving reactionary, the woman who is 'unacquainted with the importance of life and its purposes, trained to a selfish coquetry and love of petty power.' But this very baseness, this moral and intellectual poverty, is the strongest argument, the clearest demonstration of the evils flowing from the actual treatment of women. No richness can be born of such deprivation.

68 Westminster, X (July 1856), 51-79.
69 Leader VI (13 October, 1855), 988-9.
Of all George Eliot's mentally undeveloped, morally unaware women - the cluster of 'kittens' that includes Hetty, Lucy, Esther, Rosamund, and Gwendolen - Tessa is the most extreme example of utter, scarcely human ignorance. Because she is not condemnable at all, on the moral level, her childish unevolved simplicity, her unknowingness, are seen at their clearest: she is completely rejected from George Eliot's world of moral choice and personal dignity. No kind of spiritual substance is accorded to a creature so limited, intellectually. Tessa, with all her natural kindness, emerges as barely human - in George Eliot's canon, a realistic product of deprivation and ignorance - even in their best case.

The refusal to idealise innocence, then, is the first striking difference between George Eliot's novel and that of Trollope. Most significant, however, is the treacherous Tito/Pippo character. The gradual and subtle deterioration that Tito undergoes is one of the most outstanding object-lessons in George Eliot's repertoire of the imperceptible glide into corruption that is her version of evil. She is at pains to emphasise the easy good-nature of the man at first: his shrinking from inflicting pain is one of his main motives for sustaining Tessa in her illusion, for example. And in his courting of Romola, there is a genuine attraction to her goodness and her moral, as well as physical beauty. By contrast, Pippo is classically heartless and treacherous: purely egoistic in his relations to Tina, purely opportunistic in his pursuit of the little heiress Beppina. He is calculating, consistent, and remorseless. After forsaking Tina, he can still use her as a model when he finds her necessary, for the painting of Saint Filomena that
is to make his fortune. Not for him the weakness, the swaying after pleasure, given and received, of a Tito: "For Pippo prescribed to himself, and admirably observed, a line of conduct of the strictest consistency. To most men, even of those capable of making for themselves such a conjunction of circumstances, it would have been impossible to avoid the touch of some small heart-probing memory, some suggestive association, impelling them to yield, at least momentarily, to the sway of former feelings. Not so Pippo. He was too completely self-sustained to be guilty of such weakness... He saw clearly, as he fancied, what his interests and fortunes required in the matter, and ruled his conduct accordingly with the undivided enthusiasm of a fanatic.  

His ultimate fate is ironically pressaged in his last phrase: haunted by the sight of the dying Tina as a kind of implacable Fury, he is driven to a monastery, and to a life of the utmost ascetic rigour, in order to expiate - not his cruelty to Tina - but the 'unpardonable enormity of having abandoned his sacred calling in order to become an artist.  

---

70 La Beata, p. 174.

71 ibid., p. 233. This misdirected remorse incidentally provides Trollope with an opportunity to air his anti-Catholic views: 'Nothing so fatally dwarfs the intellect as systematized and continued misdirection of the moral sentiments' - and his opposition to the monastic system, even when it is regarded as a refuge for life's castaways. He advocates a kind of moral laissez-faire: 'those social systems which have...most courageously determined on allowing the Juggernaut car of moral law to pursue its course without interference, and which have advanced furthest towards seeing that in this department also whatever is is right, have, in fact, nursed fewer weaklings to be crushed by those Juggernaut wheels, and are themselves walking erect in the van of human advance and improvement.'
Pippo, then, is a fanatic: cold and purposeful in his treachery, his self-seeking, and his self-abnegation. He is incapable of love - either for Tina or for Beppina - or, for that matter, for God. Tito, by contrast, is a far more complex villain. He is only too prone to love: his feelings for both Tessa and Romola are all too spontaneous and genuine. When he is drawn to Tessa, it is because he is 'a long way off the Via de 'Bardi, and very near to Tessa.' At least at first, Tito, far from being callous, shows himself all too vulnerable to appeals to his gentleness, his protectiveness. He is almost unconscious of his duplicity: where Pippo is coldly aware of forsaking one woman for another, Tito barely seems to realise that he has committed himself to both. It is this extraordinary passiveness that is George Eliot's insight: Tito's main fault is a weakness, rather than a positive treachery - even in his more conscious rejection of Baldassare, he is mentally almost inert, his sin is mainly one of omission, of a moral spinelessness. And it is this, and his fear, which gradually form an armour around his moral sensibility - allowing him to become more positively, actively callous.

Tito as villain, then, is less villainous than his counterpart in Trollope; as Tessa is less saint-like than hers. In thus modifying and humanising the archetypal figures of myth, George Eliot is clearly putting into practice the theories of realism that she has expounded in articles and reviews; she is shading down the satisfying extremes of fantasy, in order to represent the mediocrities, the subtle evolutions of experience. When we come to the third personage of our romantic triangle, however, we find no such scaling down - on the contrary, Trollope's prosaic, though sympathetic, plump little heroine
becomes in George Eliot's hands, the learned, sensitive, queenly Romola. All the idealising focus of George Eliot's story is trained on Romola: so that, if only for reasons of emotional economy, Tessa has to be reduced to a cypher, and Tito to a moral weakling.

In Trollope's handling, the interest is more evenly spread; and, conventionally, Beppina, as the - though unconscious - usurping woman, with all the romantic disadvantages of worldly wealth and status - cannot exert the fascination of an abandoned mistress, a faithless lover. In Romola, the conventional focus is shifted: onto the unremarked tragedy of the legal respectable wife, whose marital sufferings do not even fit into the well-worn convention of the seduction of her husband by another woman. Her tragedy lies between her husband and herself; the disillusion, the shattering of her image of Tito - 'like the hideous nightmare in which the world had seemed to break away all round her, and leave her feet overhanging the darkness.'72 And this nightmare sensation of disintegration begins long before even any definite facts of treachery came to her notice.

In Romola, the conventional triangle exists, as it does in La Beata: but it exists as though for the purpose of pointing up its irrelevance. The sensational elements of such a triangular romance are entirely absent: even the reader who 'knows all' can barely muster up any real indignation at Tito's treachery: there is no real sense that he is betraying Romola by being with Tessa, or Tessa by his marriage to Romola. It is within his relationship with each of these women that the seed of falsehood lies. And part, at any rate, of the concern of the novel is to analyse, in all seriousness, and without

72 Romola, ch. 27, 379.
sensationalism, the subtle forces that break up Romola's marriage; the nightmare reality of disintegration needs no novelettish devices, no co-respondent, no eternal triangle. Tessa merely reveals Tito to us more thoroughly; she has no real bearing on Romola's marriage.

La Beata, then, similar to Romola in plot, acts almost as a counterpoint to it in mood and intention. And even if George Eliot was not affected in the slightest degree by her reading of Trollope's novel, a comparison between the novels remains illuminating for the reader, if only in highlighting George Eliot's specific and unique handling of a conventional theme.

This insight is, indeed, what emerges on all planes from a study of contemporary cultural attitudes towards Italy, towards the Renaissance, towards traditional romantic themes. George Eliot's interest in these things is firmly rooted in the cultural soil of her time. In setting Romola in fifteenth century Florence, she was, in a sense, merely participating in a current vogue for Italy and all things Italian; merely reflecting the moral and aesthetic dilemmas that filled the minds of her contemporaries; even her plot was not, in its essential structure, at all original, its classic interest being emphasised by the so-recent publication of La Beata. And yet, deeply rooted as George Eliot's romance was in the cultural influences and interests of her age, her achievement rises in all the more striking relief from a study of some of these influences. It is in her unique and characteristic treatment of common problems, of stereotyped plots, that her individuality is manifested most clearly.

The task she set herself in dealing with Renaissance Florence
bristled with difficulties; and of these, not the least was the sheer
mastery of so much intractable material, the overweening chaos of the
past, and the moral and aesthetic paradoxes of her own age projected
onto that past - the mastery and superimposition upon it of her own
complex vision of human affairs, of the inter-relations of men and
ideas. Few readers have been fully satisfied with Romola: but, if her
achievement is not commensurate with her aim, then her failure is due
to the tremendous scope of that aim. Intellectually and aesthetically,
she was a participant in the thinking and feeling of her time; and in
her creative writing, it is - paradoxically - perhaps in Romola,
distanced in time and space as it is, that this deep participation is
most manifest. But, in spite of her integral connection with the
common concerns, political, aesthetic, moral, of her contemporaries,
it is ultimately her own individual concerns that emerge from this, as
from all her novels - 'the broad sameness of the human lot, which never
alters in the main headings of its history.' This is her characteristic
tone, her specific vision, with which she does, after all, largely
succeed in imbuing the most divergent material.
The late W.J. Harvey, in an essay on Middlemarch, dismissed as essentially irrelevant the controversy over the historical originals of George Eliot's characters. 'Sometimes,' he conceded, 'it may affect the way in which a character is drawn; for example, the slightly idealised portrait of Caleb Garth may be due to George Eliot's memories of her own father. But while it may be academically amusing to debate whether Casaubon was based on Mark Pattison, Dr. Brabant, or some other actual person, it is much more important to recognise that the very name of Casaubon creates a calculated ironic discrepancy between the great Renaissance scholar and the fictional pedant.'

This somewhat curt clearing of the ground for a study of George Eliot's 'success in creating a dense, coherent, and credible social world,' raises for us more questions than it resolves. Both the assertions contained in Mr. Harvey's key-sentence are open to objection: has the interest of critics and readers as to George Eliot's 'model' for Casaubon in fact been a mere academic amusement, a dilettante diversion irrelevant to the concerns of the serious critic? And is the use of the great Renaissance scholar's name in fact calculated merely to create an 'ironic discrepancy,' a mocking shadow-picture of Mr. Casaubon's pathetic erudition (rather like the diabolical effigy that derides Mr. Brooke in his most pompous hour)? Both these questions, I would suggest,

---

1 George Eliot, Middlemarch (Penguin English Library), Introduction, p. 16.
deserve serious attention: further, I would like to show that the use
of 'namesakes,' of archetypes, throughout the novel, has a significance
intimately related to the kind of fascination that Casaubon has exerted
over source-hunting readers from George Eliot's own time to the present
day.

The early reviewers of Middlemarch found much to praise, and
somewhat to blame in George Eliot's latest and eagerly-awaited production.
Her realism, her knowledge of human nature are admired, but with a certain
awed repulsion rather than with warm enthusiasm. Edith Simcox declared
that Middlemarch marks an epoch in the history of fiction in so far as
its incidents are taken from the inner life'; at the same time, she points
to the fact that 'a first perusal of the book seems to have an almost
oppressive effect on ordinary readers, somewhat as little children are
frightened at a live automaton toy.' It is somehow 'not natural' for
anyone to know so much of so many human beings, to enter so acutely
into the complexities and intricacies of social relations.

The image of the 'live automaton toy' is rather well-chosen to
express the kind of impact Middlemarch made on many readers: it was
superior, fascinating, frightening, and scientific. Henry James found
it 'too clever by half' in some of its scientific sections: 'The author
wishes to say too many things, and to say them too well; to recommend
herself to a scientific audience.' And Sidney Colvin, in his essay in
the Fortnightly, highlights the knowledge of physiology displayed in the

---
2 Edith Simcox, 'Middlemarch,' Academy, 4 (1 Jan. 1873); reprinted in
(hereafter referred to as Century of GE Criticism).
3 Henry James, 'George Eliot's Middlemarch,' Galaxy, 15 (March 1873), reprinted
in Century of GE Criticism, pp. 86-7.
4 Sidney Colvin, Fortnightly Review (19 January, 1873); reprinted
in George Eliot and her Readers, ed. John Holmstrom and Laurence Lerner (1966),
pp. 98-106.
deserve serious attention: further, I would like to show that the use of 'namesakes,' of archetypes, throughout the novel, has a significance intimately related to the kind of fascination that Casaubon has exerted over source-hunting readers from George Eliot's own time to the present day.

The early reviewers of *Middlemarch* found much to praise, and somewhat to blame in George Eliot's latest and eagerly-swaited production. Her realism, her knowledge of human nature are admired, but with a certain awed repulsion rather than with warm enthusiasm. Edith Simcox declared that *Middlemarch* marks an epoch in the history of fiction in so far as its incidents are taken from the inner life; at the same time, she points to the fact that 'a first perusal of the book seems to have an almost oppressive effect on ordinary readers, somewhat as little children are frightened at a live automaton toy.' It is somehow 'not natural' for anyone to know so much of so many human beings, to enter so acutely into the complexities and intricacies of social relations.

The image of the 'live automaton toy' is rather well-chosen to express the kind of impact *Middlemarch* made on many readers: it was superior, fascinating, frightening, and scientific. Henry James found it 'too clever by half' in some of its scientific sections: 'The author wishes to say too many things, and to say them too well; to recommend herself to a scientific audience.' And Sidney Colvin, in his essay in *Fortnightly*, highlights the knowledge of physiology displayed in the

---


novel, the way in which George Eliot used it as illustration for
spiritual processes, and, more generally (and very perceptively),
the 'medical habit in the writer, of examining her own creations for
their symptoms.'

'By Jove,' exclaims John Blackwood, in a letter to Lewes, in
dazed wonder, 'she is equally at home here' (in the Vincy breakfast-
room). Her insight is almost uncanny; but her knowledge, scientific
or otherwise, is almost pedantic. In spite of the eagerness and
appreciation with which Middlemarch was almost universally received, there
was an equally general, and barely definable sense of disappointment.
The Daily Telegraph reviewer makes this explicit, and traces it to the
ultimately melancholy tone of the novel; and this aspect of the novel
is what concerns R.H. Hutton, in his essay, 'The Melancholy of Middlemarch':

'We all say, he writes, 'that the action is slow, that there is too much
parade of scientific and especially physiological knowledge in it, that
there are turns of phrase which are even pedantic...' And in spite of
its undoubted power as a novel, 'does it really add to the happiness of
its readers or not?' All idealism and faith in the novel is effectively
quenched; frustration, partial or total, is the lot of all the noblest
characters, and, ultimately, George Eliot's 'melancholy scepticism' is
'too apt to degenerate into scorn.'

This basic unease at the moral timbre of Middlemarch, which was,
incidentally, repudiated by George Eliot herself ("I need not tell you

6 Daily Telegraph, (18 June 1872); reprinted in GE and her Readers, op. cit., p.83.
7 R.H. Hutton, 'The Melancholy of Middlemarch' Spectator, 45 (1 June 1872),
685-7.
that my book will not present my own feeling about human life if it produces on readers whose minds are really receptive the impression of blank melancholy and despair.\(^8\), is balanced, however, by admiration for the details, for individual characters, and social milieux. George Eliot’s insight is nowhere more praised than in her portrait of Casaubon. Here, the achievement seems to be valued in proportion to the unattractiveness of the subject.

Henry James defines this achievement, vividly and precisely:

‘To depict hollow pretentiousness and mouldy egotism with so little of narrow sarcasm and so much of philosophic sympathy, is to be a rare moralist as well as a rare story-teller.’\(^9\) Other reviewers echo this admiration, the only reservation being, ironically enough,\(^10\) on the score of realism: is Casaubon’s proposal-letter, for instance, wonders John Blackwood, perhaps a little too fanciful?\(^11\) Or, suggests Sidney Colvin, perhaps the ‘formalism and dryness of Casaubon’s nature [are] a little overdone?’\(^12\) In general, however, the sympathy and discernment with which George Eliot portrays the ‘unwholesome, helplessly sinister’ scholar, as James describes him, is much admired; and George Eliot herself, though she claimed that ‘there has not, I believe, been one really able review of the book in our newspapers and periodicals,’\(^13\) yet allowed herself

---

9 James in Century of GE Criticism, p. 85.
10 Ironically, since, according to Sir Charles Dilke, it was this proposal that was copied, almost word for word, from Pattison’s proposal to Emilia Strong. (See Sir Charles Dilke, ‘Memoir of E.F.S. Dilke,’ in her The Book of the Spiritual Life (1905), pp. 16-17.
12 Century of GE Criticism, op. cit., p. 103.
13 GE Letters, 11 February 1873 (V, 374).
a word of gratification on one point—Magus’s sensibility to the
pathos in Mr. Casaubon’s character and position.14

In the novel itself, she had written, ‘For my part I am very sorry
for him.’15 This rather inadequate and understated expression of pity (reminiscent of Celia’s question about Will: ‘Is he very fond of you,
Dodo?’ and Dorothea’s equally understated response17) is filled out and
given colour and concreteness by a suggestive sentence in a letter that
she later wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe. She denies that Lewes was in
any way a source for Casaubon, and claims that, on the contrary, ‘I fear
that the Casaubon-tints are not quite foreign to my own mental complexIon.
At any rate I am very sorry for him.’18

14 ibid., 1 Dec. 1872 (V, 334).

James’s carefully worded praise, ‘philosophic sympathy,’ is interestingly
echoed in a modern formulation by V.S. Pritchett: ‘George Eliot’s pity
flows from her moral sense, from the very seat of justice, and not from
a sentimental heart.’ (The Living Novel (New York, 1947); reprinted in
A Century of GE Criticism, p. 212).

15 Middlemarch, Ch. 29, p. 12.

16 cf. ‘I am worry to add that she was sobbing bitterly...’—of Dorothea’s
honeymoon.

17 Ch. 84, p. 442. Derek Oldfield, in his essay on ‘The Language of the
Novel—the Character of Dorothea,’ (in Middlemarch—Critical
Approaches to the Novel, ed. Barbara Hardy (1967), p. 80—hereafter
referred to as Critical Approaches) shows how Dorothea’s acquiescence
in this kind of ‘conventional’ language, is a symptom of change in her,
since the days when she hotly rejected ‘such odious expressions.’
(Middlemarch, ch. 4, p. 51).

18 GE Letters, Oct. 1 1872 (V, 322).
Here, the conventional 'umbrella-phrase' can be read as a kind of hasty step backwards after a too-revealing declaration. What she has revealed, in fact, is of the greatest significance: that she is not merely 'sorry' for Casaubon, extending towards him that impersonal though real human sympathy that she extends, by creed and by inclination, to the least sympathetic of her characters; that there is a more personal empathy, rather than mere sympathy, expressed in this 'admirably sustained greyness.' 19 She has implied, in fact, what she later explicitly described to F.H. Myers, that there is an important difference between the portrayal of a Rosamond and the portrayal of a Casaubon.

Myers recounts George Eliot's response to a question about the original of Casaubon: 'With a humorous solemnity, which was quite in earnest, nevertheless, she pointed to her own heart.' And she went on to explain that whereas Rosamond had been 'hard to sustain; such complacency of egoism being alien to her own habits of mind,' on the other hand, 'she laid no claim to any such natural magnanimity as could avert Casaubon's temptations of jealous vanity, of bitter resentment.' 20

This anecdote, besides highlighting the kind of curiosity that prevailed in George Eliot's own time about the original of Casaubon, is highly characteristic of George Eliot's kind of honesty - half humorous, totally serious, selfconsciously and ruefully portentous. Most significant, however, is the self-revelation contained here: that, like Flaubert, George Eliot could have said of her dubiously

19 James, op. cit.
20 F.H. Myers, Modern Essays (1883), p. 263.
heroic hero: 'Casaubon, c'est moi.'

And she could have said it, in the light of this incident, on a wider score than that of her interest in scholarship, in mythology, and religion.

Here, I feel, even those critics who notice the special sympathy of George Eliot with her pedantic creature fall short in their analysis of this sympathy. Leslie Stephen, for instance, neatly skirts the point: 'George Eliot declared that she had lived in much sympathy with Casaubon's life, and was especially gratified when some one saw the pathos of his career. No doubt there is a pathos in devotion to an entirely mistaken ideal.' This pathos, however, arising from the mere irony of Casaubon's not having read the Germans, does not fully account for the melancholy of the character: 'But suppose that he had read the last authorities? Would that have really mended matters?' The true source of Casaubon's life-failure, as Stephen points out, is his lack of passion, of human feeling, his jealousy, his sensitivity - faults of personality, and not of scholarship: 'Now we can pity a man for making a blunder, and perhaps, in some sense, we ought to "pity" him for having neither heart nor passion. But that is a kind of pity which is not akin in love.'

Dorothea's mistake therefore turns out to be that she 'married a stick instead of a man.' And the story thus becomes a 'satire against young ladies who aim at lofty ideals. It implies a capacity for being imposed upon by a mere outside shell of pretense.'

21 W.J. Harvey makes this comparison in his essay, 'The Intellectual Background of the Novel - Casaubon and Lydgate,' in Critical Approaches, op. cit. - though he confines the George Eliot/Casaubon analogy to the former's familiarity with the field of Higher Bible Criticism.

Thus, in Leslie Stephen's reading, George Eliot's expressed sympathy and pity for Casaubon is little more than a formality - it is a 'kind of pity which is not akin to love' - since he is truly pathetic, worthy of loving pity, only in his 'devotion to an entirely mistaken ideal,' and this is by no means the most important aspect of his personality. His hollowness and malice disqualify him from that kind of loving pity. So that for Stephen, George Eliot's attitude is basically a deeply satirical one, and like all satire is concerned simply with the discrepancy between appearance and reality, between the stick that Casaubon really is, and the man that to Dorothea in her foolishness he appears to be.

This reading of Casaubon seems to me weak on two scores: firstly, in its limited understanding of the object of George Eliot's loving pity, and secondly, in its begging of what seems to be the central question attaching to Casaubon: what is appearance, and what reality? where does the 'mere outside shell' of personality end and the intrinsic self begin? what is, after all, the difference between Dorothea's vision of a Milton, a Locke, a Bossuet, or an Augustine, and the man who is Casaubon? This second question I should like to take up at a later point; at present, the first issue demands a closer analysis.

The 'pity of it,' as far as George Eliot's relations with Casaubon are concerned, seems to me to be rooted much deeper in the subsoil of her own experience, of her consciousness of her own personality, its substance and texture, as it were, than Leslie Stephen allows. Even F.R. Leavis, who draws a clear analogy between creator and creature, stops short, I feel, just at the point where the comparison becomes
important: 'Only a novelist who had known from the inside the
ehaustion and discouragements of long-range intellectual enterprises
could have conveyed the pathos of Dr. Casaubon's predicament.'

He then continues to discuss the real pathos of Casaubon's
situation - the pathos 'below the level of tragedy' lies not simply in
his futile scholarship, but, as with Mrs. Transome, it 'involves the
insulation of the egoism from all large and heroic ends,' it is found
mainly in Casaubon's desperate efforts to hide from the truth of his
ineffectuality, his unlovableness. This latter, and true pathos, Leavis
implies, is rather ambiguously presented by George Eliot: in fact, he
finds that she shares, possibly, the amused contempt with which Lydgate
views the self-deluded pedant.

According to Leavis, then, George Eliot's empathy with Casaubon
extends only to his experience of the 'exhaustions and discouragements
of long-range intellectual enterprises.' If we look back, however, at
the suggestive anecdote from which this discussion sprang, and at George
Eliot's letter about the Casaubon-tints in her own mental complexion,
it emerges quite clearly that she is referring with her pointing finger
to much more than her experience of intellectual enterprises. She talks
specifically of 'jealous vanity, of bitter resentment': the empathy, the
sense of 'Casaubon, c'est moi,' is extended to the personality-failings,
the personality-consciousness of her unattractive creature.

Myers, after relaying her reply, gallantly insists that he finds
no trace of Casaubon's faults in her; and then suggests, rather
illuminatingly, that possibly 'much of her moral weight' is due to the

24 ibid., p. 62.
sense she conveys that she has begun with her full share of faults, that her strenuous virtue, her conscious self-transcendence, are a result of long labour on a personality originally very much 'straitened in her own bowels.' In this intimate knowledge of jealousy and resentment, Myers suggests, lies George Eliot's moral power: she is a living example of how the raw materials of personality may be worked upon.

The 'moral weight' aspect apart, however, it is George Eliot's conscious, if rueful self-identification with Casaubon that is significant. 'Source-hunting' for Casaubon's character may have been a favourite readersport from the beginning - witness the questions and suggestions which gave rise to the letter and anecdote just quoted. But this fascination attaching to Casaubon, rather than to any other of the Middlemarch characters, has its roots, I believe, in something deeper than a mere academic amusement. George Eliot's readers have always felt the special and delicate intensity with which George Eliot analyses her anti-hero: how much kinder she is to him, for instance, than to her other matrimonial monster, the serpentine Rosamond. Surely, the feeling was, she must intimately have known such a man?

There have been various suggestions for her source: Robert William Mackay, Mark Pattison, Dr. Brabant - even Lewes himself, as we have seen.


26 e.g. Barbara Hardy, in her essay, 'The Surface of the Novel - Chapter 30,' (in Critical Approaches, p. 169) is especially acute in pointing to 'George Eliot's beautiful movements of decorum, that she withholding the internal commentary of Casaubon, and makes his questions and frustrated comments represent feeling.'
In recent years, there has been renewed speculation over the Pattison suggestion: she knew the Pattisons well, was the confidante of the Dorothea-like Emilia Pattison, and, according to the latter's second husband, Sir Charles Dilke, based Casaubon's proposal and Dorothea's defence of the marriage on the actual words of the living couple.\textsuperscript{27}

There was a twenty-seven year gap in the ages of both couples, and the Pattison marriage, too, seems to have gone wrong from the start. The most crudely obvious signpost to a connection with the Pattisons, of course, was George Eliot's choice of a name for her pedantic hero; the great Renaissance scholar was the subject of Pattison's 'classic treatment of sixteenth-century humanism.'\textsuperscript{28} Dilke also claims that the 'religious side' of Dorothea was taken from Mrs. Pattison, who had Puseyite tendencies in her early devotional life: as penance for the smallest fault, she used to lie for hours on the bare stones, her arms in the attitude of a cross.

Pattison himself had a reputation for sarcasm and cynicism, he devoted his entire life to scholarship, and he found difficulty in expressing emotion and in establishing warm relationships with people.\textsuperscript{29}

In spite of these apparent similarities with Casaubon, however, the analogy was vigorously denied by many who knew him: by Morley, who called it an 'impertinent blunder.'\textsuperscript{30} - Pattison was the shrewdest critic of the day, a

\textsuperscript{27} Dilke, op. cit., p. 17.


thorough scholar, and an unsurpassed teacher; by Sir Charles Dilke himself; by Mrs. Humphry Ward, who describes a visit made to the Pattisons with George Eliot as fellow-guest ('But I do not believe that she ever meant to describe the Rector in "Mr. Casaubon." She was far too good a scholar herself to have perpetrated a caricature so flagrantly untrue. She knew Mark Pattison's quality.') 31 Professor Haight, in his biography, George Eliot, also rejects the connection, for lack of real evidence of any kind. 32

At the same time, some intriguing ideas persist, connecting the Pattisons with Casaubon. Matthilde Parlett, for instance, in an essay on 'George Eliot and Humanism,' suggests that the connection is with Pattison's book Isaac Casaubon, and not with Pattison himself. George Eliot visited the Pattisons in 1870, while he was writing Casaubon, and while she was involved in Middlemarch, of which only the Lydgate/Rosamond thread had yet been spun. Soon after this visit, she dropped this thread, and began working on Miss Brooke — the Dorothea/Casaubon story. In the following spring, she wove the two together. The conclusion to which Mme. Parlett comes is that George Eliot discussed with Pattison his forthcoming book, and then created her own Casaubon as a repudiation, as anticipatory rebuttal, of Pattison's glorification of the humanist ideals of culture and erudition. George Eliot's pitiful

31 Mrs. Humphry Ward, A Writer's Recollections (1918), p. 110. Mrs. Ward also denies that Pattison served as model for her own Squire Wensloover, in Robert Elsmere. The only likeness, she insists, is in 'outward aspect,' and in 'a few personal traits and the two main facts of great learning and a general impatience of fools.' (ibid., III) — cf. Sparrow, pp. 19-22.

32 See GE Biography, pp. 448-9; 563-5.
pedant is a counter-strike against Pattison's dedicated scholar. For Mme. Parlett, this forms one element in a general attack launched by George Eliot, in company with the Positivists, on contemporary English humanism, on the futility of the Greek ethic in the universities and in the life of the nation.33

This suggestion, fascinating and plausible as it is, is rather blurred by a study of George Eliot's attitudes towards humanism, on the one hand, and by a glance at Pattison's book, on the other. Mme. Parlett quotes from the latter Pattison's belief that the 'result of this sustained mental effort [of scholarship] is not a book, but a man,' and sees George Eliot's scholar as living evidence of the pathetic human waste that can result from a lifetime of scholarship. This, however, is not really a repudiation of any claim made by Pattison himself. This is how Casaubon's biographer made his point, in a fuller version:

'The scholar is greater than his books. The result of his labours is not so many thousand pages in folio, but himself... Learning is a peculiar compound of memory, imagination, scientific habit, accurate observation, all concentrated, through a prolonged period, on the analysis of the remains of literature. The result of this sustained mental endeavour is not a book, but a man... Rare as genius is, it may be doubted if consummate learning be not rarer.'34

The greatness of the true scholar, Pattison himself declares, is rare - rarer even than genius. And he would have been the first to agree with George Eliot on the pitfalls, emotional and intellectual, in the way of the aspiring scholar. So that, on the whole, Mme. Parlett's theory seems to be conjuring up a controversy where none exists.

33 Parlett, op. cit., pp. 25-46.

34 Mark Pattison, Isaac Casaubon (1875), pp. 488-9.
It is obvious that great care is needed in speaking of the historical 'original' of a character in fiction: the process of artistic creation transforms and re-forms the historical 'model.' It seems to me, therefore, after going through the mass of material establishing and denying connections between Casaubon and Pattison, that it is quite unnecessary to accept or reject the Rector of Lincoln en bloc, as it were, as model for Casaubon. George Eliot, aware in herself of the 'Casaubon-tints,' in ways which I should like to explore, found several of these tints in certain of her friends and acquaintances, as well - and she found them because she had eyes trained upon her own inner experience to see them. Pattison was one such friend: certain contours of his inner geography she seems to have discerned quite instinctively, through a very similar conformation of her own.

There is, for instance, Pattison's own identification of his inner life with that of Amiel, whose Journal Intime he read, and by whom he was so moved that he wrote to the editor, Edmond Scherer, to express his gratitude: '...I can vouch that there is in existence at least one other soul which has lived through the same struggles, mental and moral, as Amiel. In your pathetic description of the "volonté qui voudrait vouloir, mais impuissante à se fournir à elle-même des motifs," - of the repugnance for all action - the soul petrified by the sentiment of the infinite, in all this I recognise myself.'\textsuperscript{35} The sense of powerlessness, of desperate passivity and isolation are equally a part of George

\textsuperscript{35} Quoted in Sparrow, p.130.
Elliot's experience and of that of her unlovable pedant. This inner
petrification she may have sensed in Pattison, and transformed into
the sterile labyrinths of Casaubon's consciousness.

On the other hand, Pattison exemplifies the way in which the
creative scholar differs from the fruitless pedant. This is how he
describes the mystical pursuit of knowledge - of the *totum scibile*-
that obsessed him all his days: 'The finite understanding is crushed
when it is brought into the presence of the infinite expanse of the
knowable, and turns aside in despair.' But then, the scholar 'becomes
conscious of a force within himself'; a crisis takes place; he is no
longer passive, inert, 'a mere mirror.' His intelligence 'becomes active
and throws itself out upon phenomena with a native force, combining or
analysing them - anyhow altering them, reducing them, subjecting them,
imposing itself upon them...we begin to live with a life which is above
nature...';

This ecstatic description of the violation, as it were, of knowledge,
is obviously poles apart from Casaubon's essential *passivity*, his 'creeping
paralysis' in the face of his volumes of notes, his state of perpetual
arrest at the stage of despair.

Pattison's rhapsody, in fact, is valid as a description of what
George Eliot herself tried, and failed, to achieve in *Romola*. In the
very marrow of her nature, she knew Casaubon. In a letter from which
we have already quoted, she expressed just Pattison's sense of the

---

36 ibid., pp. 128-9.

suffocating threat of the past, of the effort of the artist/scholar to subjugate all that material to her own purposes: '...I am thrown into a state of humiliating passivity by the sight of the great things done in the far past - it seems as if life were not long enough to learn, and as if my own activity were so completely dwarfed by comparison that I should never have courage for more creation of my own.'

We quoted also in this connection her approval of Mrs. Browning's poem, Casa Guidi Windows, as expressing the 'true relation of the religious mind to the Past.' The masks and effigies of history, the accumulation of knowledge and culture, must not be allowed to catch away the weight of pity from the present and the actual. Somehow, it must

38 Ibid., 17-19 Feb. 1862 (IV, 15). The relevant lines of Mrs. Browning's poem are these:

'Void........ are all images
Men set between themselves and actual wrong
To catch the weight of pity, meet the stress
Of conscience, though 'tis easier to gaze long
On personating masks, and effigies,
Than to see live weak creatures crushed by strong.'

(Casa Guidi Windows (London, 1851), p. 4)

39 Cf. Dorothea's stupefaction before the 'stupendous fragmentariness of Rome,' the 'oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes.' For her, Rome represents 'gigantic broken revelations' - brokenness, unconnectedness, confusion, degeneracy: she is passive before it, her retina diseased - the images simply 'succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a dose.' What she lacks is the 'quickening power of a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts.' (Middlemarch, ch. 20, pp. 295-7).
all be absorbed, made one's own, made to serve one's vision and one's present action and feeling. This is the task of true, imaginative scholarship, the task at which Casaubon fails ('I live too much with the dead. My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and confusing changes.' (ch. 2, p. 23)) — and at which George Eliot herself charged like a cumbersome Don Quixote at the windmills.

Ultimately, her failure in Romola was a failure in the transforming, aggressive power of the imagination, a failure in energy. The images used by Henry James and Leslie Stephen in describing this failure are appropriate: according to the former, her simplicity "lies buried (in a splendid mausoleum) in Romola"; and the latter claims, 'The masses of information have not been fused by a glowing imagination. The fuel has put out the fire.'

The enterprise of scholarship, with its pitfalls and tremendous demands on integrity and imaginative energy were well-known to George Eliot. The effect of scholarship on the personality of the scholar was equally engraved in her own experience: The tendency to escapism which she had always combatted, for example, to seek compensation in an imaginary or long-vanished world for the inadequacies of the present and the actual. In Silas Marner, already, she had compared the 'solitary imprisonment' of the money-obsessed weaver to that of the scholar: 'His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended. The same sort of process

40 James, op. cit., p. 86.
has perhaps been undergone by wiser men, when they have been cut off from faith and love - only, instead of a loom and a heap of guineas, they have had some erudite research, some ingenious project, or some well-knit theory. ¹⁴¹

And in the portrait of Bardo, the blind old scholar in Romola, she explores, though with subtlety and discrimination, further implications of this theme. The central critical question as regards Romola's father is, in fact: how does one 'place' him and his scholarly pre-occupations? Is Bardo to be admired for his learning and dedication, and indignantly sympathised with for the neglect of the world? Or is there an element of Ruskin's definition of the Renaissance sin - Pride of Science - the 'unhappy and childish pride in knowledge' - to be discerned in his attitude? As I have suggested, there is an ambiguity in her treatment, an ambiguity arising from her own doubtful estimation of erudition as a value in itself. ¹⁴²

In many ways, Bardo prefigures Casaubon. He lives in a small-windowed house, cut off from the world, in the 'prison of his blindness.' He lives with the 'great dead,' away from the 'petty scene' of the present. (ch. 5, pp. 76-7). For him, as for Casaubon, the past has a reality which robs the present of all dignity and interest. ¹⁴³ Romola, too,

¹¹ Silas Marner, (ch. 2, pp. 28-9).

¹² See my chapter on Romola, pp. 174-5.

