German Higher Criticism and the Embodiment of Progress in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*

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Declaration

I, Elise Silson, certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and

2. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: 

14 May, 2021

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Abstract

This thesis holds George Eliot's life trajectory alongside the plot trajectory of *Middlemarch*, as demonstrated by the texts she wrote, translated, and reviewed. It demonstrates her experiences and representations of progress and growth in many different contexts and modes, and on many different scales, from the individual through to the international. The historical inclusivity of her work is similarly expansive.

Eliot's Berg and Folger notebooks record her reading during the generation of both *Middlemarch* (serialised 1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* (pub. 1876). This thesis contributes insight into how Eliot intersperses historical, literary, philosophical, theological and scientific understanding with poetry in these notebooks and, in turn, *Middlemarch*. Eliot wrote narratives that incorporated diverse *Bildungen*,[1] undertaken relationally and within social systems. In doing so, she remains intimately mindful of the historicity of ideological formation, and its potentially revolutionary impact for both the individual and society: in this sense, this thesis also describes the flux between religion, power, and politics. I contribute new archival research on the Berg notebook (1868-1876), which draws out Eliot's understanding of the arts—especially poetry—as a prophetic voice that challenges communities to regenerate collaboratively (albeit imperfectly).

Eliot's understanding of progress and growth changed fundamentally and abruptly while she was translating German theological works: David Strauss' *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (German pub. 1835, trans. 1844-5, English pub. 1846) and Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (German pub. 1841, trans. 1853-4, English pub. 1854). This understanding culminates in *Middlemarch*, wherein the *Bildungen* of Eliot's characters, in community with one another, constitutes the *Bildungen* of the Middlemarch community itself. Eliot's perspective provides a stabilised, practical alternative to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' responses to Strauss and Feuerbach in their writing and in the revolutions of 1848.

In deciding to write novels rather than polemics, Eliot drew together a formidable awareness of nineteenth-century histories, science, higher criticism, and sociology. This thesis prioritises intertextual methodologies in exploring these integrations, drawing together Eliot's correspondence, translations, notebooks, essays and reviews. In harmony with this intertextuality, this thesis centralises Eliot's decision to venture not one single polemic in her writing, but diverse perspectives and temperaments in relation to one another, being worked out dialogically, within society. By demonstrating the relational ramifications of diverse world-views and consequent theologies, Eliot guides readers to evaluate the lived social impact of their relationship with the divine good: both within themselves, and in each other. In these explorations, Eliot centralises the truth of experience—especially experiences of art, narrative, and poetry—rather than dogma and doctrine.

For Eliot, any system divorced from the truth of human experience is a barrier to progress and growth, both individually and collectively. This awareness led Eliot to oppose dogmatic systems, which she conveys throughout *Middlemarch*. This thesis demonstrates both the lived origins and the textual dimensions of Eliot's understanding of human progress and growth, using a fundamentally intertextual and interdisciplinary approach.

[1] A *Bildung* is the story of a person's formation and education, as they grow into their place in the world. See chapter 2.

For Michael, Lily and Jacob,

and for my parents,

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in deep gratitude for the teaching and care of

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You have each helped to write the better parts of me: seemingly, with your eyes open.

…ooo…

Prelude

While writing this thesis, I have always prefaced any talks that I have given with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land on which I have spoken. In a similar vein, I have also sought to acknowledge that the language of this research and its associated texts are laden with trauma and displacement: both physically and spiritually. This thesis was written while living in the lands of the Ngarrindjeri people. It was written at Flinders University, which is built on the lands of the Kaurna people. I carry deep respect for these communities, their histories, their traditions, and their Elders.

I need to begin by offering my readers the same respect as I have sought to offer my listeners: in writing about religion, and nationalism, and power dynamics, and communities, and vocation, I encounter narratives that people hold inside themselves about sanctity and belonging. Just as I hope to participate in dismantling the pain of colonisation when I acknowledge Country, I also want to courteously recognise that each of my readers has had their own experiences in contact with Christian institutions and traditions. In writing about those things, I am seeking to centralise those embodied truths—both individual and corporate—in our thought and speech about those things. I am not writing in defence of dogma and religious control. I *am* writing about the diverse ways in which theological awareness features as a powerful dimension of a person's worldview.

So, having made this clarification, I would like to also explain that this has been a sacred work, for me, even though my proclamations are not definitive. I don't intend to imply any degree of perfection by that statement, but rather, to indicate the value that I place on the sanctity of solidarity within words and processes. This writing is oriented towards embodiment, experience, actualisation, and becoming, rather than performativity, and yet Eliot's performances of society in her novels are very much the topic of this thesis.

My own experiences have been a mixture of integration and conflict, in contact with the historical and textual structures that I have written about. The format of this thesis is literary and religious-historical, rather than life-writing, but it has been necessary to explain myself and my own origins at points, because theological words have a special facility for diverse signification, depending on who is speaking. I have no wish to displace the narratives of my readers in approaching these ideas. It is my sincere hope that at those times when my own narratives arise, my readers will understand that these are offered in pursuit of transparency and good faith, and not offered as any kind of exemplar.

More than some theses, there has been no way to successfully undertake this project without deliberating about form. This project occurred within a strange set of historical and personal circumstances, even before the unleashing of 2020. I have attempted to draw George Eliot's lived self into contact with her constructed, fictionalised Realism. I have tried to show—with not a small degree of tenderness—the woman whose life choices and dedication to learning propelled her to think and write with exemplary conscientiousness. It may be, in Eliot's words, that I will be a 'foundress of nothing,'[2] and that is fine. It has been a rich experience. But there is nonetheless some vanity or self-realisation that propels a PhD in Literature: that I will say something that is useful because it is true. I feel both relieved and satisfied to have sought out these things in proximity to George Eliot, because I cherish what has come of it for me, experientially.

I have had the recklessness to seek to live out the realisations that have arisen from this research process. I have shifted through many stages of faith and life in these three years; vastly further than any preceding decade except for my first. I got married. I explored a priestly call with the Anglican Church of Australia, and joined the Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi. My understandings of these things have shifted immensely and rapidly, often closely wrapped up in this research. Simultaneously, I have realised in many contexts that the words I have had to employ in this thesis mean such diverse things to different potential readers, that it is fraught to have to use them at all.

Some readers will be drawn to what seem like conclusions, when I also say that I ended up leaving the Anglican church altogether, and committing myself to my vocation of bearing honest witness at the risk of ending up with close to nothing at all, from some perspectives. So, as I write about faith, God, belief, sin, spiritual pride, and the sacrilege of spiritual abuse, please understand that I am aware there are no neutral approaches towards these terms. They are precious and sacred, and dangerously and perversely weaponised, within history.

In writing this thesis, I have tried to tell you some sliver of the very real truth. But it is just a thesis, and my perception is limited. So, in reading, whoever you are, please know that I intend to treat you gently, and with respect for the sanctity of your real, true story. Whatever it *really* is, it is sacred to me.

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[2] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Penguin, 1980 [1871-2]), 3.

1. Introduction

> To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth—what a work to be in any way present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder![3]

The writer we know as George Eliot was born Mary Ann Evans, on November 22nd, 1819, in the English Midlands.[4] She is most widely known for her nuanced characterisation, especially her tender representations of the breadth of human experience. This tenderness arose from a progressive intellect in the Hegelian sense: Eliot's Berg notebook, kept while she wrote *Middlemarch*, records quotes and notes on 'the nature of the mind… the power of reason… the operation of cause and effect… the need for man to see things from proper perspective… and inherent in the concept of perspective, the admission that all perceptions (truth) is relative, depending upon the position of the observer...'[5] These reflections infused *Middlemarch* (serialised 1871-2) with wisdom and sensitivity, facilitating reflection and growth in readers from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds, especially women. This growth is distinctly evident in a cache of letters from these readers, which I read at the Berg Archive in New York in late 2018. They link her fiction to the deep enrichment of specific lives in specific contexts. Within this thesis, '*Bildung*'—which is a literary term meaning the life-education/progress/growth of a character—forms the kernel of Eliot's thinking about social progress: that is, that collective growth or social progress consists of instances of individual *Bildungen* in dialogue with one another.

Eliot's realist novels represent the conflicts and difficulties of negotiating individual faith and doubt within life as it is lived. They depict experiences of religious betrayal, alienation and reintegration (*Silas Marner*); private devotional spaces and experiences of prayer (*Adam Bede*) and alienation from prayer (*Middlemarch*; *The Mill on the Floss*); and the internal and external experiences of public faith (*Scenes of Clerical Life*; *Adam Bede*); religious aspects of social mores and regulation, especially towards women (*The Mill on the*

[3] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford UP, 1963 [1871-2]), 13.
[4] The writer changed her name to Marian Evans in her early twenties, then went by Marian Lewes after her common-law marriage to her soulmate and intellectual peer, George Henry Lewes. Following Lewes' death in November 1878, she married John Cross in May 1880, dying as Marian Cross in December 1880. See Kathy O'Shaughnessy, *In Love with George Eliot*, (Australia: Scribe Publications, 2019) on the significance of Eliot's relationship with George Henry Lewes.
[5] John Clark Neufeldt and Victor A. Pratt, *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks: A Transcription* (California: University of California Press, 1979), xxxi.

Floss; *Middlemarch*; *Adam Bede*; *Daniel Deronda*); and the sacrifices and temptations of ministry ("Amos Barton"; *Silas Marner*; *Middlemarch*; *Adam Bede*), among many others. Eliot constructs her characters' experiences of religion within realistic social systems and relationships. Her capacity to render both the micro and macro dimensions of faith and doubt—and their socio-regulatory and political utility in society—facilitates her critiques of these structures and patterns. The fluidity of these constructions enables Eliot to examine not just one religious position or standpoint (as a polemical text would), but many, in dialogue with each other. Eliot thus *demonstrates* the social ramifications of these positions by embodying them in her characters, who model the dynamics of change within society through the lens of relationality.[6] This personal change, and its associated stimuli, constitutes the central propelling force in Eliot's narratives. As Lord David Cecil identified in 1935, and many other critics ratified in their later works:

> She did not think of a man and then invent what sort of thing was likely to happen to him, she thought of what happened to him and from that evolved what sort of man he was likely to have been.[7]

Cecil's observation bears out with increasing potency across the trajectory of Eliot's novels, most markedly in *Middlemarch*.

Eliot consistently represents personal change as the substrate of community change. In this way, she refuses to separate personal progress and development—the focus of the *Bildungsroman,* as a form—from the progress of the families, communities, and social systems within which her characters are set. The limitations placed on characters by these social systems are essential to Eliot's realism, and the frustrations experienced by her characters are, correspondingly, embodied failures of social systems. The capacity of characters to awaken to, participate in, and progress these limiting social systems is Eliot's focus. This contrasts potently with writers like David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Karl Marx, who produced a series of increasingly disruptive polemical systems, along the lines of Hegel's cycle of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. I posit that Eliot's realist narratives displace polemical synthesis as the means of resolving these mysteries, or *Welträtsel,*[8] in that they refer the reader back to lived materialities, and readers' own capacities co-author their world-views in dialogue with their communities.

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[6] I highly recommend Bernard Paris' writing in this area. See *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values*, (USA: Wayne State UP, 1965); and *Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to Her Experiments in Life*, (New York: State University of New York, 2003).
[7] Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (London: Constable, 1966 [1934]), 286.
[8] German. 'World-riddles.'

This thesis is structured as a chronology of Eliot's life, overlaid by the trajectory of development within *Middlemarch*. Eliot's personal *Bildung* integrates closely and readily with the phases of communal *Bildung* in this novel. In *Middlemarch*, society is the integration of many *Bildungen* into a common fabric. Eliot refused to separate the experiential, personal dimensions of social existence from systems of abstraction and prescription. These latter systems can be read as bids for transcendence to justify hierarchical social orders. I have sought to embody this interrelatedness in this thesis, with the intention of faithfulness to the sensations, emotions, and attachments that we live out as we seek progress for ourselves, and for our communities: be those small Midlands towns, as in *Middlemarch*, or the complex expanses of nation-states and religious movements.

The Writer's Life

Following the death of her mother, Evans was nurtured by her teachers. She continued to find connection in scholastic and literary pursuits throughout her life. Her family prized industry and respectability: biographical accounts[9] convey a similar familial culture to that of the Dodson aunts in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Maggie Tulliver's difficulties with her brother, Tom, also resonate with accounts of Mary Ann's brother, Isaac.[10] Chapter three attends to this early period of Evans' life.

Later, as George Eliot, she meticulously sought to understand the voices of other thinkers, especially in situations where she later overlaid that understanding with her own analysis and commentary. This very fundamental commitment is demonstrated in her work as a translator, as Susan Hill has demonstrated.[11] The first major project of this type was her translation of David Strauss' *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (see chapters five and six) in her early twenties. It required fifteen-hundred pages of faithfulness to Strauss'

[9] In this thesis, I primarily engage with the following biographies: Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), especially in characterisations of Robert and Tom Evans; Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot* (London: Virago Pioneers, 1987), for summaries of overall cultures of different groups and relationships in the writer's life; and Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (London: Cornell UP, 1994) for summaries of textual examples of various relationships in the writer's life. See also Gordon Haight's archivally grounded *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968), arising from his collation of Eliot's letters in 1954. Bodenheimer's "The Biographer as Therapist: George Eliot and Kathryn Hughes," *Review Virginia* 4, (2001): 237-44, emphasises the textuality of these characterisations.

[10] Kathryn Hughes, in *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), provides a nuanced set of observations about the impact of Eliot's relationship with her brother on her writing. For this reason, I have avoided overcomplicating this thesis by spending too much time discussing Eliot's formative familial relationships.

[11] Susan Hill, "Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no.3 (1997): 635-53.

difficult and exhausting voice, and remains the only English translation. This project emboldened Evans to assert intellectual and spiritual independence, which was opposed by various figures in her life, including her father and brother.

This patriarchal enforcement echoes throughout Eliot's fiction, especially *The Mill on the Floss*. Henry Alley wrote in 1979 about the 'torturous' failed education of Tom Tulliver, who was thrust into book learning, and thus alienated from his natural (and situationally suitable) practical giftings. These alienated systems paralysed his capacity for sympathetic growth, leading ultimately to his decay. More benignly (at least on the surface), the prevalent aphorisms and truisms underpinning village social orders are parodied throughout Eliot's novels, for example in *Silas Marner*'s tavern scene,[12] and in patriarchal deliberations about the selection of a hospital chaplain in *Middlemarch*:[13] these satirical episodes are potent rebuttals of Evans' early suppression. Her letters to John Sibree Junior during this period of growing self-awareness have a brassy, bombastic tone that is anomalous. This time of uninhibited, robust discourse was suspended abruptly, when Evans began to nurse her father through his terminal illness. Evans sat with him and read to him over the course of his final year, and this time together intensified her sympathetic awareness of their common humanity. This measured and attentive mode tempered her writing, but not at the expense of her vibrant wit and intellectual autonomy. Over time, this early capacity to simultaneously apply compassion, humour, and rigour developed into authority and nuance.

Following her father's death on May 31st, 1849,[14] Mary Ann enjoyed some time abroad and began to sign her correspondence, 'Marian Evans', signalling new beginnings. She then moved to London to continue working with John Chapman, the publisher of her *Life of Jesus* translation, on *The Westminster Review*. Evans reviewed and edited with fastidious and respectful attention, deferring to Chapman as chief editor while providing indispensable stabilisation and guidance. Evans' early essays were published in this context.

While boarding at Chapman's house, Evans befriended a wide array of free-thinking scholars. Her work with *The Westminster* kept her well abreast of intellectual developments, and she established a strong sense of the many threads of thought that defined the mid-nineteenth century. The texts of this time chronicle violent, lurching transitions and

[12] George Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, (London: Signet Classics, 1960), 47-56. Chapter six.
[13] See chapter eighteen of *Middlemarch*, 187-199, wherein several patriarchs meet to decide who will be the chaplain of a new fever hospital. The various superstitious impressions and nonsensical principles expressed by the men in this chapter undermines their self-importance quite comprehensively.
[14] Uglow, *George Eliot*, xiv.

realisations, and the circles that Evans moved in were characterised more by their desire to progress beyond the *status quo* of older social systems, than any uniformity of temperament or perspective. She quickly showed an unparalleled capacity for both penetrating insight and sympathetic warmth, qualities that were treasured by her friends as they passed through many difficult experiences of censorial reactions, including book burnings and social exclusion. Marian was careful to attend to realities above rumours and became an insightful—albeit not fully valued—companion in this collegiality (see chapter eight).

This capacity for insight matured towards translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* in 1854. The German edition of this book had already borne erubescent fruit in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, culminating in *The Communist Manifesto* and the revolutions of 1848. Feuerbach posits that holiness and divinity—as articulated in the Christian sacraments—are *essentially* expressions of the human potential to embody those things. Marx and Engels offered practical pathways towards this embodiment, while jettisoning the religious component. The crux of Feuerbach's undertaking was to identify human potential to enact progress. This progress would come about as humans grew to be able to see themselves and each other as capable of embodying divine goodness by living according to their best human natures, thus paving the way for future humanisms. Eliot's writing bore very different fruit to that of Marx and Engels. Nonetheless, this shared starting point is fundamental to her understanding of human progress (see chapters two and nine). Notably, within Eliot's writing, characters construct and enact diverse types of progress, according their individual contexts. Rather than positing one key realm for social progress to occur, Eliot creates matrices of diverse kinds of progress in her novels, integrating economic, political, scientific, intellectual, religious and personal progress within the social systems of her novels. This integration mirrors the lived complexities of working towards progress in community, rather than the singular thread of a polemical perspective.

Around the time of her Feuerbach translation, Marian became romantically involved with George Henry Lewes, who was in the later stages of his *Life of Goethe* (published 1855). They eloped to Germany together. Marian Lewes produced a masterful set of essays integrating German thought. These continued to flow on their return to London, culminating in her response to Otto Gruppe, titled 'The Future of German Philosophy', in which she states that 'The age of systems is passed… System is the childhood of philosophy; the manhood of

philosophy is investigation.'[15] In this essay, she repositions philosophy as a practical, lived undertaking, rather than belonging to the realm of rhetoric and polemics. George Eliot the novelist was born shortly after, in the publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1857. This fundamental shift occurred as their intellectual and romantic intimacy blossomed. They lived together happily, working together closely on *Problems of Life and Mind*: an extraordinary set of volumes on cognition, identity and morality, until his death in 1878. Marian spent a year finalising the last volume of *Problems of Life and Mind* for publication, remarrying briefly before her own death from kidney disease in 1880.

As Mary Ann Evans, Marian Evans, Marian Lewes and George Eliot, this writer was wholly that: a writer. Her notebooks and correspondence provide even more textual material from which her thought can be appraised, and within this thesis, that textual material displaces critical speculations arising from outside of Eliot's own skilful and careful articulations. Thus, while this research does certainly integrate biographical considerations in approaching *Middlemarch*, its methodology is intertextual-biographical rather than engaging the somewhat sensationalist style of personal-biographical exploration that has dominated discussions. The rationale for this is to apply a methodology that emulates George Eliot's sense of sacred attentiveness, by focussing on what she so painstakingly articulated.

Eliot's Corpus

This research engages in a close examination of *Middlemarch* (1871-2), which is broadly held as the culmination of Eliot's craft as a realist novelist. Eliot's first novel, *Scenes of Clerical Life* resists idealisation of religious experiences and the lives of clergy, by sympathetically representing the difficulties and contradictions of this social station, and the associated difficulties of seeking to reduce human suffering to neat doctrinal solutions. This sympathetic awareness was similarly extended towards David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, as theologians seeking to serve their sometimes-hostile religious communities.

Adam Bede (1859) displays Dinah Morris' transition from pietistic conservatism to more limber and socially connected family life, realised most tangibly in Dinah's potent capacities as bride, feminine companion, and Christian minister. In *Silas Marner* (1861) Eliot renders a similarly Feuerbachian *Bildung*[16] for Silas, situating spiritual fulfilment and

[15] George Eliot, "The Future of German Philosophy," in *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992 [1855]), 133-37.
[16] *Bildung* is a German term for a process of personal formation and education: of *becoming*. It is explored more fully in chapter two.

regeneration in Silas' community life. *Romola* (1863) is set in fifteenth-century Florence, continuing explorations, in that context, of the difficulties of negotiating a *Bildung* within a time of religious and social turbulence. *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) attends potently to the sociocultural challenges and difficulties of the nineteenth century context, and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) shows these challenges in very direct contact with the limitations and challenges particular to bright young women.

All these texts are, in part, the outworking of the sympathetic burden experienced by Eliot, arising out of her unusual faculties of perception: her 1859 dark gothic novella, *The Lifted Veil*, deviates from her usual form to communicate the loneliness and isolation arising from her very full awareness of the internal processes and limitations of the minds she sought to connect with. The biographical details of these experiences, for Eliot, will be explored through the focussing lens of what these experiences and awarenesses enabled her to do in *Middlemarch*.

Theological (Inter)Textuality

> History is the process whereby the spirit discovers itself and its own concept.[17]

Eliot's redeployments of Strauss and Feuerbach's writing took flesh in her definitions of growth, duty, morality, spiritual sight and blindness. She had a piercing grasp of destructive dogma and its consequences. Such theologies violate the central purpose of religion, for Eliot, Strauss, and Feuerbach: the facilitation of equitable, compassionate society. This thesis integrates three primary texts: *Middlemarch*; *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*[18] (David Strauss); and *The Essence of Christianity*[19] (Ludwig Feuerbach). Beyond and around these texts, Eliot's notebooks and essays clearly demonstrate *her* approach and linkings. I prioritise the richness and breadth of these other sources over other secondary analyses. The central purpose of this thesis has been to hear George Eliot's own voice more precisely, and to contribute to the collaborative project of hearing her with the same precision and attentiveness that she so conscientiously offered.

[17] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975 [1857]), 62.
[18] Published in Germany as *Das Leben Jesu, Kritisch Bearbeitet* in 1835-6, Evans' English translation published in 1846.
[19] Published in Germany as *Das Wesen des Christenthums* in 1841, Evans' English translation published in 1854.

Arguably, these translations of German higher criticism,[20] and her essays arising from her understanding of German materialism[21] are, alongside *Middlemarch*, the most marked examples of Eliot's deep attentiveness to other voices and cognitive approaches. These translations are explored here as Evans' lived experiences, alongside their intertextual impact, as demonstrated in her writing as George Eliot. Therein, my methodology diverges from established delineations between biography and systematic theology. I examine, as Eliot did, the ways in which ideas about faith and doubt are embodied fundamentally within behaviours and relationships. In doing so, I acknowledge Eliot's encouragement of readers in their own processes of epistemological and ideological formation. This encouragement occurs through narrative. In contrast to Eliot, Strauss' and Feuerbach's polemical texts function as ultimatums, demanding that readers either assent to or rebut what is posited. This tone will be clear throughout my explorations of both Strauss and Feuerbach. Nonetheless, Eliot persevered to hear the strengths of both Strauss and Feuerbach's contributions, and articulated them precisely through translation. She exercised both wit and discretion as she distilled their ideas in her narratives.

Eliot did not invest in delineating binaries. Instead, she made space to see the trajectories of growth, hopefulness, intention, alienation and intimacy that constitute human experience. I undertake to extend this sympathetic mode to those writers that this thesis integrates, to seek to understand what we can learn from them, without idealising or shifting the truth of those experiences. Thus, within this thesis are aspects of biographical and critical complexity that may reduce its palatability for some readers, especially as I approach David Strauss' biography and categorisation in chapter six. Strauss' life experiences, when considered alongside his textual contributions, highlight some of the difficulties and incongruities of certain critical approaches. The categorisations of Eliot, Strauss, and Feuerbach are as diverse as the ideologies of those who write about them.

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[20] 'German higher criticism', or 'historical-critical method' is a branch of criticism arising out of Hegel and the materialist tradition. It centres on reading texts (customarily the Christian gospels) through a historical lens, rather than as a self-contained text. I use 'German higher criticism' in this thesis, as it is less ambiguous within my discussions of historicity. The term conveys something of the tone of these works, as 'higher' than other texts. Such bids for interpersonal transcendence are discussed chapter seven, particularly. My experience of writing this thesis has included regularly needing to dismantle these communication inequalities when German higher criticism and/or Hegel needs to be mentioned. This ongoing dynamic is significant in relation to this research.

[21] This usage of 'materialism' refers to thought approaches that prioritise materialities within interpretation. There is some irony to the formal choice to represent these thought approaches using polemical texts, rather than through embodiment, as I will explore throughout this thesis.

Conclusion

This research focusses on the intertextual theological consciousness permeating *Middlemarch*. In attending to the materiality of *Middlemarch*—both in its interior significations, and in the texts that surround and connect to it—I draw out a grounded awareness of Eliot's placement of faith in society, as a means of clarifying both the best and the worst of human behaviour. By representing both embodied and theological dimensions of her characters, Eliot guides readers to evaluate whether the perspectives lauded as answers can actualise social progress. In these explorations, Eliot prioritises the embodiment of progress over speculations about its provenance.

2. Narratives of Learning and Becoming

> [O]ur earliest, strongest impressions, our most intimate convictions, are simply images added to more or less of sensation. These are the primitive instruments of thought. Hence it is not surprising that early poetry took this way—telling a daring deed, a glorious achievement, without caring for what went before. The desire for orderly narration is a later, more reflective birth. The presence of the Jack in the box affects every child: it is the more reflective lad, the miniature philosopher, who wants to know how he got there.[22]

Introduction

This chapter outlines the requisite critical and theoretical concepts used in this thesis. It traces the trajectory of George Eliot's theoretical awareness, and its culmination and replication in *Middlemarch*. This chapter is not a comprehensive overview of methodological content: it is, rather, more of a *Prolegomena*,[23] to deploy a term most often used in theological or philosophical works. *Bildung* and *Bildungsroman* are terms that I use extensively. *Bildung* is, most simply, the German word for 'education'. Its literary usage refers to education in the broadest possible sense: a *Bildungsroman* is a novel of becoming; of coming-of-age; of maturation. In ''stable communities', that is, in status or traditional societies,'[24] the markers of this maturation are—ostensibly, at least—clearly defined, for example in Goethe's archetypal 1795–6 *Bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.*[25] Inherent to the *Bildungsroman* is the gradual demystification of the social structures taken as definitive for the maturing protagonist. This demystification frequently includes a struggle against and redefinition of the context, thus situating the protagonist in their own unique epoch.

Such a format lends itself readily to critique of social contexts, in their limitations of hope and potential for individuals. The individual search for contextualisation most

[22] George Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook* (Edinburgh: William Blackwell and Sons, 1884), 369. This volume was edited by George Eliot before her death in 1880. It is a compendium of her essays, with a section of reflections on narrative construction and literature in the latter section. Given that these notes were selected by her specifically, they are authoritative representations of her thought.
[23] A *Prolegomena* is critical or discursive treatise that functions as a preface. It indicates the 'words before' a work.
[24] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), 4.
[25] German. 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.'

frequently comes to fruition within marriage 'as the definitive and classifying act par excellence', but as Moretti notes, 'at the end of the *Bildungsroman*'s development, marriage will even be disembodied into an abstract principle by Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* who marries not so much a woman, as a rigidly normative culture.'[26] *Middlemarch*, Eliot's second-to-last novel, is similarly active in its textual usage of marriage, demonstrating the contrast between outmoded and emerging approaches to relationship, scholarship, and identity through Dorothea's marriage to Edward Casaubon and then Will Ladislaw. This duality conveys the hopefulness of Eliot's cultural moment for the enfranchisement of women, standing in stark contrast to novels like Thomas Hardy's 1895 *Jude the Obscure*, which is limited to the aborted hopes of its scholarly working-class protagonist. Eliot's novels enact social progress by showing the cost of unsuitable systems of legitimation and decision-making, for both individuals and communities. In this way, she encourages readers to identify what progress is available to them in their own contexts, enacting and inviting solidarity, rather than pronouncing judgement and exclusion, as Hardy did.

Wilhelm Meister, like most *Bildungsromane*, traces the integration of its protagonist into his social context. *Middlemarch* traces the integration not only of one young (female) protagonist, but collective regeneration in community. I refer to this as 'embodied progress' in this thesis, as distinct from theoretical or polemical process, which frequently came at the expense of embodying relational progress, in the nineteenth century particularly. Disconnectedness, blindness, short-sightedness are all symptoms of immaturity, in *Middlemarch*, and the path out of these attributes is sympathetic attentiveness to the experiences, challenges, and frailties of others. Such disconnectedness and short-sightedness was costly for polemicists like David Strauss, in choosing how to attempt social meliorism. Marilyn Orr identifies integration as a 'key principle' of Eliot's undertaking in *Middlemarch*, observing that it

> represents the climax of her fictional work because it embodies this principle of integration almost as perfectly as any novel could… *Middlemarch* not only explores the way in which integrity manifests as integration but also itself represents George Eliot's own achievement of personal and artistic integration.[27]

Orr identifies maturity as correlating with 'incarnation', which resonates with Feuerbach's understanding of spiritual maturity as the embodiment or fleshing-out of the divine goodness that is externalised in conceptions of God. The dynamic in *Middlemarch* does not entirely

[26] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 78.
[27] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution* (USA: Northwestern UP, 2018), 8.

coincide with this Feuerbachian principle, however, in that its characters have diverse—and not necessarily noble—ideas of the divine attributes. Depending on the faith perspective of the character, internalisation of perceived divine attributes would not necessarily coincide with growth. In Eliot's novels, faith perspectives function as internal workspaces for growth and stagnation. Her characterisation explores mechanisms for social progress and degradation: the fulcrum of which is a character's capacity for empathic, responsible participation based on interpersonally connected perception. She thus demonstrates the fundamental importance of teleological[28] evaluation of faith perspectives: that is, evaluation in terms of its interpersonal and communal impacts, rather than deontological[29] or dogmatic 'correctness.' Immature characters in *Middlemarch* hold inflexibly to deontological rules that they have identified for themselves: Dorothea's early thought ratifies feminine submissiveness, whereas the rules and perspectives of *Middlemarch* patriarchs ratify the privilege that they conflate with divine providence. Maturation, in *Middlemarch*, arises from an awareness of the lived consequences of various behaviours and beliefs, both for the self and for others. Empathy is integral to both individual and communal progress, for Eliot.

The polyparadigmatic nature of *Middlemarch* has been identified by critics using diverse terminology. Interpersonal dialogue—including gossip—is identified by Morris as 'a matrix for the development of the characters',[30] and thus dialogical awareness is linked with identity formation. The capacity of an individual to translate (understand and articulate) the thought and experience of others is central to maturation in *Middlemarch*, as Susan Hill notes of Eliot's translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity.* Hill also emphasises Feuerbach's own understanding of the importance of this kind of flexibility and sympathetic responsiveness.[31] Hill links these capacities with Feuerbach's definition of spiritual maturity as the capacity to engage in earnest solidarity.

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[28] The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states 'Teleological theories are not, strictly speaking, theories about value. They are theories about right action, or about what one ought to do. But they are committed to *claims* about value because they appeal to evaluative facts, in order to explain what is right and wrong, and what we ought to do — *deontic* facts. The most obvious consequence of these theories, is therefore that evaluative facts must not then be explained in terms of deontic facts. The evaluative, on such views, is prior to the deontic' Mark Schroeder, "Value Theory," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter (2016): 3.1. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-theory.

[29] The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states 'The word **deontology** derives from the Greek words for duty (deon) and science (or study) of (logos). In contemporary moral philosophy, **deontology is** one of those kinds of normative theories regarding which choices **are** morally required, forbidden, or permitted' Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, "Deontological Ethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter (2016): 1.1. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological.

[30] Timothy Morris, "The Dialogical Universe of Middlemarch," *Studies in the Novel* 22, no.3 (1990), 282-95.

[31] Susan Hill, "Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no.3 (1997), 635-53.

Both male and female characters engage in this solidarity, which supports Tracey Rosenberg's conclusion that Eliot, in seeking to write about the real, did not see herself as bound to conflate this undertaking with femininity. Rather, Eliot posits it as a broadly applicable attribute of human potential:

> Instead, she suggests a corrective, in which art provides not dogmatically-correct role models but the capacity to understand differences: "the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures."[32]

This invitation to Eliot's readers to *imagine* and *feel*, rather than be argued into submission, produces a stability of reader-response not afforded by Strauss' *Life of Jesus* or Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. Nonetheless, the understanding of the world that gave rise to this concern for embodiment and material responsiveness arose in contact with those texts. The historical-textual grounding of *Middlemarch* demonstrates Eliot's project as not just her own, but as a collaboration with her readers that is suggested by the collaborations and connections between her characters. Thus, in both her characterisation and her intertextual approach, Eliot uses *Middlemarch* to model social progress in numerous modes and contexs. This harmonious drawing-together is central, rather than incidental, to Eliot's fiction. Bakhtin's dialogical imagination is best exemplified in these functions, within *Middlemarch*, and provides a useful theoretical apparatus at various points in this thesis.

Trajectories *versus* Categories

Middlemarch critics have lapsed, at times, into some questionable methodologies in drawing analysis of the novel together with its author's biography. Such reductionist statements originate from a drive to apply static labels or categories to lives of extraordinary complexity: an activity that is blinkered to the flux of cognition and identity that constitutes lived experience. Thus, categorisation of Eliot, or Strauss, or Feuerbach, or any other person is not the priority of this thesis at all, even though they each have engaged in cognitive states or written texts that could reasonably be categorised as atheist, Christian, and so on.

Rather, methodologically, I seek to 'play the ball' of the textual contributions of these thinkers, rather than designate which 'camp' each thinker belongs to. Texts are not transparent windows into the mind: they are constructed, fixed derivatives of awareness,

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[32] Tracey Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot: George Eliot's Reception and the Ideal Woman Writer," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 3, no.1 (2007), 6. Rosenberg is citing a letter from Marian Lewes to Charles Bray on July 5, 1859; see George Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, July 5, 1859," in *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.3, ed. Gordon Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 111.

produced within the flux of cognition. Even in the act of writing, a polemical text—such as *The Life of Jesus* or *The Essence of Christianity*—must be crafted to cohere within itself, according to its form and structure of argument. This systematic cohesion, if highly prized as a writing goal, may come at the cost of close correlation with the cognition and experiences of the writer. At some point, each work must be abandoned to its own system of signification to become finished. It cannot be revised forever, to correlate with the cognitive flux of the writer. Thus, the texts referred to in this thesis are not conflated with the internal positions of their writers. Michel Foucault differentiates between the author constructed in the mind of the reader, and the historical person who actually wrote the text. I have tried to be mindful of the potential for a methodology like mine to be an exercise in generating a fictionalised Eliot. With this in mind, I seek out the trajectories of these writers to understand what they sought to give to their readers by finishing and publishing these texts. Strauss and Feuerbach's receptions were vastly different from their intentions in many ways. The project is to see their respective and collective *Bildungen*; to appreciate Eliot's sympathetic awareness of their aims and reception histories; and to examine how she translated, softened, and built upon their stigmatised contributions in fashioning her own. It is one thing to describe the networks of those ideas that sat well with a thinker, and it is another entirely to say '[these ideas] is what [label] think and this thinker belongs in the [label] group, therefore this person held to [these ideas].' I avoid the latter. Eliot's writing deserves attentive exposition… more than could be covered in this thesis. Bearing with her in this way is especially fruitful, given her meticulous scepticism of any bid to exert control using religious or intellectual authority. Hale White, who used to read proofs for *The Westminster Review* with her, described her as 'one of the most sceptical, unusual creatures I ever knew,'[33] and as a 'Saint Theresa'[34] (an anomalous spelling that is also used in *Middlemarch*) who showed him attentive kindness in his insecurities.[35] We read this sympathetic vigilance throughout Eliot's writing.

Some critics[36] interpret Eliot's open-eyed realism as pitting materialism against religion in all forms, as an articulation of a firm and clear secular 'atheism.' Textually, this type of atheism is constructed as an inescapable consequence of Mary Ann Evans' translation

[33] Rosemary Ashton, *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), 172.
[34] Eliot's spelling.
[35] Ashton, *142 Strand*, 171.
[36] See Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (Brighton, Great Britain: Harvester Press, 1979); Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot* (London: Oxford UP, 2005); Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life*; *142 Strand.*

of *The Life of Jesus* from German into English in her early twenties (see chapters three, five and six). While such a clear and reducible shift would indeed be convenient shorthand in tracing the transitions of such an influential author's life, there is no clear material in Eliot's voice to confirm this perspective. One of Eliot's letters to Barbara Bodichon, in 1862, speaks decisively about her views, alongside her concern about tone and relationality in discussions about religion:

> Pray don't ever ask me again not to rob a man of his religious belief, as if you thought my mind tended towards such robbery. I have too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, & the spiritual blight that comes with No-faith, to have any negative propagandism in me. In fact, I have very little sympathy with Free-thinkers as a class, & have lost all interest in mere antagonism to religious doctrines. I care only to know, if possible, the lasting meaning that lies in all religious doctrine from the beginning until now:
> That speech of Carlyle's, which sounds so odious, must, I think, have been provoked by something in the manner of the statement to which it came as an answer – else it would hurt me very much that he should have uttered it.[37]

Thus, it seems reasonable to me that any reduction of Eliot's spiritual outlook to simple 'atheism' must be accompanied by evidence in her own words. I have not come across any such pronouncement in the archive or in my reading, in undertaking my research.

As I discuss in chapter six, even aside from the source issues that permeate the literary tradition of calling George Eliot an 'atheist', the meaning of 'atheism' has a long and varied arc that must also be acknowledged in deploying this term. *Circa* 1700, an atheist could simply be a Christian with a mildly unorthodox view of the Trinity. In the nineteenth century, an atheist could be a person who believed in God but did not believe in supernatural interventions outside of normal scientific causality (George Henry Lewes, for example, habitually signed his letters with the words, 'God bless you'[38]: a phrase that Marian also used at times in correspondence with Barbara Bodichon[39]). Even these ideas about scientific

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[37] George Eliot, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Nov. 26, 1862*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. This letter is transcribed in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 64-5, however Haight's rendering of the letter's punctuation has some errors, when compared to the original manuscript.

[38] George Henry Lewes, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. Holly Lodge, 6 Mar., 1860. Includes ANZ from George Eliot, signed 'Marian'*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. See transcription in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.3, 269-70.

[39] George Eliot, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. 16 Blandford Square, Dec. 26, 1860*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.3, 365-367.) 'The brightest point in your letter is, that you are in a happy state of mind yourself. For the rest, we must wait, & not be impatient with those that have their inward trials that everything outward seems to smile on them.

It seems to those who are differently placed, that this time of freedom from strong ties & urgent claims must be very previous for the ends of self culture, & good, helpful work towards the world at large. But it hardly ever is so. – As for the "forms and ceremonies", I feel no regret that any should turn to them: sympathetically, I enjoy them myself. But I have faith in the working-out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other church has presented, & those who have strength to wait and endure, are bound to accept no formula which their whole

causality still were foggy: in Eliot's Berg notebook, the section on the physical sciences attends to properties of gases overlapping with understandings of spirit:

> When Tomicelli showed that air & gas (Geist) could be weighed, he showed that substances which had been deemed spiritual & essentially different from ponderable matter were possessed of its attributes.[40]

Today, 'atheist' should not be taken to represent what it did at these earlier times, and *vice versa*: the diversity of meanings of this word render its usage very imprecise. Rather, in referring to Strauss, Feuerbach or Eliot (or George Henry Lewes) as 'atheist', within this thesis, I could only be referring to their epistemological position of tracing material cause and effect, and even then, there are more precise ways to broach the question of divinity in their thinking, which I will instead use.

When the critic's priority is to attribute a label or category, and then 'prove' its validity—thus roughly grouping a person with a doctrinal or ideological locus—this frequently comes at the cost of precision. For example, in addition to more textually-oriented discursive analysis, Semmel wrote of those men with whom Marian Evans formed more intimate friendships, linking her materialism with an integration of Comtean positivism into her realism, due to romantic aspirations towards Herbert Spencer.[41] There is no corresponding pattern linking male writers and the philosophical positions of female thinkers with whom they were intimately involved. Such speculations arise from the patriarchal presumption that a man is needed to lead a woman towards correct thought. George Eliot no more needed these men to help her to think, than Dorothea Brooke needed her uncle, Arthur Brooke, or her hollowed-out pretender of a husband, Edward Casaubon. The culmination of Dorothea's *Bildung* is her embodiment of this realisation, and Eliot overtly explores the damage wrought by cognitive abdication as a key theme of *Middlemarch*, introduced by the Casaubon courtship:

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souls—their intellect as well as their emotions—do not embrace with entire reverence. The highest "calling and election" is to do without opium & live through our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance…
God bless you,
Marian.'

See also George Eliot, *ALS 4pp 16 Blandford Square, Feb.15, 1862*, in folder '138 ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. [1853] – Aug. 18, 1880. 26 Folders,' George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, 12-14.) 'God bless you – that is not a false word – however many false ideas have been hidden under it. No – not false ideas, but temporary ones, caterpillars & chrysalids of future ideas. Farewell – ever thine, M.E.L. [Marian Evans-Lewes]'.

[40] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook]. 1869-1876. George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. 101.

[41] Bernard Semmel, "Positivism and the Politics of Compromise in *Middlemarch*," in *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), 80.

> For to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education, Mr Casaubon's talk about his great book was full of new vistas; and this sense of revelation, this surprise of a nearer introduction to Stoics and Alexandrians, as people who had ideas not totally unlike her own, kept in abeyance for the time her usual eagerness for a binding theory which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connection with that amazing past, and give the remotest sources of knowledge some bearing on her actions.[42]

Throughout her reviews and essays, Marian Evans shows a consistent, overt willingness to acknowledge the contributions of other thinkers. If she had primarily been influenced by the thought of anyone in particular, this would be clearly acknowledged in her writing (see, for example, the essays referred to in chapter eleven of this thesis). If anything, she has received too little credit for her contributions to Lewes' *Problems of Life and Mind*, the last volume of which she completed from their notes, following his death.[43] This volume is a co-authored text, at the very least.

This independence and originality resounds throughout Eliot's writing. She does not shy away from clear explorations of epistemologies and their social outcomes in her fiction, which contrasts with her essays and letters. Her choice to explore these topics in such depth, while avoiding categorical statements in her other writing, is conspicuous. These forms differ functionally, in that her realist representations of beliefs and epistemologies are not rendered separately from the behaviours that they give rise to. In this thesis, I describe this as a materialist or *teleological* evaluation: that is, different approaches are evaluated according to their embodied (rather than abstract) outcomes. This teleological emphasis contrasts fundamentally to deontological evaluations (that is, evaluations according to whether a set of actions satisfies the requirements of a set of rules or requirements). Eliot's formal choices present a pragmatic and potent challenge to systematised polemics as dogmatic proclamations about the validity of the beliefs and practices of readers. As such, in writing novels, Eliot is *doing* philosophy – an undertaking that originated in much deliberation, as chronicled in the essays preceding her decision to write novels. The perspectives posited by the patriarchs of Middlemarch are microcosms of this wider pattern, constructed as casuistic, and obstructive of social progress.

Eliot presents materialist, connected attention as the beginning of progress out of this casuistry. In doing so, she also articulates something originating in Feuerbach's thought. He

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[42] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford UP, 1963 [1871-2]), 70-71.
[43] George Eliot, *Notes for Vol IV of Problems of life and mind. Holograph notebook, unsigned and undated. 50p.* George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. This volume is in quite different handwriting to the other Eliot manuscripts at the Berg. The script slopes dramatically and is messy and hurried, giving a sense of hurry and energy that hints at the dynamic between the two writers.

acknowledges the divine as knowable through both the 'theoretic eye' and within human nature.

> But for this very reason—namely, that religion is removed from the standpoint, from the nature of theory—the true, universal essence of Nature and humanity, which as such is hidden from religion and is only visible to the theoretic eye, is conceived as another, a miraculous and supernatural essence; the idea of the species becomes the idea of God, who again is himself an individual being, but is distinguished from human individuals in this, that he possesses their qualities according to the measure of the species. Hence, in religion man necessarily places his nature out of himself, because the nature which is the object of theory lies outside of him, because all his conscious existence spends itself in his practical subjectivity. God is his *alter ego*, his other lost half; God is the complement of himself; in God he is first a perfect man. God is a need to him; something is wanting to him without his knowing what it is—God is this something wanting, indispensable to him; God belongs to his nature.[44]

Feuerbach is proclaiming the knowability of the divine through experiences of the nature or 'essence' of human beings. The search for this is the spiritual progress of the individual. Throughout *The Essence of Christianity*, 'religion' is placed in opposition to this 'theoretic eye,' which in other settings might be called visionary, poetic, or prophetic awareness, as I will explore. Thus, within Feuerbach's thought, holiness becomes the capacity to perceive 'God' within the self—at one with the best capacity of the self—and to value and encourage that other people. In this, Feuerbach's sense of sanctity balloons, making theological space for radical inclusivity and social responsibility. Eliot links this internal awareness and holy action towards others with Teresa of Avila, in *Middlemarch*.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels studied *The Essence of Christianity* closely: a young Marx wrote effusively in 1844 to Feuerbach to 'assure' him of 'the distinguished respect and—excuse the word—love' that he had for him on account of the identification of belief structures as a '*societal* concept!'[45] Marx is articulating Feuerbach's firm commitment to the material realisation of Christian theological principles: that is, a shift in emphasis from dogmatic deontology to teleology. In Feuerbach's words:

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[44] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957 [1854]), 195. I could not access a first edition German copy, but did find a second edition at the Löhe Memorial Library in Adelaide: *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, 2 ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1848). The librarian said that I was the first to borrow the text since its acquisition when the library was first established, in 1882. This has contributed to my overall impression that Eliot's work is substantially more popular than that of the theologians she translated.

Similarly, the copy of Strauss' *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* that I borrowed for this project had last been borrowed thirteen years ago.

[45] Karl Marx to Ludwig Feuerbach, August 11, 1844, in Karl Marx, *The Letters of Karl Marx*, trans. Saul K. Padover (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979), 34-5.

> This philosophy… corresponds to the real, complete nature of man… It does not… regard the *pen* as the only fit organ for the revelation of truth, but the eye and the ear, the hand and the foot.[46]

This 'real, complete nature of man' was to be the antidote for the inequalities and frustrations of society. In realising and embodying the attributes externalised in Christianity's synthesised God, humanity would grow towards embodiment of and perfect unity with the divine good. In Feuerbach's spiritual *Bildung* for humanity, the action of God in the world would be expressed within a perfected humanity.

Feuerbachian spiritual progress is integral to Eliot's *Bildungen* (see especially chapter seven). While a textual theological summary like the above may not read in our cultural moment as cataclysmic, its implications were enormous in terms of who could be a spiritual authority in the nineteenth century: who could ask the questions, and who could answer them. In this sense, Eliot's approach had some links with that of Marx and Engels, as she sought to socialise spiritual authority throughout her novels, especially *Middlemarch*.

Marx co-authored *German Ideology* with Engels, and it was published in 1845. Marx considered this discursive contribution to be the fulfilment of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*:[47]

> I by no means say (that were an easy task!): God is nothing, the Trinity is nothing, the Word of God is nothing, &c. I only show that they are not *that* which the illusions of theology make them,—not foreign, but native mysteries, the mysteries of human nature; I show that religion takes the apparent, the superficial in Nature and humanity for the essential, and hence conceives their true essence as separate, special existence: that consequently, religion, in the definitions which it gives of God, e.g. **of the Word of God... only defines or makes objective the true nature of the human word**.[48]

What is the Word in relation to? The diversity of interpretations of 'the true nature of the human word' can also be phrased as a signification of the question of *die Welträtsel*[49] of the nineteenth century. *Die Welträtsel* are the questions that are to be solved: the goals of the learned in any particular epoch, and their definition varies greatly. Their resolution is key to the progress of societies: the construction of what the problem or question *is*, largely defines where effort is focussed, within a community or society. Interdisciplinarity and cooperation between parties holding diverse perspectives is an ideal posited in *Middlemarch*, arising out of the monistic perspectives of German philosophy. That is, perspectives that acknowledge that truth can be known and explored using diverse toolkits and from diverse perspectives,

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[46] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, ix.
[47] This work was co-authored by Marx and Engels, but the first volume was authored by Marx.
[48] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xxxviii. Bold added.
[49] Trans. 'The riddles of the universe.'

and that all sound modes of exploring materiality will result in a deepened understanding of reality. In this vein, it must be acknowledged from the outset that while the monisms of Strauss, Feuerbach and Eliot were bent towards both epistemological collaboration and humility, monism has not had homogenous social impact. Notably, it was referred to within the fascist nationalisms of early twentieth century Europe. For these former thinkers, the human and relational consequences of actions were enough to determine their holiness, whereas later pseudo-materialities were used as justification for eugenics and genocide. But, in 1866, when Ernst Häckel first coined the term 'monism' in his *Generelle Morphologie*, the term denoted the knowability of diverse aspects of reality, through what became scientific method.[50] Such an approach sits comfortably with Eliot's diversity of epistemologies in *Middlemarch*, which is central to this overall thesis. Monism's early twentieth-century deterioration occurred when it transitioned from the socialisation of discernment and perception through scientific method, to the development of Race Theory, which undergirded German National Socialism during the Third Reich. This transition is one of the most potent examples of the absolute necessity of coupling understandings of progress with sympathetic awareness.

Various nineteenth-century thinkers sought out new answers using these new tools in science, and as these diverse theoretical approaches became available, so too did multiple perspectives of the nature of reality. Within a casuistic, power-hoarding, deontological perspective, such diversity and intellectual freedom was perceived as dangerous, and as undermining social order. However, for those undertaking earnest exploration towards the common good, the freedom and empowerment of exploration seemed to have boundless potential. Consequently, tensions arose between thought approaches, with far-reaching social and political implications. These are shown on a micro level in the *Bildung* of *Middlemarch*'s young scientific doctor, Tertius Lydgate.

In 1872, the year of publication of the latter sections of *Middlemarch*, Emil du Bois-Reymond addressed an unprecedentedly large assembly of scientists and physicians in Berlin. He proclaimed that 'Natural Science, the world-conqueror of our times, resting as on a festive occasion from her labor, should strive to define the boundaries of her immense domain.'[51] In

[50] Häckel's major works include the *Generelle Morphologie* [German. 'General Morphology'] (1866), *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* [German. 'Natural History of Creation'] (1868) and the *Anthropogenie oder Entwickelungsgeschichte des Menschen* ['Anthropogeny: or the Evolution of Man'] (1874).
[51] As cited in Todd Weir, "The Riddles of Monism: An Introductory Essay," in *Monism, Science, Philosophy, Religion and the History of a Worldview*, ed. Todd Weir (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

this presentation, du Bois-Reymond went on to specify these limits: the origin of movements (first causes) and the origin of consciousness, placing these matters outside of the realm of natural science. As such, these 'marked the limits of natural knowledge,'[52] and it is in this context that du Bois-Reymond coined the term, *'Welträtsel*', later drawn on by Häckel in his 1900 book, *Die Welträtsel*. The scientific knowability of the cognitive processes by which morality and identity were formed was the subject of the Lewes' *Problems of Life and Mind*, the fourth volume of which was written around the same time as *Middlemarch* (the undated notebook, in Marian's handwriting, is held at the Berg archive).[53] It clearly shows that for the Leweses, such things were considered well within the realm of scientific, systematic reflection: this clarifies Eliot's description of her novels as 'experiments in life'.

Eliot's qualification to do these experiments was embodied in her private life and relationships, alongside in the relational contributions of her novels. She wrote her characters with diverse stimuli around them—data-points arising from these 'experiments in life'—from which they learned about their relationships to the world around them.[54] Eliot did not represent these diversities uncritically, but rather, demonstrated the relational outcomes of worldviews as the most important test of their validity or unsuitability.

Realism and the Truth of Flux

These explorations were intricately linked with the statements made in *Problems of Life and Mind*, offering frameworks for cognitive development and the causal links between experiences and learning, including ideological formation. In 1874, Eliot produced a poem in a private notebook, later discovered by Bernard Paris.[55] This poem is simultaneously a distillation of her ongoing freedom of religious formulation, and her collaboration with G.H. Lewes in early cognitive science. It was written two years after *Middlemarch*.

I Grant You Ample Leave

I grant you ample leave

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[52] Weir, "The Riddles of Monism," 9.
[53] George Eliot, *Notes for Vol IV of [George Henry Lewes's]. Problems of life and mind. Holograph notebook, unsigned and undated. 50p.*, George Eliot collection of papers, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York.
[54] I studied biochemistry and microbiology before moving into the humanities, and I have often been struck by how 'orthodox' Eliot's sense of colonies and collective well-being is, within the modern sciences. It is a delight to me. I haven't quite managed to draft anything on George Eliot and microbiology at this stage, however.
[55] See the articles, "Psychoanalytic Perspectives on George Eliot," (1965); '*Middlemarch* Revisited: Changing Responses to George Eliot' (1999); and the books, *Experiments in Life*; and *Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to Her Experiments in Life* (New York: State University of New York, 2003).

To use the hoary formula ‘I am’
Naming the emptiness where thought is not;
But fill the void with definition, ‘I’
Will be no more a datum than the words
You link false inference with, the ‘Since’ & ‘so’
That, true or not, make up the atom-whirl.
Resolve your ‘Ego’, it is all one web
With vibrant ether clotted into worlds:
Your subject, self, or self-assertive ‘I’
Turns nought but object, melts to molecules,
Is stripped from naked Being with the rest
Of those rag-garments named the Universe.
Or if, in strife to keep your ‘Ego’ strong
You make it a weaver of the ethereal light,
Space, motion, solids & the dream of Time —
Why, still ‘tis Being looking from the dark,
The core, the centre of your consciousness,
That notes your bubble-world: sense, pleasure, pain,
What are they but a shifting otherness,
Phantasmal flux of moments? —[56]

Eliot is acknowledging the perceptive and cognitive flux that gives potency to her realism. ‘The Great I Am’ is used by the God of the Old Testament to refer to himself: the poem shows the tension and interplay between self, divinity, and the cosmos, noting most centrally that ‘if in strife to keep your ‘Ego’ strong / You make it a weaver of the ethereal light /… Why, still ‘tis Being looking from the dark, / The core, the centre of your consciousness / That notes your bubble-world’. Just as she did in *Middlemarch*, Eliot refuses to assent to the immutability of theological doctrine, while also making space for its interplay with the sensations of ‘Being’. In 1874, discussions about ‘I Am’ as a name for God were peaking. ‘Jehovah’ is an adaptation of the Hebrew phrase, ,אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה[57] which was God’s self-identification to Moses when he spoke from the burning bush.[58] In 1874, discussion centred around understanding the temporality of the phrase, emphasising future tense: *I will be who I will be*, conveying a sense of agency and unfolding. More contemporary scholarship now understands this phrase to be rendered in a case without temporality, which would give a very different meaning to this poem, because it carries a sense of unchangeability.

Eliot’s commitment to materialist theology is recognised extensively in criticism of

[56] George Eliot, “I Grant You Ample Leave,” in *The Complete Shorter Poetry of George Eliot*, vol. 2, ed. Antonie van der Broek, (London: Routledge, 2005 [1874]), 119.
[57] *’Ehyeh ’ăšer ’ehyeh*. Hebrew. ‘I am who I am.’
[58] Exodus 3.14.

her work.[59] The materialist standpoint enfranchises individual perception and prioritises it over tradition as a source of reliable information about the nature of reality, even in relation to matters of divinity, which were traditionally mediated by religious authorities. In light of this awareness, Eliot's use of narratives, rather than polemics, to explore matters of faith and social wellbeing is highly significant. Rather than positing one 'correct' perspective, Eliot brings diverse voices and perspectives into dialogue, and thus leaves the narrative open to diverse interpretations, according to the context and perspective of each reader. This plurality (as Hodgson calls it)[60] is fundamental to what I would call Eliot's dialogical imagination, after Bakhtin. Eliot represents not just the *Bildung* of a single character, in *Middlemarch*, but the collective *Bildung* of a community (see chapters twelve and thirteen): in doing so, she provides a textual representation of the machinations of social progress (see chapter nine).

As well as progressing from individual to collective *Bildung*, Eliot also draws together diverse historical contexts in *Middlemarch*. The most distant of these is sixteenth century Spain, in her inclusion of Teresa of Avila as Dorothea's spiritual analogue. This historical layering is derived from Eliot's very broad intertextual awareness. The assembly of this knowledge-base is acknowledged in *Middlemarch* in the educational backgrounds and social contributions of characters: Edward Casaubon's fruitless sifting through histories and mythologies and Tertius Lydgate's juxtaposition of scientific knowledge with relational ignorance are cautionary examples. Mary Garth's use of Plutarch to write texts to educate her sons, and Will Ladislaw's deployment of his artistic perception as social vision, both of which show Eliot's sense of the relational applications of knowledge. *Middlemarch* itself is her corresponding output. The drawing-together of multiple *Bildungen* was an early

[59] See Rosemary Ashton, especially *The German Idea,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination*, (Great Britain: Harvester Press, 1979); Michael Carignan, "Fiction as History of History as Fiction? George Eliot, Hayden White, and Nineteenth-Century Historicism," *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History and the Philosophy of History* 29, no.4 (2000): 395-415; Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2005); Moira Gatens, "The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot," *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no.1 (2009): 73-90; Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1968); Knoepflmacher "George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism," *Victorian Studies: A Journal of the Humanities, Arts and Sciences* 7, (1964): 306-9; George Levine, *An Annotated Critical Biography of George Eliot*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1988); John Neufeldt and Victor Pratt, "Introduction," in *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks: A Transcription*, (California: University of California Press, 1979); Bernard Paris "George Eliot's Religion of Humanity," *ELH* 29, no.4 (1962): 418-43; Joseph Wiesenfarth, "Mythic Perspectives in George Eliot's Fiction," *The George Eliot Review: Journal of the George Eliot Fellowship* 24, (1993): 418-43.