¹³ cf. 'Mr. Casaubon apparently did not care about building cottages, and diverted the talk to the extremely narrow accommodation which was to be had in the dwellings of the ancient Egyptians...' (ch. 3, pp. 46-7). For Dorothea's loyer, at any rate, the past does presume to catch the weight of pity away from the present.
is brought up 'in learned seclusion from the interests of actual life, and had been accustomed to think of heroic deeds and great principles as something antithetic to the vulgar present'; (ch. 27, p. 376) and she has to be educated to a strong sense of the 'needs of the nearest.'

Bardo is engaged on a great work that will never see the daylight: it is cut off by his blindness, both physically and mentally, as he himself recognises: his blindness "acts like a dam, sending the streams of thought backward along the already-travelled channels and hindering the course onward." (ch. 5, p. 78) He is vulnerable to Tito's guarded mockery and to Nello's less guarded analogies: "...one of those scholars who lie overthrown in their learning, like cavaliers in heavy armour, and then get angry because they are over-ridden..." (ch. 13, p. 202)

Bernardo, whose judgment is central in the novel, remembers Bardo when he was young and had fire in his eyes, and cannot understand "that he, with his fiery spirit...could hang over the books and live with shadows all his life." (ch. 31, p. 427) The loss of the 'fire' of life is equivalent to Casaubon's emotional sterility: like Casaubon, Bardo can be harshly unresponsive to those nearest him, at least until his attention is drawn to the hurt he has inflicted - as when he complains to Romola of the "wandering, vagrant propensity of the feminine mind." (ch. 5, p. 78).

And Dino, Bardo's son, indictls his father with sheer criminal pettiness and neglect in his pursuit of classical knowledge: his concerns are valueless, luxurious, and, in the actual setting of his life, outrageously irrelevant: "he has been like one busy picking
shining stones in a mine, while there was a world dying of plague above him."

Nevertheleas, Bardo does retain a certain power and dignity through all his misfortunes. And as for his shortcomings, George Eliot does make it clear that they are his own personal failings, which would have manifested themselves, whatever his occupation had been:

'...the family passions lived on in him under altered conditions...'

(ch. 5, p. 70) If scholarship does not ennoble them, at least, in Bardo's case, it is not to blame for his defects. Moreover, by contrast with Casaubon, he is described as 'perpetually seeking the assurance that the outward fact continued to correspond with the image which lived to the minutest detail in his mind.' (ch. 5, p. 75) Bardo needs this assurance that his inner memories and mental constructs correspond to the objective facts: Casaubon, as we shall see later, does not depend on such a correspondence.

And finally, Bardo, despite his physical blindness, is clear-sighted enough about his claims upon posterity: he acknowledges, though with bitterness, what Casaubon cannot bring himself even to contemplate: that his work will not come to fruition, that, except for his library, he will be forgotten. (ch. 5, pp. 78-9).

Bardo, then, in his dedication to learning, his isolation from life, his ultimately futile enterprise, is a prototype of the scholar in George Eliot's canon. Her placing of him and his enterprise remains ambiguous: it is futile, impractical, diversive, isolating, but nevertheless, there is a dignity and an energy in the scholar's persistence and dedication.
Ultimately, George Eliot implies that the fundamental human passions and failings manifest themselves through and in spite of a man's occupation. A large part of Theophrastus Such, for example, is devoted to the foibles and intrigues of the scholarly world, the petty jealousies, squabbles, and downright cruelty which marks the erudite, no less than the ignorant. 'How We Encourage Research' illustrates the modern counterparts of the rack and the stake in the worship of Truth through Torture. The victim of international jealousies and rivalries changes from a 'pleasant, flexible' dilettante into a bitter bore: 'The gall of his adversaries' ink had been sucked into his system and ran in his blood.' And his rival, Grampus, quietly takes over Merman's original idea, once the latter's reputation is ruined for ever. This scholarly moral fable does contain some gentle mockery at the misplaced grandiosity and self-estimation of minute learning. But essentially, the irony is trained on human jealousies and cruelties - passions which the possession of knowledge seems to serve, rather than counteract.

Similarly, in 'A Man Surprised at his Originality,' the 'gaseous, illimitably expansive conceit' of 'Lentulus' is satirised, and on grounds that invite comparison with one of George Eliot's charges against Casaubon: 'the total privacy in which he enjoyed his consciousness of inspiration was the very condition of its undisturbed placid nourishment and gigantic

---

44 Interestingly, Merman, the pathetic hero of this little moral tale, is obsessed by 'the possible connection of certain symbolic monuments common to widely scattered races...!' - a new Key to all Mythologies?

45 Impressions of Theophrastus Such, III, p. 64.
growth... the demand for definiteness is to all of us a needful check on vague depreciation of what others do, and vague ecstatic trust in our own superior ability. 46

Casaubon's intellectual failure is laid down to a similar indefiniteness: his theory was not likely to bruise itself unawares against discoveries: it floated among flexible conjectures... it was a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate notion of Gog and Magog: it was as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together. 1 (ch. 48, pp. 312-3) 47

The importance of the empirical approach in research, as in life, of contact and, if necessary, of bruising collision with solid facts, is of course central to the novel. The root of Bulstrode's self-deception lies in his evasion of such solid facts: and nemesis overtakes him in the form of a quite unmanageably solid Raffles:

'...sin seemed to be a question of doctrine and inward penitence, humiliation an exercise of the closet, the bearing of his deeds a matter of private vision adjusted solely by spiritual relations and conceptions of the divine purposes. And now, as if by some hideous magic, this loud red figure had risen before him in unmanageable solidity...!' (ch. 53, p. 382)

Lydgate, on the other hand, at least in his scientific endeavours, has a sound perception of the way in which imagination, at its purest,

46 ibid., IV, p. 77-8.
47 W.J. Harvey, in his essay, 'The Intellectual Background of the Novel,' sketches the history of mythography, the pseudo-science - involving pseudo-linguistics - in which Casaubon is engaged. (Critical Approaches, pp. 31-5)
functions: that 'imagination which is not mere arbitrariness, but the exercise of disciplined power - combining and constructing with the clearest eye for probabilities and the fullest obedience to knowledge; and then, in yet more energetic alliance with impartial Nature, standing aloof to invent tests by which to try its own work.'

(ch. 16, p. 249) 'Many men,' continues the narrator, 'have been praised as vividly imaginative on the strength of their profuseness in indifferent drawing or cheap narration...' Similarly, she castigates 'false outward vision' in 'False Testimonials': '...powerful imagination is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation, and a creative energy constantly fed by susceptibility to the veriest mimetiae of experience, which it reproduces and constructs in fresh and fresh wholes...'

---

48 Theophrastus Such, XIII, p. 197.

cf. 'Historic Imagination,' in Leaves from a Note-book: 'By veracious imagination, I mean the working out in detail of the various steps by which a political or social change was reached, using all extant evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation... For want of such real, minute vision of how changes come about in the past, we fall into ridiculously inconsistent estimates of actual movements, condemning in the present what we belaud in the past, and pronouncing impossible processes that have been repeated again and again in the historical preparation of the very system under which we live. A false kind of idealism dulls our perception of the meaning in words when they relate to past events which have had a glorious issue: for lack of comparison no warning image rises to check scorn of the very phrases which in other associations are consecrated.' (Reprinted in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (1963), pp. 446-7)

It is this 'concrete and detailed understanding of the past, with the possibility of 'warning-images,' and its constant traffic with the issues of the present and the future, that George Eliot calls 'veracious imagination.' Anything else is mere 'schemed picturesqueness'; or, as Lewes would put it - 'Falsism.' (cf. 'Realism in Art; Recent German Fiction,' Westminster, LXX (Oct. 1858), 493)
Much earlier in her career, George Eliot had already insisted on the importance of this essential truthfulness of imagination - whether in poet or preacher. In her article, 'Worldliness and Other-worldliness: The Poet Young,' she had written:

The grandiloquent man is never bent on saying what he feels or what he sees, but on producing a certain effect on his audience; hence he may float away into utter inanity without meeting any criterion to arrest him. Here lies the distinction between grandiloquence and genuine fancy or bold imaginativeness. The fantastic or the boldly imaginative poet may be as sincere as the most realistic: he is true to his own sensibilities or inward vision, and in his wildest flights he never breaks loose from his criterion - the truth of his own mental state.

Young was indicted on this basis of a 'disruption of language from genuine thought and feeling,' a 'want of genuine emotion.' And when we are faced with phenomena like Casaubon's proposal letter, and the 'frigid rhetoric,' which George Eliot compares to the 'cawing of an amorous rook,' (ch. 5, p. 72) we are perhaps in a better position than the inexperienced Dorothea for noticing this disruption - as also of observing how 'Generalities are the refuge at once of deficient intellectual activity and deficient feeling.'

The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own. (ch. 5, p. 71)

The tendency to generalise, then, to float off into a limbo,

---

50 ibid., p. 371.
remote from truth of fact and feeling, was an object of George
Eliot's contempt from her Westminster days and earlier. Intellectually,
this is Casaubon's fatal flaw: his attempt to 'climb to heaven by
the rainbow bridge of "the high priori road"' - unlike the scholar,
Gruppe, for example, whom she commended in an early article, for
being 'content humbly to use his muscles in treading the uphill
a posteriori path which will lead, not indeed to heaven, but to an
eminence, whence we may see very bright and blessed things on earth.'
51
Casaubon, on the other hand, takes the rainbow bridge, like the
priest in A College Breakfast Party:

'His thought takes rainbow-bridges, out of reach
By solid obstacles, evaporates
The coarse and common into subtilities
.........................and begs
(Just in parenthesis) you'll never mind
What stares you in the face and bruises you.'
52
Casaubon, too, avoids 'solid obstacles' and bruising facts.53 In


53 W.J. Harvey has emphasised the pseudo-scientific nature of the approach to myth that Casaubon typifies: the mythographic interpretation being based on the 'orthodox prepossessions of writers such as Bryant, who saw in the Greek legends simply misrepresentations of the authentic history given in the book of Genesis' - as George Eliot herself put it, in her review of Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect (Westminster, LIV (Jan. 1851), 353-68; reprinted in Pinney, p. 36). Mythographers were apparently not above a certain plasticity in arranging chronologies to support their theses, a by-passing of the truth in a none-too-rarified sense. (Critical Approaches, pp. 33-4)
Dorothea, he looks for a 'soft fence' against the abrasive world without and the 'muffled suggestions of consciousness' within. Casaubon longs desperately for an insulated world: insulated from the sharpness and vitality of fact and feeling.

It is this withdrawal from contact with solid obstacles, whether intellectual or emotional, that Dorothea almost physically experiences as 'foggy.' (ch.29, p. 14) He, like the other egoists in the novel, is cocooned by years of self-justification and rationalisation - that 'intricate thickness, like masses of spider-web, padding the moral sensibility.' (ch. 61, p. 129) Where his padding is not complete, it lets in not light, but pain. And, finally, he dies, in a psycho-physiological irony, of fatty degeneration of the heart.

His insulation against life is the cause of his death: but, after all, in this, as George Eliot makes clear, he is typical rather than otherwise: for 'the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.' (ch. 20, p. 293) 'Stupidity,' in her terms, of course, refers precisely to that 'padding of the moral sensibility,' from which Bulstrode suffers, from which all the egoists in the novel suffer, not excluding Dorothea herself: 'We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects - that he had an equivalent centre of self...' (ch. 21, p. 323)
What Dorothea has to emerge from is just that padding, that wadding, muffling the 'directness of sense,' that isolates her unredeemed husband. The psychological and moral process is seen, characteristically, in physiological terms - as a kind of stripping to the quick of the nerves and the senses. Fatty degeneration means death: and when Casaubon does finally encounter a moment of 'acute consciousness,' of harsh, unmitigable reality, it is when 'for the first time [he] found himself looking into the eyes of death.'

(ch. 42, pp. 229-30)

One of the adjectives most often found in connection with Dorothea is 'ardent.' In all she does, she needs fervour, enthusiasm - like George Eliot herself, who 'cannot even pour out breakfast well' without it.54 This ardour of Dorothea's is so well-known that it is interesting to consider one of the letters that George Eliot wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe, with whom she maintained a sporadic, but sympathetic correspondence:

'I remember that too you wrote of your husband as one who was richer in Hebrew and Greek than in pounds or shillings, and as the ardent Scholar has always been a character of peculiar interest to me I have rarely had your image in my mind without the accompanying image...of such a scholar by your side.'55

'The ardent Scholar has always been a character of peculiar interest to me': this interest, at the time of writing, had already borne fruit, in the figure of Bardo; and it was destined to come to a second harvest in that of Mordecai. Ardour in scholarship, as in every other human activity, appealed powerfully to George Eliot's sympathies. And there is a peculiar fascination for her in an enthusiasm that by

54GE Letters, 5 June, 1848 (I, 265).
55ibid., 8 May, 1869 (V, 30).
nature of its object might seem to threaten the primacy of that simple human fellowship, that 'deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men,' (ch. 61, p. 133) that she had set up as her ultimate criterion.

This is a conflict that has its roots in George Eliot's earliest outpourings: it forms the painfully and ponderously conscientious undertone of the adolescent letters, of her Evangelical phase: the sense of incompatible loyalties or passions. Human love, music, literature — ardour for these is felt as a direct threat to her dedication to religion.56 There is within her own experience the knowledge of the difficulty of reconciling different ardours: for this reason, perhaps, Barbo's passion for learning, even though it leads him away from the immediate and the human, is seen with a sympathetic eye. And in Mordecai, intellectual and human ardour become one, each serving the other, in the prophetic vision that dominates him.

The 'ardent Scholar,' then, was a focus of special interest for George Eliot throughout her life: it is the non-ardent scholar who rouses feelings in her that are rather more complex. In her review of MacKay's Progress of the Intellect, she undertook a defence of the study of 'the retrospective': 'it would be a very serious mistake,' she wrote, 'to suppose that the study of the past and the labours of criticism have no important practical bearing on the present.' Her

56 See Letters, 18 Aug. 1838 (I, 5); [4] Sept. 1838 (I, 8); 6-8 Nov. 1838 (I, 10); 16 March 1839 (I, 21); 26 Feb. 1840 (I, 39); 23 March 1840 (I, 42); 6 April 1840 (I, 47).
defence is based on two arguments: that a study of the past will quicken the Positivist process of expelling the errors of that past; and that the purely practical, Comtist thinker risks a kind of narrowness in his thought - he may lack the 'susceptibility to the pleasure of changing [his] point of view, of mastering a remote form of thought, of perceiving identity of nature under variety of manifestation - a perception which resembles an expansion of one's own being, a pre-existence in the past.\(^{57}\) At the same time, she concedes some justice to the 'common sarcasms against men of erudition per excellence, that they have rarely been distinguished for warmth of moral sympathy or for fertility and grandeur of conception.'

Scholars, she suggests, tend to lack warmth and creativity. She goes on to praise the ideal nature that combines the qualities of the scholar and of the practical thinker: but what is interesting here is the clear admission of the occupational hazards, as it were, involved in the scholarly life. From her own experience, she knew of these hazards: of the tendency for the minutiae to fill one's vision to the exclusion of all vivifying and creative emotion. Her early scholarly enterprises - the abortive Chart of Ecclesiastical History, and her translation of Strauss's \textit{Leben Jesu} - threatened her with this blockaded sensation - the "sense of moving heavily in a dim and clogging medium" which is Casaubon's lifelong fate. (ch. 50, p. 334)

'\textit{How I nauseate pen, ink, and paper.}'\(^{58}\)


\(^{58}\) \textit{GE Letters}, 31 October, 1844 (I, 183).
Caught in the toils of scholarship, she writes, poignantly and ponderously: 'leathery brain must work at leathery Strauss for a short time before my butterfly days come. O how I shall spread my wings then and caress you with my antennae!' The Casaubon-experience is expressed from within, in that phrase, 'leathery brain must work at leathery Strauss.' Here is no transforming aridity, such as would justify remoteness from human sympathies: here is the mental sensation of heaviness and mechanical labour, unlightened by instinct.

In her reaction from Evangelicalism, with its strenuous demands on consciousness, George Eliot wrote with the righteous indignation of the convert:

'The action of faculty is imperious, and excludes the reflection why it should act. In the same way, in proportion as morality is emotional, (i.e. has affinity with Art,) it will exhibit itself in direct sympathetic feeling and action, and not as the recognition of a rule. Love does not say, "I ought to love" - it loves. Pity does not say, "It is right to be pitiful" - it pities. Justice does not say, "I am bound to be just" - it feels justly. It is only where moral emotion is comparatively weak that the contemplation of a rule or theory habitually mingles with its action...'

This plea for spontaneity in the moral and the emotional life comes with a certain pathos from the Marian Evans who had written to Maria Lewis of a forthcoming marriage: 'I trust that the expected union may ultimately issue in the spiritual benefit of both parties; for my part when I hear of the marrying and giving in marriage that

59 ibid., Aug. 7 1845 (I, 197).
60 'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness' op. cit., p. 379.
is constantly being transacted I can only sigh for those who are multiplying earthly ties, which though powerful enough to detach their heart and thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable to be snapped asunder at every breeze. If spontaneity and passion are being deliberately stifled here, the tone is not remote from that of Casaubon's ill-famed letter of proposal to Dorothea: the same concern to justify, to dignify the emotional is found in Casaubon's 'impression of your eminent and perhaps exclusive fitness to supply that need (connected, I may say, with such activity of the affections as even the preoccupations of a work too special to be abdicated could not uninterruptedly dissimulate);' (ch. 5, pg. 60) — the same tension and portentous solemnity.

To revert to the article on Young, however, — in the healthy moral organism, the 'action of faculty is imperious.' Mary Garth, perhaps the healthiest of the characters in Middlemarch ('a vigorous young mind not overbalanced by passion' (ch. 33, p. 65)), responds to her testing moment of crisis — Mr. Featherstone's last demand for his will — quite instinctively and uncalculatingly: only afterwards she 'began to be more agitated by the remembrance of what she had gone through, than she had been by the reality — questioning those acts of hers which had come imperatively and excluded all question in the critical moment.' (ch. 33, p. 71)

The crucial acts of life 'come imperatively': they reveal the true nature, the accumulated experience of the human being. At critical moments, Lydgate is borne away on a flood-tide of emotion —

61 GE Letters, 18 Aug. 1838 (I, 6).
with Laure, with his casting-vote for Tyke, and - most importantly - with his commitment to Rosamond. To him, these acts 'come imperatively' - even while his other self sees beyond the infatuation: 'He knew that this was like the sudden impulse of a madman - incongruous even with his habitual foibles. No matter!' (ch. 15, p. 231)

Lydgate's acts are ultimately regretted: but at least they are a result of spontaneous feeling: in Casaubon's case, the determining act of his life, the decision to marry Dorothea is undertaken without enthusiasm, in the same 'foggy' climate in which he has pursued his intellectual endeavours. 'Love does not say, "I ought to love" - it loves.' But Mr. Casaubon does say, 'I ought to love' - this is virtually a paraphrase of George Eliot's highly ironic account of his feelings after his engagement:

'...it was now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over the intervals of studious labour with the play of female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the solace of female tendance for his declining years. Hence he determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was.' (ch. 7, p. 91)

His reactions to the glories of Rome are in a similarly passive and impersonal mood. ("Should you like to go to the Farnesina, Dorothea? It contains celebrated frescoes designed or painted by Raphael, which most persons think it worth while to visit"..."They are, I believe, highly esteemed...He is the painter who has been held to combine the most complete grace of form with sublimity of expression. Such at least I have gathered to be the opinion of conoscenti." (ch. 20, pp. 301-2)) This conscientious but 'blank absence of interest
or sympathy affects Dorothea, in her aridency, 'with a sort of mental shiver.' (ch. 20, p. 301) Even in his intellectual life, Casaubon is far from the 'ardent Scholar' who had fascinated George Eliot all her life. Ardour implies purpose, or a longing for purpose: and 'poor Mr. Casaubon...was lost among small closets and winding stairs, and...easily lost sight of any purpose which had prompted him to these labours.' (ch. 20, pp. 302-3)

Intellectually, as well as emotionally, he 'has got no good red blood in his body' (ch. 8, p. 104) - it is all semicolons and parentheses. In some essential way, his deficiencies as a scholar and as a man are seen as integrally connected. It is the same 'small hungry shivering self' (ch. 29, p. 12) that blocks off rapture of any kind, self-transcendence of any kind - 'the vividness of a thought, the ardour, the energy of an action.' As Felix Holt explained to Esther: "It comes to the same thing; thoughts, opinions, knowledge, are only a sensibility to facts and ideas..." 62 Ultimately, the ground of personality, of accumulated experience, is one: Casaubon, in his negation, is the fore-runner of Hordecai in his affirmation.

Ardour in one sphere of life may seem to endanger involvement in another: the ardent scholar may risk losing 'warmth of moral sympathy.' But finally, George Eliot sees such a loss, such a remoteness from life, as a failure in the vitality of the scholar, as well as the man. She herself had known this experience of 'anhedonia'; 63 the draining of

62 Felix Holt (ch. 10, p. 182).

vitality from intellect and emotion alike. In depicting Casaubon's 'swampy' inner world, she wrote as one who had been through the Slough of Despond, and still had not shaken off its clogging effects.

Around the time of the writing of Middlemarch, George Eliot's letters contain a sprinkling of the usual references to despondency and illness. Perhaps the most general and revealing reference occurs in the letter to Harriet Beecher Storew, from which we have already quoted. She writes that her American friend's letter 'made me almost wish that you could have a momentary vision of the discouragement, nay, paralyzing despondency in which many days of my writing life have been past, in order that you might fully understand the good I find in such sympathy as yours - in such an assurance as you give me that my work has been worth doing. But I will not dwell on any mental sickness of mine.'

The paralysis, the need for assurance and sympathy, the general hasty summing-up, 'mental sickness' - these are veins that run through her personality, even before the beginning of her 'writing life.' Subjectively, at least, they are exactly parallel to Casaubon's experience, his inner climate.

Further references again remind us of Casaubon's laborious 'creeping paralysis.' - references to 'those often-recurring hours of despondency which, after cramping my activity ever since I began to write, continue still to beset me with, I fear, a malign influence on my writing.' A few months later, the tone of despair grows sharper:

64 GE Letters, 8 May 1869 (V, 29).
65 ibid., 23 December 1871 (V, 229).
...my life for the last year having been a sort of nightmare in which I have been scrambling on the slippery bank of a pool, just keeping my head above water."66 And to Emanuel Deutsch, she had written, as a fellow-worker, to urge him out of his depression: 'Hopelessness has been to me, all through my life, but especially in painful years of my youth, the chief source of wasted energy with all the consequent bitterness of regret."67

The 'swampy feeling was, then, not unknown to her; but especially in the 'painful years' of her youth, as she looks back on them, she manifested what we may read as almost the full gamut of the 'Casaubon-tints' in her complexion. The heaviness, the scholarly pomposity, the clogging of emotion, we have noticed already. It is when we come closest to the 'moral' aspects of Casaubon's personality, to those aspects that Leslie Stephen found quite incompatible with the kind of pity which is akin to love - it is just in these aspects that we can see a reflection of George Eliot's own - especially youthful - experience.

To refer back once more to F.H. Myers's anecdote - it was Casaubon's 'temptations of jealous vanity, of bitter resentment,' that George Eliot found within her own life-experience. A glance at some of the passages in which these aspects of Casaubon's character are analysed will isolate the points for comparison. George Eliot writes of Casaubon's 'uneasy susceptibility...a morbid consciousness that others did not give him the place which he had not demonstrably

66 ibid., 19? Aug. 1872 (V, 301).
67 ibid., 7 July 1871 (V,160).
merited - a perpetual suspicious conjecture that the views entertained of him were not to his advantage..." (ch. 42, p. 219) His inner suspicion and discontent 'passed vapour-like through all' the loving assurances Dorothea could give him: he interprets every motion of hers as proof of his suspicions, and the 'tenacity with which he strove to hide this inward drama made it the more vivid for him; as we hear with the more keenness what we wish others not to hear.' (ch. 42, p. 221) This 'mental sickness' of his, which we might be tempted to label paranoia, is, after all, partially justified by the author: for, in fact, his suspicion that he is 'not any longer adored without criticism,' is based on a 'strong reason' - 'that he was not unmixedly adorable.'

The account of his tormented and jealous 'weaving work' is extraordinarily realistic. Suspicion, imagination, jealousy, self-doubt lead this man of learning into Featherstone's absurdity of imagining that he should have any enjoyment or frustration, after his death, in the lives of those who remained behind:68 - to a level of action that 'made him

68 '...if one of those people [who would be the happier when he was gone] should be Will Ladislaw, Mr. Casaubon objected so strongly that it seemed as if the annoyance would make part of his disembodied existence.' (ch. 42, pp. 223-4) This irrational imagination leads to the cocicil in his will, and to the analogy with Featherstone, pointed up by the Volume-title, 'The Dead Hand,' and by Featherstone's mischievous will, and 'programme for his burial': 'We are all of us imaginative in some form or other, for images are the brood of desire; and poor old Featherstone, who laughed much at the way in which others cajoled themselves, did not escape the fellowship of illusion. In writing the programme for his burial he certainly did not make clear to himself that his pleasure in the little drama of which it formed a part was confined to anticipation. In chuckling over the vexations he could inflict by the rigid clutch of his dead hand, he inevitably singled his consciousness with that livid stagnant presence, and so far as he was preoccupied with a future life, it was with one of gratification inside his coffin. Thus old Featherstone was imaginative, after his fashion.' (ch. 34, p. 77).
defeat his own pride by shocking men of ordinary honour." (ch. 50, p. 335)

The tortured consciousness of self from which this complicated suffering arises is, it seems clear, not a construct of George Eliot's imagination. Repeatedly, in her letters and in her published writings, she showed that she knew such a suffering all too intimately. The self-doubt, the sense of physical gracelessness, of lack of charm, of not being 'unmixedly adorable,' the pathetic attempts to disguise this aching awareness, in one form or another, are there in many of the early letters, in particular:

"'unstable as water, thou shalt not excel" seems to be my character..."\(^69\)

'...there seems a probability...of my being severed from all the ties that have hitherto given my existence the semblance of a usefulness beyond that of making up the requisite quantum of animal matter in the universe...do you not think I shall be a stunted shrub?...And to tell you the truth, I begin to feel involuntarily isolated, and without being humble, to have such a consciousness that I am a negation of all that finds love and esteem as makes me anticipate for myself - no matter what..."\(^70\)

"The bliss of reciprocated affection is not allotted to you under any form..."\(^71\)

'...mine is too often...a walled-in world."\(^72\)

'...my pallid mind..."\(^73\)

'I...have thought my soul only fit for Limbo to keep company with other abortions, and my life the shallowest, muddiest, most unblessing stream."\(^74\)

'I...must wonder by what strange hallucination fellow beings are attracted towards [me]."\(^75\)

\(^{69}\) \textit{Letters}, 6 Feb. 1839 (I, 14).
\(^{70}\) ibid., 23 May 1840 (I, 50-1).
\(^{71}\) ibid., 20 Oct. 1840 (I, 70).
\(^{72}\) ibid., 27 Oct. 1840 (I, 71).
\(^{73}\) ibid., 21 Dec. 1840 (I, 76).
\(^{74}\) ibid., 3 Nov. 1842 (I, 150).
\(^{75}\) ibid., 4 Nov. 1842 (I, 151).
"What should you say to my becoming a wife? Should you think it a duty to...warn him from putting on such a matrimonial hair-shirt as he would have with me?"\(^76\)

'I can take myself up by the ears and inspect myself, like any other queer monster on a small scale.'\(^77\)

'...poor tentative efforts of the Mater Princip to mould a personality...It seems to me as if I were shrinking into that mathematical abstraction, a point...like a poor sprite metamorphosed into a pomegranate seed or some such thing.'\(^78\)

In a sense, the full history of George Eliot's 'Casaubon-consciousness,' if we may term it that, can be summed up in two of her most whimsical letters - two in which she succeeds in 'mythologising,' objectifying her pain, to the point where it can be smiled at, at the least. The first letter is an account of a mock-proposal from a musty German professor - author of 'at least twenty volumes, all unpublished, owing to the envious machinations of rival authors, none of them treating of anything more modern than Cheops, or the invention of the hieroglyphics.' His requirement being 'a wife and translator in one' plus 'personal ugliness and a snug little capital,' he 'finds his utmost wishes realised' in Miss Evans, who promptly accepts the proposal, 'thinking that it may be her last chance.'\(^79\)

Besides the figure of the learned Professor, who acts as an obvious caricature-prototype of Casaubon, the painful self-awareness,

\(^76\) ibid., 21 April 1845 (I, 183).

\(^77\) ibid., 13 Oct. 1847 (I, 239-40).

\(^78\) ibid., 4 June 1848 (I, 264).

\(^79\) ibid. Editor's note 3, to letter of 5 Nov. 1846 (I, 226); quoted from Nathilde Blind, George Eliot, (1883), pp. 46-7.
the whimsical self-mockery of the letter, clearly serves as therapy, a sublimation of self-pity, for Marian Evans. The self-image suggested, however, is far from appealing or romantic.

Similarly, in the second of these outbursts of whimsy, Marian recounts a mock-legend of her creation by a very young and inexperienced sprite - 'a rough though unmistakeable sketch of a human baby.' Mother Nature, 'being rather cross-grained in her cups,' after rollicking all the autumn in the vintage, bad-temperedly wants to smother this fiasco of a Homunculus; but eventually is prevailed upon by the pitying sprites to preserve it, on the grounds that they will create many kind friends for it, "and they shall love and cherish and guard its poor rickety soul"...so that at last it grew to think and to love. 80

This little myth is extraordinary in its real vitality of detail - its sheer zest of humour and imagination. It marks, of course, an important phase in George Eliot's own transcendence of self-torment and self-pity. The escape-route is, characteristically, through that human love whose function it is 'to mitigate the harshness of all fatalities.' 81 And throughout her life, probably because of her own deep gratitude for and dependence on this kind of love, she was to feel a special tenderness for those who suffer - mentally or physically. It is simply the need for sympathy that summons it from her. 'I have a trick,' she was to write, 'of caring more for anyone who has a trouble than for those who seem quite scathless.' 82

80 ibid., 23 Nov. 1848 (I, 273).
81 ibid., 14 May, 1867 (IV, 364).
82 ibid., 25 June 1867 (IV, 369).
It is for this reason, of shared, and not merely theoretically described experience, that the descriptions of Casaubon are so powerful. The 'pathos of a lot where everything is below the level of tragedy except the passionate egoism of the sufferer,' was a pathos especially appealing to the woman who had been Marian Evans—who had suffered the resentments and jealousies and self-distaste of her relations with Dr. Brabant, and Spencer and Chapman.

Brabant has been suggested as a source for Casaubon. The similarities consisted of his, too, being engaged, for years, on a great scholarly work, which came to nothing, and of the possibility that Marian's early infatuation for him and his learning may have paralleled Dorothea's hopes from her marriage with Casaubon. (cf. Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and her Art (Cambridge 1948), p. 119—writes of Maggie's feeling for Philip in The Mill on the Floss: 'The combination of attractions by which she is bound to him resemble those that draw Dorothea to Casaubon in Middlemarch; it is obvious in both novels that George Eliot has a complete understanding of this type of experience...' She suggests that her relation with Dr. Brabant may have been the 'seed of George Eliot's understanding of what Dorothea felt for Casaubon.' (p. 38) She also quotes Eliza Lynn Linton's rather spiteful account of Dr. Brabant: "...a learned man who used up his literary energies in thought and desire to do rather than in actual doing, and whose fastidiousness made his work something like Penelope's web...he never got further than the introductory chapter of a book which he intended to be epoch making, and the final destroyer of superstition and theological dogma.' (p. 37)

After her disillusionment with Dr. Brabant, Marian writes resentfully of his 'reputation ague,' (Sept. 1844, (I, 161)) and later still, in a tone of resentment and petulance that is rather Casaubon-like in itself. (5 Nov. 1846 (I, 225); 23 Feb. 1847 (I, 231-2) However, since Dr. Brabant really was a scholar, and knew the German critics, the analogy is far from complete. Perhaps the most we can say is, as we have suggested in the case of Mark Pattison, that Marian Evans, like the magnet that draws iron shavings to itself, automatically selected those aspects of those of her friends and acquaintances that corresponded to what she knew of the Casaubon-consciousness within herself.
This particular pathos of a self-rejected consciousness, of a personality aware that it is in some way crippled, disqualified for life, finds its most powerful expression, perhaps, in her 'jeu de mélancolie' - The Lifted Veil. This, for instance, is how Latimer, the hyper-sensitive hero, describes himself: 'I thoroughly disliked my own physique and nothing but the belief that it was a condition of poetic genius would have reconciled me to it. That brief hope was quite fled, and I saw in my face nothing but the stamp of a morbid organisation, framed for passive suffering - too feeble for the sublime resistance of poetic production.'

This 'morbidly sensitive nature perpetually craving sympathy and support,' is in love with the heartless Bertha, and completely at her mercy: 'no wonder, then, that an enthusiastic self-distrusting youth should watch and wait before the closed secret of a sarcastic woman's face, as if it were the shrine of the doubtfully benignant deity who ruled his destiny.' Rejected by her, his 'self-consciousness was heightened to that pitch of intensity in which our own emotions take the form of a drama which urges itself imperatively on our contemplation, and we begin to weep, less under the sense of our suffering than at the thought of it. I felt a sort of pitying anguish over the pathos of my own lot: the lot of a being finely organised for pain, but with hardly any fibres that responded to pleasure - to whom the idea of future evil robbed the present of its joy, and for whom the idea of future good did not still the uneasiness of a present yearning or a present dread.'

He is exquisitely aware, through his gift of

84 The Lifted Veil (ch. 1, p. 295).
85 ibid. (ch. 1, pp. 297-8).
86 ibid. (ch. 2, p. 311).
insight, of the contempt and ridicule with which others see him.

Finally, his own prophetic vision of Prague is like Casaubon's attitude to present needs, petrified in the past: 'a city under the broad sunshine, that seemed to me as if it were the summer sunshine of a long-past century arrested in its course - unrefreshed for ages by the dews of night, or the rushing rain-cloud; seorching the dusty, weary, time-eaten grandeur of a people doomed to live on in the stale repetition of memories...It is such grim, stony beings as these, I thought, who are the fathers of ancient faded children...who worship wearily in the stifling air of the churches, urged by no fear or hope, but compelled by their doom to be ever old and undying, to live on in the rigidity of habit, as they live on in perpetual midday, without the repose of night or the new birth of morning.'

The passage is highly reminiscent of Mr. Casaubon carrying his taper among the tombs of the past. It becomes a symbol of Latimer's own fate, of a death-in-life; only this is a 'perpetual midday,' unlike Casaubon's perpetual darkness.

At the other end of her writing career, George Eliot created another such morbidly uncomfortable character, reminiscent of Latimer in his self-consciousness, his mixture of ambition, shyness and self-ridicule. Theophrastus Such, the anti-hero and cynical narrator of the foibles and follies of humanity, lays his ground by mocking himself, by pricking the balloon of his own self-esteem, and thus establishing kinship with - and

87 ibid., (ch. 1, p. 287).
the right to ridicule - the rest of humanity:

'When I was a lad I danced a hornpipe with arduous scrupulosity, and while suffering pangs of pallid shyness was yet proud of my superiority as a dancing pupil, imagining for myself a high place in the estimation of beholders; but I can now picture the amusement they had in the incongruity of my solemn face and ridiculous legs. What sort of hornpipe am I dancing now?'

His mistrust of the figure he cuts, his haunting suspicion that at this very moment someone is sniggering at him, his sense of physical gawkiness, force him into a self-protective pose (as though he were an invulnerable combination of Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch).