[60] Peter Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real*, (London: SCM Press, 2001), *passim*.

consideration in writing *Middlemarch*. In its earliest formats, Dorothea and Tertius' stories were written separately, only to be drawn together later.[61]

While writing *Middlemarch*, Marian Lewes kept two notebooks that I draw on throughout this thesis. The Berg notebook and the Folger notebook were begun in 1869: the former was the notebook kept at home, and the Folger notebook was for travel. This broad intertextual awareness is conveyed in the chronologies at the end of the Berg notebook that list names, grouped under the following headings. Many of these names feature in *Middlemarch*; photographs of these pages of the notebook are included as an appendix to this thesis:

I – Moses: Initial Theocracy
II – Homer: Ancient Poetry
III – Aristotle: Ancient Philosophy
IV – Archimedes: Ancient Science
V – Casar [sic]: Military Civilisation
VI – St Paul: Catholicism
VII – Charlemagne: Feudal Civilisation
VIII – Dante: The Modern Epic
IX – Gutenburg [sic]: Modern Industry
X – Shakespeare: Modern Drama
XI – Descartes: Modern Philosophy
XII – Frederick: Modern Policy
XIII – Bichat: Modern Science

Both notebooks are brimming with observations about sociocultural histories and the poetry that was associated with those histories and cultures. Eliot's notes cover Greek, Roman, Vedic and Jewish cultural narratives, mainly in the form of poetry, as well as a cluster of poems that summarise what Christ represented in Eliot's contemporary context. Most notable is a cluster of English poetry by Edmund Spenser, William Blake, and the progressive theologian, William Smith. Smith's poem, 'Christian Resignation' is of particular interest, for its materialist, socially just theology which, I have found, is primarily constructed of lines from Teresa of Avila's guide to mystical prayer, *The Interior Castle*.[62] Saint Theresa[63] is Dorothea's spiritual analogue in *Middlemarch*, as I explore in chapter ten. The notes throughout the rest of the Berg and Folger notebooks refer to the poetry and mythologies of many civilisations. Eliot notes those phases in each of those civilisations when gender

[61] For a descriptive breakdown of these components, and how they were brought together in *Middlemarch*, see Harriet Farwell Adams, "Prelude and Finale to Middlemarch," *Victorian Newsletter* 68, Fall (1985): 9.
[62] See Elise Silson, "'You Are a Poem': Poetry, Revelation, and Revolution in George Eliot's Middlemarch," *St. Mark's Review*, no.251 (2020): 57-74.
[63] Eliot's spelling.

equality,[64] access to education, non-violence, and democracy were most prevalent, at one point referring to (Hellenic) Zeus as the 'god watching over and enforcing the fraternity thus constituted' by the Athenians.[65] Eliot's language in relation to those epochs is fervent; practices are referred to as 'primitive'[66] when they oppressed tenantry and featured 'patriarchal despotism'[67]. Eliot's understanding of what constitutes social progress is clear in these notebooks and in *Middlemarch*, as I will explore.

Eliot's writing notes demonstrate that from the earliest stages of writing *Middlemarch*, she sought to work dialogically. These earlier explorations included stern critique of those arrogant enough to posit a unitary voice over others, most markedly Jacob Bryant, who is the most Casaubon-like personage discussed in Eliot's notebooks and correspondence, replete with his own *Key to All Mythologies*:

> Bryant
>
> "A New System; or an Analysis of Ancient Mythology: wherein an attempt is made to divert tradition of Fable: & to reduce the Truth to its original purity" By Jacob Bryant esq. (Born 1718, died 1804. Eton & Cambridge man. Published The New System 1774-6. He wrote a dissertation on Rowley's poems to prove that they could not have been written by Chatterton, because he appeared not to understand them himself: corrections on the Gypsy language, & a dissertation to prove that the war of Troy never took place and that Troy never existed.) Bryant combines abundant scepticism with abundant confidence in his own power to lay open the kernel of latent truth concealed in fable. "Current assent to the stale legends of Deucalion & Inachos, or to the story of Phryxus & the Golden Fleece finds suprizing [sic] confirmation of the Mosaic History in the Gentile account of the Deluge, the grand Epocha to which all nations referred. The chronologies which go beyond it, false. The Egyptian Chronology coincides very happily with the accounts given by Moses. His object, to display truth in its native simplicity; to show that all the rites and mysteries of the Gentiles were only so many memorials of their principal ancestors & of the great occurrences to which they had been witnesses. The basis of all this theorizing is: that the resemblances of rites, named among various nations all over the world is due to the wide settlement of one family – "the children of Ham, or Ammonians". "The learned Books all saw this [that it was all the operation of one people][68]; & taking for granted that the people were the Phenicians [sic], he attempted to interpret the names by the Hebrew tongue." The Deity of the "Ammonians" was the Sun. He admits that Greece and its isles were people by the Sons of Japhet, but holds that the conquering "Helladians" were "Ammonians".[69]

Eliot undertook her own research into ancient mythologies in this notebook, and while she does identify commonalities between them, she also allows them their distinctions, holding them together only loosely.

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[64] See especially Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 52.
[65] Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 41.
[66] Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 54.
[67] Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 49.
[68] Eliot's brackets.
[69] Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 81.

Progress and Polyparadigmaticity

Franco Moretti's book, *The Way of the World*[70] explores attributes of *Bildungsroman.*[71] In *Middlemarch*, age and maturity are certainly not synonymous, and the diverse *Bildungen* of its characters hinge on their capacities for social integration and collaboration. As with the other *Bildungsromane* that Moretti discusses, in *Middlemarch*, characters are formed both by private experience and interpersonal relationships, the latter being fundamental to characters' capacities to appropriately contextualise and interpret the former. Thus, for Eliot, the maturity of a character depends on their capacity for understanding and thus collaborating with others. Immaturity is chiefly represented as either self-absorbed and near-sighted attempts to control the other for the exclusive benefit of the self, or, in Dorothea's case, uncritical deference to this impulse in others.

This capacity for understanding of the other aligns with Moretti's concept of 'polyparadigmaticity,'[72] which is fundamental to a 'network plot' [73]of mutuality: that is, multiple paradigms come into networked contact, effecting reciprocal character development. There are several characters in *Middlemarch* that particularly encourage networked development and progress. This is undertaken through responsive, patient and empathic engagement with characters who find themselves struggling to process their experience and future trajectories. These characters—particularly Mary, Caleb, and Susan Garth—are represented as mature and good (see chapters twelve and thirteen). Polyparadigmatic thought (which could also be phrased as dialogical awareness[74]) is associated with maturity, in *Middlemarch*, which is reinforced in plot outcomes and focused in narratorial observations. All *Middlemarch* characters experience formative struggle, and frequently the struggle that produces a sympathetic urge orients and comforts other characters, in their turn.

Growth towards this dialogical capacity is associated with ideas of true sight, reflection, translation, and disenchantment, in Eliot's fiction. Personal progress constitutes social progress, in *Middlemarch*. Maturation is, for Eliot, growth towards responsive and compassionate engagement with other people, undertaken with humility. The concluding passage of *Middlemarch* highlights this dynamic:

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[70] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 2000).
[71] *Bildungsroman* is a German term. '*Bildung*' = education/formation/coming-of-age; '*s'* = of; '*Roman*' = novel. So, *Bildungsroman* is a Novel of Formation/Education/Coming-of-Age.
[72] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 43.
[73] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 43.
[74] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), *passim.*

> Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of a young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life… But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas… the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.[75]

As characters in *Middlemarch* engage in these 'diffusive' and 'unhistoric' acts, they shape one another. Submission to this shaping is to live 'faithfully', thus participating in 'the growing good of the world.' This dynamic forms the substance of the dialogical modelling that Eliot undertakes in *Middlemarch*: rather than stating polemically that her readers should live in a certain way, through the interactions of her characters, she demonstrates to the reader their potential for similar social impact, 'amidst the conditions of an imperfect social system'. Thus, the plot of *Middlemarch* links the small particularities of individual lives with the sweeping potential of progressive social theories, including theological eschatologies. Nancy Henry described Eliot's 1867 poem (published 1874), "O May I Join the Choir Invisible," as using music as a metaphor for participation in the collective good. She quotes from the poem,

> Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
> And in diffusion ever more intense,
> So shall I join the choir invisible
> Whose music is the gladness of the world.[76]

Conclusion

This thesis engages with Eliot's personal *Bildung*, as it intersects with the phases of progress and maturation that are rendered in *Middlemarch*. This interplay is also integrated with the intertextual connections that cause historical epochs to reverberate through the novel. These layered significations draw diverse voices and modes of thinking into dialogical contact. This dialogical contact invites Eliot's readers into a similar mode of growth to that displayed by her characters, as they grow. This growth is towards the embodiment of those qualities required to regenerate the fabric of society, for the common good.

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[75] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford UP, 1963), 896.
[76] Nancy Henry, "Middlemarch: 1870-72," in *The Life of George Eliot: A Critical Biography*, (USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 59. **https://doi-org.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/10.1002/9781118274644.ch7**.

3. Midlands: Early Life

Biographies generally are a disease of English literature.[77]

Introduction

There are many biographies of George Eliot, the most notable of which was written by her husband John Cross, published in 1885 following his rise to fame[78] as the late novelist's husband. Cross had only known his wife for a short time before marrying her when she was sixty years old. The volume was eagerly awaited but did not measure up to expectations. Haight notes the 'harsh opinion'[79] of Eliot held by the journalist and novelist Eliza Lynn Linton, and yet, on reading this biography, she proclaimed:

> more is omitted than is told… The almost god-like faultlessness of the character… is matched only by the vagueness of drawing and the indefiniteness of the features… Those who knew George Eliot in her unfledged condition when she was only a tentative beginner… remember one or two episodes which showed the dominant characteristic of her moral nature with more sincerity than anything to be found in this *Life*; and the curious slurring over of names which in their time were important landmarks in her history gives to those who know something of the *dessous des cartes* a certain feeling of suppression and nebulosity which makes this life not so much genuine history as a trimmed, erased, and amended protocol. In a word, the book has been written to embalm and preserve the image of the Ideal George Eliot as success made her appear and as the world accepted for reality.[80]

Cross' romanticised account differed from the more analytical account of the German-born revolutionary Mathilde Blind, in 1883 (revised then republished in 1888; American reprint in 1885). Blind's account was not helped by any special relationship with its subject, but stands up very well alongside contemporary accounts, on account of her background as a translator of German philosophy and theology and her progressive poetry.

Drawing on several of the more recent biographies, this chapter traces Evans' early years, before reflecting on the language used by other scholars to describe her experiences and beliefs in her teens and early twenties. I particularly focus on the nature of her transitions, but not to neatly categorise her as 'Christian', 'unchristian', 'atheist', or anything else, as I touched on in chapter two. Rather, I note the formative phases of George Eliot's mastery of ideological and religious signifiers and approaches, and their social and relational outcomes. This was a life-long process enriched by her later writing and translations. These

[77] George Eliot, "GE to Mrs. Thomas Adolphus Trollope, London, 19 December 1879," in Gordon Haight (ed.), *George Eliot Letters*, vol.7, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 230.
[78] Gordon Haight, "Cross's Biography of George Eliot," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 25, no.1 (1950): 1.
[79] Haight, "Cross's Biography of George Eliot," 1.
[80] As cited in Haight, "Cross's Biography of George Eliot," 1-2.

formative phases highlighted, for Evans, the fractious tendencies of ideological factionalism.

Beginnings and Settings

George Eliot was born Mary Ann Evans, in Warwickshire in the English Midlands on November 22, 1819.[81] Her father, Robert Evans, came from a Derbyshire family that originated in Wales.[82] Mary Ann's mother, Christiana Pearson, was Robert's second wife, the earlier Mrs Evans dying in 1813.[83] References to Christiana are sparse throughout Eliot's accounts of her life, including her journals: subjects of importance were kept close to Mary Ann's chest later in life, too. Uglow notes a maternal objection to the 'waste' of candles once Mary Ann took to loving books.[84]

Mary Ann (b.1819) was the youngest of three children, preceded by Christiana (Chrissey) (b.1814) and Isaac (b.1816).[85] Mary Ann was named after two Methodist aunts on her mother's side, whose temperaments and social position are like the Dodson aunts in *The Mill on the Floss*. Ashton notes that her father displayed a corresponding attachment to the Midlands *status quo*, living out 'stubborn Tory 'Church and State' views'[86] as inflexibly as any *Middlemarch* patriarch. It was within these strictures of Midlands respectability and moral legitimacy that Evans began her life, and the complexity and inconsistencies of these conditions are rendered throughout her novels:

> Again, she has the Victorian eye for the social structure. Here in the big house of the village she plants Squire Donnithorne; there in the rectory the Rev. Mr. Irwine; working in the lush fields farmer Poyser; in his shop in the village street Mr. Carpenter Burge; preaching on the green Dinah Morris, farmer Poyser's Methodist niece from the manufacturing town of Snowfield thirty miles distant: each is clearly assigned his or her proper place on the map.[87]

In late 1868, as Eliot began writing *Middlemarch*, she wrote to her close friend Barbara Bodichon of a trip to visit the region again:

> We enjoyed our journey to the North. It was a great experience to us to see the stupendous iron-works at Sheffield, and then, for a variety, we went to the quiet and beauty of Matlock, & I recognized all the spots I had carried in my memory for more than five & twenty years. I drove through that region with my Father when I was a young sprig – not very full of hope about my woman's future! I am one of those perhaps exceptional people whose early childish dreams were much less happy than the real outcome of life… You will divine my sentences, If you can only half read them. I am scribbling on my lap, with a soft background.

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[81] Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), 11.
[82] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 11.
[83] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 12.
[84] Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot* (London: Virago Pioneers, 1987), 28.
[85] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 12.
[86] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 13.
[87] Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*, (London: Constable, 1966 [1934]), 295.

Always yours,
Marian.[88]

Robert Evans consistently advanced his career through close attention to his work and social standing, beginning as a carpenter, apprenticed under his father. He later became a land manager on the Newdigate Estate. Mary Ann maintained deep pride in these achievements, defending him against description as a 'mere farmer' with the following words:

> Now my father did not raise himself from being an artizan to be a farmer: he raised himself from being an artizan to be a man whose extensive knowledge in very varied practical departments made his services valued through several counties. He had large knowledge of building, of mines, of plantation, of various branches of valuation and measurement – of all that is essential to the management of large estates. He was held by those competent to judge as *unique* amongst land-agents for his manifold knowledge and experience, which enabled him to save the special fees usually paid by landowners for special opinions on the different questions incident to the proprietorship of land.[89]

This esteem permeates her novels, in her representations of the complexities and sensitivities of land management and its associated relational exchanges. This deeply pragmatic awareness correspondingly deepens Eliot's realism throughout her novels.

Eliot set many of her novels in this time and place: *Silas Marner*, *The Mill on the Floss, Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* all resonate with these early childhood experiences. These settings are not idealised, but rather are bound up with the sociopolitical shifts of the early nineteenth century, reflecting throughout her writing life on the drastic changes she witnessed in the Midlands landscape and people. The political setting of *Middlemarch* and *Felix Holt* is the 1832 Reform Bill; the coal mines colour the hills in *Daniel Deronda*; and the times preceding these shifts are, somewhat wistfully, portrayed in *Silas Marner* and *Adam Bede*.

Mary Ann's lived experiences of these shifts in English culture and landscape were finite and immediate. She articulated them in snippets across sources, simultaneously representing the social consequences of these shifts for the vulnerable: 'she acknowledged the 'heavy barges' seen in the distance and the small boys in corduroys 'hungrily eating a bit of brown bread and bacon.''[90] These observations were most developed in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, written in 1879, after many earlier iterations. Eliot's representations of English rural life expressed her respect for her father's vocation, as he displayed his

[88] George Eliot, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. The Priory, 21. North Bank, Regents Park, Nov. 16, 1868*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, 487-88.)
[89] George Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, [Wandsworth, 30 September 1859]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters,* vol.3, 168.
[90] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 13.

commitment to fair representation and attentive responsiveness in his work. Despite the vast discursive distance she covered before she began writing novels in 1856—and her gradually escalating rejection of his conservatism and ideological inflexibility—Evans' temperament nonetheless emulated his broad and sober situational awareness and pragmatism. Robert Evans' approach to management, arising from a conservative and inflexible social awareness, was propelled by a steadfast observance of his Church of England faith, which incorporated Christian compassion and social responsibility. This sense of responsibility extended to advocating in 1834 for Newdigate's tenants to have a portion of their rents returned, following an especially poor wheat harvest that year. This fairness and plain speech fits especially with the character of Adam Bede, in his engagement with Squire Donnithorne and his son Arthur.[91] What Robert Evans lacked in revolutionary ardour, he made up for in earnestness. This also links him with the steadiness of Caleb Garth, in *Middlemarch*.

Early Schooling and Evangelicalism

Mary Ann approached her studies with the work ethic modelled by her father. She was a fastidious and earnest student, studying first at Miss Latham's in Attleborough. She then boarded at Mrs Wallington's school in Nuneaton, where she befriended an Irish governess, Maria Lewis. It was Maria's influence that first sowed the seeds of Evangelicalism in the young Mary Ann, a fact that Ashton characterises with hostility:

> [Maria] belonged to the Evangelical wing of the Church of England, and had a Puritan distrust of pleasure and leisure with which she **infected** Mary Anne. Some of the latter's earliest extant letters are to Miss Lewis, to whom she pours out scriptural echoes, piety, and severe disapproval of all triviality.[92]

Notwithstanding this account, Eliot continued to speak highly of Maria Lewis throughout her life, to the extent that Edith Simcox, a friend of Eliot's late in her life, returned to the Midlands to interview Maria, finding:

> A nice little fair old lady, with one eye gone, which they say was an ugly squint in youth. She was governess at the Nuneaton School and had evidently been the superior person of that period: the virtuous cultivated young lady whom Mrs Evans held up as a model for imitation to her aspiring little daughter. Miss Lewis used to visit at Griff – remembered going to see Polly [Mary Ann] and Chrissy in bed with measles, was 'like an elder sister' to them. Spoke of the child as very loveable, but unhappy, given to great bursts of weeping; finding it impossible to care for childish games and occupations: it is of course significant that as a mere child, the governess should have been her friend rather than any schoolfellow.[93]

The caricature of evangelical belief that undergirds Ashton's interpretation deviates from

[91] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 16.
[92] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 19. Bold added.
[93] Keith McKenzie, *Edith Simcox and George Eliot*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 129.

Eliot's own sense of the relationship. The young Mary Ann's correspondence from this time does indeed resonate with her novelistic descriptions of spiritual short-sightedness, isolation and inwardness at the expense of relational and spiritual belonging. Her characters cultivated these tendencies within themselves, rather than being 'infected' by others. Their processes of maturation are resolved in community and relationship, including the capacity to live amicably despite difference. The mature novelist, George Eliot, was insufficiently malleable to speak so charitably of an individual that had inflicted such an 'infection' on her, if we are to acquiesce to Ashton's metaphor. Orr comments: 'Her youthful letters… are a convenient source for any who are on a quest for evidence of the pathologies of adolescent faith.'[94] Like Orr, I see this phase of belief more as a reflection of Evans' youthfulness than any undue pressure or restriction originating in her relationship with Lewis.

The Christianities of the British Isles at this time provided a range of definitions of what constituted a Christian. For this reason, attempting to construct a definitive argument for attribution of a simple label at any point in George Eliot's life is not useful, or even possible. Words like 'Christian' and 'Atheist' shift dramatically within different spaces and at different times. More relevant is research that posits transitions through 'stages of faith', such as that of Don Freeman and James Fowler, as developmentally normal. Maturation is often from dogmatism towards 'conjunctive faith' which involves 'awareness of need to hold polarities, contradictions, paradoxes together.'[95] Similarly, Mathew Guest *et. al*, in their research on contemporary university-based religion in the UK, challenge 'a bifurcation that is characteristic of the public discourse about religion in contemporary Britain, polarising religious and secular zealotry, while both take form via a propositional expression of "belief."[96] More colloquially, one person's saint is another person's heretic, and another person's zealot, which has long been the case.

It is both respectful and pragmatic to hold Eliot's self-identification as authoritative, including during those phases of her life where she resisted identifying herself by any particular label:

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[94] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution* (USA: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 12.
[95] Don Freeman and James Fowler, "Stages of Faith," *Canadian Mennonite* 6, no.10 (2002): 1.
[96] Mathew Guest, Sonya Sharma, Kristin Aune, Rob Warner, "Challenging 'Belief' and the Evangelical Bias: Student Christianity in English Universities," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28, no.2 (2013): 209.

> I have an unreasonable aversion to personal statements… I shrink from decided 'deliverances' on momentous subjects, from the dread of coming to swear by my own 'deliverances' and sinking into an insistent echo of myself.[97]

Amid the complexities of her developmental processes, Mary Ann was seeking to make sense of the mental attributes that set her apart from her contemporaries; trying to rein-in the disruptions created by the insights and imagination of her exceptional mind:

> My imagination is an enemy that must be cast down ere I can enjoy peace or exhibit uniformity of character. I know not which of its caprices I have most to dread—that which incites it to spread sackcloth 'above, below, around', or that which makes it 'cheat my eye with blear illusion, and beget strange dreams,' of excellence and beauty in things of only 'working day price'.[98]

It is this capacity for wonder at the divine in the pedestrian that was maintained in Evans' thought throughout her life. Her acute perception enabled a deep awareness of the value of *things as they are*.

Evans rapidly outgrew the school at Nuneaton, and at the age of thirteen (in 1832), she transferred to Rebecca and Mary Franklin's school in Coventry.[99] She was there until 1835, and maintained her close friendship with Maria through regular letters. Rebecca Franklin was particularly influential on Eliot's prose style and manner of speech:

> Rebecca's meticulous, carefully weighted prose style and manner of speaking gave added gravity to Mary Ann's already solemn manner - but she gained confidence, for her intelligence and diligence were regarded as good, not eccentric, qualities.[100]

She undertook her first translations in this context, beginning with Maria Edgeworth's novels from French into English when she was thirteen. These attentive translations arose out of a serious and earnest evangelical asceticism. Mary Ann strove to fully develop her intellectual potential, at the expense of her physical and emotional comfort. 'Her growing spiritual fervour increased her alienation from Isaac, who resisted all her passionate arguments and held to the High Church views of his Birmingham tutor.[101] But it increased her closeness

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[97] George Eliot, "GE to Frederick Harrison, London, 15 January 1870," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.5, 76.
[98] George Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Griff, 17 September 1840," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*vol.3, 65-6.
[99] Ashton, *George Eliot*, 18.
[100] Uglow, *George Eliot*, 29.
[101] See Kathleen Adams, "A Family's Eye View of George Eliot," *George Eliot Review* 31, (2000): 75. Isaac Evans was offered the opportunity to contribute to John Cross' biography of his wife, George Eliot, in 1881. Isaac unwittingly contributed evidence of his lack of knowledge about his sister, stating in his notes on the biography manuscript he received that 'I can think of no-one who gave GE books as a little girl unless it was her Uncle Everard,' 'I went to a Fee School for a short time but Mary Anne never did,' and, regarding her hunger for books, 'The dearth of literature could not have been felt *at that time*. Looking back to that time from the midst of her ample literary surroundings in middle life she might well have seemed to her to describe the state of her childish surroundings thus, but I know that then she was fonder of digging pits in the garden and such like than of books… I cannot believe in the Joe Miller Jest book. **If it had been in the house I should have been**

with Maria Lewis, whom she visited in the holidays.'[102]

What Haight calls 'sensual' religiosity has received broad acknowledgement in Eliot criticism. He notes that it features in *Middlemarch* in Dorothea Brooke, who held to 'the secondary importance of ecclesiastical forms and articles of belief compared with spiritual religion.'[103] In her later representations of evangelical faith, George Eliot represented this mode of belief as a kind of 'torpor'[104] when Silas is first introduced, and also uses this word to refer to the death from opioid addiction and cold exposure of Eppie's mother, Molly, and for Godfrey Cass' moral stagnation:

> Slowly the demon was working his will, and cold and weariness were his helpers. Soon she felt nothing but a supreme immediate longing that curtained off all futurity—the longing to lie down and sleep… But the complete torpor came at last: the fingers lost their tension, the arms unbent; then the little head fell away from the bosom, and the blue eyes opened wide on the cold starlight.[105]

Thus this tragic state is extremely harmful, in Eliot's writing: a descriptor of death itself. In the case of Dorothea Brooke, it is described as a 'imperfect coherence'[106] marked by imprecision, and a frustration of what she expected in her marital 'journey.'[107] In this, Eliot narrates, she is 'wadded with stupidity.'[108]

From Griff to Coventry

Christiana, Mary Ann's mother, died of breast cancer in early 1836. Mary Ann continued her studies, despite becoming the family's housekeeper at Griff.[109] She became attached to the role. Dorothea Brooke describes the task of household management as a satisfying one, 'with the homage that belonged to it.'[110] This sentiment resonates throughout Mary Ann's correspondence. Her later letters retain a calm and warm fondness for domestic responsibilities:

> There is an exquisite stillness in the sunshine, a sense of distance from the London hurry, which encourages the growth of patience… The butcher does not bring the meat, everybody grudges selling new milk, eggs are scarce, & an expedition we made yesterday in search of fowls

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more likely to discover it than Mary Anne' (75). It is not a stretch, on these grounds, to compare Isaac with Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss.*

[102] Adams, 'A Family's Eye View,' 31.
[103] Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 47.
[104] George Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (Toronto and London: Signet Classics, 1960 [1861]), 12.
[105] Eliot, *Silas Marner*, 112-113.
[106] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford Univerity Press, 1963), 209.
[107] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 209.
[108] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 207.
[109] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 57.
[110] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 5.

> showed us nothing more hopeful than some chickens six weeks old which the good woman observed were sometimes "eaten by the gentry with asparagus".[111]

Amid these duties, Evans began to write, publishing for the first time in *The Christian Observer* in January 1840.[112] 'Knowing That I Must Shortly Put Off This Tabernacle' is a devotional poem that she included in a letter to Maria Lewis in July 1839, written after an evening walk at Griff. The poem conveys a sense of revelry in the subjects of the various stanzas, filtered through Evans' acutely Evangelical awareness. Evans readily broadens her affectionate farewells to both 'Ye patient servants of creation's lord' and 'Ye feebler, freer tribes, that people air,/Fairy like insects, making buds your lair', demonstrating what was to be an enduring motivation towards social inclusivity. The poem also names the costs of her learnedness, nonetheless listed as something to embrace and bless:

> Books that have been to me as chests of gold,
> Which, miser like, I secretly have told,
> And for them love, health, friendship, peace have sold,
> Farewell!

Secular books are explicitly distinguished from the biblical text, which is piously elevated in the poem, hinting at the attentive biblical awareness that would permeate all her works:

> Blest volume! Whose clear truth-writ page, once known,
> Fades not before heaven's sunshine or hell's moan,
> To thee I say not, of earth's gifts alone,
> Farewell!

In the closing stanza, a sense of other-worldly fulfilment and fruition conveys the transcendentalism of this phase of Evans' thought. This transcendentalism, once Evans became more familiar with Comte's work and materialism more generally, was later understood as a distraction, or an illusion, that obstructed full and productive engagement with reality:

> There shall my newborn senses find new joy,
> New sounds, new sights my eyes and ears employ,
> Nor fear that word that here brings sad alloy,
> Farewell![113]

Evans moved decisively out of this transcendentalism when she was subjected to patriarchal disruptions in her family, forcing a move to Coventry in the 1841 (see chapter

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[111] George Eliot, *ALS To [Mrs Gilchrist] Brookbank [Shottermill] May 9 [1871]. 2 Leaves.* George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.5, 146-47.)
[112] George Eliot, "Knowing That I Shortly Must Put Off This Tabernacle," in Antonie Gerard van den Broek (ed.), *The Complete Shorter Poetry of George Eliot* (London: Routledge, 2016), 7.
[113] George Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Griff, [17 July 1839]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 27-8.

five). The family vacillated about Coventry for four years after Christiana's death, with discussions coming to a head following Isaac's engagement in 1840. Rosemary Bodenheimer, in her brilliant *Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*, identifies a rule that Evans 'scrupulously practiced in her correspondence,' to 'refrain from complaining about any member of her family or even from indicating the changing opinions of Robert [her father] or Isaac [her brother].'[114] Even later in her life, she was rarely drawn into open criticism. Arrogance was insufferable, however, especially where religion was concerned (see chapters eight, nine, and eleven). In her ongoing correspondence with Maria Lewis throughout the Evans family's deliberations, Mary Ann expressed persistent distress at her deprivation of agency:

> I forbear to put down on paper… I will only hint that there seems a probability of my being an unoccupied damsel, 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.[115]

In the end, Isaac's preferences took priority over Mary Ann's wish 'not to be dislodged from [her] present pedestal or resign [her] sceptre'[116] within her domestic role in their household. Mary Ann felt the shift as a wrongful disruption when she was moved from Griff to Coventry in 1841: a distance of five miles, but a different place altogether.

This awareness of the potential social—especially the familial—cost of free inquiry did not dissuade Mary Ann Evans from intellectual and theological explorations, once she arrived in Coventry. She undertook this writing and research with the tenacity and rigour that she first discovered within herself during her ascetic Evangelical adolescence. She was supported and nourished during these years in her relationships with her teachers, especially Maria Lewis, an Irish evangelical whose gentleness provided a refuge for Evans, even as she moved away from evangelical belief herself. Evans' earnest and fastidious approach extended out of an earlier sense that all things be offered up to God, an idea fundamental to the Protestant work ethic also ingrained in her by her father. However, this desire led her, as she formed relationships with free-thinkers (especially Unitarians[117]) in the Bray and Hennell

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[114] Bodenheimer, *Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 57-8.
[115] George Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Griff, 2[8] May 1840," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 50.
[116] Bodenheimer, *Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 58.
[117] Unitarianism refers to a belief that whilst Jesus was sent and inspired by God, he was not himself God. There have been many Unitarian communities throughout Christian history, in diverse geographical contexts, that often developed independently of each other. Consequently, the term 'Unitarian' more appropriately refers to a belief that the Christian God is one person, excluding Christ from the Godhead, rather than referring to a static and cohesive set of defined doctrines. Nonetheless, Unitarian congregations were extant in England in the nineteenth century.

households, outside of the spaces and doctrinal observances within which she began. This exploration led her into contact with influential thinkers for whom the '*unglücklicher Durst*'[118] had very real and harsh consequences. Despite the social risks of these associations, those characters who share the characteristics of this early Evangelicalism—and the blinkered inflexibilities of Mary Ann's family—were understood by Eliot to be immature and lacking in true understanding.

[118] German. 'Unhappy thirst.' This term arises in Hegel, and was quoted by David Strauss. See chapter six.

4. Real Beings, Blind Abstraction, and Ludwig Feuerbach

> …arguments which interpret her novels in terms of one single theory such as Comtean positivism, Darwinian theory, phrenology, Ruskinian 'realism' or Victorian feminism are at once illuminating *and* inadequate. The vivid images, to be replaced in fiction by complex characters and minutely observed communities, are symptoms of her growing distrust of abstract argument and generalisations, whether based on religious doctrine or theoretical philosophy. She saw that such arguments could become enclosed in their own circles of logic and language and lose all touch with the human experience they were supposed to describe.[119]

Introduction

The structure of argument within a polemic is, in many regards, an inversion of the *Bildungen* Eliot wrote. Within a polemic, segments of the argument are laid out and drawn together to posit a unitary position. It is frequently part of this mechanism—especially in the polemical forms prevalent during the long nineteenth century—to also amend or rebut the positions of other polemical voices, with a view to eclipsing them. Thus, for the engaged reader, the choices are either to assent to the text, or formulate a rebuttal.

An inversion of this dynamic occurs within the *Bildungen* of Eliot's characters. Rather than moving towards static, uncompromising conclusions, her characters frequently begin as static and uncompromising. Only some grow out of that state. I have already summarised the early life experiences that resonate with these understandings. In this chapter, I show this function in Eliot's fiction, also highlighting apposite events in Eliot's broader discursive biography.

Dorothea Brooke

Dorothea's pious idealism, at the beginning of *Middlemarch*, marks out the beginning of her *Bildung*, raising the question of what will ultimately constitute her maturity. Eliot's insistence in the 'Prelude' that there are many 'Theresas' throughout history who are doomed to oblivion because of their contexts, leads into Dorothea's introduction. Dorothea is blind to beauty and common sense in her 'cleverness'. Her puritanical outlook is linked explicitly with spiritual pride. She alienates herself from her context to search for the hidden spiritual

[119] Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot* (London: Virago Pioneers, 1987), 78.

meaning in each event. Dorothea's engagement with religion, is grounded in renunciation and exclusion, as a misguided bid for transcendence, rather than being the product of any special spiritual insight:

> Englishness comprises a particular kind of character (istics) and characters. British national identity, like Victorian discourse, is constituted through exclusion, enacted largely around religion.[120]

Middlemarch opens with an account of St Theresa as a small girl, taking her younger brother across the moors to be martyred with her. She is promptly retrieved by protective uncles in order that, when the time is right, she will find 'her epos in the reform of a religious order.'[121] Despite sharing Theresa's ardent, 'passionate, ideal nature' which 'demanded an epic life,'[122] Dorothea is grouped with the Theresas who

> With dim lights and tangled circumstance... tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith[123] and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul... Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognizable deed.[124]

It should be noted that this 'coherent social faith' includes uncles that protect the prospects of young women, rather than marrying them off unsuitably. Somewhat ironically, Theresa's historical experience included fleeing from the suitor endorsed by her uncles, into religious life. Thus, Eliot could be read as showing more similarity between Dorothea and Theresa than a disconnected, surface reading of *Middlemarch* can afford: both of them ultimately resist the lives scripted from them, in spite of their respective patriarchal limitations.

Dorothea is, from the outset, conspicuously ineffective in her grasping after the sublime through affectations of holiness. She is not represented as 'called.' Dorothea's engagement with religion differentiates her not just from her contemporaries, but also from the saints portrayed in the Christian histories that she cherishes. Her contemporary context frustrates her as she clutches at holiness, for example in her ascetic rejection of some jewels left to her and her sister, Celia. This performative gesture is linked with 'a strong assumption

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[120] Jude Nixon, "Framing Victorian Discourse: An Introduction," in *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.
[121] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963 [1871-2]), . Historically, Theresa was retrieved so that she could be married. She took holy orders instead.
[122] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xv.
[123] It should be noted that this 'coherent social faith' includes uncles that protect the prospects of young women, rather than marrying them off unsuitably. Somewhat ironically, Theresa's historical experience included fleeing from the suitor endorsed by her uncles, into religious life.
[124] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.

of superiority' and is referred to as 'Puritanic toleration, hardly less trying to the blond flesh of an unenthusiastic sister than a Puritanic persecution.'[125] Dorothea quickly recants, and keeps her favourites:

> 'How very beautiful these gems are!' said Dorothea... 'It is strange how deeply the colours penetrate one, like a scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St John. They look like fragments of heaven...' All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy.[126]

Dorothea's most conspicuous trait, within this introduction, is her use of religious affectation as a means of legitimation: a source of pride which isolates her in her 'specialness' and makes her above the advice offered to her about marriage, young women, and quasi-amorous old clergymen. Importantly, however, this artifice is linked to a desire to live rightly, and as such it functions as part of Dorothea's youthful naivety.

This religious fixation blinds Dorothea to the beauty in front of her: she is frequently described as so focussed on the metawisdom that may be behind her surroundings, that she is blind to the simple beauty or common-sense wisdom that is closest to her. This blindness functions similarly to 'torpor' in *Silas Marner*, which describes Silas' inability to exist in the moment. Silas attains fulfillment and maturity by dispensing with this torpor to live fully present with Eppie and Aaron in their garden. Dorothea's blindness limits her capacity to engage suitably with her context. The associated imagery is at its most heightened during Dorothea and Edward Casaubon's courtship. Unlike *Middlemarch*-Theresa's uncles, who call her back from her juvenile search for martyrdom, Mr. Brooke is unable to turn Dorothea back from her naive quest to martyr herself. She is a virgin sacrifice to her suitor's emotional and spiritual desiccation. Sherry Mitchell (citing Robert Damm and Franklin Court) emphasises the irony of this analogy with Theresa, noting 'Dorothea's initially insincere and impractical conception of ascetic mysticism.'[127]

Christian religious literature that was popular in the nineteenth century—particularly Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and the publications of the Religious Tract Society—stresses the role of renunciation in spiritual maturation. The limited, sheltered context in which Dorothea originates is steeped in these values, and Dorothea systematically avoids anything that may demand her attention in 'the World' rather than 'keeping her eyes on heaven.' Her awareness in this part of the novel bears similarity to Eliot's early years of religious scrupulosity. This

[125] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 8.
[126] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 8.
[127] Sherry Mitchell, "Saint Teresa and Dorothea Brooke: The Absent Road to Perfection in Middlemarch," *Victorian Newsletter* 92, (1997): 32-7.

tendency is represented as visionary in these popular religious texts, but in Book One of *Middlemarch*, it is spiritual immaturity, which Dorothea will shed.

Dorothea's growing capacity for vision is closely intertwined with the process of disenchantment that she undergoes in her marriage to Casaubon. Eliot's description of this suffering includes on of her most frequently-quoted passages:

> Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. 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 e 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, most of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.[128]

Dorothea's response to this disturbance of her belief in Casaubon is to surrender herself to him even more fully, by 'worshipping'[129] him and further immersing herself in her attempts to improve his life. In doing so, she is intially still 'wadded' by the stupor of deference, as she struggles to process the transition from idealisation of Casaubon to reconcile herself to her actual life. Marriage strips her of her idealism, as the posturing of her early religiosity is corrected by her relational attentiveness, arising within her awareness of art, during her honeymoon in Rome, and her associated intimacy with Will Ladislaw. This grief at her real situation is the beginning of her true development, including her spiritual growth.

Casuistry and Power

In *Middlemarch*, characters are introduced according to the first principles that they have derived for their individual world-views. These are used satirically to undermine similar bids for power in the lives of Eliot's readers. The patriarchs of Middlemarch each deduce worldviews that absolutely centralise them and their agendas, conflating privilege with providence. Nicholas Bulstrode leans on religious conformity and financial control; Peter Featherstone on property rights; Arthur Brooke on his own sense of social inevitability; and Edward Casaubon on pseudo-transcendent scholasticism. Each of these claims are merely blinkered abstractions. These men are immature because they are self-centred. They paint their likeness onto their idea of God, and this in turn perverts their interpersonal awareness, with deeply dysfunctional social implications. This pattern draws together immaturity or a lack of personal growth, and unregenerate social impact. Instead of opening their eyes to the complexities and potential of their community, they assume that what is external to them is

[128] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 207.
[129] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 214.

merely a set of instrumental extensions of themselves and their interests. In constructing these patriarchal characters and their relational networks, Eliot is demonstrating the mechanics of Middlemarch society. Enforcers of this kind are not always male in Eliot's novels, however the Dodson aunts in *The Mill on the Floss* enact a similar function, and Mrs Cadwallader fills a similar role in *Middlemarch*.

Various characters are subjected to these authority figures, most of them young. Others, such as Caleb Garth, are disempowered and beholden in other ways. Caleb's generous nature means he has not amassed enough money to be powerful. Tertius Lydgate is subjected to Bulstrode in his medical work at the hospital that is funded by Bulstrode. Fred Vincy is subjected, at first, to his financial dependence on Peter Featherstone. Dorothea is trapped by her idealistic romanticisation of Edward Casaubon's scholarly work. Nonetheless, these characters collaborate towards social regeneration, through awareness of one another's challenges and failings. They thus demonstrate processes of maturation and social progress (see chapter thirteen). The plot of *Middlemarch*—as with all of Eliot's novels—is fundamentally character-driven, and this enables her to enact the social consequences of these diverse epistemological positions. Thus, the struggle for self-realisation is integral to the plot of *Middlemarch*, and this is presented as only occurring in empathic relationship with 'real beings,'[130] to use Eliot's term in her translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*.

Dorothea begins in awed subjection to these patriarchal constructions: specifically those of her desiccated scholastic suitor-then-husband, Edward Casaubon. Short-sightedness and blindness serve as metaphors for this deference, positioning Dorothea's pietistic paralysis as a kind of enchantment. In introducing Dorothea, Eliot first describes her spiritual analogue, Theresa of Avila (*circa* 1515-1582). The prelude to *Middlemarch* is a short, realist rendition of Theresa's call narrative, which notes her uncles' obstruction of her 'ardent nature'. In direct contrast to this nature, Casaubon is analogous to Thomas Aquinas (*circa* 1225–1274). Given Aquinas' extensive commitment to systematisation, he functions as an archetype of the epistemological approach that she considered antithetical to progress.

Unsuitable authority figures correspond to the mysticism and distortions that Strauss sought to exorcise using his *Life of Jesus,* as I will explore in chapter six. Within her novels, Eliot represented these distortions through descriptors like blindness, short-sightedness, and torpor. The substantive attributes of responsive and situationally beneficial cognition are

[130] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957 [1854]), xxxiv-xxxv.

represented as those behaviours that allow grounded, accurate, and sympathetic sharing of knowledge and relational understanding. This awareness enables more sophisticated social collaborations. Thus, these capacities are not evaluated in terms of 'Christian' or 'non-Christian', but rather, in terms of their recognition of the natural sanctity of human experience, especially suffering and struggle. These values were well established within Evans through her lived experiences, especially regarding tribal religious conflicts. They were drawn into sharper focus by her translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* in 1854 (see chapter nine).

Analogues and Epochs

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas posits a sequential, cumulative order of learning as follows: logic, mathematics, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, metaphysics. He explores revelation along scholastic rather than relational lines. Aquinas built on Aristotle, who professed to 'start from the things which are more knowable and clear to us.'[131] The functional difficulty in both Aristotle's and Aquinas' systems is the tendency to universalise what is apparent to them, rather than accounting for diverse perceptions and experiences. This project is both exemplified and harshly critiqued in the power-hoarding epistemologies of the Middlemarch patriarchy, as they craft their evaluations of knowledge—especially privileged religious knowledge—according to what will elevate them and exclude others. This occurs most essentially in Edward Casaubon's elusive and all-consuming reductionist project, his *Key to All Mythologies*: an obsession that comprehensively obstructs him from human connection and virtue. More crudely, Peter Featherstone's view of God as primarily concerned with land rights also fits this formula.

Within real history, the social ramifications of this casuistic deontological approach are exemplified in the Dominican Inquisitions, especially the Spanish Inquisition of Theresa's time. These were geared towards the redemption of the Christian community to ensure belief was held on 'correct' deontological grounds. Aquinas' recommendation that heretics be executed and that sin be remediated using physical pain[132] was fundamental to this approach. This idea also arose in the Jansenite movement in France in the seventeenth century, which emphasised the need for 'perfect contrition' as a condition of the forgiveness of God; torture and self-mutilation were considered a legitimate means of eliciting such contrition.

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[131] Aristotle, *Physics*, Loeb Classical Library, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aristotle-physics/1934/pb_LCL228.9.xml, Book 1 Section 1, page 8.
[132] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2, q.64, a.2; also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Chapter 146.

This legacy and these movements contrast fundamentally with Dorothea's analogue, Theresa of Avila, in *Middlemarch*. The drawing-together of Aquinas and Theresa, given the impact of Theresa on the reception of Aquinas' theological legacy, and given the extensive notes in the Berg and Folger notebooks on the social ramifications of different religions, is extremely significant. Surprisingly little has been written on the matter, and what has been offered has limitations. Schork professed historical knowledge of the two figures in *Middlemarch*, but as this contribution is a single-paragraph introduction to an article that still manages to erroneously state that Theresa of Avila founded the Poor Clares (rather than the Discalced Carmelites), there is more to be added.[133] The Poor Clares were established by Clare of Assisi three hundred years before Theresa was born.

The metaphor and meaning of Theresa's seminal work of contemplative mysticism, *The Interior Castle*, is influential on this novel's meaning and construction. Like the other young men and women of Middlemarch, Dorothea moves from deferral to active agency through a process of self-reflection and perceptive, empathic engagement with her contemporaries. This trajectory replicates Theresa's movement through various epistemological 'rooms' within herself. At the centre of this interior castle, in the core of her truest self, Theresa attained union with the divine, exemplifying a gestational revelatory mode. This sense of birthing divinity from within resonates with the role of the Virgin Mary as Θεοτόκος,[134] a title popularised at the council of Ephesus in 431 when it was dogmatically decreed that Jesus is both God and man. *The Interior Castle* arose within the context of pre-sixteenth century beliefs that women, like Eve, are particularly susceptible to moral corruption, because of their supposed emotionality.[135] Thus, such an unapologetically feminine expression was revolutionary. Eliot's dry wit features in her Utopian childhood for Theresa in the Prelude to *Middlemarch*, as the real Theresa's life was severely limited by gendered restrictions of Catholic Spain in the sixteenth century. Theresa was nonetheless a

[133] R.J. Schork, "Victorian Hagiography: A Pattern of Allusions in "Robert Elsmere" and "Hellbeck of Bannisdale," *Studies in the Novel* 21, no.3 (1989): 292. I offer my own publication in its stead: Elise Silson, ""You Are a Poem": Poetry, Revelation, and Revolution in George Eliot's Middlemarch." *St. Mark's Review*, no. 251 (2020): 57-74.
[134] *Theotokos*. Greek. 'God-bearer.' This title was popularised at the Council of Ephesus in 431, where it was polemically decreed that Jesus is both God and man. This council of Christian bishops was convened to settle a dispute between Nestorius and Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, after Nestorius sought to assert that Mary was *Christokos* but not *Theotokos*. Nestorius was declared a heretic at the council, but his categorisation remained contentious, with some ongoing support in the Eastern church. He was exiled from 435 onwards.
[135] Elena Carrera, "The Emotions in Sixteenth-Century Spanish Spirituality," *Journal of Religious History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 235-52.

key force in the dismantling of the Spanish Inquisition.[136] Dorothea is correspondingly rendered as an agent of potent social change, which leaves space for analogy between the *Middlemarch* patriarchy and the Spanish Inquisition.

Eliot demonstrates in *Middlemarch* that feeling is firmly intertwined with discernment. This emotionality—in contrast to Aquinas' scholastic sense of revelation—is indispensable to true sight:

> 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 chords of emotion – a soul which passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge.[137]

Theresa's written works pay overt homage to Thomas Aquinas, particularly, as a means of protecting her from backlash from the inquisition. *The Interior Castle* describes the lived process of shedding dogmatic encumbrances to attain true union with Christ, and through that, potent capacity for social regeneration. Theresa describes the experience as being like a bee, back and forth between mystic experience and solidarity with real suffering,[138] both as 'organs of knowledge' to use Eliot's terms. Adams notes (regarding *Adam Bede*) that '[e]loquence, like literacy, calls attention to the complexity and significance of that which it cannot adequately articulate," and in doing so, strikes on Eliot's core undertaking in her novel-writing: the dialogical drawing together of diverse experiences and perspectives.[139] This integrated dialogical awareness is Eliot's key motivation, another historical echo of Theresa's 'organs of knowledge.' In this integration, Eliot establishes the primacy of experience over the sublime, any supposedly transcendent account, be that religious or artistic, that disagrees with lived experience is incomplete or inadequate. Thus, these elevated systems of representation must be subjected to and checked against real life in the real world, including against the experiences of people who would not usually be considered authorities, such as women and the working classes.

Through her internal experiences of prayer and the associated texts that she wrote, Theresa survived the scrutiny of the Spanish Inquisition, and afforded similar safety to her

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[136] See Arlette De Jesus, *The Teresian Epistolary or the Backstage of Foundings and Reforms: The Construction of Power in the Letters of Saint Theresa of Avila*, Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2010.
[137] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 239.
[138] Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 43. See also Anderson, MaryAnderson, "Thy Word In Me: On the Prayer of Union in St. Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle," *The Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 3 (2006): 329-54.
[139] James Eli Adams, "Gyp's Tale: On Sympathy, Silence, and Realism in Adam Bede," *Dickens Studies Annual* 20, (1991): 228.

nuns.[140] Both Theresa and Eliot demonstrate that women are entirely capable of discerning their vocations for themselves, and in that knowledge, leading others to understand their own capacities. Theirs is a shared legacy. Within seven years of the publication of *Middlemarch*, there was a renewal of interest in Theresa of Avila. By 1970, alongside Catherine of Siena, Saint Theresa was declared at the second Vatican council to be a 'doctor of the church,' equal in title to Thomas Aquinas. Theresa's writings were poetic and frequently included narrative, providing spiritual guidance and sustenance to her readers. This melioristic impact has been far more constructive and protective than the violent and combative aspects of Aquinas' endorsement, although it would be unfair to assert that Aquinas was in no way constructive. Thus, a comparison that Eliot establishes in *Middlemarch* between the impacts of polemical and embodied approaches continues to bear out in the receptions of these writers.

The tensions established throughout *Middlemarch* between sanctity and profanity, and immanence and transcendence, are complex. Dorothea, in her youthful state of naivety, is shown seeking her *epos* in a time and context that is far from the sacrifices and piety of virgin martyrs. At the same time, their martyrdoms are inescapably resonant as she submits to gendered norms by seeking her own spiritual fulfilment through inclusion in Casaubon's 'higher' male purpose. Thus, Dorothea initially assents to the blinkered perspectives of the patriarchs exerting authority over her. Intertextual references highlight not only what Middlemarch society *is*, but also the scope of might have been available to Dorothea if her story was unfolding in a different epoch or situation. If she had been a man, she could be ordained and receive a living for pursuing her natural bent towards morality and compassion. If she had been a virgin saint living centuries earlier in a Catholic society, she could take holy orders. At least at the beginning of the novel, we see that Dorothea has been educated and conditioned for a social role according to her gender, rather than according to her nature and capacities. She is led as if she is blind, rather than being allowed her own appraisal of her surroundings, and initially accepts this condescension. Middlemarch patriarchs are no more suited to the roles their failures relegate them to, than Dorothea is to her mandatory submission. *Middlemarch* begins in a social system founded on blindness to actualities, and as such, decisions about social roles in Middlemarch are not grounded in situational awareness.

Following her marriage to Casaubon, Dorothea's engagement with religion is

[140] Stina Busman Jost, "The Devil in the Details: How Teresa of Avila's Description of the Work of the Devil Assured and Liberated Women." Medieval Mystical Theology 26, no. 1 (2017): 6-19.

conspicuously phrased as part of her devotion to her ill-equipped husband. Narratorial critiques of these conditions present Eliot's critique of Victorian culture, particularly in relation to gender and vocation. The holy women of *Middlemarch*—Mary Garth and Dorothea—are shown directly subordinated in marriage to the book's most unfit—and yet most celebrated—candidates for ordination. Bulstrode falls short of his wife's virtue in her grace towards him (see chapter seven), and Lydgate is not, at first, sufficiently aware to function well in his marriage. Nonetheless, young women are scrutinised far more than this broader system:

> As to freaks like this of Miss Brooke's, Mrs Cadwallader had no patience with them, and now saw that her opinion of this girl had been infected with some of her husband's weak charitableness: those Methodistical whims, that air of being more religious than the rector and curate together, came from a deeper and more constitutional disease than she had been willing to believe.[141]

Meanwhile, Casaubon is unregenerate in his sense of his place above Dorothea:

> he had deliberately incurred the hindrance [of courtship to his work on his *Key to All Mythologies*], having made up his mind that it was now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship... As in drought regions baptism by immersion could only be performed symbolically, so Mr Casaubon found that sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him; and he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion.[142]

Eliot thus demonstrates the unregenerate blindness that is integral to maintaining these poorly-attuned social systems. The result is parched; diseased; infected.

Projection or Embrace

Each of the *Middlemarch* patriarchs is introduced according to their connective and perceptive approach, articulated as a religious outlook. The metaphor of impeded vision permeates Eliot's novels as a sign of immaturity: Dorothea is 'short-sighted'[143] in *Middlemarch*, and Silas Marner is the 'blind weaver of Raveloe' who weaves his life in with those around him. Eliot's gothic novella, *The Lifted Veil* is an extended exploration of the impact of true sight on the other, and the ramifications of trusting without understanding. Eliot reacts particularly against coercive behaviours arising from this short-sightedness, inviting the reader to reflect in the first chapter, when Dorothea is dogmatically rough with Celia: 'is there any yoked creature without its private opinions?'[144] Poor perception and bids for control go hand-in-hand throughout Eliot's writing.

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[141] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 59.
[142] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 61-2.
[143] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 27.
[144] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 10.

Chapter eighteen of *Middlemarch*[145] is a montage of epistemological caricatures, illustrating the nonsensical foundations of these patriarchal deliberations, as various men bumble through an illogical, superstitious and politicised selection of a chaplain for the hospital. The choice is between Reverend Camden Farebrother (an affable and world-wise Church of England man who is well-integrated into village life), and the socially distant, untouchably Calvinistic Mister Tyke. Nicholas Bulstrode, who funds the hospital, prefers Tyke because he will further Bulstrode's bids for control of the community using religious prejudice. Tertius Lydgate, as the new young doctor in Middlemarch, is late to the meeting and must announce his loyalties to maintain his own position in that community. This montage-form appears in some of Eliot's other works: the tavern in *Silas Marner*, for example, which similarly demonstrates the fallible and fickle foundations of rural community consensus. Discussions centre on the matter of the cholera hospital, and the characterisation of Middlemarch's more established doctors is framed in terms of broader community perceptions. For example, Dr Sprague 'had weight, and might be expected to grapple a disease and throw it; while Dr Minchin might be better able to detect it lurking and to circumvent it'.[146] The tension between the knowledge of the young medical expert and the social pressures to which he is subjected is communicative of Eliot's sense of the backwards nature of this kind of social determination.

These oversights and laxities in decision-making illustrate Lydgate's lack of political and social awareness, despite his advanced technical capacities. These traits result in Tertius's projection of his sense of idealised femininity onto Rosamond, which prevents him from truly seeing her. Rosamond projects a corresponding masculinity onto Lydgate. The short-sightedness of both Rosamond and Tertius corresponds with Dorothea's lack of discernment in marrying Edward Casaubon, due to her idealisation of him (and misplaced confidence in her own cleverness). Edward's choice to maintain distance from Dorothea by hiding in his academic pursuits correspondingly prevents him from seeing *her*. Thus, in both the public and domestic spheres, poor perception results in suffering for the Middlemarch community.

Conspicuously, several characters warn others during these phases of blindness, by pointing out realities rather than idealisations. Celia Brooke warns Dorothea,[147] Mary Garth

[145] Beginning page 187.
[146] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 193.
[147] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Chapter V, 39-49.

warns Fred,[148] and Camden Farebrother warns Lydgate.[149] Blindness is not dispelled by anything other than the consequences of their mistakes, however, and these situationally aware (yet also fallible) characters hold vigil for their 'struggling, erring'[150] companions. The moral challenge of *Middlemarch*, then, is to widen understanding of the divine good beyond blind absolutes (be those idealising or dismissive), and associated bids for control, to instead consider the cognitive approaches within which mutual well-being originates.

The Virtue of Acknowledging Fallibility

Eliot constructed representations of imperfect (rather than ideal) realities. Some of her characters do not manage to grow, and those that fulfil their potential always do so imperfectly. These latter characters thus contribute to social melioration, but still do not offer a unitary voice, as Eliot refuses to suspend her sense of the flux of experience, and the flux of ideologies, cognitive states, and relationships, within that… the *subjectivity* of these things. She does not present the authoritative, unitary, omniscient voice as an end-point within scholarly process, or any other process of maturation. Rather, she shows her characters becoming more aware, more perceptive, more responsive, and thus more able to participate constructively in the fluidity of community life. For Eliot, maturity is adaptive, humble, connected, and perceptive of its own subjectivity.[151]

It may seem untimely to discuss the conclusions of Eliot's novels in this particular chapter, but what Eliot is highlighting when she raises these definitions of immaturity in her *Bildungen* also speaks to her understanding of conclusions and end points. If we position Eliot as the friend holding vigil for the reader (in a similar function to those *Middlemarch* chapters I describe in the previous section), then her resistance of idealised, fairly-tale endings makes far more sense. An archetypal example from Gillian Beer's *George Eliot*:

> The scale and scope of her achievement is undeniable: the intellectual depth of connected life, the emotional power of humdrum experience, the range of exploratory discourses. What is debated is the relation of that achievement to our needs as women and her powers as a woman. One key problem has been the obduracy with which she encloses her heroines within the

[148] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Chapter XIV, 137-147.
[149] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Chapter XVII, 177-187.
[150] George Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, Wandsworth, 5 July 1859," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.3, 110-111.
[151] For an interesting discussion of George Henry Lewes' writing about Goethe, see Jeffrey Keuss, "Poetics of the Subject and the Sacred into the Nineteenth Century," in *A Poetics of Jesus: The Search for Christ Through Writing in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 53. Keuss discusses Goethe's sense of '*nature in process*', which ties in very well with what I am describing in Eliot, here. I regret that I had not heard of this book until it was recommended by one of my examiners, but it is exceptionally pertinent.

> confines of ordinary possibility, the confines from which the author had, by means of her writing, escaped.[152]

Similarly, earlier feminist scholars—of the 1970s particularly—have by-and-large been disappointed in their searches of Eliot's fiction for portrayals of the emancipation that she was able to live out. More conservative Christian writers have long wondered at her theological subtlety despite what Elizabeth Gaskell called 'the awkward blot'[153] of her marital life, while secular writers like Ashton and Bonaparte have been baffled by the ongoing signs of a deep sympathy with Christian theological positions. Rosenberg observes that, over time, such feminist readings came to be acknowledged as failing to 'look closely at her approach, to gender… The traditional modes of womanly behaviour that she allegedly perpetuated began to be viewed as astute analyses of the position of women'.[154] The same can be said of these broader representations of other kinds of limitation and progress.