George Eliot presents her character through his own words, without comment or implied criticism; it is difficult to know how, or if, she is 'placing' him at all. It seems very possible that, to a large extent, she is identifying herself with her harp-tongued and melancholy narrator - at least to the extent that she is to be identified with her narrative voice in any of her novels. In that case, through the masks of the created character, with all its detailed documentation, can be discerned this basic trait of her own self-distaste, the suspicion of one's image on the retina of others - 'We sing an exquisite passage out of tune and innocently repeat it for the greater pleasure of our hearers.'

There is a kind of deliberate masochism, a conscious arousal of embarrassment and pain here, that seems to rise from something less

---

88 Theophrastus Such, I, 5.


89 Theophrastus Such, p. 4.
impersonal and detached than a merely pathological case-history. George Eliot here seems to be protesting rather too much.

George Eliot, then, from the mysterious alchemy of personal experience and secondary experience, worked on by imagination, created Casaubon. There is much of her in the learned divine, perhaps as much of her as there is in Dorothea (pace Lewes, who wrote to Blackwood, in his jubilation: "Surely Dorothea is the very cream of lovely womanhood? She is more like her creator than any one else and more so than any other of her creations. Only those who know her (Dodo- or her creator) under all aspects can have any idea of her."

And here we come to what seems to me to be the crux of the matter: if George Eliot created Casaubon out of the very heart of her own nature and experience, out of that same existential source from which Dorothea emerged, then it would seem that something very important is being said in Middlemarch about personality, and the ways in which it is described and known. It seems to me that some very awkward questions are raised in the novel, and are not entirely resolved. As if of malice afore-thought (and indeed, this particular malice is sure to have been afore-thought), George Eliot confuses the genial easy categories conventionally resorted to, in novel reading and in life.

The most famous and obvious example of this deliberate arrest of the reader's expectations occurs at the beginning of Chapter 29:

---

90 *GE Letters*, 10 Sept. 1872 (V, 308).
One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea - but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect. In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us."

(ch. 29, p. 9)

What George Eliot is attempting here is something, at least on the surface, quite irrational. She is, in a word, trying to blur our sense of the distinctions between people, between personalities. The rational reader may be tempted to rise up against her imperious and rhetorical questions, and declare that the difference between Dorothea and Casaubon lies deeper than a blooming skin and white moles - that to reduce his sympathy for the heroine to this level is not to do him justice.

Nevertheless, the seemingly irrational attack on our assumptions floodlights our own irrationalities. In so far as we sympathise with Sir James, for instance, in his physical disgust for Mr. Casaubon - and probably most readers do - we are open to the author's shrewd hit about 'the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James.' For what George Eliot is implying is that our judgments, our estimation, our perception of each other is a tangled complex of the physical and the spiritual, the aesthetic and the moral. At root, she is asking: What is the personality, that we are so sure of the difference between a Casaubon and a Dorothea: so sure of the better object for our sympathy?
the core of consciousness of the individual is approached, what happens to these differences? 'Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungred like the rest of us.'

If this hunger lies at the core of each of us, then do the differences amount to much more than the blooming skin and the white moles, after all?

I have, of course, overstated the question. George Eliot is not actually declaring that there is no basis for differentiating between one personality and another. It seems to me that she is simply, and with quiet persistence, asking the question, as a kind of ground-bas throughout the novel.

There is a passage in Lewes's *Study of Psychology*, which is directly relevant to this question. Discussing the freedom of the will, Lewes suggests that there is 'something more' to men's obstinate belief that they are free than Spinoza's diagnosis that 'they are conscious of their actions but ignorant of the causes.' 'What is this something more? It is our conception of a Personality, which is not limited to the momentary feelings, and not exhausted in the individual act. The mere feeling does not suffice...In a voluntary act, there is the intervention of the *we*: that is to say, accompanying the feeling of the act itself there is a vague feeling of the act as one manifestation of a variously manifesting Self.' This feeling leads us to postulate the existence of an abstract *Will*, which dominates individual choices...

91 (1879), pp. 106-111. This was the first Problem of the *Problems of Life and Mind*, which George Eliot worked so anxiously to prepare for separate publication, after Lewes's death.
an idea that is 'not tenable when we reduce the abstraction to its concretes in subjective and objective terms, and view the Will as the generalised expression of all volitional impulses.'

We do, however, says Lewes, have a power to arrest, and re-direct the action of our organs, or thoughts. The biologist recognises the 'facts of self-formation' - that with this control of the organs, 'we can place ourselves under the tutelage of Experience' and even alter the immediate reflex of the mechanism. Therefore, since 'the Will is...the abstract expression of the product of Experience, it is educable, and becomes amenable to the Moral Law.' The freedom of the will thus amounts to 'the sense that we have a range of motives surveyed by a Personality which is the incorporation of our past experience, and carries the prevision of alternative futures.'

This, then, is Lewes's reduction of the concept of personality - 'the incorporation of our past experiences.' George Eliot too sets up a series of 'experiments in life,' melting down the rigidity of this concept. "Character is not cut in marble...It is something living and changing." (ch. 72, p. 310) - what is implied is more than the redeemability of the human being: character, the personality, becomes infinitely fluid, unseizable. If it is merely an accumulation of past experiences, every moment of active existence, of fresh experience, can alter its pattern. Definitions, descriptions become obsolete in the moment of utterance.

There are several points at which this vision of personality comes to the surface in Middlemarch. The discussion from which we have
just quoted is one such point: the disagreement between Dorothea and Farebrother about Lydgate's guilt. Here, Dorothea, apparently soaring into mysticism, is in fact being more consequent and realistic than the more cynical Farebrother. If character is not something solid and unalterable, then one may go a step further than Farebrother's pessimism: "Then it may be rescued and healed" - for, as Lewes puts it, Personality 'carries the prevision of alternative futures.'

Dorothea herself has experienced all too keenly this sense of fluidity in her impression of people. After Casaubon's death, he changes for her - posthumously, as it were: the uneasy, almost ghost-like experience is described, through a physiological image:

'She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs... Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did.' (ch. 50, pp. 330-1)

Casaubon has become a figure of nightmare for her: his form has become fluid and unknown. This violent experience of the shift in personality-structure of her husband is of course complicated by the fact of Dorothea's intervening - and distorting - consciousness. The pier-glass image at the beginning of Chapter 27 is the central parable

of the novel - relevant not only to cases of gross egotism, such as Rosamond's, but to the workings of consciousness in every human being.\(^{93}\) The change in Casaubon, retrospectively, is therefore largely a change in Dorothea's consciousness of him: but even allowing for this inevitable factor of distortion, a question is raised in Dorothea's mind, and, I would suggest, in the reader's mind: 'Who was Casaubon?'

This unnerving sense of sea-change is experienced again by Dorothea, in her perception of Will, at the crisis of the novel (Chapter 80). He becomes for her, in her nightmare vision, 'two images - two living forms that tore her heart in two, as if it had been the heart of a mother who seems to see her child divided by the sword...'. There is the Will of the past, the redeeming bright 'spirit of morning,' for whom she only now discovers her passion. And simultaneously, she sees the other Will, 'a changed belief exhausted of hope, a detected illusion...'

(ch. 80, pp. 388-9) The personality of the young man whom she had seemed to know is fragmented and dissolved: incompatibles co-exist, both are 'persistently with her, moving wherever she moved.' One is almost reminded of the two images that Hamlet shows his mother: her two husbands, poles apart from each other, yet both loved by her, both expressing her 'personality.'\(^{94}\)

\(^{93}\) cf. Hilda Hulme's interesting suggestion that the image might have owed something to Lewes's discussion of what he considered Spinoza's one fallacy: the absoluteness of human consciousness. Lewes quotes from Bacon's *Novum Organum* in support of his contention: the human understanding is an 'unequal' mirror to the rays of things which, mixing its own nature with the nature of things, distorts and perverts them.' ('The Language of the Novel - Imagery,' *Critical Approaches*, p. 123)

\(^{94}\) This device, of presenting two possible images for contemplation and moral edification is traditional in literature and homiletics - cf. Donne's Sermon Preached at White-hall, Feb. 29, 1628. (in *John Donne: Selected Prose*, chosen by Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1967), p.331)
This sense of the fluidity of the personality is felt, moreover, by several characters of the novel, of themselves. Will feels that more is at stake in Dorothea's good opinion of him than the simple success of a passion. For him, the 'great dread' is of 'becoming dimmed and forever ray-shorn in her eyes.' (ch. 37, p. 144) It is something intrinsic in him that depends upon her vision, her consciousness of him. And it is this self-image that is endangered by Dorothea's misconception of the relations between him and Rosamond.

After the compromising scene with Rosamond, 'it seemed to him as if he were beholding in a magic panorama a future where he himself was sliding into that pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of circumstance...We are on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our future selves, and see our figures led with dull consent into insipid misdoing...!' (ch. 79, pp. 383-4) The relevant words here are 'beholding...magic panorama...look passively...future selves...see our own figures.' Integrity of self crumbles: the consciousness of the 'we' of which Lewes speaks. Through the passive vision, particularly, all is possible.95

95 Lydgate's 'two selves' are also an expression of this fluidity: 'He had two selves within him apparently, and they must learn to accommodate each other and bear reciprocal impediments. Strange, that some of us, with quick alternate vision, see beyond our infatuations, and even while we rave on the heights, behold the wide plain where our persistent self pauses and awaits us.' (ch. 15, p. 231).

These are not merely two facets of Lydgate's personality (the dead metaphor of a diamond's facets would release us from the problem that George Eliot wants us to face - would allow us to assume a single entity of personality, with merely different aspects of it.) Lydgate has no single self, and each of his possible selves is aware of this, aware of the other, in this case - the raving self sees the persistent self on the wide plain, and the persistent self 'pauses and awaits' the raving self. Lydgate is an uneasy amalgam of selves.
There is, perhaps, ground for suggesting that this sense of fluidity is a characteristic of passivity, of weakness — in spite of the fact that it assails Dorothea — who is anything but passive by nature — at crucial points in her experience. I should like to return to her later: now, it will be sufficient just to indicate how two of the passive characters, Fred and Rosamond, regard themselves. Fred's salvation depends very largely on Mary's existence and view of him:

"In fact, it is probable that but for Mary's existence and Fred's love for her, his conscience would have been much less active... Even much stronger mortals than Fred Vincy hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they love best... Certainly it would have made a considerable difference to Fred at that time if Mary Garth had had no decided notions as to what was admirable in character." (ch. 24, pp. 368-0)

Fred, in his unredeemed state, is a decidedly passive character. After the contents of Featherstone's will have become known, he is 'utterly depressed. Twenty-four hours ago he had thought that instead of needing to know what he should do, he should by this time know that he needed to do nothing...' (ch. 36, p. 105) Rosamond, too, in her different way, invests her strength in passivity. Her significant motto is expressed in her reaction to Lydgate's troubles: 'What can I do...?' Her typical reaction is non-active: 'restraining any show of her deep disappointment, and intrenching herself in quiet passivity under her husband's wrath.' (ch. 65, p. 201) (my italics)

Rosamond's passivity is proportionate to the extent to which she thinks of herself as mirrored in the eyes of others: as an object of adoration, even of adulterous passion, but with all the passion, all the
despair on the side of the lover. First, Lydgate had been the stimulant to 'delightful dreams': later, he is replaced in her fantasy-world by Will Ladislaw. In his presence, 'she felt that agreeable titillation of vanity and sense of romantic drama which Lydgate's presence had no longer the magic to create.' (ch.75, p. 337)

Her passive fancies 'constructed a little romance which was to vary the flatness of her life: Will Ladislav was always to be a bachelor and live near her, always to be at her command, and have an understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes.' (ch. 75, p. 338)

Her essential life is lived out in these dreams. So that when her troubles multiply, she falls into an acute state of torpor, as though the breath of life is denied her. She sits at home in languid melancholy and suspense: Will's coming is the sole focus of her existence. There is a pathological - and peculiarly feminine - process of breakdown going on within her: she 'sat down to the piano, meaning to play, and then desisting, yet lingering on the music stool with her white fingers suspended on the wooden front, and looking before her in dreamy ennui.' (ch. 77, p. 364) - so that Lydgate shrinks from this 'perpetual silent reproach of hers.'

Her state, in fact, could almost be diagnosed as that described in a book which had made a very deep impression on George Eliot and a translation of which she had read in 1840. This was L'Éducation des mères de famille, by Louis Aimé-Martin. Of this discussion of the desirable education of women, to a sense of their own dignity, to the
wise choice of husbands, and to responsible behaviour in marriage, George Eliot wrote that it was the 'most philosophical and masterly book' on the subject I ever read or glanced over.\textsuperscript{95a}

What she actually read in 1840 apparently was an anonymous English adaptation of the French original. This was a general attack on current notions of women's education, the emphasis on externals, on valueless accomplishments; and it culminated in a plea to women to remain within the private sphere, not to attempt to enter the larger world of affairs: 'Our first, most peremptory, and most urgent duty is, the improvement of our own character.'\textsuperscript{95b}

In 1842, however, a more faithful translation of the French original appeared: \textit{The Education of Mothers of Families}, which ends with an interesting section written by the translator, Edwin Lee, 'Remarks on Education.' Here, he quotes from various contemporary authorities on nervous diseases, and their ideal breeding-ground in female education. That George Eliot read this version as well as the earlier one is doubtful, though quite possible; since, however, the material is relevant to our study of Rosamond and illuminating of contemporary ideas on the relation between nervous disease and moral degeneration, it will be interesting to look briefly at Lee's collocation of opinions on the subject.

\textsuperscript{95a} \textit{GE Letters}, 17 Sept. 1840 (I, 66).

\textsuperscript{95b} \textit{Woman's Mission} (1839), 98.
"Man is destined to act," writes one authority, "to act with energy and intelligence...a thousand impulses unceasingly solicit him to manifest himself by his acts. Idleness is not only condemned by the moral code, but likewise by the laws of health. It is not merely the mother of vices, but likewise the mother of diseases, especially of nervous diseases." Women's frivolous education, laying the stress on coquetry and its arts, and neglecting the mind and spirit, leave them prey to vacancy and ennui: "They can only avoid the sufferings which oppress them by abandoning to circumstances, or to their inclinations, the care of giving rise to a frivolous and dangerous object of activity." 96

"By far the greater portion of the young ladies (for they are no longer women)," writes another author, "of the present day are distinguished by a morbid listlessness of mind and body except when under the influence of stimulus, a constant pining for excitement, and an eagerness to escape from everything like practical and individual duty." 97 Women aim at "accomplishments rather than acquirements, at gilding rather than gold" - and this leads them into nervous disorders, once the specious excitements of girlhood are over, and new sources of stimulation and excitement are not so easily forthcoming.

This could almost be a case-book account of Rosamond's condition: the concern for accomplishments, appearances, the nervous disease to which she falls prey, the need for constant stimulation. The root of the problem lies in the fact that her total self is invested in these

97 ibid., p. 366.
fantasy-satisfactions: she has no solid core of personality. And the trauma she undergoes when Will, her last hope, turns against her, is precisely the shattering of this essential fantasy-self:

'Rosamond, while these poisoned weapons were being hurled at her, was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence... The poor thing had no force to fling out any passion in return; the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her: her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness.'
(ch. 78, pp. 377-9)

Rosamond, in her crisis, has lost her sense of self: she is in a floating, phantasmagoric world. When the two women, Rosamond and Dorothea, meet at this juncture, both are suffering from this sense of disintegration: they are both 'in a shipwreck.' (ch. 81, p. 406). And they are both saved by Dorothea's action, that sets off the 'generous effort' in Rosamond, which is, though unrealised by Dorothea herself, 'a reflex of her own energy.' (ch. 81, p. 407)

'A fine act' has this power, George Eliot believes; 'it produces a sort of regenerating shudder through the frame, and makes one feel ready to begin a new life.' (ch. 66, p. 219)

It is action, the 'fine act,' that has this power of creativity, of renewal. The characters of the novel, in moments of activity, create themselves, in a quite literal sense. We are here involved in a consideration of George Eliot's views on determinism and free-will. In terms of her vision of the world, man is so bound by so many determining factors, that he may well be tempted to see his life as a
'creeping paralysis,' as Lydgate does. It is "uncommonly difficult to make the right thing work: there are so many strings pulling at once," is Lydgate's answer to Dorothea's crucial question about Farebrother: "Why has he not done more?" (ch. 50, p. 337)

How to act in such a world, is the central problem of Dorothea, and of almost all the characters in Middlemarch. In Dorothea's case, it is a question of finding an outlet for her characteristic ardour, her energy. What form can activity take where aspiration is constantly mocked by achievement? Dorothea places no importance at all on simply being: on the intrinsic value of her personality. She must do: "What can I do?" is her cry to activity, as it is Rosamond's to passivity.

Dorothea, at the beginning of her 'deep experience' is 'oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do?... (ch. 3, p. 39) The 'summer haze,' the indefiniteness, is the 'foggy' climate of Casaubon's world, of which we have spoken. And George Eliot, with the exquisite balance of counteracting ironies that marks this novel, defends Dorothea from our easy cynicism. For her not to have felt the anguish of such longing, at this point, 'and in her circumstances, would have been to endow her with 'stupidity and conceit.' Moreover, her thirst for activity has a humility about it: she envisages it as a different, better kind of submission; it 'would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path.'
She is prepared, then, for the hard lesson that awaits her: she is taken all too literally at her word, and finds her form of moral action in passivity, in renunciation. At first, in the initial shock of her marriage, she is conscious only of 'moral imprisonment' - of a sense of 'busy ineffectiveness.' (ch. 28, pp. 3-4) Her sense of connection with a wider life has, more painfully than ever, to be kept up 'as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies. - 'What shall I do?'

'Whatever you please, my dear:' that had been her brief history since she had left off learning morning lessons and practising silly rhythms on the hated piano. Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty.' She is in a nightmare world of near-death, where every object is 'withering and shrinking away from her.' Life is 'disenchanted,' 'deadened as an unlit transparency.'

Her quest for some form of 'active wifely devotion,' drives her forward, nevertheless. The nightmare deepens: her suffering is bound to silence (if only for fear of her husband's health):

'...she sat listening, frightened, wretched - with a dumb inward cry for help to bear this nightmare of a life in which every energy was arrested by dread.' (ch. 37, p. 155) Her marriage-experience gradually paralyses her native ardour: it is 'a perpetual struggle of energy with fear.' (ch. 39, p. 176) The crisis of her relation to Casaubon is reached after he has heard from Lydgate the truth of his condition. Her 'impulse' is to go at once to her husband. 'But
she hesitated, fearing to offend him by obtruding herself; for her ardour, continually repulsed, served, with her intense memory, to heighten her dread, as thwarted energy subsides into a shudder.'

(ch. 42, p. 230) She goes, nevertheless, and his unresponsive hardness, his rigid arm, is 'horrible' to her. This for her is a crucial moment: 'In such a crisis as this, some women begin to hate' — a hatred born of continual, unrecognised repression.

Here, it is illuminating to notice what I have earlier referred to as the mythic fascination which the possible torment within a marriage held for George Eliot. Intuitively, one would guess that some bitter personal experience (the 'affair' with Chapman, possibly) lay at the root of an apparently general observation such as she makes in The Lifted Veil (which can be seen as a paradigmatic fable for this particular kind of marital claustrophobia): 'there is no tyranny more complete than that which a self-centred negative nature exercises over a morbidly sensitive nature perpetually craving sympathy and support.'

(ch. 1, p. 297)

In her bones, Marian Evans knew what it was to be subjugated and tormented in this particular way. Janet and Dempster, Tina and Wybrow, Maggie and Tom, Romola and Tito, Mrs. Transome and Jermyn, Dorothea and Casaubon, Lydgate and Rosamond, even Gwendolen and Grandcourt — in all these human couplings, one partner is subjected to frustration, a freezing of the will when she (or, occasionally, he) attempts to establish some kind of loving contact with the other; in all of them, the politics of human relations are revealed, the power that accrues
to the cold, the unloving, the egoistic, and the humiliation, the paralysis experienced by the weaker of the two, the constant vulnerability and sensation of outrage. Even Gwendolen, who does not exactly love Grandcourt, even during their engagement-period, and whose motive for marriage is also a power-motive - she would gladly subjugate Grandcourt, as he in fact subjugates her - even she falls into this category of struggling reacting human beings, imprisoned by the frigid presence and will of an unloving partner. Her helplessness, the futility of her little schemes in the face of the implacable will of her adversary - these render her pitiful and tragic, in spite of her limitations. She is stifled, the very air to breathe is denied her: a sensation parallel to that experienced by the other victims of 'self-centred negative' natures.

In essence, it is often the weaker partner, the more ignorant, the more limited, that wields this intimate sceptre of power - a fact of natural history that George Eliot elsewhere exploits as an argument for female emancipation. ('Wherever weakness is not harshly controlled it must govern, as you may see when a strong man holds a little child by the hand, how he is pulled hither and thither....') It is pointless to speculate too rashly on the personal basis for George Eliot's knowledge of the bitter taste of a failed marriage: it is possible that this is simply one example of her Shakespearian propensity for living within an extraordinary range of human experience. More

---

97a 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,' Leader, VI (13 Oct. 1855); reprinted in Pinney, p. 203.
specifically, we can notice that her concept of marriage was an epitome of her general ethic of sympathy: the activity of the loving imagination in its most intense and pervasive form. The demands of the marriage-situation itself being so great, failure becomes grotesque - an aesthetic, as well as a moral disaster.

To return to Dorothea, and her crisis with Casaubon, however. At the moment where 'some women begin to hate,' she finds strength to struggle with herself, and out of her sense of paralysis, the energy is generated for a further act:

'Dorothea sat almost motionless in her meditative struggle, while the evening slowly deepened into night. But the struggle changed continually, as that of a man who begins with a movement towards striking and ends with conquering his desire to strike. The energy that would animate a crime is not more than is wanted to inspire a resolved submission, when the noble habit of the soul reasserts itself.' (ch. 42, p. 234)

It is the same energy that might have gone towards 'hurting a lambed creature,' that Dorothea instead turns towards a creative 'resolved submission.' This, for her, is the supreme moral act at this crisis.

It is no easy solution to her problem, however. The suffering involved in repression, in enforced passivity, continues. And on the day before her husband's death, it reaches a new point of crisis:

'This afternoon the helplessness was more wretchedly numbing than ever: she longed for objects who could be dear to her, and to whom she could be dear. She longed for work which would be directly beneficent like the sunshine and the rain, and now it appeared that she was to live more and more in a virtual tomb... Today she had stood at the door of the tomb and seen all Ladislaw receding into the distant world of warm activity and fellowship - turning his face towards her as he went.' (ch. 48, p. 516)
On this occasion, however, her passivity is uninspired: it is a mere submissive dread: 'She sat still and let Tantripp put on her bonnet and shawl, a passivity which was unusual with her...' (ch. 48, p. 316) And she is saved from a lifetime of such moral enslavement only by an act of grace, as it were: she is suddenly and miraculously redeemed from giving her enforced promise, by Casaubon's death.

Now that she is free again, her search for beneficent activity begins once more. With her characteristic energy, she fulfils the apprehensions of Mr. Brooke, who predicted that she 'would not long remain passive where action had been assigned to her' (ch. 50, p. 326); and she insists on reading Casaubon's will. She releases Farebrother from his unwilling captivity to small needs, and ignites in him the full energy of action and vision: 'The gladness in his face was of that active kind which seems to have energy enough not only to flash outwardly, but to light up busy vision within: one seemed to see thoughts, as well as delight, in his glances.' (ch. 52, p. 360)

The energy of creative activity has this power of inflaming 'busy vision within,' as Lydgate is the first in the novel to realise, at least in his scientific world. For him, true imagination is 'the inward light which is the last refinement of Energy, capable of bathing even the ethereal atoms in its ideally illuminated space.' (ch. 16, p. 249) But in his human relations, this energy gradually deserts Lydgate: 'Lydgate thought of himself as the sufferer, and of others as the agents who had injured his lot. He had meant everything to turn out differently; and others had thrust themselves into his life
and thwarted his purposes. (ch.73, pp. 313-4) He has fallen from the 'serene activity' of the intellectual life into the 'absorbing soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances.' And in his crisis, he responds with insufficient energy: essentially, he gives up the struggle with Rosamond - a surrender that is seen as tragic: 'Perhaps if he had been strong enough to persist in his determination to be the more because she was less, that evening might have had a better issue. If his energy could have borne down that check, he might still have wrought on Rosamond's vision and will. We cannot be sure that any natures, however inflexible or peculiar, will resist this effect from a more massive being than their own. They may be taken by storm and for the moment converted, becoming part of the soul which enwraps them in the ardour of its movement; but poor Lydgate had a throbbing pain within him, and his energy had fallen short of its task.' (ch.75, p. 346) (my italics) His failure is a failure in energy - a fall into the bitter nerveless cynicism of his later years. ('He once called her his Basil Plant.' (Finale, p. 460))

It is Dorothea who restores to him some measure of energy, some sense of 'wholeness' of character: 'The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character.' (ch. 76, p. 352) Ultimately, as at the beginning of the novel, George Eliot sets up a defence of her heroine, in the destiny of 'beneficent activity' that she has chosen for herself: 'Many who
-261knew her , thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature
should have been absorbed into the life of another , and be only
kn01.nl in a certain circle as a wife and mother.

But no one stated

exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done • . • '
(Finale , p. 461)

TIle consummation is not complete:

but a life of

activity has been achieved , and this in terms of Ge orge l:!iliot ' s ethic
is a good in itself.
It is Dorothea ' s characteristic , then , to act in moments of
crisis.

Significant actions , however , in the tightly-webbed world in

which she lives , are bound t o be

fe~V" ,

and to seem petty .

In a crisis ,

such as the night of her disenchantment with Will (Chapter 80 ), the
workings of free-will , of the self struggling tmvards activity , are
explored.

Jilld in this connection , it will be illuminating to digress

s omewhat and to notice

h~T

fully this scene bodi es forth the philos ophi cal

doc t rines of Spinoza ' s Ethics and of Mill ' s System of Logic , both of
1-Thich George Eliot knew well . 98

98 George Eliot ' s connections with Spinoza are several. Pe sides her youthful interest in his philosophy , and her translation of both the Ethics
and the Tractatus 'I'heologico-Poli ticus , there is a connection throue;h
Lewes , who had written an article on his life and philosophy (Westminster ,
39 (June 1843) , 372-407) , before she had met him , an article which 1-laS the
' first attempt to vindicate the great philosopher before the i nglish public ' as he himself -w;.rote in a later article on the same subject in the Fortnightly
IV (1 April , 1866), 385-406 . Ge orge Eliot also notices and highly cormnends
an article by Froude in the vJestminster , 64 (July , 1855) ; 1-37: ' I don ' t
at all agree with Froude ' s own views , but I think his account of 0pinoza ' s
doctrines admirable. ' (Letters , 21 July , 1855 (11 , 211)) And Hilda
Hulme makes two interesting connections betvTeen Lewes and Spinoza , and
between George Eliot and Spinoza. She quotes from Lewes ' s Life and \'iork
of Goethe on the idea of life as development : ' Geothe ' s Theosophy was
that of Spinoza , modified. by his own poetical tendencies . •• 1n it , the
·whole universe was conceived as divine; not as a lifeless mass , but as
the living manifestation of Divine Energy ever flowing forth into
activity .•• the Horld is always becoming. Creation continues ..• The world
vias rnade and is still a-making. ' (Hilda Hulme , ' The Language of Eiddlemarch. , '
;;~

(continued on p . 261 • . • )


'An emotion,' wrote Spinoza, 'can only be restrained by an emotion stronger than, and contrary to itself.' He distinguished between actions and passions: 'the former always indicate our power,' they are a product of a mind filled with adequate ideas, but 'the latter...show our infirmity and fragmentary knowledge.' 'An emotion which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea thereof.' 'In proportion as each thing possesses more of perfection, so is it more active, and less passive; and, vice versa, in proportion as it is more active, so is it more perfect.'

Froude, in his article on Spinoza, which George Eliot commended so warmly (see above, Note 98), expands and explains these gnomic utterances. Human conduct, like any other conduct, is determined by laws - like the laws of matter. But in both spheres, necessitarianism does not preclude control: this is always attainable through 'proper understanding of these laws.' 'However vast,' Froude writes, 'the difference between those who deny and those who affirm the liberty of the will...it is not a difference which affects the conduct or alters the practical bearings of it.' Knowledge is the keystone of action: 'The better we know, the better we act.' Necessitarianism 'insists in

98 (cont'd.).

Novel - A Forum on Fiction (Fall, 1968, p. 43). And she quotes from one of George Eliot's letters: the 'only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them and given an analysis.' (Letters, 4 Dec. 1849 (I, 321)) identifying Middlemarch as that carried-out 'process of translation.' (Hilda Rüme, 'The Language of the Novel - Imagery,' Critical Approaches, p. 118-9).
exact conformity with experience on the conditions under which self-determination is possible."

Adequate ideas, in Spinoza's terms, therefore, are distinct and unconfused ideas of the widest connections of things. The phenomena of experience lead to the understanding of the laws underlying that experience, and therefore form a guide to judgment and action.

'In so far as [the mind] is influenced by inadequate ideas, "eatamus patitur" - it is passive and in bondage, it is the sport of fortune and caprice; in so far as its ideas are adequate, "eatenus agit" - it is active, it is itself.'

'All things desire life, seek for energy, and fuller and ample being...it is the primary law of every single being that it so follows what will give it increased vitality...The appetites gather power from their several objects of desire;...and man as a collective person gathers life, being, and self-mastery only from the absolute good, - the source of all real good, and truth, and energy, - that is, God.'

When we come to George Eliot's own expressed views on the problem of Necessitarianism and free will, we find a very similar position. In an important letter to Mrs. fonsonby, on 10 December, 1874, she tries to reassure her in her religious doubts - tries effectively to shore up the crumbling banks of morality in a determinist universe. She denies that the basis for human sympathy is cut away in such a universe. Fatalism should not be allowed to petrify life: the laws of nature do

99 Westminster, 64* (July 1855), p. 29.
not prevent ordinary human needs from seeking fulfilment: 'the consideration of molecular physics is not the direct ground of human love and moral action, any more than it is the direct means of composing a noble picture or of enjoying great music.'

What she maintains here is very much what Froude maintained in his 'Spinoza' article: that a knowledge of the laws of determinism need not 'affect the conduct or alter the practical bearing of it.' Again, she writes to Mrs. Ponsonby: '...every fresh morning is an opportunity that one can look forward to for exerting one's will. I shall not be satisfied with your philosophy till you have conciliated necessitarianism - I hate the ugly word - with the practice of willing strongly, willing to will strongly, and so on, that being what you certainly can do and have done about a great many things in life, whence it is clear that there is nothing in truth to hinder you from it...'

The distinction between the knowledge of the laws of determinism and practical conduct is echoed in Mill's System of Logic, where, like George Eliot, he deplores the word, 'Necessity,' itself. The term, he writes, seems to imply some kind of magical relation between Cause and Effect, that leads to the degrading sense of moral compulsion: it 'involves much more than mere uniformity of sequence; it implies

100 GE Letters, 19 Aug. 1875 (VI, 166).

This insistence on 'willing to will' is born of an experience similar to that of Amiel, with whose Journal Intime Pattison identified so intensely, stressing the pathos of the 'volonté qui voudrait vouloir, mais impuissante à se fournir à elle-même des motifs.'
not prevent ordinary human needs from seeking fulfilment: 'the consideration of molecular physics is not the direct ground of human love and moral action, any more than it is the direct means of composing a noble picture or of enjoying great music.'

What she maintains here is very much what Proude maintained in his 'Spinoza' article: that a knowledge of the laws of determinism need not 'affect the conduct or alter the practical bearing of it.' Again, she writes to Mrs. Fonsonby: '...every fresh morning is an opportunity that one can look forward to for exerting one's will. I shall not be satisfied with your philosophy till you have conciliated necessitarianism - I hate the ugly word - with the practice of willing strongly, willing to will strongly, and so on, that being what you certainly can do and have done about a great many things in life, whence it is clear that there is nothing in truth to hinder you from it...'

The distinction between the knowledge of the laws of determinism and practical conduct is echoed in Mill's System of Logic, where, like George Eliot, he deplores the word, 'Necessity,' itself. The term, he writes, seems to imply some kind of magical relation between Cause and Effect, that leads to the degrading sense of moral compulsion: it 'involves much more than mere uniformity of sequence; it implies

100 GE Letters, 19 Aug. 1875 (VI, 166).

This insistence on 'willing to will' is born of an experience similar to that of Amiel, with whose Journal Intime Pattison identified so intensely, stressing the pathos of the 'volonte qui voudrait vouloir, mais impuissante à se fournir à elle-même des motifs.'
irresistibleness.'101 'Now, a necessarian, believing that our actions follow from our characters, and that our characters follow from our organization, our education, and our circumstances,' will tend towards fatalism, believing that 'his character is formed for him, and not by him.' This is a 'grand error,' claims Mill, since man himself is 'one of the intermediate agents' in forming his own character: his own desire to mould it in a particular way is one of the circumstances forming it. Therefore, Mill concludes, the 'objectionable term,' "Necessity," itself should be dropped from the vocabulary: 'The free-will doctrine, by keeping in view precisely that portion of the truth which the word Necessity puts out of sight, namely the power of the mind to co-operate in the formation of its own character, has given to its adherents a practical feeling much nearer to the truth than has generally (I believe) existed in the minds of necessarians.'102 (my italics)

101 cf. T. H. Huxley, On the Physical Basis of Life (1868): It is a law that 'unsupported stones will fall to the ground... But when, as commonly happens, we change will into must, we introduce an idea of necessity which most assuredly does not lie in the observed facts... For my part, I utterly repudiate and anathematise the intruder. Fact I know; and Law I know; but what is this Necessity, save an empty shadow of the mind's throwing?...' In further exposition of George Eliot's own view, he writes that in a world full of misery and ignorance, the 'plain duty of each and all of us is to try to make the little corner he can influence somewhat less miserable and somewhat less ignorant than it was before he entered it.' For this, one needs only two beliefs: 'the first, that the order of Nature is ascertainable by our faculties to an extent which is practically unlimited; the second, that our volition counts for something as a condition of the course of events.' Both beliefs, he claims, are verifiable experimentally. (Reprinted in The Essence of T. H. Huxley, ed. Cyril Bibby (New York, 1967), pp. 57-8).

102 cf. CE Letters, 9 Oct. 1843 (I, 162): 'Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds, agreement/intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union.' It is impossible to eradicate false ideas, without damaging the moral natures of those who hold them: therefore, one's aim should be harmony with those 'who are often richer in the fruits of faith though not in reasons, than ourselves.' Thus, the 'truth of feeling' emerges as the only reliable guide to action, very much as it does in Mill's analysis.
The 'habit of willing' can survive consciousness of pain and pleasure, and becomes what is 'commonly called a purpose.' It is only when our purposes have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise, that we are said to have a confirmed character. 103

Mill's position here is virtually identical with George Eliot's. Man himself is one of the causes of what he becomes. He has only to wish to change, to act intelligently upon the accumulation of past experience. What is fatal is passivity: man must oscillate between the two stances of learning and acting. And in this light, determinism—that is, the belief in 'undeviating law'—is even necessary to make a moral act possible: since 'experience is valuable only in so far as it can teach, and it can teach only in so far as it is consistent.' 104

This moral imperative to act upon an intelligent survey of experience, to free oneself from the bondage of the passions is shared then by George Eliot with Spinoza and Mill. In 'Leaves from a Notebook,' she discusses the relationship between learning and action: 'On this subject, as on so many others, it is difficult to strike the balance between the educational needs of passivity or receptivity, and independent selection. We should learn nothing without the tendency to implicit acceptance: but there must clearly be a limit to such mental submission."