Rosenberg's conclusion supports my view that Eliot, in seeking to write about the real, did not see herself as bound to embody the ideal woman in her characters. Rather, Eliot

> cautions us that when we attempt to define this figure, we must be wary of constructing an identity which is restricted to the dominant ideologies of our own historical moment. Instead, she suggests a corrective, in which art provides not dogmatically-correct role models but the capacity to understand differences… In achieving this, Eliot sought to construct a role in which her identity as a woman, and as a writer, and as a "struggling, erring human".[155]

This insight became an integral part of her ability to examine diverse aspects of the human experience as it was, rather than positing a unitary ideal. This leaves Eliot's readers with autonomy in deepening their own perceptive capacities, and associated capacity for discernment and connection in their respective contexts.

Religious Unitary Language

Eliot positions blinkered, transgressive, unreflective modes of behaviour as socially damaging, in her novels. This situates her sense of *Bildung*, and within this, her sense of personal maturation. This sense of immaturity and regeneration/redemption flows from her theological and philosophical background, especially Feuerbach's definitions of perverted religion:

> This philosophy is essentially distinguished from the systems hitherto prevalent, in that it corresponds to the real, complete nature of man; but for that very reason it is antagonistic to

[152] Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 3.
[153] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester and New York: Mandolin, 1997), 594.
[154] Tracey Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot: George Eliot's Reception and the Ideal Woman Writer," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 3, no.1 (2007): paragraph 19.
[155] Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot," paragraph 23.

> minds perverted and crippled by a superhuman, *i.e.* anti-human, **anti-natural religion** and speculation.[156]

Nicholas Bulstrode's controlling religiosity is a very strong example of 'anti-human' religion, in its obstruction of healthy pastoral care at the cholera hospital. Casaubon's suppression and obstruction of Dorothea is against her nature; is 'anti-natural'. The broad consensus that Fred is suitable for ordination (rather than Mary Garth or Dorothea), is a further exampe of 'anti-natural' religion, as their respective natures are ignored by the Middlemarch community, in favour of gendered norms. 'Perverted and crippled' behaviours in *Middlemarch* are those that impede human connection, and are unresponsive to human natures, instead attributing labels and roles without proficient consideration of their suitability. These behaviours are justified internally according to the markers that characters take as representative of their religious special-ness, which I attend to in more depth in chapter seven. In this sense, these characters illustrate Feuerbach's statement that 'Religion is the dream of the human mind',[157] as those characters that dream of transcendence in *Middlemarch* are not shown basing such attitudes on natural realities, and similarly, Dorothea's deferral to Edward Casaubon is dream-like and torporous. These dreamlike cognitive approaches serve as 'opium' for the 'special' believer, providing reassurance in the face of reality. In this regard, Eliot pits herself firmly against transcendence as a religious goal, simultaneously sanctifying doubt and its acknowledgement, and demystifying faith.

Throughout her essays, novels and letters, Eliot opposed the blinkered pride inherent to voices that professed to speak over—or to exclude the experience and awareness of—others. This position resounds in her 1855 essay, 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cummings'[158] and recurs throughout her corpus, including her letters (see chapter eleven for more on her essays). Dr Cummings engaged in presumptuous revision and regulation of the spirituality and morality of his audiences, pressuring them to defer their own perceptions of their lives and experiences to his profession of special religious knowledge. Eliot argued, essentially, that his relational incapacity showed a corresponding theological capacity. 'By their fruit you shall know them,' being an associated biblical principle.[159]

This aversion to disconnected prescriptiveness and posturing is conveyed throughout Eliot's realist novels. It is sometimes personified when social norms are enforced in

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[156] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957 [1854]), xxxiv-xxxv.
[157] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xxxix.
[158] George Eliot, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming," in *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[159] Matthew 7.20, NRSV.

damaging ways, for example in the behaviour of the Dodson aunts and Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. Similarly, Nicholas Bulstrode brokers power using his position as banker as evidence of his being chosen by God to weild power within the Middlemarch community (see chapter seven for more on Bulstrode). The swindling of Silas Marner at the beginning of that novella hinges upon the blind trust that Silas offers to his companions at Lantern Yard, his puritanical religious community. Silas' blind, socially isolated weaving is the story's key motif, and he is drawn out from that near-crippling state by the need to invest relationally in those around him, especially Eppie. Similar deference characterises the immaturity of Dorothea and Lydgate, in *Middlemarch*. Mary Garth's resistance of Peter Featherstone is an anomalous and radiant alternative to this deference, which Mary enacts with reserve and compassion.

Toxic social enforcers operate in places of disconnection from the protagonists of Eliot's novels. Eliot demonstrates the social impacts of these bids for unitary power by narrating the internal journeys of these protagonists, thus demonstrating their fallibility. Religion is often fundamental to power-moves in Eliot's writing, frequently integrating diverse, self-centred interpretations of 'true' Christian religion. In *Middlemarch*, particularly, Eliot represents a very broad range of Christianities, the most vocal of which are consistently shown to be nothing more than whitewashed self-legitimisation at the expense of others. This self-absorption is a hallmark of immature spirituality in Eliot's novels, exhibited as rumination and introspection in Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* and Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, as well as Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. The overall sense is of not being able to see the forest for the trees, so to speak. Each of these characters seeks, in their immaturity, to hide from their surroundings—especially from their relationships—in order to undertake their *Bildung* in transcendent isolation. However, each of these characters, over time, realises that this isolation is not the path to self-realisation, which must necessarily be undertaken in connection and community.

This formulation of immaturity conveys Eliot's extensive integration of materialism into her understanding, which is attributed throughout scholarship to the influences of Comte's positivism, and Strauss and Feuerbach's associated materialism, flowing out of the monist tradition that I have described in chapter two. Feuerbach links these ideas with 'real being' in his exploration of symbols and reality:

> we should not, as is the case in theology and speculative philosophy, make real beings and things into arbitrary signs, vehicles, symbols, or predicates of a distinct, transcendent absolute, *i.e.* abstract being; but we should accept and understand them in the significance which they have in themselves, which is identical with their qualities, with those conditions which make

> them what they are:—thus only do we obtain the key to a *real theory and practice*. I, in fact, put in the place of the barren baptismal water, the beneficent effect of real water. How "watery," how trivial! Yes, indeed, very trivial. But so Marriage, in its time, was a *very trivial truth*, which Luther, on the ground of his natural good sense, maintained in opposition to the seemingly holy illusion of celibacy. But while I thus view water as a real thing, I at the same time intend it as a vehicle, an image, an example, a symbol, of the "unholy" spirit of my work, just as the water of Baptism—the object of my analysis—is at once literal and symbolical water. It is the same with bread and wine. Malignity has hence drawn the same conclusion that bathing, eating, and drinking are the *summa summarium*, the positive result of my work. I make no other reply than this: If the whole of religion is contained in the Sacraments, and there are consequently no other religious acts than those which are performed in Baptism and the Lord's Supper; *then* **I grant that the entire purport and positive result of my work are bathing, eating, and drinking, since this work is nothing but a faithful, rigid, historico-philosophical analysis of religion—the revelation of religion to itself, the *awakening of religion to self-consciousness***.[160]

Strauss, Feuerbach and Comte all wrote about the necessity of forming cognition around tangibly observed phenomena, rather than suspending cognitive agency in deference to tradition and other religious authorities. These were not abstract observations, merely for the edification of philosophers and hyper-reflective lay-thinkers: their impacts were fundamental to the secularisation of western society.

Strauss and Feuerbach's conclusions, while referred to as 'atheistic', were made within the German theological community, wherein theological teaching appointments were made within a clearly structured and regulated class system. As such, they were designated as *Staatsdiener*:[161] public servants who formed part of the social regulatory structures within the State's governance,[162] established by the Prussian government in 1788 in its Edict on Religion, written by the conservative minister, Johann Christoph Wöllner.[163] Under this edict, church preaching of heterodox religious ideas 'such as Unitarianism'[164] was forbidden: similarly, those appointed to theological teaching, as David Strauss had been before his forced retirement in 1839, were expected to further and deepen orthodox understandings without questioning them overtly. With the coronation of Friedrich Wilhelm IV in 1840, just before the 1841 publication of *The Essence of Christianity*, the motivation to proactively conserve the 'true faith' was rekindled as the rate of social change across Europe continued to increase exponentially.

In an era of potent religious nationalisms, they were very aware of the might of

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[160] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xl-xli, bold added, Feuerbach's/Eliot's italics.
[161] German. 'Servant of the State' or public servant.
[162] Michael Sauter, "The Enlightenment on Trial: State Service and Social Discipline in Eighteenth-Century Germany's Political Sphere," *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no.2 (2008): 197.
[163] Sauter, "The Enlightenment on Trial," 195.
[164] Sauter, "The Enlightenment on Trial," 195.

religious orthodoxies in maintaining hegemony. These social orders were distinctly hierarchical, built on the premise that a special class of perception and special religious insight legitimised the allocation of power in these systems. Comte,[165] Strauss, and Feuerbach diversely noted that the systems built themselves at least partially on fictions: on beliefs that were fashioned to support power imbalances, rather than earnestly crafted as responses to clear evidence about the world and how it worked. Strauss undermined established perceptions of the Gospels as inerrant and literally historical, rather than mythological, and the product of culture and tradition. Feuerbach wrote about interpersonal ethics as the essence of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

Eliot engages sophisticated theological and socio-political commentary, signalling beyond the text to examples of oppression and emancipation. She identified prophetic and revolutionary modes as fundamental to social regeneration and revision, within an entrenched social system. Definitions of faith and unbelief, and ideas about the implications of these definitions, are extremely diverse. The distinction of Eliot's writing is her resistance of any inflexible definition of faith and unbelief. Rather, she elevates real 'being' as the origin of learning about human progress. This elevation opposes the blindness of dialogical incapacity and interpersonal alienation, including any polemic generated in such a mode.

It is central to this realism—and to Eliot's understanding of epistemological humility and integrity—that her novels carry the same ambiguity as human experience in defining these ideas. Consequently, Eliot's writing is sensitively connected to ecclesiological history, biblical studies, and German higher criticism, yet decisively resists the inflexibility and combative tone of polemics. Eliot is simultaneously relentless and sympathetic in her observations of social function and the power structures, struggles, and reprieves inherent to human experience. Her steadfast insistence on observation rather than definition resulted in a corpus of texts that stands together as piercingly insightful, but simultaneously gentle and inherently enfranchising of her readers in exercising their own perception as the origin of their ethics and social responsibility.

[165] Comte's influence in *Middlemarch* is peripheral to this research. I recommend the fourth chapter of Bernard Semmel's 1994 book, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford University Press) on this subject.

5. Coventry in the Chrysalis

Leathery brain must work at leathery Strauss for a short time before my butterfly days come.[166]

Introduction

Mary Ann Evans' time at Coventry was formative. Bodenheimer identifies, through her exceptional knowledge of Evans' correspondences, tangible shifts in Evans' communication:

> During the first eight months of the new life in Coventry, Mary Ann's correspondence with Maria Lewis proceeded apparently as before. In the "language of flowers" which she initiated with Maria on October 1, 1840, she was "Clematis," Maria "Veronica," and the religious tone of the correspondence seems if anything exaggerated during the year that followed. Yet there are subtle changes, which suggest at least in retrospect the newly **venturesome thinking** that Mary Ann was privately conducting in her new surroundings. Her diction, still heavily mannered at twenty-one, veers between pietistic sermonizing and Shakespearean banter, both styles revealing more interest in the production of powerful language than in their subject matters… Mary Ann merges her own unsettled anxiety with Maria's troubles when she hopes that Maria "may have the assurance that 'your Father is at the helm'."[167]

Initially, a straitened piety dominated Evans' correspondence with Lewis, including suggestions of synchronising their intercessions for one another to alleviate Evans' social isolation, and Lewis' stress in her ongoing search for work.

This 'venturesome thinking' led Evans to cease attending church services on January 2, 1842, which strained her relationship with her father, particularly. Evans wrote to her father to clarify her reasoning:

> I am induced to try if I can express myself more clearly on paper so that both I in writing and you in reading may have our judgements unobstructed by feeling, which they can hardly be when we are together. I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined **visibly to unite myself** with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than with other classes of believers in the Divine authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness. In thus viewing this important subject I am in unison with some of the finest minds in Christendom in past ages, and with the majority of such in the present (as an instance more familiar to you than any I could name I may mention Dr. Franklin[168]). Such being my very strong convictions, it cannot

[166] George Eliot, as cited in Jane Eberwein, "Dangerous Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: Mary Ann Eans, Emily Dickinson, and Strauss's Das Leben Jesu," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 21, no.2 (2012): 1-19.
[167] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 59.
[168] Benjamin Franklin, as per Haight's footnote. 'As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupt changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters

> be a question with any mind of strict integrity, whatever judgement may be passed on their truth, that I could not without vile hypocrisy and miserable truckling to the smile of the world for the sake of my supposed interests, profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove. This and this alone I will not do even for your sake—anything else however painful I would cheerfully brave to give you a moment's joy.[169]

Evans' letters to Maria Lewis shed their earlier effusion as her life became less cloistered. She continued to engage diplomatically and sympathetically with Lewis as the latter sought work as a governess. In these letters, Evans graciously integrates openness about her transitions with a commitment to helping her friend find a comfortable professional situation:

> Of course in Mr. W.'s family perfect freedom of thought and action in religious matters would be understood as an unquestioned right, but as education, to be such, implies aggression on supposed error of every kind and incubation of truth it is probable you would not choose to put yourself in a position apparently requiring the anomalous conditions of neutrality and command.[170]

Thus, even early on, Evans distinguished carefully between emotional-relational connections, and doctrinal diversities, maintaining warmth and respect across difference. This liberation of difference from opposition remained a key value throughout her lifetime, evident throughout her novels. This capacity is the substance of growth, for Eliot, and she saw collective capacity of this kind as fundamental to overall social progress. It mattered far more to her to cooperate in seeking compassion, than it did to ensure homogeny of perception or expression.

Free Thought

In Coventry, she continued to change quickly and fundamentally, forming a close sense of collegiality with Charles and Caroline (Cara) Bray. She subsequently befriended Caroline's brother, Charles Hennell. Hennell brokered her early writing life, including her translation of David Strauss' *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*. In this freethinking context, she maintained a clear delineation between her own internal reflective processes and her expectations of the people around her, being careful not to conflate her perspectives with those of others. Her sensitivity towards the diverse beliefs of her family and friends was exemplary, and did not dilute her intellectual exploration. Now in her early twenties, Evans was in the process of becoming George Eliot.

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in England, some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it.' in Albert Smyth (ed.), *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 84.

[169] George Eliot, "George Eliot to Robert Evans, Foleshill, [28 February 1842]", in Gordon Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851* (London: Oxford University Press and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 150-1.

[170] Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Foleshill, [20 May 1841]", in Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 90-1.

Evans was deeply influenced by Charles Hennell's 1838 book, *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, within this awakening to the subjectivity and diversity of different Christian theological and dogmatic positions. This book was her first—and most dramatically influential—exposure to higher criticism, stirring questions regarding the cultural development of the Christian religion. These explorations of the historical and discursive origins of Christianity were a welcome relief from the blinkered religious factionalism and posturing that Evans observed in her surrounding community. These texts and discussions provided a robust space within which to explore theological matters with both cognitive rigour and relational poise.

Evans continued to share earnestly with Maria about these transitions, taking pains to preserve their friendship. Evans' letter of November 1841 is, quite likely, the most frequently quoted passage from her letters:

> My whole soul has been engrossed in the most interesting of all enquiries for the last few days and to what results my thoughts may lead I know not—possibly to one that will startle you, but my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error.[171]

This sense of commitment amid the difficulties of exploration mirrors the words of Georg Hegel, whose work was deeply understood by and fundamentally influential on Hennell. To quote Hegel:

> Nicht die Neugierde, nicht die Eitelkeit, nicht die Betrachtung der Nützlichkeit, nicht die Pflicht und Gewissenhaftigkeit, sondern ein unauslöschlicher, unglücklicher Durst, der sich auf keinen Vergleich einläßt, führt uns zur Wahrheit.[172]
>
> [Not curiosity, not vanity, not the consideration of expediency, not duty and conscientiousness, but unquenchable, unhappy thirst—that brooks no compromise—leads us to truth.][173]

Bodenheimer observes aptly:

> By December 8 [1841] she had released herself from all tactful conformity to Maria's Evangelicalism, writing a diatribe against the divisiveness of religious denominations—the "eternal dragons of Church and dissent"—which, she imagines, would even if kept apart, "find abundant food under the generic names Church and Dissent and these would begin to bite and devour each other".[174]

In this letter, Evans is referring to a conflict between Miss Rebecca Franklin, daughter of a Baptist minister, and Miss Lewis, of the Church of England.[175] Mary Ann frames the

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[171] Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Foleshill, [13 November 1841]," in Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 120-1.
[172] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel* [Letters from and to Hegel], (Leipzig: Meiner Verlag, 1977 [1785-1812]), 168.
[173] My translation.
[174] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 60.
[175] Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Foleshill, [13 November 1841," in Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851*, 122.

potential solution of leaving each other to worship in separate contexts without interference, by referring to a biblical solution. This rhetorical choice is overlooked by Bodenheimer. Mary Ann draws a parallel with Abraham's decision, according to the Christian Old Testament, to give his sons (Isaac and Ishmael) separate land, decreeing that they 'divide the cities of the land between them' in order to resolve the conflict.[176] Evans' rejection of tribal disputes within Christian denominations—and similarly, her shedding of the psychological burden of the fear of hell—was, indeed, fundamental to her reflective processes at that time. However, it must also be noted that she continued to make sense of these conflicts within her established Christian theological awareness, framing her solutions according to her understanding of spirituality and ethics, which she continued to value deeply. The Judeo-Christian mythos remained Evans' native rhetorical dialect.

Nonetheless, her thirst for truth was a source of deep suffering in her familial relationships, especially with her father. Evans' initial decision to stop attending church occurred during a visit from Lewis, and she did similarly on January 16th, as he noted in his journal.[177] Their neighbours, the Sibrees, requested support from the Reverend Francis Watts,[178] Professor of Theology at Springhill College, Birmingham,[179] to induce her back to the fold.[180] Evans wrote six letters to Watts between April 1842 and February 1843.[181] Her letter to him of August 3rd, 1842, is decisive. She thanks him, with characteristic courtesy, for loaning her some (ostensibly) corrective books, before categorically rebuffing his interference:

> You implied a wish to know whether my pursuit of truth were prayerful, and I cannot feel quite honest in passing by your half question without notice. My convictions as to the nature of the Deity are so held *in equilibrio* by the appearance of things in my glimmering apprehension that prayer, beyond that involved in culture, would be in my idea (though possibly I am quite

[176] Eliot, "GE to Maria Lewis, Foleshill, [13 November 1841," 122.
[177] Robert Evans, "Robert Evans's Journal, Foleshill, 2-16 January 1842," in Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 124.
[178] Bernard Paris simply refers to Professor Watts as a 'clergyman', making no mention of his academic credentials. It seems that within this text, particularly, it was not considered favourable to associate learnedness with faith. I prefer the approach Evans takes in her essays and novels, where she displays a strong tendency to acknowledge the achievements and positive contributions of the people she describes, even when she deviates quite fundamentally from some aspects of their position.
[179] Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 41.
[180] Bernard Paris, *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 10.
[181] The originals for these letters 'disappeared from view into private hands' after typewritten copies were made at the Library of Scotland. One of the letters—dated 11th April 1842—later arose again in hard copy in 1998, and was found to differ in subtle ways from the printed version. I found some similar errors were found in the letters at the Berg archive, which suggests that it would be fruitful to undertake a new edition of Haight's *George Eliot Letters*, in the fullness of time. See Bill Adams, "An Echo of the 'Holy War'," *George Eliot Review*, no.30 (1999): 59.

wrong) a vain offering. I confess to you that I feel it an inexpressible relief to be freed from the apprehension of what Finney[182] 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 ever-lastingly fatal. It seems to me that the awful anticipations entailed by a reception of all the dogmas in the New Testament operate unfavourably on moral beauty by disturbing that spontaneity, that choice of the good for its own sake, that answers my ideal.

You will say I am a naughty girl but you have a simple and hasty expression of some of my feelings, which if wrong and of injurious effect, will I hope be rectified. Pray pardon my freedom and all else that needs pardon and believe me, Revd and dear Sir,

Yours with grateful respect,
Mary Ann Evans.[183]

Contemporary research into religious experiences of young people shows that it is not unusual for young adults to transition from early conservatism to more moderate approaches to belief,[184] and Evans' progressions follow this developmental trend. It is also worth noting that the strength of Evans' language was, rhetorically speaking, a necessary part of her extrication from ongoing rescue attempts from conservative quarters. Her assertion of a spirituality and a morality outside of constant anxieties about whether she is 'saved' has been interpreted as evidence of a 'loss of faith.'[185] Others have attempted to apply more nuance, but with similar imprecision:

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[182] Charles Finney (1792-1875), the American revivalist Evans refers to in this letter, is an originating archetype of hell-and-brimstone theological approaches. Finney is broadly considered a father of contemporary Pentecostalism, and his theology focusses on Calvinist splitting of saved people from unsaved, based on clearly and inflexibly defined definitions of sinful behaviours as evidence of whether someone has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit or not. These traditions continue to be particularly influential on the American religious right today, and fit typologically with Lantern Yard in Silas Marner. Finney is an archetype of religious unitary language and behaviour, described in the previous chapter. He wrote:

"Parents often pray very earnestly for their children, because they wish God to save them, and they almost think hardly of God if He does not save their children. But if they would have their prayers prevail, they must come to take God's part against their children, even though for their perverseness and incorrigible wickedness He should be obliged to send them to hell. I knew a woman who was very anxious for the salvation of her son, and she used to pray for him with agony, but still he remained impenitent, until at length she became convinced that her prayers and agonies had been nothing but the fond yearnings of parental feeling, and were not dictated at all by a just view of her son's character as a wilful and wicked rebel against God. And there was never any impression made on his mind until she was made to take strong ground against him as a rebel, and to look on him as deserving to be sent to hell. And then he was converted. The reason was, she never before was influenced by the right motive." From Charles Grandison Finney, Finney on Revival (London: C. Tinling & Co., 1954), 85.

[183] Eliot, "GE to Francis Watts, Foleshill, 3 August [1842]," in Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851*, 143-44.

[184] For example, please see Don Freeman and James Fowler, "Stages of Faith," *Canadian Mennonite* 6, no.10 (2002); and Mathew Guest, Sonya Sharma, Kristin Aune and Rob Warner, "Challenging 'Belief' and the Evangelical Bias: Student Christianity in English Universities," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28, no.2 (2013): 207-23.

These kinds of research methodologies arose in the late twentieth century. Nineteenth-century analyses of spiritual maturation/change are narrative/anecdotal; Eliot's novels contain many examples.

[185] George Levine, "Introduction: George Eliot and the Art of Realism," in George Levine (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

> She abandoned the dogmas of Christianity, but she could not abandon the Christian habit of mind, "the consciousness of Christian centuries in her bosom," that had become an integral part of her being. Her Christian consciousness remained with her all her life, shaping the way in which she addressed herself to reality… After her break with Christianity, Marian Evans did not immediately arrive at the purely secular humanism that characterizes her mature thought and art.[186]

Depending on the theology being applied, very different conclusions can be drawn about these personal and spiritual shifts. It seems perverse to apply Finney's filters to Evans, given her explicit objection. I would not rush to read church attendance as a decisive indicator of a person's private spirituality, and I similarly baulk at the application of any single indicator to decree that Evans was Christian or un-Christian. It is best to stay with her words about herself, in her letters and notebooks.

It is, however, significant that Eliot contextualises her novels using Christian traditions and understandings, but without endorsing Christian hegemonies. These representations produced extraordinarily sophisticated insights into the diverse functions of faith and religion (which are most certainly distinct from each other). I build on the work of Peter Hodgson[187] and Marilyn Orr,[188] in this area. Orr's summary of Eliot's position is useful:

> Basil Willey… in his *Nineteenth Century Studies*, published in 1955… disputed Lord David Cecil's claim that George Eliot was "not religious." Willey argued that religious was "just what she was," contending that "the whole predicament that she represents was that of the religious temperament cut off by the *Zeitgeist* from the traditional objects of veneration, and the traditional intellectual formulations… [Barry Qualls in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* also weighs in] by stating that George Eliot maintained her connection to biblical texts and language "when she lost her faith," without his feeling the need to defend or explain the premise.[189]

Eliot was deeply engaged with diverse Christian theological positions and traditions for the rest of her life. These engagements were organically integrated into the rest of her thought towards a broader theory of life, which accommodated a 'yearning affection towards the great religions of the world.'[190] This was clearly directed towards renewal rather than obliteration of religious thought, by the time she started writing *Middlemarch*:

> …since you have read my books, 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

[186] Bernard Paris, *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values*, (USA: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 11.
[187] Peter Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real* (London: SCM Press, 2001).
[188] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution* (USA: Northwestern UP, 2018).
[189] Orr, *Theopoetics of Evolution*, 5.
[190] Eliot, "GE to Clifford Allbutt, London, [August 1868]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, 472.

> adopted as a pleasant rebellion. Still, I see clearly 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 [eras?] of religious decay.[191]

Evans undertook close study of the New Testament during her first year at Coventry, heavily influenced by Hennell's *Inquiry*,[192] a revised second edition of which was published in 1841. She undertook a phase of intensive reading in the sciences, deism, and rationalism, and began to teach herself German. It was through Eliot's links with Caroline Bray (nee Hennell) and the wider Hennell family that Eliot secured the job of translating Strauss' *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*.

It was a natural progression for Eliot to take up the role of translating Strauss' *Life of Jesus,* as 'the most learned member of the Bray-Hennell circle.'[193] The translation was initially undertaken by Elizabeth Rebecca ('Rufa') Brabant,[194] arranged by her father, Doctor Robert Brabant. Robert Brabant was a friend of Coleridge, who had tutored him in the complexities of German theology. Rufa's father obstructed her marriage to Charles Hennell, ostensibly on the grounds that Charles had 'unsound' lungs. Once Rufa became financially independent and married Charles in 1843, she also quit her father's translation project.[195] Doctor Brabant had been an early reader of both Charles Hennell's *Inquiry* and Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, and his connection of the common objectives of the two works led him to correspond with Strauss with a view to facilitating an English translation of *The Life of Jesus*.[196]

Evans' commitment to translate Strauss evidenced her deep commitment to engaging with doctrinal diversity. Directly preceding this translation, Hennell offered the following rationale for his *Inquiry*:

> To those whose interest is already so much awakened upon the subject of the divine origin of Christianity, that they feel the necessity of arriving at some certain conclusion, more than they fear any possible results to which such inquiries may lead, this attempt to contribute to the solution of the difficult question is offered.
>
> The hypothesis, that there is a mixture of both truth and fable in the four Gospels, has been admitted, in different degrees, by many critics bearing the Christian name… **The right of private judgement in the separation of truth from fiction being once accorded, the precise limits which ought to be assigned… becomes a matter of interesting research to all who**

[191] Eliot, "GE to Clifford Allbutt, London, [August 1868]," 472.
[192] Leander Keck, "Foreword to the Series," in David Strauss (trans. George Eliot; ed. Leander Keck), *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1972), xlviii.
[193] Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), 47.
[194] Rufa is later referred to in correspondence as Mrs. Charles Christian Hennell in Haight's *George Eliot Letters.*
[195] Keck, "Foreword to the Series," xlviii.
[196] Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), 65.

> **wish to know what they are to believe and disbelieve on the subject of the Christian religion**.[197]

Similarly, Evans' translation of Strauss:

> Wherever a religion, resting upon written records, prolongs and extends the sphere of its dominion, accompanying its votaries through the varied and progressive stages of mental cultivation, a discrepancy between the representations of those ancient records, referred to as sacred, and the notions of more advanced periods of mental development, will inevitably sooner or later arise… the discrepancy between the modern culture and the ancient records, with regard to their historical portion, becomes so apparent, that the immediate intervention of the divine in human affairs loses its probability.[198]

These articulations certainly found their way into Evans' thinking about matters of faith, naming tensions that were already evident in her family and community relationships, e.g. the conflict between Misses Franklin and Lewis, described above. Evans also formed a close acquaintance with John Sibree Junior,[199] who had translated Hegel.[200]

Despite enjoying this expansion of her outlook, Evans did not enjoy or wholly agree with Strauss. She retained a sense of comfort in her understanding of Christ, as her father neared what would be his fatal illness:

Source: https://aleteia.org/

> she was Strauss-sick—it made her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion, and only the sight of her Christ-image and picture made her endure it. Moreover as her work advances nearer its public appearance, she grows dreadfully nervous. Poor thing, I do pity her sometimes with her pale sickly face and dreadful headaches, and anxiety too about her father. This illness of his has tried her so much, for all the time she had for rest and fresh air, she had to read to him. Nevertheless she looks very happy and satisfied with her work.[201]

The Christ-image referred to was a reproduction of Thorvaldsen's 'Risen Christ'. The posture of the original work shows open arms and hands, simultaneously offering comfort to the viewer, and inviting them into his embrace.