104 George Levine, 'Determinism and Responsibility,' *PMLA*, 77 (June 1962); reprinted in *A Century of GE Criticism*, p. 353.
else we should come to a standstill. The human mind would be no better than a dried specimen, representing an unchangeable type. When the assimilation of new matter ceases, decay must begin. In a reasoned self-restraining deference there is as much energy as in rebellion; but among the less capable, one must admit that the superior energy is on the side of the rebels.  

There must be passive absorption of learning, and there must be a limit to such absorption. There must be energy and there must be restraint. But between the two possible excesses, George Eliot finds the excess of passivity the more destructive. The 'dried specimen' that would result is surely precisely a Casaubon-figure - 'A great bladder for dried peas to rattle in,' as Mrs. Cadwallader elegantly describes him.

Life is energy working on experience: often this translates itself into intelligence working upon and discarding objects of emotion and passive attachment. For George Eliot herself, this was always a painful problem, which resolved itself gradually on the side of energy and activity: '...since you have read my books,' she wrote to Dr. Clifford Allbutt, 'you must perceive that the bent of my mind is conservative rather than destructive, and that denial has been wrung from me by hard experience - not adopted as a pleasant rebellion. Still, I see that we ought, each of us, not to sit down and wail, but to be heroic and constructive, if possible, like the strong souls who lived before, as in other cases of religious decay...'

---

105 'Judgments on Authors,' Leaves from a Note-book, reprinted in Pinney, p. 443.
106 GE Letters, August 1868 (IV, 472).
The passive stance is congenial to her; and for that very reason perhaps, she increasingly emphasises the importance of energetic action. Again, in *Leaves from a Notebook*, we find a section entitled, 'A Fine Excess.' *Feeling is Energy* - which more or less encapsulates the content. The essay praises 'the generous leap of impulse,' that is needed 'to swell the flood of sympathy in us beholders, that we may not fall completely under the mastery of calculation, which in its turn may fail of ends for want of energy got from ardour.'

Action, enthusiasm, energy - these gradually emerge as imperatives to the moral life. Even in her personal life, in her last years, she

---


108 In fact, there is even a hectic note of almost fascist fervour in 'False Testimonials,' *Theophrastus Such*, XIII, 189: 'I respect the horsewhip when applied to the back of Cruelty, and think that he who applies it is a more perfect human being... because his out-leap of indignation is not checked by a too curious reflection on the nature of guilt - a more perfect human being because he more completely incorporates the best social life of the race, which can never be constituted by ideas that nullify action... it is undeniable that a too intense consciousness of one's kinship with all frailties and vices undermines the active heroism which battles against wrong.'

The last sentence has the authentic ring of the woman who wrote:

'I am not in any sense one of the "good haters"; on the contrary, my weaknesses all verge towards an excessive tolerance and a tendency to melt off the outlines of things.' *(G's Letters, 16 Jan. 1873 (v, 367)).*
seems to have experienced a renascence of vitality. F.H. Myers writes of the intense mental vigour, the powers of concentration she manifested then, her untiring interest in reading, for instance, and in visiting art-galleries: 'Nor was this a mere habit of passive receptivity. In the intervals between her successive composition her mind was always fusing and combining its fresh stores...'

'Fusing and combining its fresh stores' - there could hardly be a better formulation for the antithesis to the Casaubon-mentality. And yet, as we have seen, this 'passive receptivity' was not unknown to her, either.

The problem is one of balance - 'between the educational needs of passivity...and independent selection.' Lewes expresses the same problem, in his account in his Journal (3 June, 1866) of a visit from Bain, the psychologist, who was a frequent dinner-guest at the Lewes's home: 'After dinner Bain called and stayed till 11 discussing philosophical questions. Together we groped our way to some explanation of the organic differences between the receptive and active intellects. He began by remarking how men of active productivity were almost always men of small receptivity; and too impatient to be doing, were almost incapable of learning. I suggested that in them the reflex was more direct—than in the receptive natures: an idea or emotion rapidly discharging itself in a result or action, instead of exercising

109 Modern Essays, p. 259.
a wide reflex on the sensibilities and awakening a complex ideal precursor to the act.' (AE Letters (IV, 266))

Doing and learning must both be present: and learning emerges as a kind of delaying action on the direct reflex, allowing time for a 'complex ideal precursor to the act.' This account had already been touched on by Lewes, in his review in 1859 of Bain's The Emotions and the Will. There, Lewes had expounded and criticised Bain's discussion of the differences between voluntary and involuntary actions: after rejecting, on physiological as well as psychological grounds, all alternative conventional distinctions, Lewes came to the conclusion that the only significant difference lies in the fact that voluntary powers have been learned. Repeated experience results in 'volition,' in control. 110

Voluntary action then requires a foregoing learning-process: creative activity implies receptivity. The balance is all: if it is disturbed on either side, action is either paralysed or rendered automatic, involuntary - the 'idea or emotion rapidly discharging itself in a result or action.'

We can return now, after this rapid survey of the philosophical views of Spinoza, Mill, Lewes, and George Eliot herself, on the function and working of moral activity, to our starting-point, Chapter 80 of Middlemarch. Dorothea's first reaction to the shock of betrayal, the scene that she witnesses between Rosamond and Will, is a hectic rush

110 'Voluntary and Involuntary Actions,' Blackwood's, 86 (Sept. 1859), pp. 295-306.
of vitality:

'She was never animated by a more self-possessed energy... It was as if she had drunk a great draught of scorn that stimulated her beyond the susceptibility to other feelings. She had seen something so far below her belief, that her emotions rushed back from it and made an excited throng without an object. She needed something active to turn her excitement out upon. She felt power to walk and work for a day, without meat or drink... She had never felt anything like this triumphant power of indignation in the struggle of her married life, in which there had always been a quickly subduing pang; and she took it as a sign of new strength.' (ch. 77, p. 372)

Her eyes are unnaturally bright, as Celia notices: 'And you don't see anything you look at...'' This blindness - one of Dorothea's motifs in the novel - acts as a warning-signal to the reader. (She is short-sighted (ch. 3, p. 43); she always sees what no-one else sees (ch. 4, p. 51); she is 'a girl who would have been requiring you to see the stars by daylight' (ch. 6, p. 84); her vision of her future with Casaubon is an experience of 'not consciously seeing, but absorbing into the intensity of her mood...' (ch. 3, p. 37); and her maturity is marked by the phenomenon of 'no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting herself to their clearest perception' - now, 'she looked steadily at her husband's failure' (ch. 37, p. 139).

It is a factitious strength that she feels now, in the moment of reaction: almost a physiological reflex. It is the mood of her early youth, before her 'deep experience began' - as Celia slyly suggests: "Dear me, Dodo, are you going to have a scheme for them?" said Celia, a little uneasy at this Hamlet-like raving."

When she visits the Farebrothers, the very mention of Ladislaw's name produces an instant psycho-physiological reaction: 'She was
surprised and annoyed to find that her heart was palpitating violently, and that it was quite useless to try after a recovery of her former animation.' (ch.30, p. 387) And throughout her experience of the night, George Eliot's language remains very largely physiological. Almost clinically, it seems, she is out to analyse how, in extremis, moral action is produced.

'The limit of resistance was reached, and she had sunk back helpless within the clutch of inescapable anguish.' In her helpless passive reaction, she is shaken by the waves of suffering...too thoroughly to leave any power of thought.' Her anguish, active only in its intensity, continues through her dark night of the soul: 'she besought hardness and coldness and aching weariness to bring her relief from the mysterious incorporeal might of her anguish.' The two images of Will torment her: and her reaction is a reflex of 'scorn and indignation and jealous offended pride.' She flames out at him, while she retains sufficient physical and emotional energy for anger: But finally, 'she lost energy... even for her loud-whispered cries and moans: she subsided into helpless sobs, and on the cold floor she sobbed herself to sleep.'

This is the first stage of labour, as it were, in the birth of moral action. Up to this point, Dorothea has responded with passion, in Spinoza's terms, showing her human 'infirmity and fragmentary knowledge.' Or, 'to recall Froude's version, she is 'passive and in bondage...the sport of fortune and caprice...'

But in the morning, when she wakes, it is 'with the clearest consciousness that she was looking into the eyes of sorrow.' She has 'waked to a new condition: she felt as if her soul had been liberated
from its terrible conflict; she was no longer wrestling with her
grief, but could sit down with it as a lasting companion and make it
a sharer in her thoughts. For now the thoughts came thickly. It
was not in Dorothea's nature, for longer than the duration of a
paroxysm, to sit in the narrow cell of her calamity, in the besotted
misery of a consciousness that only sees another's lot as an accident
of its own.'

Now that she is liberated from the 'narrow cell' of her egotism,
the bondage of passion, she can think, she can transcend narrowness,
and the besottedness of the irrational being. She relives the events
of the previous day, and the habits of character already established
in her by experience come to her aid: 'she forced herself to think'
altruistically. (my italics) She wills to will. The strength of her
'first outleap of jealous indignation and disgust' is vanquished by
'an emotion stronger than, and contrary to itself' (Spinoza) - 'the
dominant spirit of justice within her.' This stronger emotion is partly
the fruit of her recent experience: she has, through her own marriage-
sufferings, learned to understand the trials of Lydgate's lot. And the
'active thought' involved in this perception of analogy, this 'vivid
sympathetic experience,' returns to her now 'as a power: it asserted
itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as
we saw in the day of our ignorance.'

Her experience, then, is fully 'learned'; it leads Dorothea
to true vision and understanding. And as 'it is the primary law of
every single being that it ...follows what will give it increased
vitality - and man as a collective person gathers life, being, and
self-mastery only from the absolute good, - the source of all good, and truth, and energy, - that is, God' (Froude, p. 29) - so Dorothea yearned towards the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her, and rule her errant will. 'What should I do - how should I act now, this very day if I could clutch my own pain...

Now the light is 'piercing into the room,' and she opens the curtains and sees the tableau of the burdened man and the burdened woman; she sees and she realises that neither vision nor deliberate blindness is sufficient - 'She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.' She is involved, and she must act: she cannot simply and passively learn from her experience: 'What she would resolve to do that day did not yet seem quite clear, but something that she could achieve stirred her as with an approaching murmur which would soon gather distinctness.'

Mark Schorer has called Middlemarch a 'novel of religious yearning without religious object.' ('Fiction and the "Matrix of Analogy,"' Kenyon Review, II (Autumn 1949); reprinted in A Century of GS Criticism, p. 276). Both F.W. Hallow (Atheism and the Value of Life (1884)) and R.H. Hutton (Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith (1887)) deal critically with this aspect of George Eliot's philosophy, her version of 'Methodism minus Christianity,' her 'sickroom' morality, the 'cold moral solitude' of this very scene of Dorothea's anguish - her 'pseudo-religious philosophy,' in Schorer's terms. (ibid. p. 275)

Nietzsche, too, wrote of her arbitrary divorce of the Christian God from the Christian morality: 'We others believe otherwise. When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole. For the English, morality is not yet a problem.'

George Eliot, herself, however, if she had felt called upon to vindicate her philosophy, might well have echoed Mill's comment on Comte: the value of the Politique Positive, he wrote (in his Autobiography (1873), p. 213) 'consists in putting an end to the notion that no effectual moral authority can be maintained over society without the aid of religious belief.'
She changes her clothes, in a kind of ritual of initiation (as Mrs. Bulstrode does in a similar moment of resolution - ch. 74, p. 334). And the act implies both resignation and resolution: 'Dorothea wished to acknowledge that she had not the less an active life before her because she had buried a private joy.'

George Eliot's close study of the 'processing' of a virtuous action is, in a sense, a dramatization of the views of Spinoza, Mill, and Lewes on the subject. And even in the scene that follows, with Rosamond, George Eliot never loses contact with the psycho-physiological nature of the process: 'Dorothea had counted a little too much on her own strength: the clearness and intensity of the mental action this morning were the continuance of a nervous exaltation which made her frame as dangerously responsive as a bit of finest Venetian crystal... (ch. 81, p. 399) When she speaks, it is with 'palpitating anxiety,' 'brokenly.' The effort, the strain, are immense, symptoms of her will to sympathise with Rosamond's difficulties. Only after Rosamond has confessed the truth of her relation to Will, does a spontaneous flow of feeling become possible: 'Her immediate consciousness was one of immense sympathy without check; she cared for Rosamond without struggle now, and responded earnestly to her... ' (ch. 81, p. 407)

In this crisis, then, Dorothea has been shown to act. And her action is a result of experience worked on by intelligence and sympathy, and issuing in vision and understanding. In acting, Dorothea becomes most fully herself. Again to refer back to Froude, 'in so far as (the mind's) ideas are adequate...it is active, it is itself.' The fruits of this organic process are life and energy, 'and fuller and ampler being.'
It seems then, that only through an act, through a movement of energy in the world, can a man become himself. For Lewes, the personality is simply an 'incorporation of our past experience.'; for Mill, man is 'one of the intermediate agents' in forming his own character. The personality thus remains for George Eliot a very fluid thing: 'character is not cut in marble,' it is continually in flux, subject to experience and the voluntary (i.e. 'educated') acts of the individual. Dorothea, in spite of the limited nature of her achievement, does deserve to be described, in Mill's terms, as a 'confirmed character,' since her 'habit of willing' has survived mere consciousness of pain and pleasure. Her acts are 'unhistoric,' but 'the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive.' It is ultimately, then, her being, rather than her acts, that is 'greatly effective.' And yet in the terms of the novel, Dorothea's acts were important in the creation of her being.

At this point, we can return to the discussion, from which we started, of the nature of the personality, and George Eliot's implicit attacks on the simplicities in this field. We quoted the passage at the beginning of Chapter 29, in which she challenges her reader's assumptions about the intrinsic difference between Casaubon and Dorothea, and reduces these differences to a blooming skin and white moles. By blurring her distinctions in this way, George Eliot is doing much more than some special pleading for 'poor Casaubon.' Both Casaubon and Dorothea were, as we have seen, rooted in George Eliot's most personal experience: both sensibilities were aspects of her own sensibility. The pity which she shows for Casaubon, and which Leslie Stephen found
to be 'not akin to love,' is more akin to self-analysis, perhaps. And Stephen's assertion that the story is a 'satire against young ladies who aim at lofty ideals. It implies a capacity for being imposed upon by a mere outside shell of pretence' - neatly evades the crucial question that the story raises - namely, how does one know the shell from the man? On the deepest level, what is the difference between a stick and a man, between Casaubon and Locke or Milton, or Bossuet, or St. Augustine, or Aquinas, or Isaac Casaubon himself?

Here, we take up the thread of W.J. Harvey's claim, with which we began, that 'the very name of Casaubon creates a calculated ironic discrepancy between the great Renaissance scholar and the fictional pedant.' On Mr. Harvey's view, the mention of these other doctor-saints in connection with Casaubon, would be equally and solely for the purpose of implicit mockery, both of Casaubon himself, and of Dorothea for her infatuation: 'Here was something beyond the shallows of ladies'-school literature: here was a living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile complete knowledge with devoted piety; here was a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint.' (ch.3, pp. 33-4)

In fact, the point would have to be extended to include Dorothea's own shadow-archetype - St. Teresa - who also achieved the ideal consummation, the combination of knowledge and piety, of contemplation and practice, that she called the 'mystic marriage.' On this view, St. Teresa would have been introduced into the novel - as Alpha and Omega - solely to highlight the irony of contrast, of the discrepancy between aspiration and actuality. Similarly, of course, in the case of Will's archetypes - Shelley and Chatterton. The three main characters
of the novel would thus be shadowed by these inscrutable archetypes, forever unattainable, forever mocking by their very existence the petty struggles of the inhabitants of the Middlemarch world.

This interpretation seems to me very incomplete. Irony is undoubtedly present in this use of archetypes: but something much more radical is being suggested here than the mere obviousness of ironic contrast. For one thing, the references to Casaubon’s archetypes, particularly, are sometimes decidedly ambivalent. The reference to Locke, for instance, occurs in a conversation between Dorothea and Celia, after the first meeting with Casaubon:

"How very ugly Mr. Casaubon is!"

"Celia! He is one of the most distinguished-looking men I ever saw. He is remarkably like the portrait of Locke. He has the same deep eye-sockets."

"Had Locke those two white moles with hair on them?"

"O, I daresay! When people of a certain sort looked at him," said Dorothea, walking away a little." (ch. 2, p. 26)

In this little interchange, the mention of Locke serves not for contrast but for comparison. Celia is concerned with Casaubon’s physical ugliness, and the comparison does not affect her: she would be quite willing to concede Locke white moles as well, and reject the two scholars in a body, as unromantic objects. Dorothea, on the other hand, would be equally willing to concede that Locke had white moles: this does not interest her either, since physical appearances do not enter into her exalted vision of marriage.

The next reference is to Pascal. As Dorothea dreams of her future with Casaubon, she thinks, "'Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal..." (ch. 3, p. 40)
Here, there is, obviously, an irony implicit: we can feel instinctively that Casaubon is no Pascal. And yet, at least to the frivolous mind, this thought of Dorothea’s can be taken quite at face-value: it is indeed possible that marriage to Pascal too would have been no romantic heaven: that even if Casaubon had been another Pascal, Celia would still have rejected him, and Dorothea would still - rightly or wrongly - have rushed into marriage with him. The issue would have remained ambivalent: one could have looked at the marriage through Celia’s eyes, or Sir James’s, or Mrs. Cadwallader’s, and stiffened with repulsion and outraged worldly wisdom; while Dorothea herself, of course, subjectively, would have felt the same aspirations and hopes as she does now. The only difference might have been in the resulting marriage; on the other hand, Celia and Sir James might very well have been vindicated. In other words, the fact that Casaubon is not a Pascal seems largely irrelevant here: the irony, though present, is not paramount.

The point is perhaps best made by the author herself, in her own comparison of Casaubon with Milton: 'I protest against any absolute conclusion, any prejudice derived from Mrs. Cadwallader’s contempt for a neighbouring clergyman’s alleged greatness of soul, of Sir James Chettam’s poor opinion of his rival’s legs, - from Mr. Brooke’s failure to elicit a companion’s ideas, or from Celia’s criticism of a middle-aged scholar’s personal appearance. I am not sure that the greatest man of his age, if ever that solitary superlative existed, could escape these unfavourable reflections of himself in
various small mirrors; and even Milton, looking for his portrait in a spoon, must submit to have the facial angle of a bumpkin. Moreover, if Mr. Casaubon, speaking for himself, has rather chilling rhetoric, it is not therefore certain that there is no good work or fine feeling in him. Did not an immortal physicist and interpreter of hieroglyphs write detestable verses? (ch. 10, p. 125)

In this passage, clearly with mischievous intent, George Eliot stirs up the muddy pool of popular prejudices and sweeping rejections. In rather the same way as in the paragraph at the beginning of Chapter 29, she confuses our angle of vision, she blurs our confidence in categories, in perception in general. The 'small mirrors' of which she speaks are like the pier-glass scratches, and like Lewes's quotation from Bacon's Novum Organum: human understanding is described as an 'unequal mirror to the rays of things.' Distortion, subjectivity are inevitable.

Moreover, generalisation is false. George Eliot's plea is justified: there may be cases of fine feeling and poor expression, of good science and bad poetry co-existing in the same person. Are we then to see Casaubon as such a mixture, in the same way as Savonarola is seen in Romola, as a pattern of human inconsistencies, which do not necessarily preclude a kind of greatness? In Romola, on this point, she wrote: 'To the common run of mankind it has always seemed a proof of mental vigour to find moral questions easy, and judge conduct according to concise alternatives.' This 'Tom-Tulliver'

---

112 See Note 93.

113 Romola, ch. 64, p. 358.
mentality has its place in most readers' reactions; and George Eliot is repeatedly at pains to jar, or disturb such critical complacency.

Her technique is similar throughout — a technique of sly analogy, of mute challenge to defend assumptions and instincts. Of Mr. Casaubon's appalling love-speech to Dorothea, she writes calmly:

'No speech could have been more thoroughly honest in its intentions: the frigid rhetoric at the end was as sincere as the bark of a dog, or the cawing of an amorous rook. Would it not be rash to conclude that there was no passion behind those sonnets to Delia which strike us as the thin music of a mandolin?' (ch. 5, p. 72) There is a certain impudence and irony about this analogy of course; but once again, the analogy very largely holds: it would be very rash to reach such conclusions, on the one hand, while on the other, it is possible that the sonnets to Delia contained no more passion than Mr. Casaubon's frigid rhetoric. The question remains open: the analogy is no simple irony. It in fact complicates the question, as does the reference to Milton's facial angle, and to Locke's white moles.

As for the comparison with St. Thomas Aquinas, which Naumann uses so cunningly to play on Casaubon's vanity — here again, the irony is not simply one of contrast. Naumann purports to see in Casaubon, 'just what I want — the idealistic in the real.' (ch. 22, p. 329)

In absentia, Casaubon is afterwards treated to much disrespectful mockery; but on the analogy with Aquinas, he has this to say: 'The head is not a bad type after all' — no meagre praise from the fastidious artist — 'I daresay the great scholastic himself would have been
flattered to have his portrait asked for. Nothing like these starchy
doctors for vanity!" (ch. 22, p. 333)

Once again, the use of the archetype serves as parallel, and
not merely as ironic contrast. It results both in a certain
concession of dignity to Casaubon, and in a shrewd hit at the genus
of scholars in general. Martin Svaglic, in his study of 'Religion in
the Novels of George Eliot,' even turns the conventional treatment of
the archetype as contrasting ideal on its head, and writes: 'it is
hard to avoid the feeling that George Eliot is offering a comment on
the worthlessness of scholarly Christianity by coupling with his the
name of the saint whom the Age of Enlightenment had set down as the
unassailable proof of scholastic folly: the butt of the jokes of
Laurence Sterne and even of Charles Lamb.'

At any rate, it is clear that these analogies raise questions,
and aim at a more than satirical effect. The questions are very basic,
and deceptively simple. What is Casaubon really like? What, in fact,
is the difference between him and Milton, or Locke, or Aquinas -
intrinsically, that is, how do we know for sure that there is such a
great difference, that George Eliot is creating a 'calculated ironic
discrepancy'? At what point does greatness shade off into parody?

The problem is discussed explicitly in the passage in Daniel
Deronda, in which Daniel tries to focus rationally and sensitively, on
his encounter with Mordecai (Chapter 41). He sees Mordecai's personality

114 Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 53 (April 1954);
reprinted in A Century of GE Criticism, p. 290.
and mission under different possible lights: from Sir Hugo's point of view, he is a monomaniac, somewhat more talented than most monomaniacs. 'In such cases, a man of the world knows what to think beforehand.' (like the 'common run of mankind' in Romola?)

The passage continues: 'Deronda's ear caught all these negative whisperings; nay, he repeated them distinctly to himself. It was not the first but it was the most pressing occasion on which he had had to face this question of the family likeness among the heirs of enthusiasm, whether prophets or dreamers of dreams, whether the

'Great benefactors of mankind, deliverers,' or the devotees of phantasmal discovery - from the first believer in his own unmanifested inspiration, down to the last inventor of an ideal machine that will achieve perpetual motion. The kinship of human passion, the sameness of mortal scenery, inevitably fill fact with burlesque and parody. Error and folly have had their hecatombs of martyrs. Reduce the grandest type of man hitherto known to an abstract statement of his qualities and efforts, and he appears in dangerous company: say that, like Copernicus and Galileo, he was immovably convinced in the face of hissing incredulity; but so is the contriver of perpetual motion. We cannot fairly try the spirits by this sort of test. If we want to avoid giving the dose of hemlock or the sentence of banishment in the wrong case, nothing will do but a capacity to understand the subject-matter on which the immovable man is convinced, and fellowship with human travail, both near and afar, to hinder us from scanning any deep experience lightly.' (ch. 41, pp. 353-4)

In Middlemarch, through her use of archetypes, as well as by more explicit means, George Eliot is forcing on her readers, I would
suggest, a similar mental conflict to that undergone by Deronda at this point. It is 'this question of the family likeness,' that concerns her, the 'kinship of human passion,' the similarity of fact and parody, the dangers of definition, both for what it includes and for what it excludes. Here, Deronda is assailed by the 'family likeness' between Mordecai and Copernicus and Galileo, on the one hand, and that between Mordecai and the enthusiast with the metaphysical key, on the other. How to discriminate, how to describe, even...?

The problem with Casaubon is very similar. George Eliot surrounds him in such a way with his cortège of archetypes that awkward questions immediately arise. It is a case, once again, of 'dangerous company,' of a 'family likeness,' that impresses on us the difficulty of describing a human being. Fact is filled with burlesque and parody: Locke, Milton, Aquinas have their ludicrous aspects, as does Casaubon. Where does the difference really lie?

The answer of course is given at the end of the Daniel Deronda passage: 'nothing will do but a capacity to understand the subject-matter on which the immovable man is convinced, and fellowship with human travail, both near and afar, to hinder us from scanning any deep experience lightly.' Two things are required: knowledge and sympathy. On the first score, Casaubon is judged quite simply by his output, by his achievement in the world. Here indictment is secure: he produces nothing that can remotely compare with the productions of Milton, or Locke, or Pascal. On this score, too, Dorothea's and
Will's archetypes are clearly ironic contrasts: Dorothea achieves no historic act, and Will writes no poems. In the sphere of the known, the actual, all three are indeed mocked by their famous shadows.

But to say this is not to say everything. For nothing is known, after all, about the intrinsic worth of the personalities involved, about the depth of experience. This is the second criterion in presuming to describe a human being: 'fellowship with human travail, both near and afar, to hinder us from scanning any deep experience lightly.' On this score, Will may well be a poet of the same calibre as Shelley, for example. He and Dorothea in fact have a discussion on this very subject. Will defends the poet as experiencing intrinsic man, while Dorothea, with characteristic insistence on activity, lays stress on fruition, on accomplishment:

"To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern, that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely ordered variety on the chorus of emotion - a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that condition by fits only."

"But you leave out the poems," said Dorothea. "I think they are wanted to complete the poet. I understand what you mean about knowledge passing into feeling, for that seems to be just what I experience. But I am sure I could never produce a poem."

"You are a poem - and that is to be the best part of a poet - what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods," said Will...! (ch. 22, pp. 341-2.

In the balance established by the novel, both views are vindicated. Men are known by their acts: moreover, they become
themselves through acts. And yet, ultimately, men are not known at all, since their acts are so small a part of their potential, which is not known, and which is intrinsic.

Dorothea and Will and Casaubon are not simply mocked by their illustrious archetypes: it seems, on the contrary, that with a keen sense of human dignity, George Eliot is placing these three worldly 'failures' deliberately in the 'dangerous company' of Teresa and Shelley and Milton. Casaubon's pathos is always 'below the level of tragedy'; and yet George Eliot implies that the family likeness does exist. His achievement is nil, his personality is corroded by bitterness and jealousy. And yet George Eliot herself is his 'spiritual mother,' as we have seen - as she is Dorothea's. Basically, there is a certain 'sameness of mortal scenery,' that blurs easy distinctions. The implication might be that all who have an 'intense consciousness' within them, who are 'spiritually a-hungered,' form one band, even though only the illustrious few ever come to fruition, to 'far-resonant action'. The final effect of the archetypes in Middlemarch is not to mock but - however pathetic the achievement - to dignify human effort.

---

115 The use of archetypes in this way has roots in George Eliot's earliest habits of thought - cf. her non-ironic youthful comparisons of herself with Saint Paul and William Wilberforce. (GE Letters, 18 Aug. 1838 (I, 7); 6-8 Nov. 1838 (I, 12).
My aim in this final chapter is to trace the motivations behind George Eliot's almost universally unpopular choice of subject for her last novel. A large section of her reading public has always found the Jewish aspect of Daniel Deronda esoteric, difficult, and even objectionable; and what I should like to show is that the motivations for her choice are much more complex than critics generally allow - that they are rooted in the diversified intellectual interests of a lifetime, and that the purposes towards which she worked are essentially and closely integrated with the total texture of the novel. In short, what I shall argue is that a significant portion of George Eliot's variegated - and hitherto untapped - experience was channelled into Daniel Deronda - and not least into its Jewish subject-matter; that here many facets of her nature, intellectual and emotional, are reflected in unprecedented richness.

At the centre of the novel lies the whole question of cultural and moral values, an attempted 'placing' of English standards by implicit analogy with some alternative culture. Her choice of Judaism to act as defining contrast extends its roots deeply and widely into the history of her sensibility. I shall here be indicating some of these tortuous subterranean patterns of thought and feeling, and the forms in which they emerge into the accomplished work of art.

The general reaction of contemporary readers to her choice of a
Jewish theme for Daniel Deronda might be summed up, not unfairly - if unrhythmically - if her name were to be substituted for that of God in the well-known little jingle:

How odd
Of God
To choose
The Jews.

The sheer oddness of it is what seems to have struck contemporary reviewers with the greatest force. There is a certain tone of fastidious bewilderment that recurs constantly under various guises. In antagonistic reviews, and even in those few that approve her choice and handling of subject, the Jewish theme emerges as definitely esoteric - either laboriously recherché and in rather dubious taste, or else exciting in an off-beat, revelatory kind of way - depending on the viewpoint of the critic. But in any case, puzzling, unanticipated - odd.

Why did George Eliot choose the Jews? The question is rarely posed in a serious, a more-than-rhetorical form in the critical literature of George Eliot's own time. The Edinburgh Review finds nothing at all to its taste in the entire novel, and is quite uncompromising in its account of the Jewish section: it is 'feeble and laboured...We have not yet heard...of any reader who has responded warmly to this special claim upon his interest.'¹ Such a slashing castigation is followed up by detailed rejections of characterisation and plot: Mirah is 'the most trifling of angelic heroines'; Mordecai, a 'hectic figure,' an 'absolute failure'; Daniel's first searches for Mirah's family 'tremble...upon

¹ Vol. 144, p. 466 (October 1876).
the borders of the absurd'; and Daniel's mother is 'as nearly absurd
with her theatrical gestures and addresses as it is possible for George
Eliot to be.' The Cohen family alone are accorded some praise, particularly
little Jacob - 'the only thoroughly delightful Jew in the whole group.'
But the main burden of the Jewish section - its intellectual and
emotional essence, centring on Mordecai's ideals and hopes - is frigidly
dismissed as a 'somewhat visionary project.'

From this review, the typical reaction of critics emerges - it is
exceptional only in the extent of its anathema, which covers Gwendolen
and Grandcourt, as well as Mordecai and Mirah. Otherwise, it can stand
as fairly representative, as we shall see, of the kinds of puzzlement and
aversion that the Jewish section aroused. The Edinburgh reviewer, however,
unlike most of his contemporaries, does attempt to account for this
aberration on George Eliot's part. According to his diagnosis, George
Eliot has become 'fooled and flattered' by success: the 'intoxicating
philtres of adulation' have gone to her head, so that she is now straining
too hard to live up to her fabulous reputation. This explanation is
unsatisfying and condescending, to say the least; but at least the question,
'Why?' has obviously occurred to him.

It is a question that does not recur with academic and deliberate
intention very often in the critical literature on the subject. As it is
the main question that I shall attempt to face, it will be worth-while first
to examine in closer detail some of the other reactions of George Eliot's
hitherto adoring public. Blackwood and Lewes, for instance, her two most
unswerving admirers, have obviously some unease and wonderment inter-
larded with the extreme lavishness of their praise. In Blackwood's
comments, particularly, in response to each section of the novel that George Eliot sends him, we can catch unmistakeably the tone of over-protestation - which, even allowing for the acknowledged special relation between self-doubting authoress and reassuring publisher, does betray the mental barriers over which he is leaping. There is some discomfort, at the very least, in his commendations:

'You tell the Tale of Deronda's goodness and that of the stray Jewish Maid so straightly and so simply that no feeling of doubt or improbability arises...’12

'Where did you get your knowledge of the Jews? But indeed one might say that of all your characters, so life-like and human are they.'13

'Of Mordecai I feel that it would be presumptuous to speak until one has read more, and I daresay that puzzling and thinking over that phase of the Tale has been the cause of my not having written to you sooner.'14

'On the whole, the Critics are behaving very well, and I only wonder those who take little exceptions venture, on the imperfect state of their information, to do anything but cry hurrah over the splendid banquet that is opening before them.'15

'She is A Magician. It is a Poem, a Drama, and a Grand Novel...There is no doubt about the marvellous Mordecai...’16

'The whole tribe of Israel should fall down and worship her.'17

'Jews are not generally popular pictures in fiction, but then look how they are served up. They never have been so presented before like human beings with their good and their evil, their comic and their tragic side.'18

2 GE Letters, 25 May 1875 (VI, 145).
3 ibid., 30 November 1875 (VI, 195).
4 ibid., 24 February 1876 (VI, 221-2).
5 ibid., 29 February 1876 (VI, 225).
6 ibid., 2 March 1876 (VI, 227).
7 ibid.
8 ibid., 11 May 1876 (VI, 250).
Blackwood's apprehensions emerge post facto:

'I always knew that the strong Jew element would be unpopular, but your picture of the Jew family at home did wonders in overcoming the public distaste to a kindly human view of the Jewish character.'

'The Jews should be the most interesting people in the world, but even her magic pen cannot at once make them a popular element in a Novel...'  

'I feel more than ever what I have often said to critics: 'Bow and accept with gratitude whatever George Eliot writes.'

From this selection of Blackwood's comments, his position emerges quite clearly: as a shrewd business-man, he is worried over the public response to George Eliot's 'Jewish novel'; as a sensitive man and a cultured reader he is conscious of a certain residue of distaste at George Eliot's choice of subject, an emotional obstacle that he does overcome in sheer tribute to her creative and perceptive powers as a writer.

Lewes, in his letters to Blackwood, swings even more wildly between aggressive admiration and a husbandly anxiety, a more overt doubt than ever before, as to whether George Eliot has indeed succeeded this time in hitting her target:

'...your taking so heartily to the Jewish scenes is particularly gratifying to me, for I have sometimes shared her doubts on whether people would sufficiently sympathise with that element in the story.'

In response to Blackwood's doubts about Mordecai, Lewes writes:

'I think it on the whole one of the greatest of her creations.'

And he gently rebukes Blackwood for casting a gloom over Marian; for confirming her own fears of the 'imperfect sympathy' with which the Jewish

9 ibid., 5 November 1876 (VI, 305).
10 ibid., 25 November 1876 (VI, 313).
11 ibid., 10 June 1876 (VI, 262).
12 ibid., 1 December 1875 (VI, 196).
13 ibid., 27 February 1876 (VI, 224).
section would meet. Then again, rather defiantly:

'To my mind it is the greatest work she has done.'¹⁴

There is momentary jubilation at the publication of Part IV - it

'seems to have drawn blood everywhere. How could it fail? The Jewish element has also been more generally popular than we expected.'¹⁵

But by November, a grimmer realism has set in:

'There seems to be so general a sense of disappointment - so much deadness to the Jewish element - that my only hope for a large sale...is in the Jewish public....'¹⁶

'Deadness to the Jewish element' - the phrase very aptly sums up the general response, or lack of response, George Eliot herself, with even more than her usual despondency, anticipated a hostile reception for her novel:

'I expected from first to last in writing it, that it would create much stronger resistance and even repulsion than it has actually met with.'¹⁷

'Ignorant surprise and lack of sympathy'¹⁸ were what she had expected. And she is indeed almost pathetically grateful for the expressions of appreciation and sympathy that do reach her, from private individuals and, particularly, from Jewish readers. They are her justification: on the public scene, in periodicals and reviews, it generally goes hard with her Jewish novel.

The Saturday Review, for example, notes a sense of 'falling-off'

¹⁴ ibid., 1 March 1876 (VI, 226).
¹⁵ ibid., 9 May 1876 (VI, 247).
¹⁶ ibid., 22 November 1876 (VI, 312).
¹⁷ ibid., 29 October, 1876 (VI, 301).
¹⁸ ibid., 16 December 1876 (VI, 317).
and lays it down to the 'utter want of sympathy which exists between her and her readers in the motive and leading idea of her story...

What can be the design of this ostentatious separation from the universal instinct of Christendom, this subsidence into Jewish hopes and aims? 19

Here, the question, 'Why?' is almost purely rhetorical, a gesture of bewilderment. A token-answer is offered: 'It is true that everything has its turn, and it may perhaps be regarded as significant that the turn of Judaism has come at last.' There is a kind of vogue for accounts of Jewish life and culture: and the implication is that George Eliot is somehow riding the crest of the wave. It is to this reviewer unalterably an esoteric vogue: Mordecai is 'caviare to the multitude, an unintelligible idea to all but an inner circle.'

The vocabulary used is telling: 'falling-off,' 'subsidence into Jewish hopes...' The contempt is thinly veiled. George Saintsbury, in his review in the Academy, is less gentlemanly: Mordecai's teaching is succinctly labelled, 'Samothracian mysteries of bottled moonshine.' His prototype is Sephardo, in The Spanish Gypsy, and such a delineation of 'the character and aspirations of a curious people' is more suited to poetry than to the novel. 20 Saintsbury thus accounts for the failure of Daniel Deronda by emphasising its didacticism, its contravention of the 'immutable law that no perfect novel can ever be written in designed illustration of a theory.' But the question, 'Why?' is not significantly raised: why did George Eliot choose to deal with so recherché, so unpopular an 'provincial' a subject?

19 Saturday Review, XLII (16 September 1876), 356-7.
20 Academy, 10 (9 September 1876), p. 254.
Similarly, Hutton, in his *Spectator* review, finds the description of Mordecai's ideals vague and unsatisfying:

'The most inadequate part of the book has been the part in which Mordecai has canvassed his politico-religious enterprise...the conception of Mordecai's religious and political mission has transgressed the bounds of what even George Eliot can accomplish in fiction...'

And, in line with his general critical position, he lays his dissatisfaction to the charge of George Eliot's abandonment of formal religious belief: she has 'parted with all the old lines of principle, except the keen sympathy with every noble sentiment which she always betrays, and imported nothing new and definite in their places, except the vaguest hopes and aspirations...'

The charge of being esoteric again recurs in the *Westminster*'s review:

'...Daniel Deronda is silly, for it is full of foolish hopes, which may have a meaning to a single race, but for which George Eliot has failed to secure a catholic response.'

Again, failure is laid won to didacticism: laborious extraneous proofs of historical reality are no defence of the realism of her Jewish characters: 'There is a truth in the best fiction which is higher than that of history.' The increasingly cerebral quality in her novels threatens them as works of art: her growing preoccupation with 'the matters of the hour' indicates a decline in her real greatness as a novelist:

'She has failed to see that there are questions of more importance to all ages than the science and aspirations of this, and that her duty was to tell stories which would command the sympathies, not of the learned merely, but of the learned and simple; not of her own time only, but of all ages...'

---

21 *Spectator*, 49 (29 July 1876), 948.
22 ibid., (10 June 1876), 734.
In this very significant review, George Eliot's concern with the events and aspirations of her own day, rather than with the memories and nostalgies of her youth, her focussing on a small and untypical section of the population, her growing obscurity of style and complexity of intellectual reference - all these are viewed as symptoms of a general narrowing, a withdrawal from the broad human sympathies, the universal, sweeping concerns of her earlier novels. She has wandered from the open highway into strange, crooked, and rather shadowy paths, where the general sympathy cannot easily follow. It is all rather regrettable...

If there are few attempts at accounting for this bizarre development in George Eliot's interests, however, one solution to the problems generated by it does crop up very early on: the tacit agreement simply to ignore the Jewish half of the novel, to concentrate on Gwendolen and, virtually, to divide the book into two halves. George Eliot herself was aware of this tendency, and protested bitterly at 'the laudation of readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there..."24 But, in spite of this apparently sufficient declaration of intention, readers and critics till our own time have persisted in a kind of literary schizophrenia: Leslie Stephen ('In spite of the approval of learned Jews, it is impossible to feel any enthusiastic regard for Deronda in his surroundings.'25), Joan Bennett, Gerald Bullett, Robert Speaight - all detach the Gwendolen story for serious consideration and praise, turning from the Jewish part with a kind of respectful regret.

24 GE Letters, 2 October 1876 (VI, 290).
25 'George Eliot,' The New Yorker, 1902, p. 191.
The most famous and articulate exponent of the 'two novels' theory, however, is, of course, F.R. Leavis - in his chapter on George Eliot in *The Great Tradition* (1948), and in his later article in *Commentary* (October, 1960), 'George Eliot's Zionist Novel.' For Dr. Leavis, the weakness and the strength of the novel 'stand apart, on a large scale, in fairly neatly separable masses.' His admiration and enthusiastic recognition goes out to the 'good half of Daniel Deronda,' and places it 'among the great things in fiction.' The 'astonishing badness of the bad half,' however, is dealt with at the beginning of his chapter - it is, in his own words, got out of the way first, before he turns lovingly to the 'astonishingly contrasting strength and fineness of the large remainder.' The discrimination is quite confident and clear-cut: like a wise and remorseless surgeon, Dr. Leavis exercises his scalpel on what is for him patently dead tissue. In the later article in *Commentary*, it is true that Dr. Leavis does partially react from this extreme position: 'the surgery of disjunction' now seems to him a less simple and satisfactory affair than he had thought. But essentially his position remains one of rejection of the 'mass of fervid and wordy unreality' which is the Jewish part of the novel.

Where Dr. Leavis differs from his predecessors, however, is in presenting a cogent and plausible rationale - a psychological motive for what both he and they feel to be George Eliot's aesthetic crime. 'The kind of satisfaction George Eliot finds in Deronda's Zionism is plain,' he writes; and in both *The Great Tradition* and the *Commentary* essay he proceeds to link this 'Zionist enthusiasm' with the emotional needs of the woman who never entirely came to terms with her adolescent cravings.
So far from being 'at bottom cold,' as Henry James describes the Jewish part of the novel, it is, for Leavis, filled with 'something strongly and very questionably emotional; a powerful, but equivocal element of inspiration.' And so far from its failure being a result of her overweening intellectualism, it is due to the same craving for emotional, exaltation, the same barely disguised wish-fulfilment, that taints the portraits of Maggie and Dorothea with self-indulgence. This 'unreduced enclave of immaturity' seizes on the idealism generated by Zionism, as a 'larger duty,' which, for Leavis, is nothing but a 'permanent intoxication, all sufficient and transforming' - a substitute for the religion she has rejected. And 'the living intelligence that goes with her creativity' does not go with this 'hectic undertaking': the Zionist solution is narrow and not generally applicable; in advocating it, she shows herself 'too much a Victorian, too much the product of a local and limiting climate.'

Here, we have returned almost exactly to the criteria and objections of the Westminster reviewer. But what is interesting and original about Dr. Leavis's account is his psychological explanation: his answer to the question, 'Why did George Eliot choose the Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, as theme for her last novel?' But although he does make a few courtesy-bows in the direction of her persona as 'nobly earnest intellectual,' it is with the self-indulgent, self-compensating woman that he is mainly concerned in his discussion of the 'bad half' of the novel. There can be little doubt that there is some truth in his diagnosis: the point of insight, however, I find distorted almost out of all validity, by the over-emphasis which Dr. Leavis places upon it.
Dr. Leavis mentions in his Commentary article the obvious grounds for an analogy between Daniel Deronda and Romola: the former novel is 'an achievement of those intellectual energies - the power of acquiring immense erudition with indefatigable labour...and of applying it with an unremitting concern for factual and historical truth - which had gone to the working-up of the historical setting in Romola,'²⁶ Both Romola and Daniel Deronda display this power of George Eliot's for historical scholarly research for fictional purposes. This obvious similarity granted, however, the differences between the two became all the more striking.

In Romola, the scholarly detail is loaded onto every page of the novel, the style and culture of Renaissance Florence explicitly intrudes in dialogue and description alike. The overweighted academic tone of the whole is a result, as we have seen, of George Eliot's dazed fascination before the sheer wealth of the historical data at her disposal. In Daniel Deronda, however, the texture of the writing rather indicates than displays the mass of learning that lies behind it. There is a much more organic handling of the background to the Jewish section; and it should come as no surprise to find that George Eliot's acquaintance with many aspects of Judaism reaches far back into her history: it is no hot-house bloom quickly and artificially cultivated for the immediate purpose, but a plant with roots that are many, deep, and wide-spreading, far under the top-soil of the novel. As Lewes proudly put it: 'only learned Rabbis are so profoundly versed in Jewish history and literature as she is.'²⁷

Her knowledge of Hebrew, for example, dates back to her Coventry days - at least in some rudimentary form. (Sufficient, for instance, to

²⁷ GE Letters, 1 December 1875 (VI, 196).
allow her to drop a stray Hebrew expression in a letter to Maria Lewis in 1841; 28 or to cope with the Hebrew quotations in her translation of Strauss’s Das Leben Jesu in 1844. 29 From then on, there are scattered references in her letters that indicate a sustained interest in the subject — on 10 July, 1854, for instance, she returns a borrowed Hebrew Grammar to Sara Hennell.

Jewish history was always among her interests, from the earliest days — at first, strongly coloured by her Evangelical preconceptions. (When, in 1838, she opted to spend her evenings during a week in London reading Josephus’s History of the Jews, rather than visit the theatre, she probably felt that her chosen occupation was not only neutral or harmless — a better alternative to the frivolity and sinfulness of theatre-going, but that it was a positive religious pursuit — somehow graced by the cloak of Christian knowledge.) Her acquaintance with the Old Testament was close and extensive, as the thick crop of quotations in her early letters clearly shows. In her Evangelical period, again, her view of the Old Testament was radically Christianised: it is seen always as a kind of preamble to the fulfilment contained in the New Testament — in particular, of course, the Prophetic books. Her position suffers fundamental change, naturally, after her rejection of Christianity: she now lays herself open to all the findings of Biblical criticism, with their shrewd body-blows at the careful structure of historical religion. German work on the subject — far in advance of the English — is an important influence on her attitudes to religious belief; and, typically, she reacts vigorously against her former theological position.

28 ibid., 3(-4) September, 1841 (1, 105).
In her essay on *The Progress of the Intellect*, she uncompromisingly rejects the 'theory of accommodation,' which was a sort of last-stand against the extreme conclusions of the critical approach. According to this theory, the parts of the Old Testament that the modern sensibility finds barbaric can be reconciled with the sublimity of other parts by being regarded as 'benevolent falsities on the part of the true God' - a conscious divine adaptation to the needs of a primitive society. In denial of this, Marian Evans asserts the thorough-going critical position that these 'barbaric' passages are the expression of an early mythical period such as is found in the history of any other nation - they constitute a 'degrading conception of the divine attributes.'

Similarly, in her article in the *Leader* in 1856, 'Introduction to Genesis,' she discusses the range of attitudes displayed by Bible critics - from that of extreme orthodoxy ('He is not an inquirer, but an advocate'), through the accommodation theory (God teaching 'as a father teaches his children' - He 'must adapt the form of His revelations to the degree of culture, which belongs to men at the period in which His revelations are made') - to the accommodation theorists, 'the Old Testament is still an exceptional book; they only use historical criticism as a winnowing fan to carry away all demands on their belief') - and on to the position of extreme heterodoxy, which constitutes 'a perfect freedom from pre-supposition, as unreserved a submission to the guidance of historical criticism, as if it were examining the Vedas,' and which

---


finds the Old Testament 'of a character which it would be monstrous
to attribute to any other than a human origin.'

She accepts the heterodox position as the intellectually
consequent and honest one - an acceptance in line with her general
insistence on the 'inexorable law of consequences,' in the scholarly
as well as the moral sphere. But what is significant for our purposes
in these two articles is the profound and lucid knowledge they display,
both of the Bible itself and of the critical literature: the familiarity
with the cruxes of the Old Testament, with the positions adopted by
contemporary scholarship, and with the implications of these positions.
At this period of her life, at least, Biblical scholarship was one of
her principal intellectual interests. And over the next twenty years,
with the publication of various controversial works of Bible criticism
in English (Milman's History of the Jews had already appeared in 1830;
Bishop Colenso's 'arithmetical' study of the Bible, The Pentateuch and
Joshua, was published in 1862, as was Stanley's History of the Jewish
Church; and Stanley's translation of Ewald's History of Israel appeared
between 1869 and 1880) and the important work of Graf and Kuenen in
Germany, George Eliot must have remained in touch with the progress of
scholarship in this field, at least through the reviews of these books
which appeared regularly in the intellectual periodicals.

Here we touch on an area of some conjecture. Let us say only
that it seems highly probable that George Eliot did read the articles
in the Westminster, for example, particularly in the period 1851-1860,
when she herself was writing for and editing the journal. Included
among these, is a very erudite paper on the concept of the Sabbath
among the ancients, the Jews, and the Christians - which appeared in the same issue as her own review of The Progress of the Intellect, and which apparently created quite a furore in scholarly circles: according to a note in the next volume of the Westminster, the 'most accomplished scholars of the day...consider it...exhaustive of the subject,' and its success made it necessary to reprint it to meet wide demand.

In July, 1852, there was an article on 'The Restoration of Belief,' in which the idea that 'reverence can attach itself exclusively to a Person' - a Personal Object - is attributed primarily to the Hebrew system: from there, it was continued into Christianity - 'and brought with it the devout loyalty of heart, the singleness of service, the incorruptible heroism of endurance, which had encountered Antiochus Epiphanes at Jerusalem.'

Recognition of the nobility and courage displayed in Jewish history had now become fashionable, and there appears increasingly in the frequent articles and reviews on Jewish scholarly subjects a note of respect and acknowledgment, albeit qualified naturally by a rejection of Judaism's specifically religious dogmas (The 'central idea of the Jewish polity' - to regard natural events as ministers of God's justice, for example - is condemned as a 'half-truth rounding itself out with falsehoods."

Hebrew culture, the quality of life among the Jews, is contrasted favourably with that of the poorer sections of the English population,
for example, in an article on 'Sunday in Great Britain,' in April 1856. To the former, poverty did not mean degradation: 'to listen to the teaching of the law with which he had long been familiar, to restrain avarice, to surrender himself to religious impressions, was a task... akin to the long-developed instincts of a Jew. His poverty may be compared with that of a Highlander or a Cumberland peasant: they have little worldly comfort, but they have time for sober thought...'

If George Eliot did read this article, then it must have chimed in very harmoniously with her own feelings about the epic dignity of 'a Highland or a Cumberland peasant.' Her life-long love of Scott and Wordsworth spring to mind, her expressed admiration for the stern lofty culture they embody, the Puritanism, the Bible-saturated life-style. In this connection, it is illuminating to think of her review in October, 1856, of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Dred, where she praises an element 'equally grand [with the portrayal of racial conflicts] which she also shares with Scott... This is the exhibition of a people to whom what may call Hebraic Christianity is still a reality, still an animating belief, and by whom the theocratic conceptions of the Old Testament are literally applied to their daily life.'

The grandeur and poetry of such a civilisation obviously had a powerful attraction for her: it transfused life, in all its prosaic details, with that enthusiasm without which 'one cannot even pour out breakfast well (at least I cannot).'

Racial solidarity, the other element that she finds 'grand' in Mrs. Stowe's portrayal of Negro life,

35 ibid., Vol. 65 (April 1856), 453.
36 ibid., Vol. 66 (October 1856), p. 572.
37 GE Letters, 5 June, 1848 (I, 265).
and that vividly informs the Waverley novels, is to find a significant
place in her own fictional world - in the faith of Zarca, the Gypsy
chief ('The mystic striving of a common life/ That makes the many one');
and in Romola's choice of vocation - "I must go and see if my own people
need me." But it is in Daniel Deronda that George Eliot attempts the
supremely difficult task of presenting the Hebraism, the racial identity,
of the original Hebraic people; of transferring the popularly accepted
emotions and sympathies attaching to Scott's Highlanders to a despised
contemporary Jewry. Of this, we shall have more to say when we come
to look more directly at Daniel Deronda itself.

To return to Westminster, however, the racial aspect of
Jewish identity receives attention in an article on 'Types of Mankind,'
in the same issue, of April 1856. Their racial integrity, their antiquity,
cosmopolitanism, and loyalty to their own religion, according to the
writer, 'convert them into a touchstone by which to test ethnological
theories.' It is the fact that they are physically unchanged, in spite
of a certain amount of intermarriage, that serves the writer as evidence
of 'the original diversity of races,' and of his 'opinion that races are

---

38 Cf. 'Notes on the Influence of Sir Walter Scott on George Eliot,' by

39 The analogy between Mordecai and Scott's Highlanders is sustained through
several passages in the novel and the Letters. There are, for instance, Mrs. Meyrick's apprehensions that the unknown Mordecai would be a 'man
whose conversation would not be more modern and encouraging than that of
Scott's Covenanters.' (ch. 46, p. 33) Deronda asks Mrs. Meyrick to do
justice to his account of Mordecai, in telling her daughters about him -
"don't assist their imagination by referring to Habakkuk Mucklewrath." (ch. 46, p. 35) As George Eliot says, 'the romantic or unusual in real
life requires some adaptation.' (ch. 46, p. 33).

Of her general intentions with regard to Mordecai's character, George
Eliot wrote to Blackwood: 'The effect that one strives after is an outline as strong as that of Balfour of Burley for a much more complex
character and a higher strain of ideas.' (25 February 1876 (VI, 223))
permanent. How this view ties in with George Eliot's own views on racial integrity will appear later, when we come to consider the development of her attitudes on the matter.

Reviews of books on Jewish history, theology, internal developments, are scattered throughout the volumes of the Westminster over the period. There is a review of a German work on Moses Mendelssohn, and of one by Abraham Geiger,\textsuperscript{40} of Dr. J.M. Jost's \textit{Jewish History} which 'introduces the general reader to the knowledge of an immense amount of intellectual activity little suspected by him.'\textsuperscript{41} This rather excited discovery of a little-known world of undreamt wealth, is an important element in the vogue that Judaica clearly enjoyed over this period: the appeal of such discovery, and the substantial dignity, the intellectual and spiritual treasure-trove it brought to light, was very powerful to a disillusioned generation, from whom the glamour and conviction of Christian culture was sadly stripped. Indeed, comparisons between Jewish and Christian civilisation are frequent, and not always to the vindication of the latter. (The Westminster reviewer of Jost's \textit{Jewish History}, for example, finds that the Rabbinical controversies 'compare advantageously' with those of the Christians.)

This comparative approach, granting Hebraic wisdom an independent status never before acknowledged in Christian England, reaches its popular culmination, perhaps, in Emanuel Deutsch's famous article, 'The Talmud,' in the \textit{Quarterly Review} of July 1867. Fifty years afterwards, Morley, in his \textit{Recollections} (1917), remembers 'the shock given

\textsuperscript{40} Vol. 69 (April 1858), 570-3.
\textsuperscript{41} Vol. 70 (July 1858), 239.
to orthodox faith...by a Jewish scholar, who showed that the sublimest sayings in the Gospels found exact parallels in the Talmud. And, writing of Huxley's paper 'On the Physical Basis of Life' (1869), Morley compares its impact to that of Deutsch's article: 'No article that has appeared in any periodical for a generation back (unless it be Deutsch's article on the Talmud in the Quarterly of 1867) excited so profound a sensation...'

In general, the Westminster adopts a liberal attitude towards the contemporary problem of Jewish emancipation. In the following excerpt, tribute is paid to the glories of the past, together with hopes for a spiritual revival in the future. The passage is representative of one section of enlightened opinion in mid-Victorian England, and, as such, is worth quoting:

'During the darker times of persecution and oppression, the Jewish people command our admiration, as much by the eminent intellects which emerge among them, as by the constancy with which they endure suffering. Let us hope that as their freedom is now nearly complete in Christendom, the intellectual fruits of the times of their liberation may not be less rich than those of the years of their adversities.'

Equally representative, however, of another body of opinion on the 'Jewish problem,' is the view expressed in the same issue of the Westminster, in an account of a travel-book on Holland, which included a whole chapter on the Jewish population:

'As Jewish disqualifications are abolished, this race will adapt its movement to that of modern society... appreciating the noble words of Mendelssohn that the best religious principles are those which best harmonize with the general interests of humanity.'

---

43 Vol. 1, p. 90.
44 Vol. 72 (July 1859), 259-60.
45 ibid., pp. 267-8.
Here we have clearly defined the twin strands of liberal opinion regarding the Jews - that advocating maintained integrity, and that hoping for entire assimilation. On the one hand, the Jewish future is seen as some kind of apotheosis of individual religious and racial fulfilment; on the other, the recalcitrant race that has constituted such a thorny problem in the history of Europe, is seen as at last surrendering, giving up the ghost of its unique, idiosyncratic existence. This is a crucial issue, both on the wider intellectual scene - involving as it does conflicting visions of the future of humanity in general - and in the individual development of George Eliot.

The future of Jewry is dealt with again in the next volume of the Westminster, in a review of a book that was a kind of minor landmark in the 'pre-history' of Zionism - J. Salvador's Paris, Rome, Jérusalem. The relation between religion and politics is crucial here: Salvador, a French Jew by birth, tries to define his Jewish identity in purely nationalistic terms. The reviewer writes approvingly:

"The restoration of the rights of nationalities and of individuals, which is characteristic of the modern period, will necessarily lead to the free development of a religion truly universal."146

A universal religion - this is one solution to the long obstinacy of Jewish resistance: it is to melt before the warm breath of civic and national recognition - a solution especially appealing to those who had rejected the special demands and rituals of their own childhood faiths. Christians, on the other hand, had a different solution to offer for the two-thousand-year-old problem.

46 Vol. 73 (April 1860), 581.

46a This involved the conversion of the Jews to Christianity and their Restoration to Palestine as a necessary preliminary to Christ's Second Advent. This cause was espoused notably by Lord Shaftesbury, and was a subject of some controversy among Evangelicals during Mariner's own Evangelical phase (see Christian Observer, 1838-April, 232; May, 286-7; Sept. 554-6; Nov. 665-70).
The purpose of this swift and rather cursory glance through the volumes of the Westminster from 1851 to 1860 is, as we have stated, to indicate something of the extent to which an interest in Jewish life, in all its aspects, had penetrated the general intellectual atmosphere of the period; and also to posit the likelihood, especially in view of her pronounced early interest in the subject, of George Eliot’s being au fait with scholarly developments in these historical, philosophical and theological fields, at least through such secondary media. Later, in the years when she was meditating the actual writing of Daniel Deronda, there appeared other reviews—of translations of Hebrew literature and Commentaries ('in many points of view interesting to the intelligent public at large, showing that modern civilisation is indebted to the Jew for much more than the invention of banking and bills of exchange, commonly supposed now-a-days to be their most considerable contribution.'), of Ewald’s History of Israel, and of Kuenen’s Religion of Israel. So that it seems probable that George Eliot did remain fully acquainted with events in the academic sphere: after all, her calibre and her early marked interest does place her in a category above that merely of 'the intelligent public at large.'

But it is for many other reasons as well as purely scholarly and historical ones, that it seems fair to attribute to George Eliot unusually sensitive antennae for picking up the waves of development in internal Jewish affairs over a period reaching back far beyond the four years or

47 Vol. 100 (October 1873), 465.
48 Vol. 102 (July 1874), 223.
49 Vol. 103 (April 1875), 484-6.
so when *Daniel Deronda* was, properly speaking, being conceived. There is, for example, the whole question of her attitudes to the Jews, as racial group and as individuals: from casual references in her letters, we can trace a change of viewpoint that is significant not only in its own right but as an indication of wider changes in her mentality.

We find at first, for example, a sour reference in an early letter to Maria Lewis, to an evening spent listening to an oratorio: she is consciously unenchanted, both on the general puritanical grounds that 'I have no soul for music...I am a tasteless person but it would not cost me any regrets if the only music heard in our land were that of strict worship...' and, specifically, because her religious sensibility is outraged by the profane circumstances of the particular performance: it is 'little less than blasphemy for such words as "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ" to be taken on the lips of such a man as Braham (a Jew too!).'50

In this last aside, three words of telling indignation, much is revealed of the unthinking dogmatism of the young Evangelical. But even after her 'conversion,' when the dogmatic grounds had been swept away, the note of casual antagonism is still to be found in her letters: she praises Hennell's conception of Jesus, for instance (in his *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity*), as 'a Jewish philosopher,' while adding that it is 'almost like saying a round square.'51 Perhaps it is not worth-while trying to work out the implications of what looks like a startling piece of blinkered prejudice, such as she was so vehemently to reject in later years.

50 *GE Letters*, 6-8 November 1838 (I, 13).
51 ibid., 16 September 1847 (I, 237).
In a letter to John Sibree, however, a few months later, her views are expounded with greater fullness and clarity—and also with a certain quiet violence that may have been engendered by Disraeli's assumption of racial superiority. The letter is worth quoting at some length:

'As to his theory of "races" it has not a leg to stand on, and can only be buoyed up by such windy eloquence as "You chitty-faced squabby-nosed Europeans owe your commerce, your arts, your religion to the Hebrews—nay, the Hebrews lead your armies—"...Extermination up to a certain point seems to be the law for the inferior races—for the rest, fusion both for physical and moral ends. It appears to me that the law by which privileged classes degenerate from continual intermarriage must act on a larger scale in deteriorating whole races. The nations have been always kept apart until they have sufficiently developed their idiosyncrasies and then some great revolutionary force has been called into action by which the genius of a particular nation becomes a portion of the common mind of humanity...The negroes certainly puzzle me—all the other races seem plainly destined to extermination or fusion not excepting even the "Hebrew-Caucasian."...The fellowship of race, to which D'Israeli exultingly refers the munificence of Sidonia, is so evidently an inferior impulse which must ultimately be superseded that I wonder even he, Jew as he is, dares to boast of it. My Gentile nature kicks most resolutely against any assumption of superiority in the Jews, and is almost ready to echo Voltaire's vituperation. ["Un Christien contre six Juifs." I bow to the supremacy of Hebrew poetry, but much of their early mythology and almost all their history is utterly revolting...The very exaltation of their idea of a national deity into a spiritual monotheism seems to have been borrowed from the other oriental tribes. Everything specifically Jewish is of a low grade.'

52 ibid., 11 February 1848 (I, 246-7)
The general racial theory of which the Jews are here made exemplars is reminiscent of that propounded in the Westminster, which we quoted earlier. It is representative of one block of the enlightened opinion of the time - the belief in the eventual unity of mankind, in which individual racial idiosyncrasies, divisive factors would be dropped, and only that which was essentially human, universally adopted, would remain. Towards the Jews themselves, their racial fellowship, their religious achievements, the young Marian Evans obviously felt some antagonism - possibly only as a reaction against Disraeli's grandiloquence. For all the reasoned, intellectual tone of the passage, she is somehow affronted, slightly vindictive in her reaction. Her irritable sarcasms are not, after all, so far removed from the rather cheap irony of Punch's reaction to Disraeli's theories:

"Look at that old clothes-man," said we to ourselves; "who would think that the unmixed blood of Caucasus runs through the veins of that individual who has just offered us nine-pence for our penultimate hat, and is refusing to give us ten-pence for our preter-plu-perfect, or rather more than finished and done for, high-lows." 153

Over the next few years, however, a change in her attitudes gradually takes place. There is the ironic but non-committal note in a letter to Sara Hennell, that the only piece of good news is 'that the "Society for the Conversion of the Jews" has converted one Jew during the last year and has spent £4400.' 54 One can detect no more than satiric detachment here; but in November, 1854, she went with Lewes to see a performance of Lessing's Nathan der Weise in Berlin, and from

53 Punch, 12 (1847) 145.
54 GE Letters, 28 May 1853 (II, 102).
her letter to Charles Bray the following day, we can see that her sympathy and imagination have been caught:

'You know, or perhaps you do not know that this play is a sort of dramatic apologue the moral of which is religious tolerance. It thrilled me to think that Lessing dared nearly a hundred years ago to write the grand sentiments and profound thoughts which this play contains... In England the words which call down applause here would make the pit rise in horror,'

Here, certain connections and associations are made that are to be carried through and developed later, in Daniel Deronda: the association of the Jews with religious tolerance, and with general cultural openness, which is associated in its turn with the intellectual superiority of the Continental mind over that of the English. But what is most striking about Marian Evans's reaction is the new note of enthusiasm: she has obviously been stirred deeply by Lessing's play.

In addition, however, during that winter in Berlin, she had met Varnhagen von Ense, whom Lewes had known well in his student days, and who now frequented the best society of Berlin, and introduced the Leweses into these circles. Varnhagen, the biographer of Goethe, had also had the distinction of being the husband of the celebrated Jewish salon personality, Rahel Levin. Varnhagen later published her correspondence, and he showed Marian his wife's diaries, which laid bare her feelings of love/hatred for her Jewishness.

This chain of association between Marian Evans and Rahel is not as tenuous as it may perhaps appear. Her acquaintance with Rahel's

---

55 ibid., 12 November 1854 (II, 185).
husband led, for one thing, to her reading Heine properly, for the first time - Heine, who had frequented Rahel's salon in the 1820's, whose lyric collection Die Heimkehr was dedicated to her, and whose attitudes to Judaism were similarly ambivalent and bitter-sweet. Through meeting Varnhagen and hearing him talk of Rahel and Heine, Marian Evans must have had a new and unimagined world of experience opened before her: the world of the cultured Jew, uncertain of his identity, loving his heritage, revolting against the stigma it laid upon him in the culture and social values of the contemporary world that he equally cherished.

From this time onwards, George Eliot's attitudes and reactions to Jews, as a race and as individuals, underwent a radical change. As so often with George Eliot, the catalyst was a human being, rather than unembodied ideas: in this case, the effect of Lewes's cosmopolitan sympathies, his wide range of friends and acquaintances, his flexibility, his catholic intellectual enthusiasms, was both marked and far-reaching in its impact on her imaginative life.

The immediate objective results of her acquaintance with Varnhagen were, as we have noticed, that she began to read Heine seriously, and she wrote in 1856 an article for the Westminster, on 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine.'56 This essay, the first serious account in English of the poet's achievement, inaugurated what became over the '50's a veritable Heine vogue, in reaction against the pre-Victorian appraisal of him as a 'dirty, blaspheming Jew' - to use

56 Jan. 1856.
Carlyle's elegant phrase. Her article 'probably did more than any other single work in introducing to English-speaking peoples the genius that was Heine's.'\textsuperscript{57} The vogue reached its culmination with Arnold's famous essay in the \textit{Cornhill} in August 1863, in which Heine was characterised as the arch-opponent of Philistinism, the continuator of Goethe.

The question of what led George Eliot to an interest in this hitherto-maligned poet, however, can be brushed aside by references to her own religious and personal situation which, according to Sol Liptzin (in his article, 'Heine, the Continuator of Goethe. A Mid-Victorian Legend'),\textsuperscript{58} ensured that she felt no fastidiousness or repulsion for Heine's irreligious railleries or personal immorality. Such negative motives are quite insufficient to account for so deep an interest. It was the revelation of his Jewishness that profoundly touched her, his struggles to define his identity, to accept and place his heritage in a complete world-view.

Twenty years later, she was to remember Heine's \textit{Romancero}, and use a stanza from the section, 'Princess Sabbath,' (in the Third Book, 'Hebrew Melodies') as epigraph for a chapter of \textit{Daniel Deronda} - Chapter 34, the description of Sabbath evening at the Cohen's. And not only in the epigraph, but throughout that whole chapter, Heine is present - in the ambivalent consciousness of Deronda, to whom the


\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Journal of English and Germanic Philology}, 43 (1944) 317-25.
Sabbath experience seems admirable, grotesque, inspiring, and sensual, in turn. The dignifying influence of the Sabbath, when the prince, who has been turned into a dog, becomes human once more (in Heine's allegory), is reflected in the Cohen household through the medium of Deronda's surprise at the change in the pawnbroker's family, since the morning.

In his fragment, 'Jehuda ben Halevy,' however, his seriousness, his enthusiastic sympathy is drawn uppermost - and we have what is recognisable as at least a possible prototype for George Eliot's Mordecai. Heine declares at the beginning of the fragment that he feels a certain closeness to the medieval Jewish mystic, feels that he knows him, in his nobleness and sadness. After describing Halevy's education in his voluminous Jewish culture, Heine goes on to write of his life-long passion for Jerusalem, which was this Jewish poet's 'lady' - in an age when 'the lady was as needful/To the tuneful minnesinger/As to bread-and-butter, butter.' (Heine's mischievous streak will not be repressed even in this serious and comparatively whole-hearted enthusiasm.) Halevy's sorrow in the desolation of Jerusalem, his life-long yearning for the Holy City, his clinging to the words of returning pilgrims, are recounted with sympathy - culminating in his own hazardous pilgrimage, his death at the gates of Jerusalem, and his reception in heaven by the angels singing his own rhapsody of welcome to the Sabbath, Lecha Dodi.\(^59\)

---

\(^59\) This Hymn was, in fact, written by Shelomo Halevy Alkabetz, and not by Jehuda Halevy, as Heine says.
The idea of the medieval poet, and his single consuming passion, is embodied again in George Eliot's scholar-poet, with his relentless vision. Indeed, George Eliot's knowledge was not limited to Heine's account: it seems clear that she read Jehuda Halevy's poetry for herself, and in the original Hebrew. The sample of Mordecai's verse which we are given (as he tries to imprint it on the mind of the acrobatic Jacob) is remarkably reminiscent of Halevy's style and tone: the allusiveness of his imagery is, indeed, quite a striking achievement, and indicates in a quiet unobtrusive way the sheer depth and scope of George Eliot's learning.

All in all, we can hazard a guess that it was with this crucial encounter in 1854 with Varnhagen, and the link this created with the salon-world of Rahel and Heine, through Varnhagen's personal memories, and through their published writings - it was through this, that Marian Evans entered for the first time the strange world of the special experience of the Jew. She came to realise, from within, as it were, the possible richness and nobility of such a life, reflected in the great figures of the past. And she came to sympathise in a much more vivid way than before with the problems of contemporary Jews, in their social and cultural no-man's land - conscious of a glorious past, yet unable to translate its glories into terms relevant to the present and the future. The solutions she advocates in Daniel Deronda are arrived at only after a profound understanding of the dilemmas of contemporary Jewry: they did not constitute for her any kind of romantic fantasy, but the only possible and realistic key to a future that should be worthy of the past.
One cornerstone of her view of Judaism was, clearly, her belief in the importance of the visionary - the man excelling in learning, wisdom, piety, and sheer humanity - who represents the best fruits of his culture and acts as a redemptive influence on his more prosaic and earth-bound brothers. This is Sepharo in The Spanish Gypsy - philosopher, scientist, mystic, lovingly human, and intensely Jewish:

While my heart beats, it shall wear livery -
My people's livery, whose yellow badge
Marks them for Christian scorn. 60

He is an apotheosis, a justification: on him, on Mordecai, George Eliot can lavish all her admiration, all her instinct for nobility and grandeur in human life. Sepharo towers, in a sense, over all the other characters in the drama: he has a firmness, a sad serenity, a high belief, that places him spiritually above the passionate struggles of Don Silva and Fedalma, or the mere inflexibility of the Prior or of Zarca. He represents the Jewish genius at its best - intellectual, spiritual, yet fully committed to the human ties and duties from which it takes its being.