In 1841, the year Evans started translating Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of*

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[197] Charles C. Hennell, *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (Google Books <https://archive.org/details/aninquiryconcer00henngoog>, [1841]) iv-v.
[198] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, 1.
[199] Bernard J. Paris describes Francis Watts as 'a clergyman whom her pious neighbours the Sibrees had sent to bring her back into the fold' (*Experiments in Life* 10). The correspondence between Evans and John Sibree Jnr. shows that they made similar theological and political transitions (Sibree decided against becoming a clergyman, after beginning the process). Their ongoing correspondence is open and warm, which Paris does not appear to have referred to.
[200] Leander Keck, "Editor's Introduction," in David Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's The Life of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977 [1865]), xlviii.
[201] Mrs Charles Bray [Caroline 'Cara' Hennell], "Mrs. Charles Bray to Sara Hennell, February 1846," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 206.

Christianity was published in Germany. The book is a ground-breaking materialist exploration of the social function and utility of the Christian faith. In it, Feuerbach explores the various sacraments and tenets of Christian religion, demonstrating that each returns essentially to collaborative and respectful social ethos, arising from reverence for the divinity within each human being, as expressed in Christ. His central thesis was that God is, *essentially*, an externalised expression of humanity's highest potential, and that as humanity matures into that potential, the idea of God becomes superfluous.

The Essence of Christianity was enormously influential on the young Friedrich Engels, who shared it with his friend, Karl Marx. Marx mistakenly anticipated that Engels would translate Feuerbach into English, and may have been brokering a similar project when he visited John Chapman's house in London in 1854:

> Two translations of your *Wesen des Christentums*, one in English and one in French, are being prepared and are practically ready for the printer. The former will appear in Manchester (Engels has supervised it)... This summer, twice weekly, the German artisans here—that is, the communist element among them, several hundred of them—have heard lectures on your *Essence of Christianity* by their secret chiefs, and have shown themselves to be remarkably receptive.[202]

Marx studied Feuerbach's work closely for six years before writing his *Communist Manifesto*, which triggered violently abrupt revolutions across Europe in 1848. Evan's correspondence during this time articulated solidarity, venturing to John Sibree Jnr that she would consent 'to have a year clipt off [her] life for the sake of witnessing such a scene as that of the men of the barricade bowing to the image of Christ 'who first taught fraternity to men.'[203] This understanding of Christ as an expression of sacred solidarity rather than a representative of the religious establishment remains present in Eliot's writing, including in the notebooks that she kept while writing *Middlemarch*. It is most clearly expressed in the poetry of the Berg notebook (see chapter ten), which she kept (alongside the Folger notebook) as a reading journal during the writing of *Middlemarch*. The Berg notebook is labelled 'Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters' on its front cover, and is held at the Berg Archive, in New York (see photograph in the appendix). This notebook has been a key source for this thesis, and has not been written about in connection with *Middlemarch* aside from some limited linkings in the introduction to its transcription by John Neufeldt and Victor

[202] Karl Marx, "To Ludwig Feuerbach (in Bruckberg), Paris, 38 Rue Vaneau, August 11, 1844," in Saul Padover (ed.), *The Letters of Karl Marx* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 35-7.
[203] Eliot, "GE to John Sibree, Jr., [Foleshill, 8 March 1848]," in Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851*, 252-3.

Pratt.[204]

The Critical Turn

The impact on Evans of translating Strauss has been variously described. Without explicit reference to archival materials or correspondence, Levine calls it a 'loss of faith',[205] Paris calls it pantheism,[206] and Dolin identifies it as atheism.[207] Felicia Bonaparte stands out in her extravagance of assertion, and in her reticence to explain it, although she is not isolated in her approach:

> For over a century Eliot's religion, her relationship to Christianity, has been the subject of much discussion and disagreement. **We have long known, of course, that throughout her adult life Eliot was an atheist**, but we have known also that her early Christian passions somehow found themselves into her fiction. Because Eliot was not generally given to inconsistency, this has disturbed us.[208]

Have 'we' long known this? The ongoing presence of Christian imagery and theology throughout Eliot's corpus—especially in the Berg notebook—is not really so opaque. Bonaparte's precision here is of a similar calibre to her assertion, later in her book that 'the mulberry, like all varieties of the fig, is a symbol of fertility and therefore a symbol of the Bacchus.'[209] Bonaparte goes on to posit that there was a decisive repudiation of faith that occurred during the Renaissance,[210] and that this was further reflected in Eliot's ostensible rejection of the Christian 'myth'. There was no ultimate repudiation of faith. Rather, the Renaissance marked a shift in discursive patterns around faith, but this can just as easily be argued as a reform of religious chicanery and thus a purification of religion, within the Hegelian process of the refinement of religion towards embodied, experiential truth (see chapter nine).

Descriptions of Eliot as 'atheist' have very broadly echoed Lord David Cecil's assertion in his 1934 *Early Victorian Novelists* (republished 1966), that Evans was 'not

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[204] John Neufeldt and Victor Pratt, 'Introduction,' in *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks: A Transcription* (California: University of California Press, 1979).
[205] George Levine, "Introduction: George Eliot and the Art of Realism," in George Levine (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.
[206] Paris, *Experiments in Life*, 11.
[207] Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165.
[208] Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (Great Britain: Harvester Press, 1979), 53-4.
[209] Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross*, 64. Mulberries are frequently associated with Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, as they do not bloom until the first frost has passed, thus showing patience preceding fruitfulness. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Pyramus and Thisbe suicide under a mulberry tree, their blood staining the fruit red. It is not reasonable to reduce the mulberry to a Bacchanalian symbol in the way that Bonaparte has here. It seems respectful to assume that Bonaparte is not asserting that mulberries are a kind of fig.
[210] Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross*, 65.

religious' after 'the progress of thought and discovery to her made it impossible to believe.'[211] The vast majority of Eliot biographers have ratified this assumption, most centrally Rosemary Ashton and those who have drawn on her biographical work:

> The Strauss was George Eliot's first published work, and undoubtedly the discipline of translating such a scholarly work on such a subject completed her break with religious orthodoxy. But it is likely that Spinoza was at least as important in her 'conversion to disbelief.'[212]

'Orthodoxy', like 'atheism' has meant vastly different things at different times in history and within different groups of people. Some of Ashton's more moderate statements are more authoritative:

> Even in her earlier days of strict Evangelical piety she felt it no sin to read and enjoy German texts, as well as that most 'German' of English texts, *Sartor Resartus*, though she did warn a friend to whom she recommended it that it was not 'orthodox'. Almost inevitably her mental shift from Evangelicalism to free-thinking was connected to her German reading.[213]

Others approach the question with more nuance, recognising that Eliot's contributions were made as part of 'a process of revisioning religious beliefs, experience, and consciousness in the context of scientific discoveries.'[214] Hodgson makes a similar assertion in his 1973 editor's introduction to Strauss' *Life of Jesus*,[215] reaffirming his position in his 2001 book on theology in the novels of George Eliot.[216] Hodgson and Orr both call the paradigm shift of the author's early twenties a transition between faith approaches: Hodgson towards pluralism in *The Mystery Beneath the Real*, and Orr positing Christian existentialism resonating substantively with that of Kierkegaard.[217]

I categorise faith approaches and ideologies according to behavioural and epistemological descriptors, as they occur within communal lived experience. I defer to

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[211] Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London: Constable and Co., 1966 [1934]), 302. Cecil also asserts that 'George Eliot, though she was a thinker, was not a particularly original thinker,' on page 301. His confidence is extravagant.
[212] Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 157. Ashton is quoting Schaffer's *Kubla Khan*, not Eliot. It strikes me as conspicuous that if such a statement were fitting and in line with Eliot's own position, there would be at least some appropriate quotes in Eliot's own words. The matter is most surely more complex.
[213] Ashton, *The German Idea*, 147.
[214] Orr, *Theopoetics of Evolution*, 5.
[215] Peter Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," in David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Fortress Press, 1973), xlviii.
[216] Peter Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: SCM Press, 2001).
[217] Orr does not trace any real textual link between Eliot and Kierkegaard. Like Orr, I see thinkers who naturally resonate with Eliot's contribution. The most striking thread extends out through Leo Tolstoy, whose 1894 book, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* deeply impacted Gandhi, and from there reverberated throughout many social awarenesses centred on enfranchisement, collaboration, and solidarity within diversity. See Martin Green, "Foreword," in Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), v.

Eliot's awareness of the 'Phantasmal flux of moments'[218] that comprise each person's construction of their sense of identity, and take care not to reduce her contributions to the saved/unsaved conservative binary (posited by Finney and contemporaries) from which she sought to extricate herself. Eliot's understanding of experience and cognition, and the impact of sympathetic relational connections, never reads as far from her commentary on religion. She writes about secularity in religious terms, and religion in social terms, in *Middlemarch*. Searching for a neat category or an appropriated orthodoxy in either her secularism or her approach to religion is a slippery undertaking. From her time in Coventry onwards, she held the two together in tension, including in her Strauss translation.

This translation was published by John Chapman, of London, in 1846. Following this boost, the tone of her writings changes dramatically, and a temporary window opens up in her thought and discourse displaying vivacity and freedom of engagement with a very wide breadth of ideas, without the sympathetic moderation characteristic of her writing at other times. The tone of Evans' early letters to Sibree was exuberant: the most bombastic of all her letters is written to Sibree on February 11th, 1848,[219] clearly demonstrating her early ideas about blackness and Judaism at length (photographs of this letter are in the appendix, as it is such an anomalous piece of writing that it seems important to substantiate its contents). Her words are shocking, considering her later contributions to equality and inclusivity. The letter, held at the Berg Archive in New York, is taped inside an early edition of *Silas Marner*: the tone of the two texts contrasts sharply. Some excerpts, from the letter:

> I am glad you detest Mrs. Hannah More's letters. I like neither her letters, nor her books, nor her character. She was that most disagreeable of all monsters, a blue-stocking—a monster that can only exist in a miserably false state of society, in which a woman with but a smattering of learning or philosophy is classed along with singing mice and card playing pigs...
>
> 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. Looking at the matter aesthetically, our ideal of beauty is never formed on the characteristics of a single race. I confess the types of the 'pure races,' however handsome, always impress me disagreeably—there is an undefined feeling that I am looking not at *man* but at a specimen of an order under Cuvier's class, Bimana. The negroes certainly puzzle me—all the other races seem plainly destined to extermination or fusion not excepting even the "Hebrew-Caucasian." But the negroes are too important physiologically and geographically for one to think of their

[218] George Eliot, "I Grant You Ample Leave," [1874] *The Complete Shorter Poetry of George Eliot* (London: Routledge, 2005), 119.
[219] Eleven days before the eruption of riots that marked the French Revolution of 1848.

> extermination, while the repulsion between them and the other races seems too strong for fusion to take place to any great extent.
>
> On one point I heartily agree with D'Israeli as to the superiority of the Oriental races—their clothes are beautiful and ours are execrable… My gentile nature kicks most resolutely against any assumption of superiority in the Jews, and is almost ready to echo Voltaire's vituperation. I bow to the supremacy of Hebrew poetry, but much of their early mythology and almost all their history is utterly revolting. Their stock has produced a Moses and a Jesus, but Moses was impregnated with Egyptian philosophy and Jesus is venerated and adored by us only for that wherein he transcended or resisted Judaism. 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.[220]

It would have been most satisfying for this letter to be found in a copy of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's last realist novel, given Eliot's tender (and somewhat idealised) representations of Judaism later in her life. It must suffice that it demonstrates the vast shifts that this young woman underwent in her trajectory towards her latter novels and their humanising, sympathetic representations of diversity.

These sympathetic impulses were present in the young Evans, despite the incompleteness of her *Bildung*, and her Christology remained central to her evaluations of the European revolutions of 1848, also articulated to Sibree, in a letter dated the 8th of March:

> Write and tell you that I join you in your happiness about the French Revolution? Very fine, my good friend. If I made you wait for a letter as long as you do me, our little échantillon[221] of a Millennium would be over… I am all the more delighted with your enthusiasm because I didn't expect it. I feared that you lacked revolutionary ardour. But no—you are just as sansculottish[222] and rash as I would have you… I thought we had fallen on such evil days that we were to see no really great movement—that ours was what St. Simon calls a purely *critical* epoch, not at all an organic one—but I begin to be glad of my date. I would consent, however, to have a year clipt off my life for the sake of witnessing such a scene as that of the men of the barricade bowing to the image of Christ "who first taught fraternity to men."[223]

Bodenheimer's *Real Life of Mary Ann Evans* isolates this tonal phase of her letters as an anomaly. Evans' later reactions against the destructive potential of scholarly arrogance and its social impact were consistent and emphatic throughout the rest of her writing.

April of 1848 marked the beginning of the last year of Robert Evans' life, and Mary Ann laid aside all other activities to focus on supporting him in his

> severe illness and increased dependency… Her need to act out the full meaning of her Holy War in self-sacrificial responsibility for her father is indicated by the intensity of her immersion in this task and by the severe repression of her own intellectual and emotional life. The spiritual self-discipline of the Evangelical years was renewed and refurbished in Mary Ann's

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[220] George Eliot, *ALS to John Sibree, Inserted in Eliot, George. Silas Marner. Edinburgh & London, 1861*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription:
[221] French. Specimen; sample.
[222] In revolutionary France, a *Sanscullotte* was a revolutionary or republican within the working poor.
[223] Eliot, "GE to John Sibree, Jnr., [Foleshill, 8 March 1848]," in Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters: 1836-1851*, 252-3.

> struggle against the threats to her own mental and physical health which she invited by taking the full burden of nursing upon herself.[224]

Caring for her father during this last year nourished a sense of resolution in Mary Ann as he neared death. She articulates this in a letter to Charles Bray:

> Strange to say I feel that these will ever be the happiest days of 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 humans.[225]

As Bodenheimer identifies, Mary Ann's capacity for sacrificial, sympathetic deferral of her own needs and comfort represented a kind of ascetic exile from the relationships and progressive collaborations that had come to sustain and enliven her. Her spirituality and morality bore vindicating fruit: she was free to move forward out of this isolating wilderness, with confidence in her own discretion and internal compass, but also having worn off some of the sharpness and brassiness arising after the publication of *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*.

The attention of both the young Mary Ann Evans and the older novelist, George Eliot, was absorbed by the quiet internal revolution, carried by the complexities of close interpersonal relationships. Throughout 1848, the broader composite shifts associated with the revolutions that swept Europe nonetheless commenced on similar grounds, precipitated by collective—yet diverse—awareness of the individual's capacity to self-define, outside of historically established systems. Evans had nursed her father as an act of dedication and piety, self-realising through her *kenosis*[226]: simultaneously Christ-like and free-thinking; creatively self-determining.

The formative shifts that resulted from each of these early experiences were not instantaneous in their effects, but rather were contextualised and interpreted on reflection.[227] Bodenheimer notes this principle in Eliot's novels: 'Memory itself, so frequently invoked or described as a moral activity in its own right, is an actor in this drama. In the careers of George Eliot's good characters, liberation, followed by flight, is succeeded by the critical turn.'[228]

Following Robert's death on May 13th, 1849, Mary Ann travelled in June to stay with the Brays in Europe.[229] This journey provided a time to reflect and organise the intense shifts

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[224] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans,* 80.
[225] Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, [Foleshill, May 1849]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 283-84.
[226] Greek. Self-emptying, used to refer to the incarnation of Christ.
[227] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 84.
[228] Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans*, 83.
[229] Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot* (London: Virago Pioneers, 1987), xiv.

that had occurred in the preceding years. She stayed on her own in Geneva for a time with the painter François D'Albert Durade and his wife, changing her name first to 'Marianne' and then 'Marian'.[230] This period of reflection and self-definition marked a confluence of the intellectual energy demonstrated in her letters to Sibree, with the sympathetic vigil she held for her father in his final illness. This confluence resulted in a New-Hegelian type of awareness of the historical flux within doctrine and belief: Mary Ann Evans recognised the sincerity of her father's belief, holding this in tension with her experiences of the complexities of religiosity, and the inevitable distinction between world-view and praxis.

Evans' review of Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect* begins with broad endorsement of Mackay's contribution, which alludes to her own position at that time. She was invited to undertake the review on her return to Coventry in October of 1850, where she was visited by John Chapman and Mackay.[231] The review, in contextualising Mackay, acknowledges a Hegelian sense of historical trajectory in doctrine and religious thought, which resonated with Evans' earlier reading and translation. Mackay, we read, traces the progress of the intellect according to the following chapter delineations: 'Ancient Cosmogony; the Metaphysical Idea of God; the Moral Notion of God; the Theory of Mediation; the Hebrew Theory of Retribution and Immortality; the Messianic History; Christian Forms and Reforms; and Speculative Christianity'.[232]

Thus, these experiences and reflections in Coventry soon bore out in Evans' written works. She identifies many attributes of Mackay's thought that resonate with her deeply. She observes, early in the essay:

> Each age and each race has a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and its stage of development, and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms of the past, is as futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul.[233]

This diversity of faiths is certainly rendered in *Middlemarch,* as each character lives out a unique sense of the divine/ideal that is extrapolated from their experience of life: Reverend Camden Farebrother is anomalous in his flexibility of movement across and between paradigms of thought, in a similar way to Eliot herself. This facility enables Farebrother to connect sympathetically with the breadth of Middlemarch society. This idea of sympathy

[230] Uglow, *George Eliot*, xiv.
[231] Uglow, *George Eliot*, xiv.
[232] George Eliot, "R.W. Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect (1851)," in Rosemary Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 20.
[233] Eliot, "R.W. Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect," 19.

arising from cognitive flexibility and mobility reappears throughout all phases of Marian's writing from the years in Coventry onwards, resonating with her early engagement with Hegel and his successors, including Strauss.

Conclusion

Ashton's assertion of a move away from theism is understandable, in that the naturalistic, scientific, materialist liberalism of *The Westminster Review* and the community surrounding it—and its beginning in Unitarianism—left little space for the style of religiosity that depended on legalistic appraisal of moral failures and successes as the sole measure of a person's value. Certainly, no faith of this kind could be readily reconciled with the inequalities inherent to the social systems that Evans lived within, be that in her family relationships, or the sweeping currents in which she submerged her writing life. So, in this regard, assertion of a 'theistic' origin of natural events was understandably unsuitable, due to the absence of any magical and just resolution to these confronting inequalities and difficulties. Ashton's assertion, following on from Lord David Cecil, that this 'Atheism' commenced with Evans' translation of Strauss and her introduction to materialist philosophy in the early 1840s in Coventry appears to overlook Evans' conscientious efforts not to jettison faith entirely. Rather, Evans reconfigured her explorations outside of Evangelical frameworks, and outside of the social regulatory structures ratified in the faith community she left, to her family's disapproval. In both faith settings, a theistic belief system prevailed, which came to be understood by Evans to be about things other than charismatic, supernatural revelation of the Holy Spirit, despite the assertions commonly made in those contexts. Evans' earnest search for the revelation and surety promised in these traditions was undoubtedly frustrated, and she found solace with communities and thinkers that made space for this ambiguity and the associated intellectual journey within that silence.

This approach to the study of religion as ideas-in-flux certainly unnerved those thinkers who preferred to consider their faiths as a collective expression of one static, stable connection to absolute, unchanging truth. Such an approach is expressed by Mrs Farebrother, mother of the Reverend Farebrother, in *Middlemarch*:

> I say, keep hold of a few plain truths, and make everything square with them. When I was young, Mr Lydgate, there was never any question about right and wrong. We knew our catechism, and that was enough; we learned our creed and our duty. Every respectable church person had the same opinions. But, now if you speak out of the prayer book itself you are

> liable to be contradicted… I shall never disrespect my parents, to give up what they taught me. Any one may see what comes of turning. If you change once, why not twenty times?[234]

For the writers undertaking more exploratory, free-thinking modes of religious exploration, and who were less afraid of turning, of revolution, this openness and rigour of thought was a matter of spiritual integrity that was indispensable to a genuine exploration of the divine.

Evans' explorations fit into this category, as she sought to continue the process of earnest inquiry that she embarked on in 1841 in Coventry, and it is thus inaccurate to categorise these explorations as a loss of faith. Nonetheless, her awareness of the rift it created with her father was still present in her explorations within *Middlemarch* in the early 1870s, as demonstrated in the quote above. Evans further reinforces this commitment to open inquiry in her description of Mackay's faith, which she endorses earlier in the review:

> It is Mr Mackay's faith that divine revelation is not contained exclusively or pre-eminently in the facts and inspirations of any one age or nation, but is co-extensive with the history of human development, and is perpetually unfolding itself to our widened experience and investigation, as firmament upon firmament becomes visible to us in proportion to the power and range of our exploring instruments. The master key to this revelation, is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world—of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics and our religion… every past phase of human development is part of that education of the race in which we are sharing… **A correct generalization gives significance to the smallest detail**.[235]

Thus, in coming to explore her faith within the free-thinking community, Mary Ann Evans engaged in a broad and open exploration of real experiences, real relationships, and real social systems. It became expedient to broaden her circles and scholarship by moving to London in January 1851 to board with her publisher, John Chapman, to continue this process.

[234] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Penguin, 1980 [1871-2]), 200.
[235] Eliot, "The Progress of the Intellect," 21. Emphasis added.

6. The Word made Flesh: David Strauss and the Embodiment of Progress

> In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly on the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision.[236]

Introduction

David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach were, as theologians, classed as *Staatsdiener*.[237] Their state-endorsed roles were to engage in theological reflection and writing, to provide cultural guidance in support of the close relationship between church and state in Germany. Inconveniently for this state apparatus, Strauss posited that the gospels were narratives imbued with mythological functions, rather than inerrant divine utterances. His contemporaries reacted strongly against his work, and his classification as heterodox at that time has stuck, persisting into current theological language. Nonetheless, he valued biblical narratives, without needing them to be literally true in every sense. Keck observes that *The Life of Jesus* was 'the last theological book to have excited the whole culture' and that after its publication, 'the orthodox defended a ghetto they did not recognize, and the mediators built bridges which stood on but one side of the stream because the secular world was no longer interested.'[238] Mary Ann Evans translated Strauss' *Life of Jesus* in her early twenties, as I described in chapter five. Biblical scholars of diverse persuasions have continued to build on Strauss about the nature, authorship, and content of the biblical gospels, even as his work remains taboo for many theologically educated Christians.

This chapter explores the systems and experiences within which Strauss wrote *The Life of Jesus*. He transgressed the limits of his social role in writing it, and discussion of its import, therefore, cannot be limited to what occurs within the text. In understanding what it meant for Strauss to write this book in its various editions, we can far better understand what Evans was choosing in translating it, and its social impact both in Germany and beyond. The

[236] George Eliot, *Romola* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 309.
[237] German. 'Servant of the State' or public servant. See also chapter four.
[238] Leander Keck, "Editor's Introduction," in David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's The Life of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), lxxxvi.

plurality of experiences of his readers functions similarly to the plurality of definitions of Evans' transitions. What some view as an emancipation and a disenchantment, others view as dangerous deviation from a divinely established social order.

Eliot's Realism, Strauss' Polemics, and Bakhtin's Dialogical Imagination

There is consensus that an important transition occurred in Evans' early twenties, during her time in Coventry, which was precipitated by new texts and new relationships. These transitions permeate Evans' letters, poetry, and essays. They inform her exploration of diverse faith approaches, temperaments, and personal situations in her realist fiction. She was deeply committed to understanding other voices before venturing her own, and this is shown throughout her corpus. This trait, in both her reading and her relationships, enabled her to become conversant in diverse thought-systems and cultural paradigms. This extends to their intersections and dynamics within society, especially politics,[239] economics,[240] and religious doctrines and observances.[241] Eliot's fiction couples this awareness with a melioristic impulse that invites her readers to adopt similarly perceptive faculties, towards collaboration. Marian Lewes wrote to a friend, in 1879, that 'The best history of a writer is

[239] George Eliot, "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt, (Blackwood's Magazine, 1868) in *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1884), 322-351. See also Alain Barrat, "George Eliot's Mixed Vision of Human Progress in Silas Marner: A Pessimistic Reading of the Novel," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* 35, (1992); Colene Bentley, "Democratic Citizenship in Felix Holt," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 24, no.3 (2002): 271-89; Rita Bode, "Power and Submission in Felix Holt, the Radical," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 35, no.4 (1995): 769-88; Rob Breton, "The Thrill of the Trill: Political and Aesthetic Discourse in George Eliot's Armgart," *Victorian Review: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Victorian Studies* 35, no1 (2009): 116-31; John Lamb, "To Obey and to Trust: Adam Bede and the Politics of Deference," *Studies in the Novel* 34, no.3 (2002): 264-81; Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "Why Political Novels Have Heroines: Sybil, Mary Barton, and Felix Holt," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 18, no.2 (1985): 223-41.

[240] Kathleen Blake, "Between Economies in The Mill on the Floss: Loans versus Gifts; of, Auditing Mr. Tulliver's Accounts," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33, no.1 (2005): 219-37; Ilana Blumberg, "'Love Yourself as Your Neighbour': The Limits of Altruism and the Ethics of Personal Benefit in Adam Bede," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37, no.2 (2009): 543-60;

[241] George Eliot, "J.A. Froude's The Nemesis of Faith," and "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming," in Rosemary Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 15-17; 138-170. See also Martin Bidney, "Scenes of Clerical Life and Trifles of High-Order Clerical Life: Satirical and Empathic Humor in George Eliot," *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 36-7, (1999), 1-28; Mary Wilson Carpenter, "The Apocalypse of the Old Testament: Daniel Deronda and the Interpretation of Interpretation," *PMLA* 99, no.1 (1984): 56-71; Melora Giardetti, "How Does Your Garden Grow?: Plants, Gardens, and Doctrines in George Eliot's Silas Marner," *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 48-9, (2005): 27-32; Cynthia Scheinberg, "The Beloved Ideas Made Flesh: Daniel Deronda and Jewish Poetics," *ELH* 77, no.3 (2010): 813-39. For background on "Evangelical Teaching," particularly, see Robert Ellison and Carol Engelhardt, "Prophecy and Anti-Popery in Victorian London: John Cumming Reconsidered," *Victorian Literature and Culture*31, no.1 (2003): 373-89.

contained in his writings—these are his chief actions.'[242] This chapter primarily examines Strauss' history, both textually and biographically, to qualify comparison of his approach with Eliot's. The primary difference between Strauss and Eliot is Eliot's exceptional capacity to accessibly convey the substance of progress within social settings, rather than dogmatically. This fundamental difference in tone defined the reception of their writing, as well as their experiences of social connection.

Eliot was well abreast of social and political theory and events, both contemporary and historical, even once she was writing fiction. Nineteenth-century scientific developments rapidly changed perceptions of human responsibility, potential, and capacities. These negotiations had previously been in the realm of theological and political polemics, and these shifts precipitated fundamental renegotiations of previously accepted social roles and hierarchies. Eliot insistently contextualises historical and social considerations, while actively opposing the privileging of one perspective or set of experiences (see chapter seven). Holquist's paraphrase of Bakhtin is apposite to her undertaking:

> Heteroglossia is Bakhtin's primary way of referring, in any utterance of any kind, to the peculiar interaction between the two fundamentals of all communication. On the one hand, a mode of transcription must, in order to do its work of separating out texts, be a more or less fixed system. But these repeatable features, on the other hand, are in the power of the particular context in which the utterance is made; **this context can refract, add to, or, in some cases, even subtract from the amount and kind of meaning the utterance may be said to have when it is conceived only as a systematic manifestation independent of context**.
>
> This extraordinary sensitivity to the immense plurality of experience more than anything else distinguishes Bakhtin from other moderns who have been obsessed with language. I emphasize experience here because Bakhtin's basic scenario for modelling variety is two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time and in a particular place… **each of the two persons would be a consciousness at a specific point in the history of defining itself through the choices it has made—out of all the possible existing languages available to it at that moment—of a discourse to transcribe its intention *in this specific exchange*.**[243]

This sense of plurality offers potential for interpersonal collaboration across difference, and is essentially what is missing, in Strauss. Despite his ground-breaking and intrepid sense of religion-in-the-world (including its pitfalls), his intention of regenerating the faith was not effected as he intended, and he suffered an enormous amount of collateral damage to his relationships, his career, and the sacred texts of his more innocently faithful readers. Strauss' hope was that *The Life of Jesus* would provide mechanisms for people of faith to also connect

[242] As cited in Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (London: Cornell UP, 1994), xiii.
[243] Michael Holquist, "Introduction," in Michael Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xix-xx.

with the material histories of the origins of their sacred texts, and thereby exercise rationality in connecting them with their ways of living.

This chapter considers the violent critical reception of Strauss' polemic, *The Life of Jesus*, alongside its biographical origins, to evaluate its formal efficacy. Translating this book confronted Mary Ann Evans with the gap between Strauss' intention and his reception. In becoming George Eliot, she demonstrated a commitment to accessibility that is lacking in Strauss' writing, and this resulted in vastly different textual impacts.

Strauss' Schismatic *Bildung*

David Friedrich Strauss was born on January 27, 1808 in Ludwigsburg, near Stuttgart, Germany.[244] He was 'hounded' by misfortune and unhappiness, and attributed his 'total lack of joy in life' to his conception during the mourning period for his eight-year-old brother.[245] Strauss' sister had already died before this brother, and one of his younger brothers also died. His father was a merchant who, like David, struggled to adapt contextually: 'after the defeat of Napoleon, lowered tariffs made English goods cheaper on the continent and the elder Strauss, as stubborn as his son was to be, refused to lower prices on merchandise already stocked, and so ceased to be competitive.'[246]

Physical frailties obstructed the young Strauss—'Fritz', to his family—from full participation in play and other social activities. Like Evans, he immersed himself in scholastic activities during his childhood,[247] developing a keen poetic awareness. At thirteen, he performed very strongly in his scholarship examinations, which 'involved translating German into Latin, Greek, and Hebrew as well as composing Latin verses.'[248] Keck and Hodgson both depict Strauss as a melancholy and isolated child, who gravitated towards religious observances.[249] Fabisiak attributes a fascination with morbidity, hauntings and the paranormal to Strauss, which permeated his spiritual attentions and reflections. These three versions of Strauss all gesture towards an unwillingness to sidestep uncomfortable contradictions. In this, Strauss was driven by what Hegel referred to as the 'unhappy thirst'

[244] Peter Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," in David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1973), xix.
[245] David Friedrich Strauss, *Ausgewählte Briefe von David Friedrich Strauss* [Selected Letters from David Friedrich Strauss] (Bonn, Germany: Emil Strauss, 1895), 84.
[246] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xix.
[247] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xx.
[248] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xx.
[249] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xx.

for understanding, even when that came at a relational cost.[250] Eliot did not feel so compelled to choose between the two, in her own writing and relationships, though both writers upset their fathers by maintaining dissenting religious views (see also chapter five).

Strauss studied at the Blaubeuren Protestant school from the age of thirteen, until he was seventeen (1821-1825). Hodgson identifies this study as part of the ordinary education for young men preparing for ministry, while Keck describes the setting as 'isolated and cheerless' where 'pretheological students wore black.'[251] Here, Strauss studied under Ferdinand Christian Baur, who 'remained his most influential teacher.'[252] Baur provided Strauss' initial grounding on myth and antiquity, publishing *Symbolik und Mythologie, oder die Naturreligion des Altertums*[253] in 1824-5, in two volumes). Strauss expressed his esteem for Baur along similar lines to Evans' respect for her mentor, Maria Lewis.

In 1825 Strauss moved to Tübingen to commence his university education, studying philosophy, philology and history for two years, followed by three years of 'pure' (systematic) theology. This time in Tübingen was fundamentally formative, despite his boredom with the curriculum. His extracurricular reading and social connections familiarised him with romantic and esoteric thinkers, especially the mysticism of Jakob Böhme. These studies helped him understand earlier experiences of folk-belief and the paranormal, offsetting their absence his university curriculum.

Strauss' reading during the 1820s focussed on Friedrich W.J. Schelling, who emphasised themes of revelation and mythology. Strauss reflected deeply on the contrasts between his experiences and the religious texts and traditions that he studied. In this sense, he was driven to compare his muddied experiences of revelation with the hegemonic Christian *mythos* that he studied. He continued to do very well academically, and received a prize in 1828 for an essay he wrote for the Catholic theological faculty, '*De Resurrection Carnis*' [The bodily resurrection]. This success was dissonant with his private views, which he conveyed in a letter to a fellow ordinand, Friedrich Vischer:

> Mit der Chronologie der geistigen Entwicklung, aus welcher Du mich fragt, ist es eine schwierige Sache. Ganz klar sehe ich nicht mehr hinein. Nur so viel weiβ ich, daβ ich neben Böhme und Schelling auch noch Franz Baader las, und dessen aphoristische Gedanken, wie in

[250] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel* [Letters from and to Hegel], (Leipzig: Meiner Verlag, 1977 [1785-1812]), 168.
[251] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xx. I have not come across any objections within Strauss' writing as to his attire, or any references to whether he was entertained in this context. This suggests that Hodgson exercised some degree of poetic licence, which seems a tepid substitute for more writing a more direct biographical account.
[252] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xx.
[253] German. 'Symbolism and Mythology, or the Natural Religion of Antiquity'.

> Fett gebratene Schwämme in den Ratten, in mir ausquellen lieβ. Ein Catholische Breisaufgabe, die ich 28 machte, war vielleicht die erste Wedepunkt. Ich bewies exegetisch und naturphilosophisch mit voller Uberzeugung die Auserstehung der Todten, und als ich das leβte Punktum machte, war mich klar, daβ an der ganzen Geschichte nichts sei.[254]
>
> With regards to the chronology of the intellectual development, about which you asked me: it is a difficult thing. I don't see it clearly anymore. I only know, that in addition to Böhme and Schelling[255], I read Franz Baader, and his aphoristic ideas, like fat-fried fungi to a rat,[256] were released into me. A Catholic prize, that I won in '28, was perhaps the first turning-point. I demonstrated—using exegesis and natural philosophy—great conviction regarding the resurrection of the dead, and as I formed the final full-stop, it became clear to me that there is nothing in the whole story.[257]

Strauss was not able to resolve this dissonance. His theological education was peppered with displacement and exclusion throughout his life, despite his professed objectives to be useful and honest in his contributions. He was becoming sceptical of the dogmatic propositions that were considered integral to his vocation. His expression that Baader's scholastic aphorisms were like rat-poison to him is a potent statement of his reaction against propositional religious statements that lacked positive evidence in lived experience.

However, Strauss' experiences could not furnish him with the clean, elegant atheism that is sometimes attributed to him by Eliot biographers, most pointedly Ashton and Bonaparte. These scholars were working from earlier Strauss biographies, but Thomas Fabisiak's new research (which makes strong use of Strauss' untranslated German writing) does not leave space for such a characterisation. In the Spring of 1827, Strauss travelled to

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[254] David Strauss to Friedrich Vischer, 8th February 1838. See Strauss, *Ausgewählte Briefe von David Friedrich Strauss,* 51-2.

[255] There is a reasonable case to be made for the placement of Baader and Böhme at opposing ends of a spectrum. Jakob Böhme was a 16th and early 17th century Lutheran mystic who, following several visions, led a life of challenge and alienation due to suspicion of his professed experiences, particularly his hometown. His followers, the Behmenists, represent one of the earlier theosophical movements, wherein individual revelation via visions and other spiritual experiences are celebrated as central means of knowing spiritual realities. Over the subsequent centuries, theosophical groups and societies continued to present in Germany and nearby countries, and Böhme's work was a precursor to much of the spiritualist thought and practice that maintained Strauss' interest during his lifetime. The most well-known theosophist of the nineteenth century, Madame Blavatsky, came to be extremely influential, particularly in Kerala, India, where she had a close relationship with Ghandi, who is reported to have described theosophical belief—with religious pluralism held as a central belief—as the truest form of Hinduism.

In contrast, Franz Baader was a scholastic writer whose contributions consisted of heavily abstracted aphorisms that sought to reduce experience—especially religious life and the resultant moral imperatives—back to key 'wisdom' statements that he considered universally applicable. See also chapter four.

[256] An entry in Johann Georg Krünitz's *Ökonomische Encyklopädie* suggests that this would be referring to rat-poison. See "Maus," in *Ökonomische Encyklopädie, oder Allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt- Haus- U. Landwirtschaft, in Alphabetischer Ordnung*. (Germany: Universitätsbibliothek Trier, 1876). This interpretation is speculative, as the meaning of the phrase is obscured by time. Fat-fried mushrooms are delicious to rats, at any rate.

[257] My translation.

Weinsberg to meet with the 'poet-Physician,'[258] Justinus Kerner.[259] Hodgson merely ventures that

> Kerner had under treatment a remarkable woman. Strauss was deeply affected by this and similar experiences, which were the source of his fascination with the cures of certain types of physical ailments by magnetic or hypnotic means—a fascination that was to play a fateful role in the third edition of *The Life of Jesus*.[260]

Hodgson otherwise resists description of Strauss' engagement with the paranormal, except where he touches on mesmerism and magnetism as Strauss' explanations for Jesus' miracles in *The Life of Jesus*. Fabisiak, in fundamental contrast to both Hodgson and Keck, describes this series of meetings in Weinsberg, where Strauss engaged attentively with Kerner's work with this 'remarkable woman':

> When he met Hauffe, she entered into a somnambulic trance and predicted that he would "never know unbelief." For Strauss, the experience was "incomparable": "I remember no similar moment in my life." He describes how her face underwent a "heavenly transfiguration" and how she spoke in the "most pure German"; when he gave her his hand, he felt as if his "entire mind and being lay open to her" and the floor fell out from under him.[261]

Fabisiak offers a far stranger and more complex Strauss, whose methods of exploration were not so unusual in his time:

> Romantic physicians appealed to both intuitive and empirical knowledge and emphasized obscure natural forces such as electricity and magnetism. Little understood phenomena like "animal magnetism" and "somnambulic" trances offered them access to the obscure workings of the human and divine spirit in nature and history. Along with many contemporary philosophers and theologians, they rejected the disjunctive tendencies of previous Enlightenment rationalism and materialism.[262]

In this regard, Franz Mesmer's (*b*.1734-*d*.1815) theory of animal magnetism proved

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[258] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xx.

[259] Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) and Eliot corresponded with each other from 1869 until Eliot's death in 1880. Harriet's husband, Calvin Stowe, was a Presbyterian minister. He relates having met Kerner also: 'As to my spiritualistic experiences, … From some well remembered circumstances in our family history, I know they began as early as 1806 when I was four years old, a quarter of a century before modern developments, & they have continued all my life long. I have had no connection with the modern movements… except as Father Confessor (as my wife well phrases it) to some friends who have been perplexed and alarmed. I hold still exactly the ground I have always held, and see no reason to change… Is it all subjective or is it partly objective. This is the question with me. I can not help thinking there is some objectivity about it, but just how much or how little I cannot determine. Or Justinus Kerner (with whom I had a long interview in his own Goblin Shop in Weinsberg) & his school are more to my taste than any others of modern times…' Calvin Stowe, *Stowe, C.E. ALS to George Eliot. Hartfield, Conn., May 30, 1869. 2l with AN from Harriet Beecher Stowe on the verso of the second leaf. H.*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. The Stowes addressed their letters to 'Mrs Lewes'.

[260] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xx.

[261] Strauss, *Zwei Friedliche Blätter* [Two Peaceful Letters], 18, as cited in Thomas Fabisiak, *The "Nocturnal Side of Science" in David Friedrich Strauss's Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. (Georgia: Emory University Graduate Division of Religion, 2015), 25.

[262] Thomas Fabisiak, *The 'Nocturnal Side of Science' in David Friedrich Strauss's Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Dissertation (Georgia: Emory University Graduate Division of Religion, 2015), 25.

especially useful for Strauss and many other nineteenth-century thinkers. Mesmer posited in the late eighteenth century that an ethereal fluid permeated the cosmos and the nervous systems of living creatures. He distinguished the organic 'animal magnetism' in living bodies from mineral magnetism. Sicknesses could be traced to a blockage in magnetic fluids, which could be resolved in turn through magnetic provocation of a 'crisis' in the patient. Mesmer asserted that because magnetic forces circulated through human bodies, doctors could heal people through mere physical contact. His treatments included 'magnetic passes', wherein the physician passes their hands over a patient to set magnetic forces in motion. Animal magnetism later became linked to hypnotic or 'somnambulic' trances in the clinical practices of the Puységur brothers, from 1784. They claimed that in the somnambulic state, patients could achieve clairvoyance. The magnetized individuals could, it was held, diagnose disease and prescribe treatments for themselves and others. [263] Such occurrences correlate with Feuerbach's statements on the miraculous—another theologian frequently described as 'atheist' without clarification. His writing does not leave space for such a simplistic categorisation:

> No miracle is wrought in cold blood. But it is precisely in moments of passion that the latent nature reveals itself. Man does not always pray with equal warmth and power... Man truly prays when he regards prayer as in itself a sacred power, a divine force. So it is with miracles. Miracles happen—no matter whether few or many—wherever there is, as a basis for them, a belief in the miraculous.[264]

Wherever a 'sacred power' or 'divine force' may reside—be that in a god responding to prayer, or within the prayer itself—these are not principles that can be readily attributed to someone who does not believe in divine intervention in the world. As such, *The Essence of Christianity* is a progressive theological work and not a secular atheist one, according to contemporary usage of the word 'atheist'.

The Seeress of Prevorst and Kerner's other works turned the study of somnambulic and magnetic phenomena toward more occult regions still, to the world of dead souls. Many notable figures—including sceptics like Hegel and Strauss—could accept elements of somnambulic prophecy or magnetic healing, but few were willing to brook Kerner's ideas about ghosts and demons. Strauss wrote of them as 'popular opinions from which the culture of our century has recoiled in terror once and for all; opinions with which… it was the pride of our fathers to have disposed, and which… it is now the endeavour of all rational educators

[263] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 33-4.
[264] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 194.

to expel from the youth'.[265] Strauss' interest in occult extracurricular pursuits waned to correspond with this position. In courses with Baur and others he fell gradually under the 'scientific spell,' of Schleiermacher's 'dialectics.' Schleiermacher posited that all phenomena must correspond to the existing world and fit within a coherent view of God and nature, or the infinite and finite[266] (Strauss' *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History* was a systematic response to Schleiermacher published in 1865).

Strauss would soon come into numerous points of conflict with Schleiermacher regarding the historicity and textuality of the gospels, which he articulated systematically in 1865. [267] Nonetheless, it was Schleiermacher's writing that first convinced Strauss to set his own scholarly perception above mystical experience and biblical authority.[268] When Hegel argued that philosophy and theology led to the same truths, for example, some conservative theologians took this to mean that Christian dogmas were philosophically true. Strauss, on the other hand, ultimately took it to mean that theology had to be translated— and dissolved—into the higher, scientific truths of philosophy.[269]

> Die gesunde und schöne Natur braucht, wie Sie selbst sagen, keine Moral, kein Naturrecht, keine politische Metaphysik: Sie hätten eben so gut auch hinzusetzen können, sie braucht keine Gottheit, keine Unsterblichkeit um sich zu stützen und zu halten.[270]
>
> As you have said yourself, Nature - healthy, robust and beautiful - does not depend on a morality, or on natural justice, or a political metaphysic: you could have said just as reasonably, that it does not require any Godhead or immortality to support and sustain it.[271]

Thus, the central undertaking of *The Life of Jesus* is exploration of the origins of the gospel accounts to disambiguate the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history, identifying cultural traditions, superstition and mesmeric (for Strauss, scientific, in light of the experiences I have touched on) causality as the propelling forces in these narratives.

Hodgson notes that Strauss' meeting with Frederika Hauffe during her treatment by Justinus Kerner was formative, as I have described above. Fabisiak ventures even further:

> A short time before, [Kerner] allowed a celebrated theologian to accompany him to the sick-bed of the Seeress of Prevorst. There he granted him permission to try exorcism upon her in his own way. Approaching her bed in a ceremonial posture, [the theologian] began his demystification

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[265] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 36.
[266] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 40.
[267] David Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus Series. Trans. Leander Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977 [1865]).
[268] Fabisiak. *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 40.
[269] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 40-1.
[270] Letter from Friedrich Schiller to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 9 July 1794, as cited in Gerlinde Röder-Bolton, "George Eliot and Goethe: An Elective Affinity," *Textxet: Studies in Comparative Literature* 13, (1998): 6.
[271] My translation.

> [*Entzauberung*] with this strange formula: "In the name of Reason, to which power is given over all spectres; in the name of Science [*Wissenschaft*] before whose light all deceptive images vanish; in the name of Christianity, which has purified the air of all evil spirits, I command you, demon who does not exist, depart from this sick woman!" She suddenly interrupted this solemn address and, in her crude Swabian dialect, she dealt the learned necromancer a flood of abuse, which included the delicate exclamation, "You human ass, you think I'm afraid of your filthy talk? Get out of here unless you want what's coming to you!" The noble exorcist hurried sheepishly away.[272]

Fabisiak, in his analysis of this passage, speculates that Krummacher (his source for this account) would name Strauss as this theologian, if pressed.[273] Fabisiak observes that for Strauss, 'demystification' was not so much a process of refuting superstitions and assertions of paranormal occurrences with scientific rationalism. Rather, Fabisiak posits that for Strauss, demystification was a 'derivative form of esoteric religious practices' resulting from the fact that at that time, the 'distinctions between religion, science, reason, and superstition at the time were flexible. The very notion of "disenchantment" was contested.'[274] Kerner's account of the occasion reports that the demon possessing the woman in his care responded to the 'respected scholar' with a series of insults and the objection that it was 'an evil thing, that he should be called a delusion and a non-entity.'[275]

Fabisiak asserts that these experiences impacted Strauss' understandings of Christ's healing of demon possession and physical illnesses, which he conveys in *The Life of Jesus*. He describes them as manifestations of hypnotic or magnetic healing. Fabisiak notes throughout his research on Strauss that medical and scientific discoveries deviated, increasingly, from established folklore, while still integrating practices and techniques that would now be classified more as spiritual activities than scientific/medical techniques. Diseases and problems that had previously been attributed to spiritual issues were increasingly shown to have physical origins, but artefacts of these earlier understandings remain within medical terminology, including the word 'occult' itself.[276] This was a time before ethics committees and duties of care, however, and scientific and medical processes included many practices that we would balk at today, many of which surged in England in 1858 after an act was passed insisting on the study of anatomy for two years before

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[272] Fabisiak is citing Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher, *An Autobiography*, trans. M. G. Easton (New York: Carter & Brothers, 1869), 208–9 (translation modified); trans. of *Eine Selbstbiographie* (Berlin: Wiegandt & Grieben, 1869), 166.
[273] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 7.
[274] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 3.
[275] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 2.
[276] In medicine, an 'occult' disease is one that is 'not accompanied by readily discernible signs or symptoms,' (Oxford English Dictionary).

certification as a medical practitioner.[277] These medical practices included coercive experiments, and dissections and autopsies on deceased poor people.[278] The linking of medical practice with occult practices in gothic texts alludes to the transgressive and taboo practices that were integral to medical and scientific exploration during the nineteenth century. Kerner was reportedly successful in his application of treatments that deviated from traditional exorcisms, and this also carried cultural baggage. It was not a neutral action, for a young theology student to visit such a place. The processes used by Kerner had more to do with spiritualism than they did with Christianity,[279] and as Strauss struggled to reconcile these diverse ways of knowing, he sought to find a workable synthesis through his writing. The perceived profanity of scientific inquiry in the nineteenth-century mind overlapped with the perceived profanity of Strauss' forensic approach to the gospels. In witnessing the supposed cure of the 'possession' of Frederika Hauffe, the young Strauss was confronted by the most tangible possible evidence for the limitations of his native religious paradigms. The intersection of Kerner's 'scientific' techniques with practices categorised by many Christians as occultist, further complicated Strauss' ruminative process.

Thus, for Strauss, demystification—including that of the type undertaken in *The Life of Jesus*—was essentially spiritual progress; a sign of spiritual growth and liberation that was, for him, the central power to be gained by attaining a 'true' view of religion. He understood Kerner's work with Hauffe as being effective due to the therapeutic conversations between the two of them, which delivered Hauffe of her illusions and misconceptions, thus purging her discomfort and illness. This sense of demystification also finds its way into Eliot's novels as a dimension of her *Bildungen*, when her characters move from torpor and blindness, to clear perception, thus growing towards regenerative, situationally appropriate agency.

Strauss continued his explorations within orthodox Christian contexts; and his writing continued to focus on the nature and teachings of Christ. Strauss confided in his friend,

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[277] Elizabeth Hurren, "Chalk on the Coffin: Re-Reading the Anatomy Act of 1832," in *Dying for Victorian Medicine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230355651_1 .

[278] See, for example, Kerr Dunn's book, *Mysterious Medicine*: *The Doctor-Scientist Tales of Hawthorne and Poe*, Literature and Medicine Series (USA: Kent State University Press, 2016), which discusses the links between medical practices and the Gothic.

[279] Justinus Kerner is also referenced in two letters from Calvin Ellis Stowe (Harriet Beecher Stowe's husband) to 'George Eliot', wherein he promotes Spiritualism to her as a scientifically verifiable spiritual reality. Calvin Stowe was a Presbyterian minister and professed no conflict between his Christian faith and his Spiritualist practices, which is notably different to mainstream Christian culture in our era. Harriet Beecher Stowe, his wife, went on to quite persistently promote Spiritualism to Eliot in her correspondences, which Eliot very courteously resisted, whilst empathically seeking to understand its significance for Stowe. These letters are stored together at the Berg Archive in New York.

Christian Märklin, in December of 1830:

> Bloβ das Allgemeinste der Vorstellung geben, hiesse gewiss auch den Begriff verfürzen, entweder extensiv, indem in den weggelassenen Theilen der Vorstellung noch Momente des Begriffs sterten könnten—oder doch intensiv, indem die Ausführung ins Einzelne die Lebendigkeit der Vorstellung erhöht, welche Lebendigkeit under Concreheit allein die Klarheit des Begriffes ersehen kann. Sagst Du aber: eben dieses ganze Spiel mit Vorstellung statt Begriff u. ist unehrlich, in sich wiedersprechend und muβ zu Grunde gehen, —so magst Du da nicht Unrecht haben, nur möchte ich Dir mit Hegel zurufen, daβ Du damit Prädicate ausgesprochen, die nicht besonders brandmarkende, sondern allgemeine aller Dinge sind. Offenbar ist es eine historische Nothwenidigkeit, daβ wir in diesem Zwiespalte sind, das is nich zu leugnen. Du sagst: allerdings, daβ wir im Allgemeinen, d. h. unsere Zeit, darein gekommen ist, das war nothwendig, aber wer kann den Einzelnen zwingen, darin zu bleiben?[280]

> To give the most broad sense of religious imagery would certainly also be to abbreviate the philosophical concept, either extensively (in that in the omitted parts of the idea, moments of the concept might), or intensively, (increasing the living detail of the religious image): only in clearly regarding this vivid, living detail can the philosophical concept can be seen clearly. You may well say that this whole game with religious imagery standing in for philosophical concepts is dishonest, self-contradictory and must go to ruin. You may not be wrong here, but I would appeal to you, using Hegel, that you are making objections about dynamics that are actually common to all things. Obviously it is a necessity that we face this dilemma at this particular time in history; this fact cannot be denied. You say, however, that in general, our time has come. This could not have been avoided, but who can compel the individual to remain in it?[281]

Märklin and Strauss were both newly-ordained Lutheran pastors, trying to make sense of their context and vocations. They valued the Christian symbols and traditions that they had been schooled in, yet struggled to find ways to teach faithfully for the benefit of their congregants. From the state's hegemonic perspective, the role of the *Staatsdiener* was to promote Christian orthodoxy within their communities, not to probe doctrine with disruptive, complicating questions. Strauss' honesty became very costly over time. In articulating both his faith and his doubts about Christian doctrines in his written works, Strauss was to come adrift from the institutions that provided for him.

During this time, he decided to pursue study directly under Schleiermacher and Hegel in Berlin, initially seeking to submit his essay on the resurrection of the flesh as his doctoral dissertation to qualify. Instead, he quickly wrote his doctoral dissertation, *The Doctrine of the Restoration of All Things in Its Religious-Historical Significance*, and received his diploma by mail in Berlin.[282] On the 15th of November, 1831, 'he presented himself to Schleiermacher, who told him that cholera had claimed Hegel the previous night.'[283] Strauss nonetheless gained a great deal from Hegel's widow, Marie, as well as Hegel's other students.

[280] David Strauss, *Ausgewählte Briefe*, ed. Eduard Zelle (Bonn: Strauss, 1895).
[281] My translation.
[282] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxiii.
[283] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxiii.

Hodgson describes this dissertation as 'the only extant piece of theological writing by Strauss prior to his *Life of Jesus*,'[284] and summarises its central argument:

> that the *apokatastasis tōn pantōn*, the restoration of all finite things to the creator, and the concomitant overcoming of the awareness of contradiction between finite and infinite spirit, must be *de-eschatologized*.[285] All religions have postponed this restoration to the distant future, including Christianity despite its own inner principle… [A]ccording to Schleiermacher, evil for God is essentially nothingness, nonexistent, rather than a quasi-personal agency (the devil) which could be vanquished only at the end of time in a cosmic struggle. "Therefore," continues Strauss, "the *apokstasis pantōn* for Schleiermacher is not something future but eternally present, and his restoration of all things means that the world in every moment is the best possible." The ambiguities in Schleiermacher were overcome by Hegel. "Hegel rightly denies that religion already provides the spiritual man with a present resolution of all the contradictions of his pious consciousness. **For many religions, as we have said, have postponed that resolution to the distant future; and he ascribes this [resolution] [sic] to the true philosophy, which, subjectively considered, is the restoration of all things**".[286]

This latter statement of faith on Strauss' part prefigured what Hodgson interprets as a later 'denial of the Christian faith,'[287] which arose, Hodgson asserts, out of the 'hidden motif' of 'the problem of eschatology' in *The Life of Jesus*, to be more fully asserted in the *Glaubenslehre* [Belief] and then, 'irrevocably' in *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube* [The Old and the New Faith]. Hodgson identifies, across these texts, a consistent rendering of religion and philosophy as irreconcilable; of religion as relating to a distant eschatological fulfilment, a penultimate *setting things right* at the end of time, and of philosophy as relating to the need to be fully present and dedicated to the inherent potential of each historical moment. The new faith was to be embodied, and this embodiment was to displace the old faith of notions and superstitions, many of which hindered the kind of situational and relational responsiveness that constitutes spiritual progress, for Eliot.

Embodying Progress

These ideas resonate with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, first published in 1807. They also resonate with Eliot's undertaking of practical philosophy in her writing. Her unification of philosophy and theology in *Middlemarch* thus closely follows what Strauss has posited. In harmony with both Strauss and Feuerbach, Eliot refuses to represent external, separate supernatural intervention as the means of progress and restoration. Rather, she points

[284] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xxi.
[285] 'Eschatology' refers to the conclusion, resolution, or culmination of history of a belief system. Christian eschatologies variously relate to the second coming of Christ as the fulfilment of God's work in the world. This work is what he is referring to as 'the restoration of all things.'
[286] This latter quote from Strauss is attributed by Hodgson to a quotation in *Die Lehre von der Wiederbringung aller Dinge* by Müller. "Editor's Introduction," xxi.
[287] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xxii.

insistently to the potential of human agency in community, as the pathway to embodying—rather than simply writing about—social progress. Eliot situates divine agency within individual human agency, in the form of compassion and collaboration, drawing on Feuerbach. Thus the divine life is the human life: they are one and the same, lived out in the common good. This sense of unity between these concerns fits very harmoniously in Hegel, Strauss, Feuerbach, and Eliot, further resonating in their textual receptions, where those texts were warmly received. Strauss' impact differed considerably from these other writers.

Strauss is known for what he disrupted, rather than what he built. Comparatively speaking, Strauss can, arguably, be read as a noble reclamation of agency for social progress, when held up against the aphoristic offerings of Franz Baader.[288] Baader attempted to reduce human experience and suffering to a series of principles and adages, somewhat similar to the biblical book of Proverbs. This extremity in religious thought that positioned morality as a set of behavioural boxes to tick, in order to release the providence of God. Strauss also directly opposes Christianities that displace human agency while centralising divine agency as the source of 'the restoration of all things', and this aversion may have contributed to Eliot's representations of providence and privilege in her novels. Eliot was especially critical of the conflation of patriarchal power with divine providence, in her novels, and I attend to this in detail in chapter seven. However, it is simplistic to equate any of these conflations with Christian perspectives in general. Rather, Strauss' implicit call to embody progress within human behaviour was a corrective to contemporary passive deference to Germany's religious hegemony. This corrective is echoed in the more pragmatic and functionally prescriptive offerings of Marx and Engels, who are also part of the legacy of this stream of German thought in the nineteenth century. The impacts of these events are complex, to say the least, but are not the focus of this thesis, except in the interesting contrasts between Marx and Engel's sense of revolutionary solutions to social issues, and Eliot's far gentler project of social meliorism.

Strauss' dissertation was not rationalistic in the manner that is customary in our era, neither was it a work that would be formally familiar for contemporary theologians. There was no dichotomy between religion and philosophy in Strauss' dissertation; neither was there between supernaturalism and rationalism. Rather than emphasising Hegel's contribution, he

[288] Baader (1765-1841) was a Catholic layman who became an influential mystic. In his writing, he expressed himself primarily in aphorisms which, as I discussed above, Strauss compared to rat poison in their effect on him. These aphorisms were neither systematic nor linked with lived experience, and as such, were maximally speculative.

focussed on Friedrich Schelling, and on the German mystics (Böhme, Ötinger, and von Baader). The collective thrust of these thinkers was towards theosophical thought, which emphasises personal spiritual experience as the most authoritative way to know spiritual realities. This corresponded, functionally, to Strauss' rejection of a deferred eschatology, as I have described above, but also decisively situated him within Christian heterodoxy. Strauss' search for immediacy in his lived spiritual experiences—some of which were extreme (for example those at the house of Justinus Kerner)—translated to a correspondingly embodied search for collective spiritual progress towards social regeneration. He became increasingly distant from the central doctrines of state religion that he was ordained by the state to mediate to his parish. However, at that point, those deviations had escaped the notice of the rest of the theological cohort that had been ordained for this function.