The general fate of the Spanish Jews in the poem - degraded, forcibly converted - is seen with irony, as the result of the fanaticism and avarice of the Christian society. The degrading effects on the personality are seen satirically and with eyes clear of sentimentality. 'Mine Host' in the tavern at the beginning of the drama, for instance, was converted from Judaism when a child. Now he is described

...mentioning the cost
With confidential blandness, as a tax
That he collected much against his will
From Spaniards who were all his bosom friends:
Warranted Christian... 61

60 The Spanish Gypsy, p. 195.
61 ibid., p. 13.
The result of this forced conversion is that he can take no faith seriously, he can be ruled by no higher deity than opportunism or self-preservation: he has a kind of built-in cynicism, since 'infant awe.../Dies with what nourished it.' Now, for him, 'all sacraments [are] a mode/Of doing homage for one's property.' But this deplorable attitude is seen clearly as an effect of the pressures of an antagonistic society: 'Twas Christian tyranny that made him base.'

George Eliot's view of the Jewish situation is, then, clear-sighted but sympathetic. Like Deronda, she finds some aspects of the Jewish character distorted and degraded; but, like him, she brings the faculties of comparison and rationality into play against an instinctive adoption of the antisemitic posture. She sees the moral degradation of the Innkeeper in *The Spanish Gypsy*, or the vulgar opportunism of the Cohens in *Daniel Deronda*, as the product of centuries of oppression and contempt by the surrounding societies. Like Lecky, of whose *History of Rationalism* (1865) she wrote a review for the *Westminster*, she found it only to be wondered at that the Jews had resisted this corroding process as well as they had; that they retained a certain dignity, a pride of identity in the midst of humiliation. At their worst - and Deronda is constantly making the observation in his self-communings over the Jews that he meets in the East End - they are no worse than their Christian counterparts in the economic and social scale.

The history of Deronda's inner recoils and self-rebukes, in his search for Mirah's family - this process of self-conquest, of self-education through sympathy and through comparative reasoning is, in fact,
closely linked to George Eliot's own development in sensibility.

The main problem that irks Deronda in his early experience is the dichotomy between the ideal and the actual, between the glories and martyrdoms of history, and the physical repulsiveness of contemporary suffering:

"The fact was, notwithstanding all his sense of poetry in common things, Deronda, where a keen personal interest was aroused, could not, more than the rest of us, continuously escape suffering from the pressure of that hard un-accommodating Actual, which has never consulted our taste and is entirely unselect...To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth, is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginning in newspaper placards, staring at you from a bridge beyond the cornfields...It lay in Deronda's nature usually to contemn the feeble, fastidious sympathy which shrinks from the broad life of mankind..." 62

- but what he fears in his search for Mirah's family is some jarring collision between the dream and the actuality. He is afraid of a failure in that 'force of imagination that pierces or exalts the solid fact' - he shrinks instinctively from finding Mirah's brother and mother even among the kindly, genial Cohens - they are, to his fastidious sensibility, an impenetrably 'solid fact'.

This instinctive revulsion, however, is gradually moderated, as his knowledge and understanding deepen, as he comes to share more in the lived experience of the Cohens - the real warmth and affection that reigns among them. He constantly checks and places his instinctive reactions - through self-irony and a determination to achieve a fair perspective. This is an example of his constant self-adjustment:

Deronda, not in a cheerful mood, was rashly pronouncing this Ezra Cohen to be the most unpoetic Jew he had ever met with in books or life: his phraseology was as little as possible like that of the Old Testament; and no shadow of a Suffering Race distinguished his vulgarity of soul from that of a prosperous pink-and-white huckster of the purest English lineage. It is naturally a Christian feeling that a Jew ought not to be conceited.  

The continuous use of reason, the transcendence of limitations of prejudice and subjective expectation, leads Deronda eventually to a real and creative acceptance of the Cohens. But the principal factor that aids him in this exercise of the 'chief poetic energy' is, of course, his discovery of Mordecai. On his first view of Mordecai among the Cohens, at the Sabbath table, Deronda can feel only the sharp contrast of the types - the 'unaccountable conjunction' - the presence among these common, prosperous, shopkeeping types, of a man who, in an emaciated threadbare condition, imposed a certain awe on Deronda, and an embarrassment at not meeting his expectations.  

Later, however, after he has struggled and reasoned with himself, after his momentous meeting with Mordecai on the bridge - and the oscillations in his thought that follow it - Deronda comes to see some integral connection between Mordecai and the undistinguished pawn-broker who shelters him:  

'This Jeshurun of a pawnbroker was not a symbol of the great Jewish tragedy; and yet was there not something typical in the fact that a life like Mordecai's - a frail incorporation of the national consciousness, breathing with difficult breath - was nested in the self-gratulating ignorant prosperity of the Cohens?  

63 ibid., ch. 33, p. 174.  
64 ibid., ch. 34, p. 187.  
65 ibid., ch. 42, p. 364.
There is an organic relation here, of the spiritual and the material, that redeems and vindicates the latter. The sense of 'something typical' here is characteristic of Jewish life: the symbiotic relation of the passionate visionary/sage with the 'broad life of mankind.' In this light, Deronda comes to accept and appreciate the Cohens: but it is, fundamentally, Mordecai who justifies and ennobles the idea of the Jew for Deronda. In other words, through sheer sympathy - pity, understanding for the down-trodden and the morally undernourished - neither Deronda nor George Eliot herself would have found the whole subject of a Jewish future worthy of contemplation. Such human sympathy carried Deronda only a short distance: it was Mordecai, with his intense, spiritual visions, the sheer quality of the man, who opened doors of understanding and love for Deronda.66

To extrapolate from the creature to the creator - I would argue that George Eliot herself had her considerable and intense interest in Jews and Judaism aroused not merely by her general sympathy with contemporary problems. She managed to bridge the gap between the glories of the Hebrew past, the martyrdom and spiritual achievement of historical heroes, and the actual pathos of the contemporary Jewish scene - the gap that so irked Deronda at first - by very similar means to his. Typically, it was through her contact with the personal experience of exceptional men, through their living of Judaism, that she gained her real perceptions into this generally unknown area. Two such men were Solomon Maimon, whose Autobiography is the occasion of Deronda's first conversation with Mordecai in the bookshop; and Emanuel Deutsch, the scholar and author of the celebrated paper, 'The Talmud,' which created such a stir in 1867.

66 This, incidentally, is an authentic Jewish idea: that the sage, the great man of vision and human love justifies by his very existence the lives of all the more prosaic children of his generation.
The first of these, Solomon Maimon, she knew only through his *Autobiography*. But this fact should not rule him out of court as an enlightening *personal* influence on her. 'That wonderful bit of autobiography,' for which Deronda pays half-a-crown in a second-hand shop, is a self-revelation by an extremely cultivated mind, caught between two worlds - the religious and the secular. Solomon Maimon, educated within the traditional Jewish framework in eighteenth century Poland, is representative of one of the important movements in modern Jewish history: the struggle of the intellectual to break down Ghetto-walls, to excel in the fields of philosophy and metaphysics, to reduce his religious bonds and obligations to an absolute minimum. The story of this stubborn, restless spirit, which its involuntary respect for the heritage it strove to cast off, must have held a powerful fascination for the ex-Evangelical George Eliot. The similarities, and, even more, the differences, between his heritage and hers, between his rebellion and hers, must have set his autobiography in a light of more than academic interest for her.

Maimon did win through to become a prominent metaphysician, admired by Schiller and Goethe, and declared by Kant to be the only man in Germany to understand his work. The English translator of the *Autobiography* in 1888 writes enthusiastically in his Preface, of the romance of this 'record of a spirit imprisoned within almost unsuperable barriers to culture, yet acquiring strength to burst all these, and even to become an appreciable power in directing the course of speculation'⁶⁷;

---

and calls it 'one of the most extraordinary biographies in the history of literature.' Writing more than a decade after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, he notes that one of the novel's effects was 'to make known to a wide circle of readers the vitality of Judaism as a system which still holds sway over the mental as well as the external life of men.' His translation is, then, offered as one of the fruits of this new interest that George Eliot has generated.

But, in fact, the process can be reversed: it was Maimon's *Autobiography* (in its original German form, of course) which at least played a significant part in bringing home to George Eliot this kind of vitality still present in Judaism. It presented to her a society ruled by the laws of the Torah (the body of Divine teaching, compassing every facet of life), a society with an intellectual aristocracy based on the culture and learning of its members (the infant-prodigy, Maimon, becomes a highly eligible marriage-prospect, for instance, because of his great learning.)

Maimon himself writes of this society of his youth with some revulsion; he marks out its quaint, and its macabre aspects; he finds little of nobility or dignity in this life, little to praise or admire in the intellectual system or in the moral attitudes of its adherents. His book is the work of a cynic, a rebel - 'all head and no heart.' The Cabbalah, the system of Jewish mysticism, is 'nothing but an expanded Spinozism,' he is sceptical about Rabbinism, about the early Chassidic sects. Under his pen, the grotesque aspects of his early experience spring to the fore. But, for all that, and possibly because of it, the power and vitality of this, to George Eliot's countrymen and
contemporaries, little-known way of life, must have gripped her imagination - just as much as her sympathies with the rebel spirit.

There is, in fact, interesting evidence that she not only knew the *Autobiography* but that she studied it with a closeness and a scholarly attention that are impressive in themselves. Dr. Israel Abrahams has a paper in his *The Book of Delight* (Philadelphia, 1912) on 'George Eliot and Solomon Maimon,' in which he analyses the notes and jottings found in the margins and on the fly-leaf of the particular copy of the *Autobiography* that she used. He comments admiringly that these indicate the range and profundity of her knowledge of Judaism.

The passing reference in *Daniel Deronda* is like the tip of an iceberg: it conceals not only a thorough reading of the *Autobiography*, but the fact that she could comment on, and often correct, Maimon's statements and judgments. Dr. Abrahams agrees with her about 'the misleading tendency of a good deal' of Maimon's book. She tones down some of Maimon's defiant criticisms, altogether contradicts him on other points; oddly enough, she defends Rabbinism and the Cabbala against his strictures! She corrects his pagination at one point, makes translations of Hebrew book-titles, and Dr. Abrahams finds evidence that she knew the work of Graetz, the famous Jewish historian. Some passages are pencilled, and she adds at the end an index to points of special interest in the *Autobiography*.

All this indicates, not only her remarkable previous knowledge and accurate grasp of history and theology, but that she found Maimon's self-revelation worthy of such close study. We may then conclude that she had

a particular interest in this representative of the Jewish 'Enlightenment'
movement - in his spiritual and intellectual adventures, in the way in
which Judaism loomed over his life, even when in his mind he had already
shaken himself free of it. Both she and he were rebels, against the
religious and moral framework of their youth; and yet, she spent her
whole life trying to shore up the values that that framework had supported.
Always, she insisted on the binding nature of youthful association and
affection, on the heart as well as the head. And in relation to the problem
of the Jew's attitude to the past, the solution that she shadows forth
in Mordecai and in Deronda involves a firm loyalty of race, a pride of
religious heritage that is a far cry from Maimon's clear, hard rationalism,
his universalism. From what she later writes about the consumptive watch-
maker, Cohn (whom Lewes had met at the Philosophers' Club in Red Lion
Square) when denying him to be the source of Mordecai's character, we
can deduce her reaction to the equally cerebral Maimon: she declares
that 'no such resemblance [between Cohn and Mordecai] existed, Cohn being
a keen dialectician and a highly impressive man, but without any specifically
Jewish enthusiasm. His type was rather that of Spinoza whose metaphysical
system attracted his subtle intellect, and in relation to Judaism
Spinoza was in contrast with my conception of Mordecai. 69

Mordecai, then, incorporates George Eliot's own special viewpoint
on the past, on the ties of race and common heritage - a viewpoint
involving acceptance and loyalty, even in the midst of visions for the

69 GE Letters, 18 January 1879 (VII, 96).
future. But Solomon Maimon, in his very negation and scepticism, would have brought home to her the experience of an intellectual and complex being in a setting of lived modern Judaism - an experience that on George Eliot must have exerted more fascination than the contrasting stereotypes of a heroic past or a prosaic actuality.70

The other notable Jew, on whose experience she was able to draw for her vision of the possibilities of the Jewish personality, was Emanuel Deutsch. The fascinating and heroic portrait of this scholar-poet is painted with some tenderness in Lady Strangford's "Memoir," in The Literary Remains of Emanuel Deutsch (1874); and in 'A Memorial,'71 by the Reverend H.R. Haweis, who took Deutsch into his home during his last disease-wracked months.

Born in 1829 in Prussian Silesia, Deutsch was educated both in the severe and voluminous discipline of Hebrew culture and, later, in Theology, at Berlin University. Through all his wide-ranging quest after knowledge - his 'feasts of erudition' - he never relinquished his study of the Talmud - Lady Strangford tells us that an 'enormous mass of transcriptions and translations...was found after his death.' He mastered English - studied English literature - and, in 1855, he joined the British Museum as an assistant in the Library Department. From that time till his death from cancer in 1873, besides his work in the Museum, he researched and prepared for what was to be his magnum opus - a

70 It is interesting that the name Lapidoth - which is, of course, Mirah's family name - occurs in the Autobiography: Moses Lapidoth is Maimon's bosom friend and philosophical companion in the early part of his life. (ch. XVII).

71 In Contemporary Review, 23 (April 1874), 779-98.
definitive work on the Talmud. The famous article which was published in the Quarterly Review in 1867 was only a slight fore-taste, as it were, of the feast to come, and, as Lady Strangford points out, its results were not entirely salutary - it 'excited so much attention, both in England and on the Continent, that he was at once launched, as it were, from the obscurity of a student into a rather unenviable notoriety.'

He suffered henceforth from the petty professional jealousies of his colleagues. Eventually, however, he obtained ten weeks' leave to visit the Holy Land in 1869 - an experience that aroused the ardent enthusiasm of the Jew and the poet. On his return, he delivered a dozen lectures on his visit, mainly on Phoenicia. By this time, his fatal disease had taken its grip of him, and his last years were a protracted nightmare of pain and humiliation, petty persecution by his colleagues at the Museum, and deep depression, partly justified by its 'objective correlative,' in terms of the physical suffering he had to bear, and partly the expression of an innate melancholy, a 'certain loneliness of heart that frequently hangs round the transplanted Jew.' At the end, he received unexpected leave, for a visit to Egypt; and there, he died, in May 1873.

These are the bare facts of Deutsch's life. But it is the nature of the man, as it emerges from Lady Strangford's and Rev. Haweis's accounts, and from the rather moving correspondence between him and George Eliot, that marks him out, not merely - as Dr. Haight terms him - as providing 'the principal impetus' for George Eliot's conception of Mordecai, but, more radically, as a living type of the
'heroic' Jew, equally far removed from the melodrama of both Sidonia and Fagin. The portrait that emerges is that of a scholarly, ardent nature, possessed of a strong sense of destiny, of vocation; a kind of tragic burden of words to deliver in spite of deep melancholy, self-distrust, and physical suffering - in spite, moreover, of a disabling scepticism as to the possibility or worth of anything new to be said, by him or by others: 'I have certain words in my possession which have been given me that they might be said to others, few or many...I know I shall not find peace or rest until I have said my whole say. And yet I cannot do it...It is the continuity and solidarity of refined mankind which I have in my mind, and the sameness of its achievements...and reflecting upon all this, I find that I have nothing more to say...But all this is so confused and wild...after all, this is the end of all investigation into history or art: they were even as we are. Why not be satisfied with the general result?...the futility of my own self-sacrifice...I may teach a few...that man is not bad from the beginning...But after: what is the having done this compared to a real, good, active, useful life...one which has a real - not a so-called ideal - aim and purpose? 72

This intense doubt as to the value of the reflective, philosophic life apart from a personal practical fulfilment is among the moving features of the man's inner landscape - something we have seen shadowed forth in Marian Evans's own early struggles. But there were other sides to his nature: a great human warmth, a certain whimsical humour, even playfulness - what Lady Strangford calls a 'gaîté de coeur' - sensitivity, a pride that kept his disease secret and dragged him in

72 Memoir, p. xiii.
torment to his daily work at the British Museum. He worked, writes Lady Strangford, 'as only a German can work'; and she quotes from an unnamed source a possibly hyperbolic, but still impressive eulogy: 'There is probably no one in England who possesses, to an equal degree, the varied knowledge, combined with the intense sympathy for art, nature, and humanity that distinguished the deceased scholar.'

The softer and sterner parts of his character seemed to be equally balanced: heart and head, reverence and rationalism maintaining a serene equilibrium: 'He had the fervid temperament of a poet, the tender heart of a woman, and a certain simplicity of nature that broke out occasionally as in a child.' - and at the same time - as both his biographers stress - his whole life was of a personal purity and nobility, a singlemindedness, that makes him appear as a kind of saint.

His great intellectual capacity, Haweis claims, was to fuse past and present, in a single encompassing vision: his great projected work on the Talmud was to have been a monument to this vision, and he suffered much from the sense that his fame after the 1867 article was a fraud, that he had, as yet, achieved nothing. This strain of melancholy, the sense of disparity between infinite aspiration and minuscule achievement, is a note that haunts his letters and diaries: at the end, on his last journey, the tragic disparity ached more sharply than ever: 'There is so immensely much of life within me yet, and my will is so savagely strong at times...my brain is teeming with work...The tragical irony of my failure of life cuts me to pieces.' This desperate sense of non-achievement, an almost Keatsian melancholy of frustrated creativity, became later an important aspect of George
Eliot's conception of Mordecai—his consciousness, before meeting Deronda, of 'the passionate current of an ideal life straining to embody itself, made intense by resistance to imminent dissolution.'

The other obvious facet that links Deutsch's personality with Mordecai's is the former's passionate love for the East, for the Holy Land. In the diaries written there, some passages hint at an intensity of experience approaching the mystical: his rapture at one point is 'like several ninth symphonies piled one atop of the other.' This capacity for ardent enthusiasm, this special love for the land of his ancestors, flaring out in spite of wracking pain and consciousness of the approaching end—this is, again, one of the aspects of Mordecai's character—a heroism of the spirit—that George Eliot must have drawn courage to depict as realistically feasible, from her knowledge of Deutsch during his last few years.

The history of this friendship between novelist and scholar is both moving and revealing, in the light it sheds on George Eliot's sensibility. Deutsch first visited the Lewes's in 1866; in January 1867, Mrs. Frederick Lehmann wrote to her husband about the Lewes's visit to her at Pau: '...they like Deutsch. He is the brightest.

73 The Epigraph to Ch. 43 of Daniel Deronda is taken, in fact, from Keats's Sonnet, 'On seeing the Elgin Marbles for the first time,' (1817):

'My spirit is too weak; mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.'

74 Daniel Deronda, (Ch. 38, p. 300).
German...they ever saw. That is a nice word for his hop-sparrowishness, I daresay, but they like him. 75

Thereafter, Deutsch became one of the circle that clustered around the Lewes home: he was invited to dinner, and he entertained the Leweses to a private viewing of recent additions at the British Museum. Oscar Browning mentions a cast of the Melian Asclepius—a present, I think, from Mr. Deutsch, 76 that stood in front of George Eliot's writing-table. Then, before the publication of Deutsch's famous article, it appears that she read the proofs—she asks him in a letter from Ilmenau to forward his 'precious packet' to Dresden for her. 77 The warmth and respect that radiate from this letter are a tribute both to George Eliot's sensitivity and to the reverence that Deutsch inspired in those who knew him:

'Of course no one else than you could write it [an article repudiating Fuad Pasha's supposed "Confession" of belief in Christ], and unless, with that treasure of knowledge you carry within you, you do a great deal more of the same sort, you will deserve the anathemas of men to come, who will lack something you might have given them. Especially, pray return often to that note of reproach for unashamed ignorance, and insist that the conscientious effort to know is part of religion. See how I take it on me to tell you your duty! But as a German, you are bound to be reverent to rather silly old women and take them for prophetesses."

The tone is characteristic: the mixture of serious encouragement and warmth, earnest exhortation, and arch self-consciousness. The affection and respect are unmistakable, as is her acute sense of the kind of stimulus that Deutsch needs from her.

75 GE Letters, 22 January 1867 (IV, 336).
76 Life of George Eliot, 1890, p. 90.
77 GE Letters, 13 August 1867 (IV, 385).
Later, after the publication of 'The Talmud,' there is another deeply sympathetic and loyal letter of indignation at the 'buzzing and stinging which is tormenting you. I beseech you not to battle with it. Escape from it - mentally, I mean, by working steadily without reference to any temporary chit-chat... Of course the noise of admiration is always half of it contemptible in its quality, and as besotting as bad wine if a man lets himself take too much of it... If you keep complete possession of yourself and refuse to lend yourself at small interest, you must be ultimately judged by the knowledge, the ideas, the power of any sort that you give positive evidence of."78

This 'hurried outpouring of sincere regard' can be seen, again, as both a personal manifesto - it certainly reads like George Eliot's own declaration of faith - and as an indication of the special relation between the two writers - of a kind of maternal reverence on her part.

Again, after attending a lecture of his on the Talmud, she writes: 'You had not a more anxious, sympathetic listener than I was. Indeed, I was too anxious to be able to judge of the effect on outsiders who listened with more indifference.'79 And, two weeks later, she writes with intense feeling, of his melancholy: she has thought of 'hardly anything but your trouble of mind... Do not distrust your call. I believe in it still, though I am the least hopeful of mortals both in my own affairs and in those of any one who is dear to me. In strong natures check and partial failure beget a deeper resolve.'80

78 ibid., 16 December 1867 (IV, 409).
79 ibid., 10 May 1868 (IV, 440).
80 ibid., 23 May 1868 (IV, 446).
On his return from the East the following year, she warmly bids him 'Thrice welcome!' and invites him for next Sunday: in spite of the anxiety and strain over Thornton's illness, she assures him, 'you will find affection and bring gladness.' A few months later, she begins to take regular weekly Hebrew lessons with him: one can imagine how the language and the literature must have become invested for her with the sad and rich aura of the personality of this man already under sentence of death.

She writes later of her sorrow on hearing of his illness:

'I think we shall lecture you about not taking enough care of yourself, but I hope you will silence us by saying that you intend from henceforth to dine and sleep like any stupid Christian.' Deutsch's neglect of his physical needs was notorious: he would pass whole nights at work on his private research, and turn up the next morning promptly at the British Museum. George Eliot is touchingly solicitous: one also wonders, however, if there is not a tinge of seriousness in her whimsical distinction between Deutsch and 'any stupid Christian' - a kind of acknowledgment of the cultural aristocracy that Deutsch represented for her. As I shall suggest later, with reference to the cultural values presented in Daniel Deronda, it seems that George Eliot by this time had arrived at an extremely high evaluation of the intellectual and moral standards of Judaism: at its best, it had come to represent for her perhaps the ideal embodiment of the life of fused intellect and emotion.

81 ibid., 24 May 1869 (V, 39-40).
82 ibid., 14 September 1870 (V, 116).
At all events, Deutsch's dedication to his life's work, combined with his poignant pessimism, did touch her heart: she visited him several times at Rev. Haweis's home, and wrote him affectionately and hopefully: wants to know if he has plenty of sleep, exhorts him to 'encourage Mr. Micawber's philosophy in your soul, and be sure that something will "turn up." Hopelessness has been to me, all through my life, but especially in painful years of my youth, the chief source of wasted energy, with all the consequent bitterness of regret.\(^83\) The letter continues - obviously not irrelevantly - with her observation that often failed suicides have lived to be glad of their failure. Mary Wollstonecraft is cited as an example: she got as far as wetting her clothes in order to drown easier, and then came to think as she walked, 'that she might live to be glad that she had not put an end to herself - and so it turned out... Which things are a parable.\(^84\)

The tact and concern of her feeling for Deutsch are sustained till his death: afterwards, she wrote to Lady Strangford, with a Note for her Memoir. There can be little doubt, considering this correspondence,

\(^83\) ibid., 7 July 1871 (V, 160).

\(^84\) This incident from Mary Wollstonecraft's life is a possible influence on the description of Mirah's attempted suicide - the wetting of the cloak before she throws herself into the river. It is possibly relevant, too, that Solomon Maimon, in his Autobiography, relates how he himself attempted to commit suicide at one point: he treats this 'serio-comic scene' - as 'only the upper part of the body obeyed the command of the mind, trusting that the lower part would certainly refuse its services for such a purpose.' (pp. 247-8).
that Deutsch was a strong influence on her conception of the Jewish personality; that she felt an intense sympathy, in the most literal sense of the word, with his emotional problems and intellectual aspirations; and that, apart from any obvious similarities of detail between Mordecai and Deutsch, her knowledge of the scholar shaped her own vision of the Jewish past, and of a possible Jewish future.

I mentioned earlier the special organic relation in which George Eliot saw Mordecai and the Cohen family: the extraordinary peaks of the Hebrew genius arising out of the more prosaic landscape of Jewish life. In her treatment of this latter aspect, George Eliot drew on her usual faculties of human sympathy and insight, her feeling for atmosphere and background. In 1858, she had visited the Ghetto at Prague, the Synagogue and the Friedhof. In 1866, when she and Lewes were in Amsterdam, they 'looked about for the very Portuguese Synagogue where Spinoza was nearly assassinated as he came from worship. But it no longer exists.' They went to one of the city's synagogues on a Friday evening, and her impressions are vividly described:

'The chanting and swaying about of the bodies - almost a wriggling - are not beautiful to the sense, but I fairly cried at witnessing this faint symbolism of a religion of sublime far-off memories. The skulls of St. Ursula's eleven thousand virgins seem a modern suggestion compared with the Jewish Synagogue.'85 Lewes writes in his Journal of a long ramble through Amsterdam's Jews' quarter, 'where the men women and children seemed all gathered into the street as in a salon de conversation.'86

85 GE Letters, 10 August 1866 (IV, 298).
86 16 June 1866 (quoted in GE Letters IV, 298; Note 2).
These early visits to Synagogues and Ghettoes indicate an interest and sympathy with the Jewish destiny, quite apart from and previous to any actual project for a book on the subject. In 1873, too, Lewes wrote to his son, that they had stayed on for five days in Frankfurt, 'in order that we might attend service at the Synagogue (for Matter's purposes.)' Deronda's experience at the Frankfurt Synagogue is obviously a direct result of this period of research. At that time, too, Lewes 'bought books - books on Jewish subjects for Polly's novel - and made enquiries.' One of these books was Leopold Kompert's Ghetto Stories, from which George Eliot gained impressions of the domestic and day-to-day life of Jews in the Ghetto. A fortnight later, Marian and Lewes were in Mainz and on the Saturday - 'After breakfast went to the Synagogue and were delighted with the singing...' Her studies in Jewish history intensified, naturally, around this time: 'my dwelling is among the tombs, farther back than the time of the Medici,' she writes, à propos of her current reading of Max Muller's Science of Religions. There may be a measure of truth in Lewes's husbandly pride: 'You are surprised at her knowledge of the Jews? But only learned Rabbis are so profoundly versed in Jewish history and literature as she is - and this will...make a Rembrandtish background to her dramatic presentation...'

87 ibid., 8 August 1873 (V, 424-5).
88 ibid., 30 July 1873 (V, 425; Note 8).
89 ibid., 16 August 1873 (V, 427; Note 4).
90 ibid., 17 November 1873 (V, 461).
91 ibid., 1 December 1875 (VI, 196).
It was, indeed, precisely among 'learned Rabbis' that she aroused fervent admiration for her scholarship and rare sensibility. She received letters from the Chief Rabbi, Hermann Adler, from a French Rabbi acquaintance of Francois d'Albert Durade, and from the Rabbi of the Jewish Theological Seminary at Breslau. Most significant, however, was the article written by Rabbi David Kaufmann, a Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary at Budapest. Her letter of appreciation to him is a token of the pleasure his admiration had given her: 'Hardly, since I became an author, have I had a deeper satisfaction, I may say a more heartfelt joy, than you have given me in your estimate of "Daniel Deronda".' Rarely as she reads criticism of her work, and sensitive as she is to such criticism, both positive and negative, she finds his account of her novel just such as she might have wished for—it is the 'perfect response to the artist's intention, which must make the fullest, rarest joy to one who works from inward conviction and not in compliance with current fashions...any instance of complete comprehension encourages one to hope that the creative prompting has foreshadowed, and will continue to satisfy, a need in other minds...I confess that I had an unsatisfied hunger for certain signs of sympathetic discernment, which you only have given.'92

Kaufman's scholarly and artistic appreciation of her achievement lays particular stress on the fact that George Eliot has most profoundly grasped the idea of the contemporary Jewish re-awakening to national self-consciousness. *Daniel Deronda* is the greatest modern work on the

92 ibid., 31 May 1877 (VI, 378-9).
Jews: 'we are shown not a creed, but its professors.' This is the function of the poetess, 'to transform convictions into motives, and thoughts into actions.' The achievement, for her, is tremendous: she has transfused an esoteric subject, 'the much-ridiculed longing after Palestine' - with passion and sympathy. The Jewishness of her characters is essential and authentic - they are not mere caricatures. And - the observation which George Eliot particularly appreciated for its justness - the Jewish and English parts of Daniel Deronda form a unity, constitute a designed contrast on every level. George Eliot's piety and tenderness towards Jewish customs and legends he notices specially; and, in general, he finds her scholarship, 'really amazing.'

One interesting point that Kaufmann raises - in view of George Eliot's early views on Jewish survival as a separate entity, and their later reversal in Daniel Deronda and the 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' - is that she realises the value of a specifically Jewish future, of the independent existence of such separate entities if they have some special contribution to make. Universal assimilation into some kind of amorphous 'humanity' is no longer her creed. Kaufmann sees this as a general change of world-view since Lessing's 'Nathan the Wise,' which represented the ideal of a universal religious truth - all existent partial truths being equal and fragmentary. Now, 'the days of levelling are over': proper pride in national and religious identity is accepted, the importance of commitment to a racial heritage narrower and more intense than a broadly universal one, is now acknowledged. And George Eliot, with her advocacy of Jewish 'separateness with communication,' is expressing the realised truths of her time.

Kaufmann's 'perfect response to the artist's intention' is, of course, essentially the response of a Jew. As such, its value is enhanced as far as his praise of George Eliot's insight into the nature of Judaism and the Jewish future is concerned. Such a testimony to her scholarship and perception was justifiably treasured by her. And that it was fully deserved as a testimony to her genuine and abiding interest in her subject is indicated by the fact that in October 1876, several months after Daniel Deronda had been finished, Lewes could write to Elma Stuart, that she was 'reading my m.s. and proofs when she is not absorbed in her Hebrew literature.'\(^4\) (my italics.) That she was still engrossed in these studies long after the practical need for them was past is highly significant: it accounts for the differences that we noticed between the 'absorbance' of her learning in Romola and in Daniel Deronda. This intellectual preoccupation was no hot-house growth: it had its roots in the Evangelical faith of her youth, it flourished through her periods of extreme rationalism, through personal association and sympathy, and it came to bear its fruits quite naturally in the years preceding Daniel Deronda.

The organic aspect of her knowledge and interest emerges especially strikingly with respect to her presentation of the central theme of Daniel Deronda, the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. On a superficial knowledge of the history of Zionism, George Eliot's statement and detailed understanding of what such a Restoration would involve may seem little less than miraculous - prophetic, in the light of later

\(^4\) GE Letters, 12 October 1876 (VI, 294).
events. For it was only after George Eliot's last novel was published that the great events that initiated the Zionist movement took place: the Russian pogroms in 1881 that resulted in groups of pioneers (the Hovevei Zion - the Lovers of Zion) leaving Russia to found agricultural colonies on the coastal plain of Judaea. And the great manifesto of Zionism - Herzl's *Judenstaat* - was not written until 1896; the first Zionist Congress was not convened until 1897. In view of these facts, Dr. Haigh's claim that 'Often she anticipates [important ideas] as in the case of Zionism, which she foreshadowed in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) when Theodor Herzl was only a boy' may be found excusable, though not historically quite accurate.

What we may call 'proto-Zionism' was, in fact, a quite amazingly wide-spread idea - to be found in quarters that were unconnected and often incongruous, many years before *Daniel Deronda* was even conceived. As a survey of the *Jewish Chronicle* of the mid-century years puts it:

'Those who imagine that Zionism began with Herzl will find a corrective in these volumes, in which almost every issue illustrates the Jew's abiding devotion to the Holy Land.'

The fascinating aspect of this historical phenomenon, as regards our present subject, is the link that George Eliot herself represented between the various fields, in which stirrings of the Zionist idea were to be felt. As we look more closely at these areas, it becomes clear that George Eliot did not, after all, create the idea ex nihilo - that, as usual with her creative processes, her sensitive antennae were

---

95 *ibid.*, Vol. 1, xlii-iii.
attuned, by emotional and intellectual affinities, to pick up existing waves of thought and feeling; and that there was a tremendous mass of such waves to be caught by so acute a receiver. A corollary of this process is the impact that George Eliot herself reflected back into the world of thought and action, with extraordinary results.

This, indeed, is historically one of the most interesting aspects of George Eliot's relation to the idea of Jewish irredentism: the quite unprecedented effect that she as a writer had on the lives of many of her readers. Unprecedented, that is, for an English writer; in Germany, in Russia, among more intellectually inflammable societies, such phenomena had been known as a novelist's radically influencing the life-pattern of his readers. But in England, I cannot think of another case to match the effect that George Eliot's novel had on contemporary Jewry; and the place of honour that has been accorded her in almost every historical account of the growth of Jewish national feeling in the nineteenth century. 'In the Valhalla of the Jewish people,' writes Sokolow, 'among the tokens of homage offered by the genius of centuries, "Daniel Deronda" will take its place as the proudest testimony to English recognition of the Zionist idea.'

Kaufmann Kohler attributes (probably mistakenly) the entire movement to colonise the Holy Land to her: it arose 'perhaps following an impulse given by George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, which fired some eastern men, to start, under the name of 'Lovers of Zion,' an emigration from

---

97 Knoepflmacher, in Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel (Princeton, 1965), notes rather satirically, as one effect, that Holman Hunt returned to Palestine and to his paintings 'on location' - 'around the time of Deronda's presumed pilgrimage, imbued with a new religious fervour.' (p. 127, Note 19).

98 Nahum Sokolow, History of Zionism 1600-1918 (1919), I, 212.
attuned, by emotional and intellectual affinities, to pick up existing waves of thought and feeling; and that there was a tremendous mass of such waves to be caught by so acute a receiver. A corollary of this process is the impact that George Eliot herself reflected back into the world of thought and action, with extraordinary results.

This, indeed, is historically one of the most interesting aspects of George Eliot's relation to the idea of Jewish irredentism: the quite unprecedented effect that she as a writer had on the lives of many of her readers. Unprecedented, that is, for an English writer; in Germany, in Russia, among more intellectually inflammable societies, such phenomena had been known as a novelist's radically influencing the life-pattern of his readers. But in England, I cannot think of another case to match the effect that George Eliot's novel had on contemporary Jewry; and the place of honour that has been accorded her in almost every historical account of the growth of Jewish national feeling in the nineteenth century. 'In the Valhalla of the Jewish people,' writes Sokolow, 'among the tokens of homage offered by the genius of centuries, "Daniel Deronda" will take its place as the proudest testimony to English recognition of the Zionist idea.'

Kaufmann Kohler attributes (probably mistakenly) the entire movement to colonise the Holy Land to her: it arose 'perhaps following an impulse given by George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, which fired some eastern men, to start, under the name of 'Lovers of Zion,' an emigration from

97 Knoepflmacher, in *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, 1965), notes rather satirically, as one effect, that Holman Hunt returned to Palestine and to his paintings 'on location' - 'around the time of Deronda's presumed pilgrimage, imbued with a new religious fervour.' (p. 127, Note 19).
Russia at the time of the first persecutions under Czar Alexander III.

'Lofty-visioned Mordecai,' he writes, 'found an echo in many a heart groaning under the yoke of Russian tyranny...'

It is a fact that, four years after the publication of Daniel Deronda, a new school of Jewish theorists arose in Russia, which made Daniel Deronda its own, and fervently pursued the ideals of national and political restoration. Peretz, Gordon, Smolensky, and Lilienblum - these are the men associated with this revival - some of the most important names in the early literature of Zionism. Daniel Deronda was translated into both Hebrew and Yiddish, and its effect, of encouragement and hope, on thousands of persecuted Jews is incalculable.

The gratitude and appreciation of contemporary Jews emerges in Jewish critical accounts of Daniel Deronda. David Philipson, in The Jew in English Fiction (Cincinnati 1889), finds other Jewish novels 'most superficial in conception; this was the first by a non-Jewish writer that made Judaism a study.' (p. 122) This critic, however, is exceptional in rejecting the Zionist solution put forward by George Eliot: he approves only her serious conception of Jewish religious life.

Philipson was a Reform Rabbi, and, as such, was concerned to repudiate any suggestion of lack of patriotism among the Jews. Emancipation, and not any form of nationalism, was the aim of the Reform Movement; a policy that did much to obstruct the realization of the Zionist dream. 'The Jews have not the feeling of nationality as Jews...' he wrote.

---

99 Kaufmann Kohler, Studies, Addresses and Personal Papers (New York, 1931), 463.

100 To this day, the novel is widely known in Israel; and there is even a street named after George Eliot in Jerusalem!
'It is an exploded notion...' (p. 145) From Philipson's essay, we can catch a glimpse of the heated controversies towards which George Eliot, all unwittingly, contributed.

The other voice in the controversy can be heard in the review of Daniel Deronda published in the Jewish Chronicle. This reviewer rejoices at George Eliot's choice of subject - especially 'at a period pregnant with great events apparently bearing on the subject...Indeed, the very thought that an author occupying such a proud position should have worked out these ideas with such minuteness, force, skill, and lucidity...constitute(s) a great event in itself...It is Messianic echoes which we hear. Restoration and re-constitution of the Jewish polity, as of old, is the theme.' Those who dislike the idea, says the Chronicle reviewer, are 'too much imbued with the ideas characterising their age and their respective countries.'

It is clear, then, how much strength the vision of restoration drew from George Eliot's novel - strength against all discouragement, both internal and external. From a more general point of view, too, its effect on the philosophy and self-esteem of its Jewish readers was great. There is the case, for instance, of Joseph Jacobs, the versatile critic and historian (whose works include an Anglo-Jewish history, a Spanish-Jewish history; essays on George Eliot, Arnold, Newman, Browning; an Introduction to the Arabian Nights; a book on Jesus; one on Archaeology; a Yiddish-English Manual; and collections of English and Indian fairy-tales, and of Aesop's Fables!).

101 15 December 1876.
Jacobs claimed himself to be 'almost the first who stepped outside [the spiritual walls of the English Ghetto], and regarded the position of Judaism from the standpoint of Modern Thought.'

And in his Introduction to *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays*, he describes the effect that *Daniel Deronda* had on his early intellectual life. He places it together with Spinoza's writings for its radical influence on him:

'It is difficult for those who have not lived through it to understand the influence that George Eliot had upon those of us who came to our intellectual majority in the "seventies."...George Eliot's novels were regarded by us not so much as novels, but rather as applications of Darwinism to life and art. They were to us *Tendenz-Romane*, and we studied them as much for the *Tendenz* as for the Roman...she spoke to us with the combined authority of the artist and the thinker. She was, in Mr. Myers' memorable phrase, our "Sybil in the gloom".'

*Daniel Deronda* appeared just as Jacobs was at the 'cross-paths': emerged from the Ghetto, and chilled by the world outside which was oblivious to his Jewishness, as he was at the point of deciding either 'that he re-enters the Ghetto never to emerge, or comes outside never to re-enter. Just as I was at these cross-paths *Daniel Deronda* appeared, and I found the thinker for whom I had the greatest reverence justifying from the standpoint of the most advanced thought the historic claims of the position of Judaism. I cannot trust myself to say with what eagerness I read the successive monthly instalments of *Daniel Deronda* as it appeared during 1876...George Eliot's influence on me counterbalanced that of Spinoza, by directing my attention, henceforth, to the historic development of Judaism. Spinoza envisaged for me the

---

102 Preface to *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (1896).
Jewish ideals in their static form, George Eliot transferred my attention to them in their dynamic development...

In this passage, we obviously find sketched a crisis of identity, such as has been traumatic for many Jews. The fact that George Eliot in a sense acted the sage for Jacobs - showed him a possible way out of his intellectual and psychological difficulties - is a symptom of this particular and highly specialised form of influence that she exerted. She became accustomed to having women kiss her gown, or her hand; but it seems that the influence of this novel, especially, was of a depth and a dynamism that even she perhaps never fully realised.

George Eliot's continued interest in Judaism and the specific problems of Jews reached its final public expression in 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' which was published in 1879, as part of Impressions of Theophrastus Such. (There is, in fact, a link here with David Kaufmann: answering his letter of condolence on Lewes's death, on 17 April 1879, George Eliot sends him a copy of Theophrastus Such - 'as it contains some words I wanted to say about the Jews.'

This forcibly written essay summarises her ideas on Jewish aspirations to nationalism. These are the ideas of Daniel Deronda, expressed in general and discursive terms, and with uncompromising

103 ...my mind had more than once gone out to you as one from whom I should like to have some sign of sympathy with my loss.' - (GE Letters, (VII, 137)) the tone of respect and appreciation is notable: for Kaufmann, as for Deutsch, she had an unusual, and rather touching, reverence.
clarity. The central theme is very much that stressed by Kaufmann in 'George Eliot and Judaism': the vital need for pride in individual national identities: 'the days of levelling are over.' Perhaps George Eliot's reaction against the radical humanism of her youth was due partly to the resurgence of antisemitism in Germany - ironically among the leaders of the Humanitarian movement that took Feuerbach's work as its creed.\footnote{Bauer's pamphlet on the Judenfrage, published in 1842, 'vigorously opposes Jewish emancipation on the grounds that the Jews, by adhering to their religion, excluded themselves from emancipation.' (Introduction to Rome and Jerusalem, by Meyer Waxman (New York,1918), p. 14)} Be that as it may, her view is clear: '...A common humanity is not yet enough to feed the rich blood of various activity which makes a complete man. The time is not come for cosmopolitanism to be highly virtuous.\footnote{Impressions of Theophrastus Such, p. 265.} Her dicta have the pungency of epigrams: the 'nobleness of a people, depends on its capability of being stirred by memories.' (p. 264)

Here, we have one of the essential links between such 'political' views, and her more general philosophical and moral values. Memory - that is the key to the moral life, from her earliest works onwards: memory, affection, duty, loyalty - it is an unfailing rune.

In Daniel Deronda, for the first time (with the exception of The Spanish Gypsy), the concept is taken on the national, rather than the merely familial scale; racial solidarity, pride in one's heritage, and binding influence of heredity - these are the central ideas of the novel - and now of the essay.\footnote{Joseph Jacobs, in his essay on George Eliot (in Essays and Reviews from the Athenaeum (1891)), makes a similar point: (cont'd. on p. 347...)} The influence of Darwin is perceptible:
indeed, there is some ground for thinking that the Jews, with their history of survival and loyalty to religion and race in spite of all persecution, seemed to George Eliot a kind of exemplary figure of the natural selection of races for a particular purpose.\(^{107}\)

As Dowden suggests (in his essay on *Middlemarch* and Daniel Deronda\(^{106}\)), the Jews are symbolic of that loyalty to tradition that is her central creed - a kind of ethnic religion. This is a nation haunted by its memory - that memory 'which inspires the moments with a past, a present, and a future, and gives the sense of corporate existence that raises man above the otherwise more respectable and innocent brute.'\(^{109}\) It is this faculty which has preserved it from the degradation that should have resulted from universal persecution (of which George Eliot gives a vivid and feeling account.\(^{107}\) (cont'd))

\(^{106}\) (cont'd)

'As the artist went to work more consciously, so the motive principle of her work came more to the surface. The leading conception of modern science as applied to man, the influence of hereditary transmission, was transcribed into the moral principle of the claims of race. In the novels of memory this had been disguised under the simpler form of family love.' (p. 8)

\(^{107}\) Knoepflmacher suggests a similar idea, connecting it with the theological Christian view. He says that evolutionism is enlisted in *Daniel Deronda* to proclaim the existence of a unique spiritual tradition, lodged in the development of a chosen race; and he cites Balfour's argument (quoted in L.E. Elliot-Binns's *English Thought 1860-1900: The Theological Aspect* (London, 1956), 31), that religion had already illustrated the truth of natural selection, in the evolution by the Jews of a unique aptitude for apprehending spiritual realities: science, therefore, had merely 'adopted an idea which has always been an essential Christian view of the Divine economy.' (*Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*, p. 123). The citation of Balfour who, in 1917, signed the Declaration that granted the Jews a home-land in Palestine, is significant.


\(^{109}\) *Theophrastus Such*, pp. 261-2.
In this context, racial pride has proved 'humanising'; and George Eliot pleads for the future too that 'the deep suckers of healthy sentiment' be preserved. (p. 285) She uses the device of analogy and comparison, exposing those inconsistencies of sympathy among the public that lead to antisemitism. Mazzini and the Italian Risorgimento (which has obviously exerted a profound influence on her own nationalist views and which forms part of the backdrop of Daniel Deronda), the Greek movement in which Byron gave his life, have become some of the 'glorious commonplaces' of popular sympathy, while the Jewish cause is treated with ridicule or antagonism. In general, she avers, 'the neglect of resemblances is a common property of dulness.' And such 'dulness,' which is here equivalent to her usual term of opprobrium 'stupidity' - both intellectual and moral - is what she attributes to entrenched antisemites: 'It would be difficult to find a form of bad reasoning about them [the Jews] which has not been heard in conversation or been admitted to the dignity of print.' (p. 260)

---

110 cf. Deronda's contribution to the 'Hand and Banner' discussion, in Ch. 42: 'Take what we have all heard and seen something of - the effort after the unity of Italy, which we are sure soon to see accomplished to the very last boundary. Look into Mazzini's account of his first yearning, when he was a boy, after a restored greatness and a new freedom to Italy, and of his first efforts as a young man to rouse the same feelings in other young men, and get them to work towards a united nationality. Almost everything seemed against him... Of course the scoorners often seemed wise. Yet you see the prophecy lay with him...!' (ch. 42, pp. 392-3)

Links between Mazzini and Jewish nationalism are numerous, both in George Eliot's own attitudes, and in actual fact. For her, the two movements seemed clearly analogous. And Mazzini himself regarded the Jewish situation as degrading: he exhorted the 'Israelites among the nations' not to trust to the protection of other nationalities - that will prove no safeguard for them, since the 'egoism of self-interest rules alone.' (from Duties of Man - The Duty to Country - quoted in Kallen, Zionism and World Politics, p. 47)
The essay is partly a discussion of various forms of such bad reasoning: the various pseudo-rational guises of an irrational prejudice. On this plane, it has already been interestingly anticipated in *Daniel Deronda*: the range of attitudes towards the Jews represented in that novel is impressive in its grasp of possible subtleties, of the full gamut of psychological rationalisations.

There is Deronda's own early fastidious indifference, modulating through his involvement with the particular human being, Mirah, through several keys of inner struggle and self-conquest, to final acceptance and positive vision (even before the revelation of his identity).

There is the comic glance at Lady Mallinger's reaction to Mirah's story: 'Lady Mallinger was much interested in the poor girl, observing that there was a Society for the Conversion of the Jews, and that it was to be hoped Mirah would embrace Christianity; but perceiving that Sir Hugo looked at her with amusement, she concluded that she had said something foolish.' (ch. 20, p. 338) There is Amy's and Mab's hopeful confidence that Mirah's Jewishness would "gradually melt away from her, and she would pass into Christianity like the rest of the world." (ch. 32, p. 128) There is Hans Heyrick's frankly crude racial contempt: "She will see no Jew who is tolerable. Every male of that race is insupportable, - "insupportably advancing" - his nose." (ch. 37, p. 282)

And there is the consummately ironic scene among the Davilows, just before news of Grandcourt's death is brought, in which these innocent and well-meaning people air their notions about the Heyricks' 'extraordinary Jewish friends': their descriptions
'caused some astonished questioning from minds to which the idea of live Jews, out of a book, suggested a difference deep enough to be almost zoological, as of a strange race in Pliny's Natural History that might sleep under the shade of its own ears. Bertha could not imagine what Jews believed now; and had a dim idea that they rejected the Old Testament since it proved the New; Miss Merry thought that Mirah and her brother could "never have been properly argued with," and the amiable Alice did not mind what the Jews believed, she was sure she "couldn't bear them." Mrs. Davilow corrected her by saying that the great Jewish families who were in society were quite what they ought to be both in London and Paris, but admitted that the commoner unconverted Jews were objectionable; and Isabel asked whether Mirah talked just as they did, or whether you might be with her and not find out that she was a Jewess.' (ch. 58, pp. 248-9)

Ignorance vies with Prejudice; and yet the resulting confusion is firmly grounded in observed reality. After all, even Deronda himself, with all his learning and intelligence, had at first shared in these preconceptions:

'The Chosen People have been commonly treated as a people chosen for the sake of somebody else; and their thinking as something (no matter exactly what) that ought to have been entirely otherwise; and Deronda, like his neighbours, had regarded Judaism as a sort of eccentric fossilised form which an accomplished man might dispense with studying, and leave to specialists.' (ch. 32, p. 129)

The education of the imagination to sympathy and insight is the central moral theme throughout George Eliot's novels. In dealing with a Jewish subject, George Eliot was consciously fronting both one of her greatest challenges - in terms of the obstinate blocking of the popular imagination to this particular issue - and one of the most rewarding, in terms of the richness and nobility to be revealed once the veils of prejudice were swept aside. This motive for her work is made explicit in her letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, on 29 October 1876:
'There is nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs. But towards the Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religious and moral sentiment...this deadness to the history which has prepared half our world for us, this inability to find interest in any form of life that is not clad in the same coat-tails and flounces as our own lies very close to the worst kind of irreligion. The best that can be said for it is that it is a sign of the intellectual narrowness— in plain English, the stupidity, which is still the average mark of our culture.' (GE Letters, VI, 301-2)

The note of contempt at the end of this passage has the sharpness of long exasperation. It is a note that recurs at intervals in her letters, and that is diffused, as it were, throughout the texture and content of Daniel Deronda itself. The low cultural standards of the average Englishman, as compared, for instance, with the Frenchman, emerge already in an early letter to John Sibree (on 8 March 1848), in which she sympathises with the French Revolution: the English working-classes are, she says, inferior to the French, whose minds are 'highly electrified'—'full of ideas.' In England, she finds only 'selfish radicalism and unsatisfied, brute sensuality.'

Then, there is the passage we have already quoted from her letter to Charles Bray, from Berlin in 1854; after seeing 'Nathan der Weise,' she is exalted by its 'grand sentiments and profound

111 GE Letters (I, 254).

cf. Felix Holt's speeches to the crowds on Election Day: it is just on these grounds of their 'selfish radicalism and unsatisfied brutish sensuality,' that he finds them unready for full democracy. The Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt, embroiders the same theme.
thoughts.' But - 'In England the words which call down applause here would make the pit rise in horror.' (GE Letters, II, 185)

It seems, then, that her view of the general level of English culture was very poor. Poor, narrow, insular, stupid - this is the indictment that, using the Jewish issue as a kind of test-case, she brings against the mentality of her countrymen. The qualifications of the Jews for this special purpose were two-fold: they were the objects of prejudice, of blind rejection, and they were themselves cosmopolitan, possessed of a vital and all-embracing culture by which, to a greater extent than the English population at least, they still lived.

In Daniel Deronda, the Jewish characters serve in part as a mute accusation of the larger society in whose midst, barely remarked, they live. The whole question of cultural and moral values lies at the centre of the novel; in a sense, the whole complex of

112 It is relevant here to notice Deronda's early dissatisfaction with a 'merely English attitude in Studies.' (ch. 16, p. 274)

At Cambridge, his qualities of imagination and flexibility are frustrated by the narrow and impoverished system:

'He found the inward bent towards comprehension and thoroughness diverging more and more from the track marked out by the standards of examination: he felt a heightening discontent with the wearing futility and enfeebling strain of a demand for excessive retention and dexterity without any insight into the principles which form the vital connections of knowledge.' (ch. 16, pp. 268-9)

His restlessness, which is imputed partly to his tendency to 'reflective hesitation,' is due also to the real limitations of English life and culture - so that even on his return from his studies abroad, he cannot decide on taking his place in English society.
George Eliot's extraordinary knowledge and understanding of Judaism, what James calls 'the whole heavy structure of the Jewish question,' was built up (not merely, as he suggests, 'for the express purpose of giving its proper force to this particular stroke') that is, to Gwendolen's 'supreme perception of the fact that the world is whirring past her' but) to sound as an expressive counterpoint to the inadequacy of the main stream of English life.

The contrasts arise from the beginning, when Gwendolen's inadequacy as artist is shown up, by contrast with Klesmer's fearsome integrity. Gwendolen's notions of culture and sophistication have already been indicated by direct narration: at the gambling-tables, where she is first seen by Deronda, for instance, she is consciously acting a part, hoping to impress her image on his consciousness—more, on his imagination. It is almost an aesthetic ambition; she aims at a stylishness of behaviour that shall arouse admiration in a discriminating observer. 'He was young, handsome, distinguished in appearance— not one of those ridiculous and dowdy Philistines who thought it incumbent on them to blight the gaming-table with a sour look of protest as they passed by it.' (ch. 1, p. 10)

The concept of Philistinism that rises to Gwendolen's mind carries with it the whole question of true and false culture that, as Barbara Hardy points out, is one of the central cruxes of the novel.


Gwendolen, idolised by her family for her small social accomplishments, with no guiding father-figure in her life, except her uncle, with his unctuous worldly values, has never had an opportunity to develop true cultural values. Her first confrontation with Klesmer is almost the first shock that her brittle system has received. This collision produces in her a reaction that is a prototype in miniature of the major convulsion in store for her at the end, in the discovery of Deronda's large destiny: it is 'a sinking of heart at the sudden width of horizon opened round her small musical performance.' (ch. 5, p. 68).

Klesmer's criticism, prefaced by Catherine Arrowpoint's half-serious claim that he 'can hardly tolerate anything we English do in music,' is also of more than purely technical significance:

"Yes, it is true; you have not been well taught... you produce your notes badly; and that music which you sing is beneath you. It is a form of melody which expresses a puerile state of culture - a dandling, canting, see-saw kind of stuff - the passion and thought of people without any breadth of horizon. There is a sort of self-satisfied folly about every phrase of such melody; no cries of deep, mysterious passion - no conflict - no sense of the universal. It makes men small as they listen to it. Sing now something larger. And I shall see." (ch. 5, pp. 67-8)

This is comparable to George Eliot's comments on Dorothea's bewildered experience among the 'gigantic broken revelations' of Rome: the puniness of English cultural standards is reflected in the narrowness and ignorance of the well-bred young girl, 'who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meagre Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the hand-screen sort...' (Middlarmarch, ch. 20, p. 296)
The indictment is aimed at the whole culture of which Gwendolen is representative. The contrasting concepts are familiar: width, smallness, puerile, breadth, deep, conflict, universal, larger. It is the sheer limitedness of mentality of Gwendolen and her country-men that is thrown into stark relief by Klesmer, with his merciless, almost super-human standards in art: a relief, only further emphasised by the pitying chivalrous tone, the 'studied gentleness,' that Klesmer adopts in talking to her, the restrained conscious superiority with which he speaks to all his wealthy patrons - except Catherine Arrowpoint.

Indeed, Miss Arrowpoint is the only other point of reference, as it were, in Gwendolen's life, in this 'pre-Deronda' period. Gwendolen is conscious in her of 'a certain mental superiority which could not be explained away - an exasperating thoroughness in her musical accomplishment, a fastidious discrimination in her general tastes, which made it impossible to force her admiration and kept you in awe of her standard.' (ch. 6, pp. 72-3) It is clear, at least by hindsight, that Catherine Arrowpoint and Klesmer are soul-mates: they are the true aristocrats. Through their art, their fineness and strength is revealed, their stringency in accepting only the highest as an ideal. This is what Gwendolen has so painfully to learn, the inadequacy of her own standards and ambitions, and she learns it

115 Klesmer is the artist par excellence: for him, music has a transcendental value. This is implied even in his name, which is the Yiddish title for the folk-musician, the 'troubadour,' who fulfilled an important function in Jewish society. (cf. S.A. Hirsch, 'Some Literary Trifles,' in A Book of Essays (1905), pp. 267-8)
through various bruising encounters, of which this with Klesmer is only the first.

The later interview with Klesmer is naturally more crucial for her, on several planes. Klesmer's negative opinion of her chances as an artist decides her objective fate, driving her into Grandcourt's arms. It also decides 'the immost fold of her questioning...whether she could not achieve substantiality for herself and know gratified ambition without bondage.' (ch. 23, p. 378) It is precisely this that wounds and begins painfully to enlighten her: her judged lack of 'substantiality.' She is found wanting in Klesmer's eyes, both in her capacity as musician and actress, and in her evaluation of the life of the true artist, that Klesmer so fiercely defends: "I am not decrying the life of the true artist. I am exalting it. I say, it is out of the reach of any but choice organisations - natures framed to love perfection and to labour for it; ready, like all true lovers, to endure, to wait, to say, I am not yet worthy, but she - Art, my mistress - is worthy, and I will live to merit her." (ch. 23, p. 382)

The humiliation that Owendolen suffers goes deep: she has the intelligence and sensibility (unlike that 'esteemed party man,' Mr. Dult who responds to Klesmer's artistic claims with absolute incomprehension) to appreciate his judgment and his standards. The sensation of being outclassed is new to her, and bitter.

The contrast between true and false notions of culture is carried through in the story of Mirah. In her attitudes and ambitions, Mirah is counterpointed against Owendolen. She flees from the public display of an actress's life, from the vulgarity and
indignities and intrigues attendant upon it; while Gwendolen is attracted precisely to the externals, the glamour, the adulation, the display of physical beauty and charm. At a deeper level, however, the contrast still holds: Gwendolen (like Deronda's mother) is by nature an actress: she constantly sees herself in a role, she dresses and moves for her part in the limelight. At the end, after Grandcourt's death and her return to Offendene, all the grandeur and self-projection of her courtship and marriage seem to her like 'following a lure through a long Satanic masquerade, which she had entered on with an intoxicated belief in its disguises, and had seen the end of in shrieking fear lest she herself had become one of the evil spirits who were dropping their human mummery and hissing around her with serpent tongues.' (ch. 64, p. 333) Her final terror and rejection of masks, her carelessness of appearance in her last interview with Deronda, are symbolic of the change in her. Mirah, by contrast, finds the business of acting distasteful: the business of projecting and - for her - distorting emotion. "Acting is slow and poor to what we go through within."

Yet, essentially, in her miniature way, and in spite of her fastidious rejection of much of the artistic life, Mirah is among the ranks of the true artists in the novel. There is an absolute integrity in her singing: here, she can be herself, can express emotions that she really feels, and with the restraints and sensibilities of acute musicianship. Here, her revulsion against playing a role does not apply. In her interview - or audition - with Klesmer, she is simple and unselfconscious: she chooses a song of
love for the father-land, into which her real passion can be infused, and there is a certain professionalism in all her modesty, that bespeaks the attitude of the true artist.

The contrasts in concepts of culture range throughout the novel. There is a certain ambiguity of attitude to be discerned: Deronda, in his youth, responds with anger and aversion to Sir Hugo's suggestion that he become a great singer. This does not seem to indicate a very high value set on the artist's vocation. But for the child Deronda, this suggestion comes with particular social connotations, and chimes in all too sadly with his suspicions about his illegitimate birth. Besides, Sir Hugo makes the suggestion in the form least likely to recommend it to the sensitive, fastidious boy: it is just the vulgar showmanlike aspects of the artist's life that he stresses:

"What do you say to being a great singer? Should you like to be adored by the world and take the house by storm, like Mario and Tamblerlik." (ch. 16, p. 251)

Like Mirah, then, Deronda shrinks from the life of the artist, in so far as it involves loss of personal integrity, while he maintains a real reverence for true artistry. As his mother, Acharisi, rather drily notes, they are made for each other, in this respect at least.

In his relationship with Hans Meyrick, the painter, too, Deronda displays a slightly condescending protectiveness. He helps him in many ways, furthers his possibilities of pursuing his art, but is never perceptibly weighed down by over-much reverence for his friend's vocation. This may be partly due to Hans's own frivolousness of
manner in speaking of any serious subject. But, more intrinsically, Hans's art is seen as bound up with his moral nature: he is well-meaning, affectionate, loveable, but not possessed of any real depth. He has the instincts of the artist - for instance, in the 'pure imagination' of his painting of Berenice sitting 'desolate amidst desolation,' in Mirah's phrase - which she approves as being just what Berenice in her situation would have done. (ch. 39, p. 322) But, side-by-side with Mirah, or even in speaking of the possibility of marrying her, Hans's inadequacies as a man are very apparent; and they are somehow intimately connected with his inadequacies as an artist.

So far then, the ambiguity in the novel about the role of art can be accounted for in terms of George Eliot's constant belief in the unity of moral and aesthetic criteria. When we come to consider the case of Alcharisi, Deronda's mother, however, we reach, I think, a kind of deadlock - a phenomenon in which George Eliot's usual schemata break down. The breakdown is linked with the new presence in the novel of an element alien to and disruptive of George Eliot's general moral vision. This might be called the daemonic element: a breach in her carefully constructed fortress of philosophic 'meliorism.' The breach is foreshadowed in that bizarre and untypical story, The Lifted Veil; but in general, George Eliot's work up to this point has confined itself to the realms of a rational and determinedly constructive morality, firmly based on the Evangelical values of her youth. The emergence of the 'daemonic' in Daniel Deronda, of the power of the supra-rational, of that which lurks out of the sunshine of men's moral potency, is the expression of something that had always lain under the surface of George Eliot's
conscious - and often strained - positivist vision. It was only in her last novel, that she seriously included it in her canons - as only one element among many, it is true; but its presence is perceptible and subtly subversive of the rational moral order.

The notes of unresolved discord are sounded quietly but clearly, for example, in a little-remarked, but for all that remarkable, conversation between Mirah and Mordecai. Mirah is suffering from love and jealousy: the feeling has invaded her serene, beautiful, effortlessly 'good' world - 'definite as pincers on her flesh.' "I used not to have horrible feelings," she can only remember in her torment. Mordecai tells her of his thoughts - of the divine Unity, of the Jewish contribution to the ultimate unity of mankind, of the infinity of the human spirit:

"for as our life becomes more spiritual by capacity of thought, and joy therein, possession tends to become more universal, being independent of gross material contact; so that in a brief day the soul of a man may know in fuller volume the good which has been and is, nay is to come, then all he could possess in a whole life where he had to follow the creeping paths of the senses." (ch. 61, p. 289)

Mirah's response is faint. Mordecai continues, claiming that "women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing," and tells, as example, the story in the Midrash of a girl who sacrificed herself so that her beloved could live happily with the girl whom he loved - "This is the surpassing love, that loses self in the object of love." Their subsequent interchange is worth quoting in full:

"No, Ezra, no," said Mirah, with low-toned intensity, "that was not it. She wanted the king when she was dead to know what she had done, and feel that she was better than the other. It was her strong self, wanting to conquer, that made her die."
Mordecai was silent a little, and then argued - "That might be, Mirah. But if she acted so, believing the king would never know?"
"You can make the story so in your mind, Ezra, because you are great, and like to fancy the greatest that could be. But I think it was not really like that. The Jewish girl must have had jealousy in her heart, and she wanted somehow to have the first place in the king's mind. This is what she would die for."
"My sister, thou hast read too many plays, where the writers delight in showing the human passions as indwelling demons, unmixed with the relenting and devout elements of the soul. Thou judgest by the plays, and not by thy own heart, which is like our mother's."
Mirah made no answer." (ch. 61, pp. 290-1)

There is an unusual intensity and tension in this little scene, an eloquent restraint in its ultimate refusal of resolution. It is disturbing, and intentionally so. For what we have here, as so rarely in George Eliot, is the confrontation of the two extreme views of life that are, after all, closer to each other than to the 'middle-march' that is the general tenor of her novels. Mordecai puts forward, with conviction - and without ironic qualifications from the author - the sublimest and most spiritual view of human nature, its power to transcend the self. When he speaks, it is with the eternal voice of the Hebrew sage: the voice of the prophets, of God Himself, asking the very highest of mankind. This voice of ultimate idealism is itself untypical of George Eliot's usual sober tone, consciously realistic, portentously prosaic. This is one new element in the novel, to which we shall return later.

But Mirah's response - and significant lack of response - equally stretches the range of experience in the novel beyond anything covered before. For it is Mirah, of all the characters, small, neat, controlled, somehow like a perfect little cameo, who is ravaged by 'the human passions as indwelling demons.' It is she who is unable to agree with Mordecai's
'Meliorist' vision of their mixture with the 'relenting and devout elements of the soul.' It is she who puts into question the whole moral structure on which George Eliot has built her world: the morality that restrains and teaches the right to Maggie and to Dorothea - the binding nature of loyalty, duty, the supremacy of Agape over Eros. It is as though Mirah, who has shrunk from the stage-presentation of melodramatic passions, from all outrages of her modesty and temperateness, comes through this experience to a realisation that these lurid stage-passions have their truth, their validity.

As I have suggested, these two views of human nature, Mordecai's and Mirah's, are like opposite sides of the same coin. In this vision of life, human possibilities are vast, to the heights and to the depths. The range is immeasurably larger than that included in, for instance, Middlemarch. Here, George Eliot no longer shrinks from either the sublime or the demonic; and it is possible to see in this enlarged vision one further motive for her use of the Jews in the novel. Mordecai and Mirah, and Alcharisi, to whom we shall return shortly, are all Jews: they are all shown as living on a plane very different from the prosaic 'realistic' one deliberately chosen in George Eliot's earlier work. They represent a new departure: in them is concentrated all the history and exceptional experience of the Jew, his emotional range of both heights and depths, his spiritual heritage, his knowledge of the farthest reaches of suffering, of passion. All this, the essence of the Jewish experience, George Eliot had sensed from her voluminous reading, from her contact with individual personalities. And now, in

---

116 It is interesting to notice, in general throughout the novel, the presence of the melodramatic, the macabre - scenes that are obviously influenced by theatrical effects. Gwenolen's terror when the picture of the dead hand appears unexpectedly; the 'jewel-scene' after her wedding; the meeting at the bridge, of Mordecai and Deronda. These again may be symptoms of a new acceptance of the more 'extreme,' the less rational aspects of life.
her last novel, she was to use her specialised knowledge, her enlarged perception, in her portrayal of such 'extremes.' Through this use of her Jewish characters, too, she was to underline the limitedness of her English characters, of their spiritual and emotional apprehensions.

To return to Alcharisi, however... Celebrated singer and actress, renegade Jewess, unnatural mother, she is in her life as melodramatic, as highly coloured a character as in any of her stage performances. By her life, and her words, she outrages some of her son's dearest values: the values of affection, duty, piety, motherly self-sacrifice. And yet, there is no doubt that during their confrontation, she towers above him by force of her personality, by force of the 'daemon' that drives her. She represents the meeting-point of art and life: the gulf between the two that Mirah finds so distasteful, barely exists for her. George Eliot's description of this psychological constitution is remarkable - again, a new departure in psychological analysis:

'The speech was in fact a piece of what may be called sincere acting: this woman's nature was one in which all feeling - and all the more when it was tragic as well as real - immediately became matter of conscious representation: experience immediately passed into drama, and she acted her own emotions...it would not be true to say that she felt less because of this double consciousness: she felt - that is, her mind went through - all the more, but with a difference: each nucleus of pain or pleasure had a deep atmosphere of the excitement or spiritual intoxication which at once exalts and deadens.' (ch. 51, pp. 127-8)

She is a living embodiment of art, with its compulsion, its ruthless egoism, its denial of all justification save its own power. Deronda is overwhelmed and torn by his meeting with her. For here, his world, his assumptions and ideals, count for little. He must recoil
from much of what she tells him, he is repelled by her coldness; but he is somehow powerless to assert his values in the face of her passion and her individuality:

'the first impulses of indignation at what shocked his most cherished emotions and principles - all these busy elements of collision between them were subsiding for a time, and making more and more room for that effort at just allowance and that admiration of a forcible nature whose errors lay along high pathways, which he would have felt if, instead of being his mother, she had been a stranger who had appealed to his sympathy. Still it was impossible to be dispassionate: he trembled lest the next thing she had to say would be more repugnant to him than what had gone before: he was afraid of the strange coercion she seemed to be under to lay her mind bare: he almost wished he could say, "Tell me only what is necessary," and then again he felt the fascination that made him watch her and listen to her eagerly.'
(ch. 51, pp. 133-4)

He is moved by her suffering, and pity and sympathy creates some kind of bridge between them. But essentially, she stands aloof, and he can only watch her struggles helplessly. She is pursued by the demon of her pride, her will to self-determination, to self-expression. But here, for the first time, there is an ambiguity of response in the author's treatment: harsh egotism, revolt against childhood association, ruthless exploitation of the love of others - these in her are not condemned, they are partly at least accepted as the needs of her imperious genius. Values clashing with the moral, the altruistic, by which Deronda rules his life, are embodied in her. And, in her anguished struggle with the power of her father's world, in her tortured assertion of her 'right to resist,' the author's sympathy is clearly, this time, not averted from her. It is a strange deadlock of feelings: the author - and the reader - are obviously with and within Deronda, while experiencing the quite conflicting climate of Alcharisi's world:
"It was my nature to resist, and say, "I have a right to resist." Well, I say so still when I have any strength in me. You have heard me say it, and I don't withdraw it. But when my strength goes, some other right forces itself upon me like iron in an inexorable hand; and even when I am at ease, it is beginning to make ghosts upon the daylight." (ch. 51, p. 139)

In the ebb and flow of the reader's sympathy, he cannot facilely wish for her to succumb to these 'ghosts upon the daylight.' He has a certain admiration and awe in the face of her Promethean daring, her acting-out of the daemonic, the a-moral forces within her. And her son's pleas to her to 'open your heart to relenting and love...' are resisted by her with a Faust-like obstinacy, in spite of her partial weakening at the end. She declares her own vindication:

"Had I not a rightful claim to be something more than a mere daughter and mother? The voice and the genius matched the face. Whatever else was wrong, acknowledge that I had a right to be an artist, though my father's will was against it. My nature gave me a charter." (ch. 53, p. 163)

Deronda can only answer, "I do acknowledge that."

That is the new element that Alcharisi and Mirah and Mordecai bring into George Eliot's work: the sheer acknowledgement of forces stronger, less fathomable, than the rational and the moral. The contrast is focussed sharply in the opposite attitudes of Deronda and Alcharisi to the life of the stage. Alcharisi speaks bitterly of her father's views:

"His heart was set on his Judaism. He hated that Jewish women should be thought of by the Christian world as a sort of ware to make public singers and actresses of. As if we were not the more enviable for that! That is a chance of escaping from bondage." (ch. 51, p. 132)
The contrast is absolute with Deronda's early revulsion, and with his sympathy for Mirah's similar revulsion. These two are of the same band as Alcharisi's father: Alcharisi herself sweeps all such considerations and sensibilities aside. The needs of her nature are too impelling: she will be a slave to neither human relationship nor an abstract moral law.

It is impressive, moreover, that the fits of forgetfulness that are the beginning of the end for Alcharisi, forcing her to retire from the stage - and then ironically disappearing - also constitute a new departure in George Eliot's system of punishment for evil. Usually hitherto, she had stressed that retribution is the working of the law of natural consequences. The wrong itself breeds the conditions that give rise to nemesis. Any kind of supernatural intervention was ruled out. Here, the punishment is somehow causeless; it is not integrally linked to the sin. It can be seen only as a kind of divine retribution, a deliberate jolt given to the foundations of Alcharisi's life.117

Here again, then, the moral range of George Eliot's vision is extended; ultra-rational powers are acknowledged.

On the question of George Eliot's 'meliorism,' and its point of breakdown, there is a passage in Theophrastus Such, in which she shows that she is fully aware of the limitations of her earlier humanism. It occurs in the essay on 'Debasing the Moral Currency,' in which she

117 This may have been partly what Hutton had in mind, when he wrote (in his review of Daniel Deronda in the Spectator 49 (29 July 1876), 948), of the 'religious element in the novel' - the 'shadow of a higher conception' that 'moulds human wilfulness to its higher purposes.'
deplores the vogue for grotesque parodies of great works, noble sentiments. A society in which such mockery and cynicism is rife is in danger of losing its essential seriousness. It is, in fact, in danger, she asserts, of losing all its moral and civilised values. And the ease with which civilisation can be annulled, the un-naturalness of human civilised achievement, is what she acknowledges in her approving quotation from Sainte-Beuve:

"Rien de plus prompt à baisser que la civilisation dans des crises comme celles-ci; on perd en trois semaines le résultat de plusieurs siècles. La civilisation, la vie est une chose apprise et inventée, qu'on le sache bien: 'Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes.' Les hommes après quelques années de paix oublient trop cette vérité: ils arrivent à croire que la culture est chose innée, qu'elle est la même chose que la nature. La sauvagerie est toujours là, à deux pas, et dès qu'on ôte pied, elle recommence."

The denial that culture and morality are innate to man, natural to him, is almost a volte-face from George Eliot's earlier meliorist philosophy. And the acknowledgement of 'La sauvagerie' two steps away from civilisation is a clear endorsement of her new insights in Daniel Deronda.

Humanism is no longer an adequate prescription: and George Eliot herself came to realise this. F.W. Mallock, in his essay, 'George Eliot on the Human Character,' discusses this passage from Theophrastus Such, and finds in it a clear contradiction of her usual theories of humanity. These latter he considers facile, betraying a deficiency in her practical knowledge of human nature; she has a

---

118 In Atheism and the Value of Life (1884).
superficial theoretical view of it; and, by way of a rather back-handed compliment, Mallock suggests that her unreliability as a philosopher may be to her credit as a woman - she is too good to understand the possible depravity of human nature.

If she is too good, then, by implication from Mallock's discussion, she is also too obtuse to recognise a clear contradiction when she sees one. I would maintain that the passage from Theophrastus Such, with its quotation from Sainte-Beuve, is no undigested anomaly but, by this time, a fully recognised and assimilated perception of the darker extremes of human nature. It is only a further statement of what is clearly present in Daniel Deronda - and uneasily lurking in the wings of most of her human dramas. It is, moreover, not a starkly pessimistic perception, balanced as it is, in Daniel Deronda at least, by its counterpart - a new and uncompromising spiritual idealism.

George Eliot wrote Daniel Deronda in conditions of perhaps the greatest physical pain and discomfort that attended any of her novels. With the pain, her usual depression also increased. She wrote in 1873 to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: 'The responsibility of the writer becomes heavier and heavier - does it not? - as the world grows older and the voices of the dead more numerous. It is difficult to believe, until the germ of some new work grows into imperious activity within one, that it is possible to make a really needed contribution to the poetry of the world...\textsuperscript{119}

The reference to the 'voices of the dead' is significant here.

\textsuperscript{119} GE Letters, 18 March 1873 (V, 388).
as is her stated ambition to contribute to the poetry of the world. George Eliot's consciousness of the approach of life's end, for herself and for Lewes, was increasingly acute at this time: and with this consciousness grew an acceptance, a taste for a more exalted and spiritualised kind of art than she had previously approved as 'realistic.' She was, for instance, deeply moved by Lytton's last novel, Kenelm Chillingly, and corresponded with Blackwood about her feelings.\(^{120}\) Lytton's novel does not seem quite to merit her abundant praises: she was 'deeply affected by the closing sentences and I thought even the critics would have been touched by the wind-up in such circumstances, but no, it does not seem to have touched those stern stoics.'\(^{121}\)

The closing sentences she refers to do seem to an impartial eye to deserve whatever strictures the critics put on them: they are maudlin and unworthy of such a reception as she accorded them. But the significant point lies in the 'circumstances in which Lytton wrote them: he died just after completing his novel. It was this that moved George Eliot to such an extent: the knowledge played on the sensitive awareness of mortality that had sprung up in her.

The death of friends is partly responsible for this special awareness: she has to comfort Mrs. William Smith on the death of her husband (author of Knowing and Feeling: A Contribution to Psychology - which George Eliot read and liked). She herself is in bad and continuous

---

120 ibid., 21 April 1873 (V, 402-3).
121 ibid., 28 April 1873 (V, 407).
pain - 'like a lamp out of order.' In 1874, she writes:

dead\. The approach of autumn or winter, and I am glad to find that advancing life brings this power of imagining the nearness of death I never had till of late years. And by the end of 1876, after the completion of Daniel Deronda, she has reached a certain serenity of acceptance, in spite of, or perhaps by way of, her new awareness of mortality:

'It is remarkable to me that I have entirely lost my personal melancholy. I often, of course, have melancholy thoughts about the destinies of my fellow-creatures, but I am never in that mood of sadness which used to be my frequent visitant, even in the midst of external happiness. And this, notwithstanding a very vivid sense that life is declining and death close at hand.'

This attainment of calm in the acknowledgement of death does, I would suggest, indicate a definite new phase in George Eliot's emotional life. It does, at least, emphasise that side of her nature that had always sought the ideal, the sublime, the transcendent. The deliberate restraint of this tendency within the confines of a practical empirical world-view now seems to relax: at any rate, George Eliot seems to insist that this inexorably prosaic vision must not be allowed to exclude the possibility of exceptional phenomena: 'the consideration of molecular physics is not the direct ground of human love and moral action, any more than it is the direct means of composing a noble picture or of enjoying great music.'

122 ibid., 18 January 1874 (VI, 12).
123 ibid., 1 July 1874 (VI, 64).
124 ibid., 22 November 1876 (VI, 310).
125 ibid., 10 December 1874 (VI, 99).
This perception had always, of course, been a part of her philosophy: at this phase of her life, however, it emerges into the spotlight at the very centre of the stage, as it were. In another letter to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, she writes: 'The principles which are at the root of my effort to paint Dinah Morris are equally at the root of my effort to paint Mordecai.' The coupling of Dinah Morris and Mordecai is significant: Dinah represents - more, perhaps, than any other character in all George Eliot’s work before Mordecai - the spiritual and transcendent values: she is the nun-figure, the epitome of renunciation and self-less love. But, as we have seen, she is 'placed,' she is made to develop towards a greater and fuller humanity. Mrs. Poyser’s earthy comments create a kind of framework in which Dinah’s intensity and nobility are seen from a more prosaic, 'work-a-day' point of view. Mordecai, however, is not so 'placed': by this period of her life, with ultimate issues more present and vivid to her, George Eliot is open and receptive, without irony or qualification, to a more 'poetic' vision of life. As we have noticed, it is to the 'poetry of the world,' that she wishes to contribute, at this stage.

If this is not a complete change, it can perhaps be viewed in the light of the series of letters that she wrote in 1868 to John Sibree and Charles Bray. On 11 February, she wrote to Sibree of the increasing difficulty of finding original great subjects for artistic creation: 'civilisation tends evermore to repress individual pre-dominance, highly-wrought agony or ecstatic joy.' And she declared

126 ibid., 16 December 1876 (VI, 313).
that the gentler emotions will remain ever new, and will be the
source of artistic inspiration. This is in the nature of a
manifesto for the general direction of her own life's work - the
gentler emotions, the prosaic limitations of ordinary human life.
But her regret for the lack of great subjects is perceptible as well;
for the increasing sameness, the non-heroic flatness of life that she
is forced to acknowledge.

Similarly, in her letter of 8 March, 1848, she rejoices in her
'rasch and sansculottish' feelings over the French Revolution of that
year. She is glad that John Sibree shares her enthusiasm, he is not
'one of those sages whose reason keeps so tight a rein on their
emotions.' The urge in her towards the heroic, to unalloyed joy and
commitment in the face of great events, recklessly sweeps aside
considerations of caution and detachment.

The need for enthusiasm never entirely dies out in her, through
all the deliberate maturity and sanity which is the normal tenor of
her novel-style. But in this respect, her work resembles St. Simon's
theory (which she refers in this last letter): it exemplifies the
alternation of 'critical epochs' and 'organic epochs.'

127 cf. James's judgment on George Eliot (through the approved viewpoint
of Constantius in Daniel Deronda: A Conversation):
'She strikes me as a person who certainly has naturally a taste
for general considerations, but who has fallen upon an age and a
circle which have compelled her to give them an exaggerated
attention. She does not strike me as naturally a critic, less
still as naturally a sceptic; her spontaneous part is to observe
life and to feel it - to feel it with admirable depth. Contemplation,
sympathy, faith - something like that, I should say, would have been
her natural scale. If she had fallen upon an age of enthusiastic
assent to old articles of faith, it seems to me possible that she
would have had a more perfect, a more consistent and graceful
development than she has actually had.'

(Great Tradition, p. 260)
always tension between these two tendencies; but, in general, in
most of her fiction, the 'critical' aspect is dominant. The letter
that she wrote on 4 June 1848 was to prove prophetic, in this sense:

'Alas for the fate of poor mortals which condemns
them to wake up some fine morning and find all
the poetry in which their world was bathed only
the evening before utterly gone - the hard angular
world of chairs and tables and looking-glasses staring
at them in all its naked prose...and at last the
very poetry of duty forsakes us for a season and we
see ourselves and all about us as nothing more than
miserable agglomerations of atoms - poor tentative
efforts of the Natur Princip to mould a personality.
This is the state of prostration - the self-abnegation
through which the soul must go, and to which perhaps
it must again and again return, that its poetry or
religion, which is the same thing, may be a real
overflowing river fresh from the windows of heaven
and the fountains of the great deep - not an
artificial basin with grotto work and gold fish.'

With Daniel Deronda, the need for and the consciousness of
poetry had come to the forefront, as never before. Poetry, religion,
the perception of an ideal, unifying truth, binding the fragmented
realities of life - these are of vital concern to her now. I am not
suggesting that she came to accept any kind of formal religious frame-
work: only that the limits of her vision widened immensely, to allow
for the 'great subject,' the idealised vision that Daniel Deronda, and
especially the portrayal of the Jewish characters, Mordecai, Mirah,
and Daniel, offered her.

This 'organic epoch' of her creative life is signalled by
an important letter that she wrote (on 20 March 1873) to Edward
Burne-Jones, the painter. Burne-Jones's friendship with the Lewises
began in 1868; and thereafter, he and his wife, with whom George Eliot
had an affectionate relationship, paid them regular visits. The painter's work was not generally recognised before George Eliot's death; later, it was acclaimed, and brought him his baronetcy in 1894. But during George Eliot's lifetime, she was one of the few to appreciate his art. Burne-Jones had been trained for the priesthood but had instead come to London with William Morris, to study painting. He was profoundly influenced by Ruskin's theories on art (especially by Modern Painters) and studied with Morris under Rosetti, whose work he adored; later he and Morris, with Millais and Holman Hunt, formed a new school of pre-Raphaelite painters.

At this time, however, in 1873, George Eliot was one of the few to recognise Burne-Jones's genius. He found 'her heart one of the most sympathetic to me I ever knew,' 128 And she wrote to him, in the letter to which we have referred, of her enthusiasm over his pictures:

'...your work makes life larger and more beautiful to us...Don't you agree with me that much superfluous stuff is written on all sides about purpose in art? A nasty mind makes nasty art, whether for art or any other sake. And a meagre mind will bring forth what is meagre...Your work impresses me with the happy sense of noble selection and of power determined by refined sympathy.' (GE Letters (V, 291))

This enriched version of her early realism is noticeable, in view of the idealised, spiritual beauty of the art that she now so eagerly admires. 'Here is no mediocrity, no prosaic 'middle-march' of existence. Burne-Jones's art is ethereal, pure, and noble: it is, as he himself acknowledged, not of this world. 'I mean by a picture,' he wrote many years later, 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that

never was, never will be - in a light better than any light that ever shone - in a land no-one can define or remember, only desire - and the forms divinely beautiful - ...'129

George Eliot's enthusiasm over this ideal conception of art is a token of her changing needs, her widening vision. Daniel Deronda represents the only full expression of this phase of her inner life. And, as I have suggested, the choice of a Jewish theme, and particularly of the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land, was motivated at least to some extent by this never-quite-submerged longing for a 'great subject' to work upon. In Daniel Deronda, indeed, George Eliot emerges into the 'great world,' in more than one sense: she leaves behind the life of the English countryside, of the small town, the poignancy and nostalgia for the world of her youth, and for the first time since Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, she adventures into the higher strata of society, the world of the English aristocracy, with the portraits of the Arrowpoints, the Mallingers, Grandcourt, with the casino at Leubronn, with archery-contests and balls and yachting holidays.

In point of time, as well, Daniel Deronda represents a new departure: unlike the previous novels, it is set squarely in the contemporary world: there is no autumnal light of memory, of nostalgia, no quaint distancing of outdated conditions of life. Daniel Deronda is even insistently contemporary: the background, political, economic,

social, is never allowed to recede too far, and references are numerous, to the American Civil War, the foundation of Canada, the unification of Italy, and of Bismarck's German Reich. George Eliot had always been conscious of political and social movements, as evidenced by her letters. ("Do you not take great interest in the tremendous European change which is being prepared by the new attitude of Common Labour? The centre of gravity is slowly changing and will not pause because people of taste object to the disturbance of their habits." Now, for the first time, this sense of a world in motion, of large currents, of the sheer process of change, becomes an important facet of her novel.

Her aim in introducing this sense of sweeping universal movement is, in part, of course, to intensify the theme of the intrusion of the 'larger destinies of mankind' into private lives. It provides an absolute contrast with Gwendolen's narrow, and self-centred, concerns; and it lends added poignancy to her shocked realisation at the end, of her own insignificance (what James calls the discovery of being 'at best but a rather ridiculous fifth wheel to the coach...':

"There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their own lives..."
(ch. 69, p. 398)

This amount of awareness is seen as a spiritual crisis, when 'the submission of the soul to the Highest is tested.'

---

130 GE Letters, 14 November 1872 (V, 326).
The broad and intensely contemporary range of the novel is aimed, then, partly, at reinforcing, in a new way, an old moral theme - the conquest of egotism that is the key to redemption. In addition, however, all the novelties of place and time and social portraiture are symptoms of George Eliot's increasing desire for largeness, on every plane. She is no longer concerned with the lowest common factors of human existence: her thirst for great movements, extraordinary emotions and ideals coming to effective, practical fruition leads her to areas that she has never before touched in her fiction. The desire for a truly heroic and large-scale subject - this was what came to the surface at this point of her life, to assert the possibility of idealistic and visionary endeavour, quite out of the narrow circle of family and immediate society.

To describe the origins of such a wide-ranging movement - this was one of her aims in writing Daniel Deronda. The theme of the restoration of the Jews struck her as a topic of just such an apocalyptic grandeur, an emotional and intellectual power, as she was seeking. With the wealth of knowledge and association that this theme held for her, with the range of sympathy and humour and moral admiration that it offered her, her choice is not to be wondered at. By use of it, she could 'place' English society and its values, its cultural and moral poverty; she could paint an effective 'back-drop' to Gwendolen's tragedy; she could provide a practical and positive solution to her alienated hero's quest for the security of vision of the heavens as 'a little lot of stars belonging to one's own homestead' (ch. 3, p. 27); she could
extend the sympathies of her readers to a victimised section of the human race; she could give expression to many elements of her past intellectual and emotional life that had hitherto lain dormant; and she could satisfy her urge to write, without apology or irony, on a great theme, a theme invoking her increased understanding of the possibilities of human nature and human endeavour - she could make a 'contribution to the poetry of the world.'
CONCLUSION

In *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot makes her final fictional experiment in life, her final attempt to resolve the conflicting movements that we have traced through various aspects of an often ambivalent consciousness. Her last novel is an unprecedented assertion of largeness, of breadth of horizon, geographical, social and emotional. It is a brave gesture outwards: the anxious oscillation between activity and passivity is resolved in a confirmation of the possibilities for heroic action even in a world where the Gwendolens must suffer in unrelieved and listless solitude. The movement through anguished introspection to an affirmation of action in the world is, of course, not exclusively George Eliot's experience: it is to be found in many of the major poets and novelists of the period. In this, as in many other facets of her experience and her art, George Eliot 'fully epitomizes the century; her development is a paradigm, her intellectual biography a graph, of its most decided trend.' Or, as Lord Acton wrote, with sixty years' less benefit of hindsight, her novels are 'the emblem of a generation distracted between the intense need of believing and the difficulty of belief.'

---

1 Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies* (1949), 204-5.

We have here clearly touched on a formidable large subject, the extent to which George Eliot was typical, 'emblematic' of the mood of her generation. The scope of this study has been quite specifically limited to George Eliot's own development, the emergence of themes from her early emotional and intellectual life into full artistic expression, the working-through of personal tensions to the compassionate acceptance of her creative vision: and a detailed study of the contemporary Zeitgeist would obviously be a disproportionately immense undertaking at this point. Nevertheless, her function as 'emblem of a generation' does require some emphasis and delimitation: and it is with this issue of typicality and uniqueness that I should like to close my discussion.

To a very large and obvious extent, the dilemmas under which we have seen George Eliot labouring were shared and expressed by her contemporaries. The basic crisis of religious belief in her youth was paralleled by similar crises in the lives of innumerable thinkers, poets, and novelists; as was also her lifelong concern to shore up the tottering structures of Christian morality in a world without a God. J.S. Mill described the age as one in which 'real belief in any religious doctrine is feeble and precarious, but the opinion of its necessity for moral and social purposes almost universal.' This dichotomy between desired and actual convictions was a major cause of the anxiety which was the characteristic emotional ground-bass to the period: the mal du siècle, the 'depression and ennui,' of which Arnold spoke as 'characteristics stamped on how many of the representative works of modern times.'

---

The conflict between sentimental attachment to a childhood faith, with its virtues of moral vigour, its uncompromising fastidiousness of conscience ('In all that relates to God and to himself, the Christian knows of no small faults.'), its lucid vision of man's place in an embattled universe, and the new and non-humanly oriented universe that man's reason had discovered to him - this conflict acted as catalyst in the personal lives of many Victorians, precipitating chronic states of introspective melancholy, languor of feeling, inertia of will, and the serious contemplation of suicide as the logical consequence of such a condition of non-being.

A mere list of names will give a sense of the extent of this spiritual malady: Werther, René, Obermann, Iélia, Childe Harold and the other Byronic heroes, Carlyle's Téufelsdröckh, it is a major theme in Tennyson, Arnold, and Clough; and it briefly invaded the lives of Kingsley and Mill. Amiel's Journals constitute a case-book of the condition, and we have already quoted Mark Pattison's self-identification with Amiel's psychic incapacity, with his 'volonté qui voudrait vouloir, mais impuissante à se fournir à elle-même des motifs.' Mrs. Humphry Ward bases her portrait of Mr. Langham, in Robert Elsmere, on the tortured figure of Amiel, with his sense of 'something cold, impotent, and baffling in himself...the persistence... of a kind of hunger for life and its satisfactions, which the will was more and more powerless to satisfy.'

---

5 Hannah More, Practical Piety, chap. 11, p. 142; quoted in Houghton, 232.


6 Robert Elsmere (1890), chap. 16, p. 218.
This radical emotional dilemma was a commonplace in the period. Ruskin attributed it to 'the want of power...to leave results in God's hands;' the collapse of religious belief was, I suggest, a catalyst rather than a sufficient cause for this psychological malady. At all events, its manifestations were generally and acutely painful. Kathleen Tillotson points to the vogue for novels of introspection in the thirties and forties, as a symptom of this profound and baffling anxiety: what Arnold called the 'dialogue of the mind with itself' runs through his own *Empeodocles*, as well as *Sartor Resartus*, *Dipsychus*, and *In Memoriam*, to cite only the most celebrated examples; it finds non-literary expression in the many published journals of rigorous self-examination, such as Hurrell Froude's and Mark Pattison's; and it surfaces into fiction in works such as Newman's *Loss and Gain*.

This introverted intensity of gaze was the cause, according to contemporary diagnoses, of many psychic ills: for Carlyle, energy is blocked off and dissipated by these 'sceptical, suicidal cavillings'; and for Mallock, 'Man has been curiously changing. Much of his old spontaneity of action has gone from him.' Introspection, the habit

---

7 *Modern Painters*, 3 (1897), chap. XV, sec. 10.
8 Preface to *Poems* (1853).
10 'Characteristics,' *Essays*, 3,30.

of Eliza Linton's account of the mature George Eliot: 'She was a made woman - not in the French sense - but made by self-manipulation, as one makes a statue or a vase...Not a line of spontaneity was left in her; not an impulse, beyond the reach of self-conscious philosophy...!' (My *Literary Life* (1899), 96-8).
of constant analysis, the burden of unremitting consciousness is
to blame for this. Empedocles and the Scholar Gypsy exemplify the
nihilistic tendency of the age. Mill, in his dark night of the soul,
described his experience by quoting Coleridge's lines from 'Dejection':

A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,
A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet or relief
In word, or sigh, or tear.

Suicide came to seem an inevitable, scarcely even a dramatic conclusion
to this form of suffering; and Goethe's Werther is said to have encouraged
numbers of the hesitant to emulate his final step into the abyss.

The nightmare experience of inertia is familiar to us from our
study of George Eliot's letters, and from numerous passages in her
essays and novels. Equally familiar is the reaction, epitomised by
Carlyle's doctrine of work: the most effective escape-route from a
debilitating introspection is through conscientious action, a movement
learned from Goethe's solution, in Wilhelm Meister, to the problem
stated in Werther. Tennyson claimed that 'the persevering performance
of daily duty [was] the best medicine for paralysing doubts...'12
And Carlyle traced Scott's enormous popularity precisely to his
extroverted, heroic, and healthy fictional world, free of the 'logic-
cobwebs'13 of the Victorian mental climate. George Eliot's childhood
and adolescent nurture on Scott, and her lifelong admiration of him,
comes to mind, reinforcing the many wistful references to an ideal life
of straightforward action, a simple path of duty to tread, with confidence
and high courage.

12 W. E. Gladstone, "Locksley Hall" and the Jubilee, Nineteenth Century,
21 (1887), 4; quoted in Houghton, p. 259.
13 'Sir Walter Scott,' Essays, 4, 56.
The vogue for objective art, for narrative verse, for Greek myths and medieval legends, is a symptom of the same general longing for the heroic, for the epic force of another age. Tancred declared of his age: 'there is a want of inward and personal energy in man'; and the problem of energy, of personal spontaneity and force, lies at the root of many of the conflicts of the period. So that in the interests of artistic and moral wellbeing, Arnold explicitly urges the modern poet to turn away from his prosaic age and 'to delight himself with the contemplation of some noble action of a heroic time... to escape from the crippling emotional and moral impotence of his generation.

George Eliot's incapacitating introspective melancholy, her wistful admiration for energetic and heroic action, even at the cost of subtlety and sensibility, is, then, paralleled at many points by her contemporaries - particularly, perhaps, by Arnold:

I too have long'd for trenchant force,
And will like a dividing spear;
Have praised the keen, unscrupulous course,
Which knows no doubt, which feels no fear.

And her deep-rooted dilemma over morality and aestheticism is similarly epitomised in Arnold's distrust of the artistic temperament which 'indisposes for the discharge' of the active virtues. The sense of the conflict between seeing and doing is found, paradoxically enough, in artist upon artist of the period. Kingsley expresses scorn for his morally flaccid poet, Elsley Vavasour - 'as if men were sent into the

---

14 Benjamin Disraeli, Tancred, chap. 20, in Works, 15, 190; quoted in Houghton, p. 332.
15 Preface to Poems (1853).
16 'A Farewell,' Lines 33-6.
And Tennyson declared woefully, 'Alas for me! I have more of the Beautiful than the Good!' The Palace of Art was an abiding focus of conflict and remorse - of delight fused with suspicion. René Wellek crystallises the issue when he describes the Victorian attitude as 'a didacticism rooted either in a utilitarianism that extended far beyond the Utilitarian group, or an Evangelicalism that distrusted art as secular and frivolous.'

It is quite clear, then, that George Eliot's was no voice crying in the wilderness, in her experience and expression of these and other crucial personal dilemmas. Inevitably, I have been unable to deal with the subject at length; but I have, I hope, sufficiently indicated the extent to which these central problems were shared by fellow spirits in turmoil. In spite of this typicality, however, the special nature of her achievement is undiminished. In general terms, many likenesses may be found between her patterns of thought and feeling, and those of her contemporaries: she may adequately be termed the 'emblem of a generation.' Nevertheless, the harmonics of her authorial voice remain unique and unreproducible: the fusion of sensibility and impersonality, the constant and acute consciousness of poles held in

18 Two Years Ago (Cambridge, 1857), Vol. 1, p. 112; cf. Mallock's figure of the arch-aesthete, Mr. Rose, who is in the habit of wandering by the river at night, 'hoping I might see some poor unfortunate cast herself from the Bridge of Sighs!' (The New Republic (1877), Vol. 11, p. 29).

19 Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson. A Memoir (1897), 1, 81; quoted in Houghton, p. 247.

20 René Wellek, History of Modern Criticism (Yale, 1955), 111, 86.
equipoise, the distanced, yet never unbodied sense of self, of the ills that flesh is heir to - these become through the medium of her art the wave-forms which a sensitive oscillograph can register but no machine can reproduce. To this uniqueness of tense equilibrium her own contemporaries did obeisance: encounter with her was a symbiotic experience of self-exploration: 'I felt compelled,' wrote Mrs. Ponsonby, '...to be perfectly true, to be not only veracious but true, and I was met in the same spirit.' This note of truth, earnest, almost excruciatingly strained at times, characterises her voice: it is the unmistakable, sad, and knowing tone that expresses her personal awareness of the small, hungry, shivering self at the core of her own life - a mature awareness that modulates into a generous and creative self-regard. From this paradoxical magnanimity with herself is generated the sympathy for all who are, like her, spiritually a-hungered. In her art, the emotion is recollected in a conscious, and always precarious tranquillity, that invites an equally creative honesty and magnanimity from her readers.

21 This image was immediately suggested by the prisoners' task in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel, The First Circle - more particularly by Fryanchikov's explanation to Abakumov - (Fontana Books, 1970), p. 104.

Unless otherwise specified, the place of publication is London.

A. George Eliot


Scenes of Clerical Life (1858)
Adam Bede (1859)
The Lifted Veil (1859)
The Mill on the Floss (1860)
Silas Marner (1861)
Romola (1863)
Felix Holt (1866)
Middlemarch (1871-2)
Daniel Deronda (1874-6)
Impressions of Theophrastus Such (1879)
The Spanish Gypsy (1868)
The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems (1874)
'A College Breakfast-Party.' (1878)

B. Other works consulted


Academy (The). 'Middlemarch.' (Edith Simcox - signed A. Lawrenny), 4 (1 Jan. 1873), 1-4.

-. 'Daniel Deronda.' (George Saintsbury) 10 (9 Sept. 1876), 253-54.

Acton, Lord John. George Eliot's Life. (1885). (Extracted from Nineteenth Century, March 1885.)


Annan, Noel G. Leslie Stephen, his Thought and Character in Relation to his Time. 1951.


---


'Daniel Deronda and the Question of Unity in Fiction,' *Victorian Newsletter,* XV (Spring 1959), 16-19.

Bebee, Maurice. "Visions are Creators": The Unity of Daniel Deronda,' *Boston University Studies in English* (Autumn 1955), 166-77.

Belloc (Parkes), Bessie Rayner. Remarks on the education of girls. 1856.

---

*Essays on Woman's Work.* 1865.

*Vignettes. Twelve biographical sketches.* 1866.

*In a Walled Garden.* 1895.

Bellringer, A.W. 'Education in The Mill on the Floss,' *Review of English Literature,* vol. vii, no. 3 (July 1866), 52.


Bissell, Claude T. 'Social Analysis in the Novels of George Eliot,' *English Literary History,* xviii (1951), 221-39.

Bray, Charles. The Philosophy of Necessity. 1841.

__________. Phases of opinion and experience during a long life. 1885.


__________. Shirley. 1849.


Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Casa Guidi windows. 1851.

Buckley, Jerome H. The Victorian Temper. 1952.


Butler, Samuel. The Way of all Flesh. 1903.

*Past and Present*. 1843.

*Latter-Day Pamphlets*. 1850.

*On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the heroic in history*. 1896.


'Sir Walter Scott,' *ibid.*, 4, p. 56.


Chesterton, G.K. *The New Jerusalem*. [1920].

*Christian Observer (The)*. Correspondence 'On the Restoration of the Jews to Palestine.' April 1838, p. 232; May 1838, pp. 266-7;


*Contemporary Review (The)*. 'A Memorial' (of Emanuel Deutsch), (by H.R. Haweis) 23, (April 1874), 779-98.

*Cornhill (The)*. Vols. vi - viii (July 1862 - Aug. 1863).

Coveney, Peter J. Poor Monkey: the child in literature. 1957.


Davis, Robert Gorham. 'The Sense of the Real in English Fiction,' Comparative Literature, 111 (Summer 1951), 200-217.


Deutsch, Emanuel. 'The Talmud,' Quarterly Review, 123 (Oct. 1867), 417-64.


Dilke, Sir Charles. 'Memoir of E.F.S. Dilke,' The Book of Spiritual Life. 1905.
Disraeli, Benjamin. The wondrous tale of Alroy. 1833.

Coningsby; or, the new generation. 1844.

Tancred; or, the new crusade. 1847.

Dodds, John Waddell. The Age of Paradox; 1841-51. 1953.

Dowden, Edward. Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda; Studies in English Literature. 1878.


Fortnightly Review. 'Middlemarch,' (Sidney Colvin) xiii, n.s. (Jan. 1873), 142-7.

Froude, James Anthony. 'Spinoza,' Westminster, 64 (July 1855), 1-37.

Gaskell, Elizabeth G. Mary Barton. 1848.

Ruth. 1853.

Life of Charlotte Bronte. 1857.

Cranford. 1864.


Haight, Gordon S. George Eliot and John Charman; with Charman’s diaries. New Haven, 1940.


Hanson, Laurence and Elizabeth. *Marian Evans and George Eliot; a biography.* 1952.


_________. *George Eliot's Place in Literature.* 1895.


Hennell, Charles C. *An Inquiry concerning the Origin of Christianity.* 1838.


Hook, Sidney. *From Hegel to Marx.* 1936.


House, Humphrey. 'Qualities of George Eliot's Unbelief,' *All in Due Time; collected essays.* 1955.

Hulme, Hilda. 'The Language of Middlemarch,' *Novel - A Forum on Fiction,* (Fall, 1968), 43.


Hyde, William J. 'George Eliot and the Climate of Realism,' *PMLA,* lxxii (March 1957), 147-64.

Jacobs, Joseph. Essays and Reviews from the 'Atheneum.' 1891.


James, Henry. The Art of the Novel. 1934.


James, Henry. "George Eliot's Life,' Atlantic Monthly, lv (May 1885), 668-78.


Kallen, Horace M. Zionism and World Politics. 1921.


Kingsley, Charles. Yeast. 1851.


Lang, Andrew. *Old Friends.* 1892.

*Leader (The).* 'The Future of German Philosophy.' (Marian Evans) VI (28 July 1855), 723-4.

*Leader (The).* 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft.' (Marian Evans) VI (13 Oct. 1855), 988-9.

*Leader (The).* 'Introduction to Genesis.' (Marian Evans) VII (12 Jan. 1856), 41-


Levin, Harry. *‘What is Realism?’* *Comparative Literature,* III (Summer 1951), 193-9.
Lewes, George Henry. Rose, Blanche and Violet. 1848.

Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences. 1853.

Sea-Side Studies. 1858.

The Study of Psychology. 1879.

'Spinoza,' Westminster, XXXIX (June 1843), 372-407.

'Life and Works of Leopardi,' Fraser's, XXXVIII (Dec. 1848), 659-69.

'The Lady Novelists,' Westminster, LVIII (July 1852), 129-41.

'Realism in Art,' Westminster, LXX (Oct. 1858).

'Spinoza,' Fortnightly, IV (1 April 1866), 385-406.

The Principles of Success in Literature.

Ed. T.S. Knowlson. 1898.

Linton (Lynn), Eliza. Realities. 1851.

The Girl of the period, and other social essays. 1883.

'Cross's Life,' Temple Bar (1885).

My Literary Life. 1899.


Lochhead, Marion Cleland. The Victorian Household. 1964.


Mansell, Darrel Jr. 'George Eliot's Conception of Form,' *Studies in English Literature,* V (1965), 651-62.


More, Hannah. *Black Giles, the Poacher ... To which is added,* *The Hampshire Tragedy,* a true story. 2 parts. Dublin [1795].


Murphy, Howard R. 'Ethical Revolt against Christian Orthodoxy in Early Victorian England,' American Historical Review, LV, 2 (1955), 800-817.

Myers, F.W.H. Modern Essays. 1883.


Pattison, Mark. Isaac Casaubon. 1875.


Punch. 'The Jewish Champion.' 12 (1847), 145.
Revue des Deux Mondes. 'Une Histoire Florentine de George Eliot.'

Richardson, Samuel. The history of Sir Charles Grandison. 7 vols. 1754.


Roth, Cecil. A Short History of the Jewish People. 1936.


Daniel Deronda.' XLII (16 Sept. 1867), 356-8.


The Melancholy of Middlemarch' (R.H. Hutton) XLV (1 June 1872), 685-7.

The Strong Side of Daniel Deronda.' (R.H. Hutton) XLIX (29 July 1876), 948.

Spinoza, Benedict de. Tractatus Theologico-Politicus. 1662.


Thomson, Fred C. 'Genesis of Felix Holt,' LXXIV iii(1959), 576-84.

Thomson, Patricia. 'The Three Georges,' Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVIII (1963), 137-50.

Tillotson, Kathleen, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties. 1954.

Trevelyan, G.M. Introduction in English Songs of Italian Freedom. 1911.


Trollope, Thomas A. La Feata. 1862.


A Writer's Recollections. 1918.


Wesley, John. Oh! the Deceitfulness of the Human Heart.


'The Restoration of Belief.' LVIII (July 1852), 173-204.


'Sunday in Great Britain.' LXV (April 1856), 426-56.

'Types of Mankind.' LXV (April 1856), 356-86.

'Dred.' LXVI (Oct. 1856), 571-73.

'Theology and Philosophy.' LXIX (April 1858), 570-73.

'Theology and Philosophy.' LXX (July 1858), 239.

'Theology and Philosophy.' LXXII (July 1859), 259-60.

'Politics, Sociology and Travels.' LXXII (July 1859) 265-8.
'Theology and Philosophy.' LXXIII (April 1860), 580-81.

'Romola.' LXXX (Oct. 1863), 344-52.

'Theology and Philosophy.' C (Oct. 1873), 464-5.

'Theology and Philosophy.' CII (July 1874), 223.

'Theology and Philosophy.' CIII (April 1875), 484-6.

'George Eliot as a Novelist.' CX (July 1878), 105-35.


Yonge, Charlotte. The Heir of Redcliffe. 2 vols. 1853.

Hannah More. 1888.

Young, George M. Victorian England: Portrait of an Age. 1936.