'Hegel found his expositor and enthusiastic advocate'[289] when Strauss returned to Tübingen to lecture. Strauss flourished in this setting, teaching for three semesters before devoting himself entirely to writing the first volume of *The Life of Jesus*:

> Strauss refocused the issues in German Protestant theology. Not that what he said was wholly new—as his introduction shows, many before him had spoken of the mythical element in the Gospels, and had conceded that certain stories and motifs were not historical. But no one had yet brought the various lines of criticism together into a clear and comprehensive position; never before had anyone marched relentlessly through all the material to show just how much myth, and how little solid history, the Gospels appear to contain.[290]

Alongside these experiences within the academy, in his private studies and reflections, Strauss composed a series of essays on clairvoyance, demon possession, and ghost-seeing between 1830 and 1839, published as his *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*:

> Strauss **affirms that the women's experiences of possession were authentic**, but he traces the origins of these experiences to their own psychological and physiological states: the spirits whom they encounter are projections of internal derangements and inversions in the normal, healthy order of their bodies and minds… He agrees with Kerner that exorcistic confessions are effective, but not because the "demons" repent of their "sins"; rather, the exorcist enters into the possessed woman's idées fixes, whose conflicted internal presuppositions these "confessions" open up and resolve. Strauss prefers to call such ostensible exorcisms "the psychological dissolution of the sick person's demonic delusion."[291]

In taking this line, Strauss was reconfiguring the popular understanding of mental illness among lay-Christians in Germany. Mainstream theologians, as *Staatsdieneren*, were expected to oppose such perspectives.

In this, classification of Strauss' position is especially complex, thus 'atheist' falls far

[289] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxvi.
[290] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxvi.
[291] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 24, citing Strauss, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, 316.

short of conveying his thought and writing. He also defied the rationalism of more liberal theologians. Strauss' perspective 'turned on the religious categories people used to express their ideas… Ancient religion resembled modern mental illness, then, in that both were equally incommensurate with educated philosophical and historical reason.'[292] In Eliot's novels, the mobile social meanings of such categories were diffused by her focus on the relational and internal dimensions of behaviour and belief. In contrast to Eliot, Strauss' writing was overtly critical and disruptive, despite his restorative intentions.

The reaction against Strauss and *The Life of Jesus* was 'swift and relentless.'[293] Within a month of publication of the first volume, the government requested a paper from Strauss to explain his position, which he provided within ten days. He was removed from his position at Tübingen, but was able to secure permission to continue there as a private scholar, in order to finish the second volume of the work. From November of 1832, he was cut off from contact with colleagues, banned from accessing library resources, and was in near-constant conflict at home with his father for his perceived recklessness.[294]

Strauss' internal tensions increased. He held to a (then radical) Hegelian view that social progress—and within this, eschatological fulfillment—would be substantiated by realisation of human potential within natural human history. This was fundamentally at odds with the acceptance of human suffering until Christ's eschatological return: an idea that Strauss considered intrinsic to the Christian faith. In order to seek out some degree of resolution, Strauss arrived in Berlin in October 1831, to study directly under Hegel. He had only just begun attending lectures when Hegel died of cholera. Strauss persevered, studying Hegel under Philipp Konrad Marheineke, Leopold von Henning, and Karl Ludwig Michelet (founder of the Berlin Philosophical Society).[295] In his private reading, Strauss focussed on the person and attributes of Jesus in Schleiermacher's thought, 'e.g. the unsurpassable religious consciousness of Jesus, his unusual curative powers, and the validity of the Gospel of John as a source of knowledge about Jesus' self-understanding.'[296]

Strauss began to write more overtly, despite the associated risks. He discussed his plans with Märklin:

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[292] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 18.
[293] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxviii.
[294] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxix.
[295] Strauss, *Ausgewählte Briefe Von David Friedrich Strauss,* 8-11.
[296] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xxii. Strauss later came to disagree with Schleiermacher, as he articulated in *Der Christus des Glaubens und der Jesus der Geschichte* [The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History] in 1865, in response to Schleiermacher's 1864 lectures about the person of Jesus, published as Schleiermacher's *Das Leben Jesu*.

> Because of the seemingly special importance of the relation of the concept to the Gospel history, it occurred to me first of all to work through the life of Jesus in this fashion. My first plan, sketched during a period of study in Berlin… was to have three parts. The first, positive or traditional part, would contain an objective presentation of the life of Jesus according to the Gospels, a description of the way Jesus lives subjectively in the faithful, and the mediation of these two aspects in the second article of the Apostle's Creed. The second, negative or critical part, would for the most part annul the life history of Jesus as history; the third part would re-establish dogmatically what had been destroyed. Together, with this original plan the designation of the project as "life of Jesus" developed, and one could not say that it was inappropriate. When in its execution the projected first part fell away, the third became a mere appendix, and the second grew into the real body of the book, I did not want… to surrender the original designation, and thought to make it appropriate to the altered play by the addition, "critically examined."[297]

Strauss returned to Tübingen as a tutor in 1832, working at the evangelical seminary and lecturing with 'brilliant success' on logic and metaphysics, history of philosophy after Kant, and history of ethics.[298] He ceased teaching after three semesters to focus on his writing, researching the gospels extensively, and relegating his discussion of Jesus as presented in the Apostle's Creed to his Concluding Dissertation.[299] After just over one year of work, the manuscript was complete, spanning 1500 printed pages, published in two separate volumes in 1835. Strauss was twenty-seven years old. He endeavoured, in the preface to the first volume of the first German edition, to convey his intentions in creating the work:

> The certainty of this can alone give calmness and dignity to our criticism, and distinguish it from the naturalistic criticism of the last century, the design of which was, with historical fact, to subvert also the religious truth, and which necessarily became frivolous. A dissertation at the close of the work will show that the dogmatic significance of the life of Jesus remains inviolate: in the meantime let the calmness and [*Kaltblütigkeit*, cold-bloodedness, trans. sang-froid] with which, in the course of it, criticism undertakes apparently dangerous operations, be explained solely by the security of the author's conviction that no injury is threatened to the Christian faith.[300]

By the time Strauss found himself writing the preface to the second German edition in September of 1836, the sharpness of his audience's response was beginning to be felt quite deeply. Since Strauss did not feel that he could gain much of use from his opponents, he revised the book primarily under the guidance of Christian Baur, while continuing to teach at the Lyceum in Ludwigsburg. He resented the experience:

> Differing as it does from the views of most theologians and the remainder of the public, **precisely on a matter for which a different opinion is accustomed to pass as godlessness**, it could, upon first acquaintance, only evoke in unprepared minds a vague astonishment, passing over into horror… This sort of reply is on no higher a plane than those screams often heard

[297] Strauss, *Ausgewählte Briefe Von David Friedrich Strauss,* 12-15.
[298] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xxiv.
[299] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 145.
[300] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, lii.

> from women upon the sudden report of a shot… perchance a reasonable and clearheaded man may intervene…[301]

Evans omitted to translate the preface containing this passage, as well as that of the third German edition.[302] Both show Strauss' escalating defensiveness against barbed conservative responses to *The Life of Jesus*. The content of the work became increasingly convoluted, as Strauss sought to rigorously respond to his critics. The third edition was written while Strauss was working as a freelance writer in Stuttgart, and included additions of material relating to Jesus' self-understanding, as expounded in John's Gospel.

Strauss' motivation began to dissipate, which is evident in the preface to the fourth German edition, published in 1838. This was the text Eliot translated in 1841-2:

> The critical researches prompted by the appearance of my work have, after the stormy reaction of the first few years, at length entered on that quiet course, which promises the most valuable assistance towards the confirmation and more precise determination of the negative results at which I have arrived. **But these fruits still require some years for their maturing**; and it must therefore be deferred to a future opportunity to enrich this work by the use of them. I could not persuade myself to do so, at least in the present instance, by prosecuting a polemic against opposite opinions. **Already in the last edition there was more of a polemical character than accorded with the unity and calmness proper to such a work**; hence I was in this respect admonished rather to abridge than to amplify. The intermingling voices of opponents, critics, and fellow labourers, **to which I held it a duty attentively to listen**, had confused the idea of the work in my mind; in the diligent comparison of divergent opinions I had lost sight of the subject itself… and thus my labour in this new edition has chiefly consisted in whetting, as it were, my good sword, to free it from the notches made in it rather by my own grinding, than by the blows of my enemies.[303]

This lack of time and motivation for the fourth edition can be explained by a shift of focus to the production of his *Christliche Glaubenslehre*[304]. He moved towards presenting a history not just of Christ, but of shifts in Christian dogma throughout its history, 'with the intent of showing that each dogma contains the seeds of its own destruction, seeds that began to bear fruit with the critical spirit of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation, and have fully ripened in rationalism and idealism.'[305] This can be read as a statement that his reception had fatigued him to the point of withdrawal from the conversation, foreshadowing Eliot's resolution of these difficulties by employing realism and relationality, rather than propositional polemics, in her critiques of religious power dynamics (see chapter seven).

Strauss continued to publish, 'appropriating traditional Christianity' from 1837 to

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[301] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, lv.
[302] It is normal for translator and publishers to be selective in deciding which prefaces to translate, as they frequently refer to matters that are not pertinent for readers in other languages and regions. In this omission, Eliot was mitigating similar English readings of Strauss.
[303] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, lviii. Passage dated 17 October, 1840.
[304] German. 'Christian Doctrine.'
[305] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xliv.

1840 to alleviate his alienation, influenced by Baur, his earlier teacher.[306] This shift is evident in the third edition of *The Life of Jesus*. In 1839, he received an invitation to become Professor of Theology at a new university in Zürich, which he accepted. However, there was such strong public resistance that he was removed from the position before his actual appointment. This short affiliation was enough for him to be retired, with a government pension which supported him for the rest of his life.

These experiences left Strauss irreparably hostile towards the theological establishment. His pain was further inflamed by the death of both his parents within a two-year period. He produced a fourth edition of *The Life of Jesus* in 1840, in which he retracted his earlier orthodox concessions, becoming increasingly reclusive as he continued his reading and research at his home in Stuttgart. This latter edition did not receive the same critical attention as earlier editions, mainly due to the 1841 publication of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, which was also translated by George Eliot, in 1854. 'Significantly, Strauss now gave up Hegel's view that philosophy and theology have identical content but different expression. He saw that for Hegel the human and the divine are essentially identical in Christ, but in Christian dogma Christ unites, without assimilation, the two natures. If this is so, he surmised, then Hegel's philosophy does not say the same thing as Christian doctrine. Accordingly, Strauss gave up trying to produce a theology which 'accommodated the Christian theological tradition to the modern mind.'[307] Strauss ceased to publish theology for the next twenty-three years.[308]

Dialogical Novel *versus* Unitary Polemic

In *Middlemarch*, some (but not all) characters successfully grow in both truthfulness and relational connection. This is effected by laying aside bids for transcendence, to sympathetically share burdens through collaboration, towards regeneration. Arguably, Strauss did not grow in relational connection, because his polemics functioned as a bid for theological dominance through conflict. Thus, his dialogical failure arrested his theological growth, if we are to exercise Eliot's understanding of spiritual *Bildung*. This understanding resonates deeply with Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, in particular. For Strauss, Eliot, and Feuerbach, spiritual maturity is expressly and fundamentally *not* transcendent: it is the sublime unification of a person with their own capacity for good; 'the relation of man to

[306] Hodgson, "Editor's Introduction," xliv.
[307] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxxiii.
[308] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," xxxiii.

himself, or more correctly to his own nature… The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or rather, the human nature purified… All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.'[309] The embodiment of the true nature is thus a demystifying, cleansing antidote to blindness and torpor, as I described in chapter four.

Eliot's formal choices for *Middlemarch* and her other realist novels resonate with Mikhail Bakhtin's caution against 'unitary language' in his *Dialogic Imagination*.[310] As Eliot's characters grow, they move from states of torpor and short-sightedness towards full community integration, arising from a capacity to see and connect with their real lived experience, rather than having their perception blunted by blinkered ways of viewing and interpreting themselves and their relationships with others. It is the dialogical mode of Eliot's realist novels—especially *Middlemarch*—that provides a means of critiquing the diverse ways of thinking and associated interpersonal behaviours of Eliot's characters. The external texts and histories that are drawn into *Middlemarch* are also drawn into contact and dialogue through the interplay of her characters, thus enabling Eliot to critique her social context, its dysfunctionality, and the ways of thinking that ratified that dysfunction.

In glaring contrast, unitary language is fundamental to Strauss' polemicism, within the *Geisteswissenschaft*[311] tradition: within this, a dichotomy arises between the formal outcome of *The Life of Jesus*, and Strauss' goals for it, as a text. Strauss' professed purpose for this text, as I have outlined, was to enable more flexible interpretation of the biblical text. Strauss sought to negotiate the freedom to interpret the gospels according to conscience, in the sense that each individual should not be bound to interpret the miracles of Jesus literally, but rather, to apply rational thought to their interpretations. Using Bakhtin's language, this can be phrased as a commitment to opening up dialogue about the gospels, rather than forcing the acceptance of one unitary voice about which interpretation is orthodox. However, as Bakhtin identified, the form of the novel is unique in its capacity to draw diverse voices together, and in this sense, *The Life of Jesus* demonstrates the limitations of polemical form in *modelling* any particular social change (rather than issuing a polemical decree). Eliot's more modern, phenomena-based awareness marks a tangible transition to textual acknowledgement of cognitive flux, foreshadowing modernist deployments of stream-of-consciousness narratives. These explorations in Eliot's novels corresponded to findings by George Henry Lewes in his

[309] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 14.
[310] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 271.
[311] Literally German for 'Spirit-Science', but functionally used to refer to the Humanities.

cognitive science research, undertaken with Eliot. Gill Holland asserts in a 1986 article that Lewes was the first to use the concept of stream-of-consciousness in English, even though he does not use that exact term.[312] With few exceptions (most notably *The Lifted Veil*[313]), Eliot limits her writing to realist representations of spiritual and religious experiences, and situates these experiences within the realm of possibility. Thereby, she creates space to explore, alongside the reader, the internal processes and positions that lead to outward behaviours and temperaments that have remained familiar since the novel was written. In doing so, she avoids speaking over the ideologies and experiences of her readers, instead inviting them to extend and grow their sympathetic faculties within their existing beliefs and paradigms. This choice also mitigated the substantial risks to which heterodox writers like Strauss were exposed, which Evans experienced more immediately in London once she began to coedit *The Westminster Review*.

Middlemarch equips its readers to effect social progress amid flux and incomplete understanding. This flux and impaired perception are universal to embodied human experience. Eliot articulates this diversely, in her characterisation, and thus it is integrated, connected perspectives that embody progress in her novels. The deep dialogical connection of Will and Dorothea is the most sophisticated example of this in *Middlemarch*. Fred and Mary's open dialogue functions similarly, to save Fred. This dialogical format is identified in Morris' 1990 article, which highlights the 'gossip and dialects of Middlemarch' as 'a matrix for the development of the characters.'[314] As such, they are another example of Bakhtin's Heteroglossia. Morris describes Dorothea, Lydgate and Will as struggling to 'transcend the world,'[315] an expression that precedes his summary of Theresa of Avila's presence in the novel as Dorothea's spiritual allegory. In a similar vein, Sullivan uses 'transcendence' to describe spiritual maturation within *Middlemarch*.[316] This is not a minor imprecision: both Sullivan and Morris overlook the crux of *Middlemarch*. That is, in the dialogical contact between her characters, Eliot represents diverse approaches to the task of fully and fruitfully integrating *into* society, rather than seeking to transcend it. Bids for transcendence—such as Bulstrode's and Casaubon's, as outlined in chapter seven—are the origins of painful and

[312] J. Gill Holland, "George Henry Lewes and "Stream of Consciousness": The First Use of the Term in English," *South Atlantic Review* 51, no.1 (1986).
[313] George Eliot, "The Lifted Veil" in *Silas Marner: The Lifted Veil:Brother Jacob* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958 [1859], 255-318.
[314] Timothy Morris, "The Dialogic Universe of Middlemarch," *Studies in the Novel* 22, no.3 (1990): 54.
[315] Morris, "The Dialogic Universe of Middlemarch," 283.
[316] Lindsay Sullivan, "'The Ethics of Art': Incarnation, Revelation, and Transcendence in the Ethics of George Eliot and M.M. Bakhtin." PhD, St Andrews, 2002.

destructive scenarios in this novel, and invariably originate in attempts to live as an idealised—rather than a grounded and truthful—version of the self. Grounded truthfulness is Eliot's path to both individual fulfilment and broader social progress.

So, differing from both Sullivan and Morris, I posit that the characters of *Middlemarch* are not represented as mature or immature according to their capacity for transcendence (which would deviate particularly from the materialist theologies of Strauss and Feuerbach that permeate her writing), but according to the integrity of their dialogical participation in Middlemarch life. Book One demonstrates this at length, as the reader is introduced to Dorothea and her misguided 'cleverness'. Rather than transcending society, characters participate in their own moral and spiritual formation. This is outworked through attentive integration with restorative characters like Mary and Caleb Garth and Camden Farebrother, rather than transcendence (as attempted by Bulstrode and Casaubon), as they learn to truthfully and sympathetically see themselves and each other, as I show in the following chapter. While this approach was espoused in the theologies of both Strauss and Feuerbach, it tragically resulted in further isolation and exclusion, for Strauss. Chapter eight describes Eliot's mitigation of such risks, in her formal choices, and also in her selection of male voices for the vast majority of her works.

Conclusion

There were significant complexities associated with writing in nineteenth-century Germany. The Enlightenment had caused a defensiveness in theological circles, as the intellectual territories that previously belonged solely to the church began to also be inhabited by secular philosophical, medical, and scientific assertions. These textual and political presences assertively reconfigured both folklores and church doctrines. The social climate within which Strauss, Kerner, and other German freethinkers undertook their research and reflection was strongly defined by normative Lutheranism, and deviation from these norms was costly. As in Coventry and in London, diverse thinkers banded together, not having found any neat consensus, apart from sharing a commitment to earnest and thorough inquiry across fields of study.

These fields were still being defined. Boundaries between science, theology, spirituality, and philosophy were still very ambiguous. Diseases and problems that had previously been attributed to spiritual issues were increasingly shown to have physical origins, however, the scientific and medical processes leading to these discoveries frequently transgressed existing taboos, and were not restricted by the same uniformity of medical

standards that Europeans were, until recently, accustomed. It is in this instability and risk that Strauss' *Bildung* modelled a scientific disposition and critical affect.

Arguably, nowhere are these issues more clearly demonstrated than in approaches to demonic possession during this era: there was no way to be neutral, just as there are no neutral terms of description of Eliot as heterodox or orthodox, atheist or Christian (even this observation will be considered dangerously centrist for some readers). The young Strauss was exposed to the most tangible possible limitations of the religious paradigms that he was raised in. For him, nothing could reasonably be left unquestioned: if science could now cast out demons, without reference to the name of Christ, then what was science, and who was Jesus? Strauss wrote in 1836 that the scientific study of 'possessed' people required a 'sharp, but not already unbelieving testing of the facts.'[317] His understanding of exorcism and demystification was derived in contact with early methods of psychotherapy, as psychological caretaking began to transition into the secular medical world. Thus Strauss' *Bildung* is part of the embodiment of the *Bildung* of society itself; it's demystification in casting off the demons of superstition, especially where those mysticisms power systems of inequality and oppression. Eliot engaged dialogically with his voice and many others, in writing *Middlemarch*. She invited her readers to also live dialogically, and thus melioristically. Sometimes, to do so, they needed to break free of the control of other people, and learn to know themselves, *for themselves*. As individuals tell each other the truth about their burdens and hauntings, they have opportunity to be released from their fictions, in order to live more kindly, and thus more harmoniously. This movement towards a socialised wellbeing-in-community is George Eliot's *Eschaton*, and includes the 'dissolution of demonic delusions,' within that process.

[317] Fabisiak, *The Nocturnal Side of Science*, 44, citing Strauss, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, 307.

7. Tearing the Temple Curtain: Iconoclasm as a Force of Nature

> Here and there a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind. Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognizable deed.[318]

Introduction

Middlemarch stands as a testament to a time of enormous change in political and religious discourses. Eliot's realistic reconfigurations of the mythologised lives of Christian saints and martyrs—from the book's 'Prelude' and throughout the rest of the text—signal a reinterpretation of Christian stories. These stories formed the mythos that was drawn on to legitimate Victorian conceptions of social hierarchy, particularly concerning class, vocation, and gender: rather than being positioned as subjective and temporary, these dynamics were presented, within Victorian hegemonies, as 'the way things were'. In this sense, Eliot's opposition of these dynamics through the *Bildungen* in *Middlemarch* fits with Franco Morettie's sense of *Bildungsromanen* as spaces to rehearse the growing-out of obsolete social roles and patterns. In *Middlemarch*, these reconfigurations signal a demystification of these Christian histories, which correspondingly demystifies class and power structures in nineteenth-century England. The patriarchs of Middlemarch are variously represented as undeserving of the deference and veneration shown towards them. Eliot's apparatus for establishing these shortcomings is not restricted to the setting of her novel, but rather is interwoven with signifiers that amplify the broader trajectory of western history.

The centralisation of young women's experiences and potential in *Middlemarch* is especially significant. From the book's very beginning, Dorothea Brooke is introduced as *more* than her contemporaries; as something exceptional, as we see in the quote above from the book's prelude. The way in which Eliot broaches this exceptional 'nature' simultaneously reinforces and deviates from the realist mode of *Middlemarch*. Christian metaphysical traditions were central to nineteenth-century understandings of human 'nature'. Dorothea is likened to Theresa of Avila, one of the most mystically-oriented writers in Christian history.

[318] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: London: Oxford UP, 1863 [1871-2]), xvi.

Theresa was canonised within the Roman catholic tradition in 1622, and was declared a patron saint of Spain in 1627. Eliot reinterprets Theresa's sainthood in realist, materialist terms to have more to do with her nature, than any supernatural revelation from God.

As Nixon emphasises in his introduction to *Victorian Religious Discourse*, 'The role of George Eliot in lending shape and definition to all that constitutes religious discourse in the nineteenth century cannot be overestimated. Strauss and Feuerbach's Higher Criticism exerted a powerful influence on her fiction, especially on... *Middlemarch.*'[319]
Eliot's highly specific historical—and within this, political and economic—situation of *Middlemarch* is meticulous; 'all the major characters can be mapped onto a system of social relations that manifests the continued dominance and class ideology derived from the aristocracy.'[320]

These historical references contribute to the realism of the novel's fictional setting, linking plot events to preceding religious nationalisms and hegemonies. They thus have figurative and poetic functions within the novel: in Eliot's allusions to other historical moments and social dynamics through diverse textual connections within theological and religious history. Some of these latter kinds of connection are, relatively speaking, momentary and discrete within the text. However, most of Eliot's representations of engagement with religion are made with more sweeping strokes, drawing comparisons between the different plots and characters. These strokes highlight incongruities and imbalances between classes, genders and religious or moral ideological groups. These indications are heavily coded in order to protect Eliot from reactive, unqualified backlash within her readership, which was a very real threat at that time.

Eliot frequently employs allusions to historical figures as a means of characterisation in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea is likened to various Roman Catholic saints; Edward Casaubon is linked with Thomas Aquinas; Will Ladislaw is likened to a cherubic messenger from Bernini's sculpture of Theresa of Avila.[321] Quoting Moscovici:

> Even a cursory reading of *Middlemarch* reveals a versatile use of allusions: *metaphorically*, as a mode of comparison of the character with the subject of the allusion; *metonymically*, as a means of associating the character with the subject of the allusion; *ironically*, to mark the understood

[319] Jude Nixon, *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4.
[320] Henry Staten, "Is Middlemarch Ahistorical?" *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 115, no.5 (2000): 992.
[321] Hilary Fraser, "St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in Middlemarch," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40, no.4 (1986): *passim*.

> distance between the subjects being compared; and *prescriptively*, to indicate how the character should behave.[322]

The broadest function of these allusions is transactional. They sacralise—and, to some extent, universalise—characters that are otherwise pedestrian and localised in their significance, while simultaneously demythologising the histories and individuals that are alluded to. Thus, Eliot exposes the fictions and superstitions that clothe the patriarchs, revealing the fallibility and frailty of the men idealised and protected within Middlemarch's social system. These demythologisations undermine the claims made by that patriarchy on members of the Middlemarch community. The claims are for women to martyr themselves within, in order to achieve status as wives, and for young men to similarly sacrifice themselves in order to become heirs to the patriarchy. These unregenerate patriarchs die out, left impotent to define the system. Their dethroning creates a space within which something else is built, around the true natures of Eliot's characters, rather than within defunct and unsuitable social scripts.

History as Parable

Provocatively, for an English context, Roman Catholic saints feature as analogues for Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon, in *Middlemarch*. Eliot's 'Prelude' to the novel signals Theresa of Avila's significance from the outset, and Edward Casaubon's connection to Thomas Aquinas situates him in relation to her. This configuration sets the stage for a complex theological and historical interplay that I examine closely in chapter ten. Mrs Bulstrode, the wife of the town banker, is the most explicit mouthpiece for anti-Catholic prejudice in the novel:

> Mrs Bulstrode felt that [Will's] mode of talking about Catholic countries, as if there were any truce with Antichrist, illustrated the usual tendency to unsoundness in intellectual men.[323]

Mrs Bulstrode is eventually shown to have both poor discernment and fine charitable instincts when her husband is disgraced. Eliot uses relational behaviours alongside doctrinal pronouncements to forcefully propel her own critique of the dysfunctional hierarchies that retard social regeneration in Middlemarch, and in English society more broadly.

These references are especially significant given *Middlemarch*'s historical proximity to the Italian *Risorgimento*: the unification of the Italian provinces into one nation, governed in Rome. This process of reorganisation came to a head over the decade before *Middlemarch*

[322] Claudia Moscovici, "Allusive Mischaracterization in Middlemarch," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49, no.4 (1995): 514.
[323] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 495.

was written, culminating in the First Vatican Council in 1871. This Catholic church council aggressively promoted religious conformity as the key to national identity in Italy at the time, through its reassertion of the doctrine of papal infallibility. Dorothea's deference to Edward Casaubon is described as 'throwing herself, metaphorically speaking, at Mr Casaubon's feet, and kissing his unfashionable shoe-ties as if he were a Protestant Pope.'[324] This infallibility was decreed in opposition to Branch Theory,[325] which offered a broadened definition of the 'true church,' instead of limiting salvation to Roman Catholics. By drawing these parallels, Eliot opens gendered English power dynamics to the contemporary criticisms that were being levelled at Roman Catholics. English patriarchs had framed as the dangerous practice of empowering the Pope to speak on behalf of God, a view that was reinforced through the interpretation of crises like the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 as a manifestation of divine judgement.[326] This linkage with Roman Catholicism also gently flags the story of the delayed enfranchisement of English Roman Catholics, intersecting with calls for the enfranchisement of English women. In this way, Eliot's understanding of the relationship between religion and social systems correlates with Marx's response to Feuerbach:

> the sensuous world around [us] is not a thing given direct from all eternity… but the product of industry and the state of society; and indeed [a product] in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs.[327]

In *Middlemarch*, just as in the nationalist regime of the *Risorgimento*, it falls to the patriarchs to delineate how they intend to stand on the shoulders of preceding wisdoms. Patriarchal responsibility is modelled without excessive diversity in Middlemarch society. Edward Casaubon the religious scholar, Nicholas Bulstrode the banker, Peter Featherstone the land owner, and Arthur Brooke, the broker of the *status quo*, each feature in this chapter as examples of superfluous authority figures, constructed by Middlemarch's social narratives, rather than 'given from all eternity.'[328] These different patriarchs delineate types of social authority, each being undermined in the novel, not through direct combative engagement, but through the natural consequences of their selfishness. Eliot positions these iconoclasms as

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[324] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 49.
[325] Church councils have historically tended to precipitate from new theological perspectives. They involve the coming together of the bishops to make a ruling about their denomination's response to potentially heretical models of thought.
[326] Robert Ellison and Carol Engelhardt, "Prophecy and Anti-Popery in Victorian London: John Cumming Reconsidered," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31, no.1 (2003): 373.
[327] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976 [1845-6]), 45.
[328] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 45.

forces of nature—winds of the Holy Spirit, in Hegel's understanding[329]—thus appealing to material realities rather than superstitions.

Each Middlemarch patriarch writes their own sacred text, within which they are central. They each apply a different epistemology to centralise their own interests and objectives, conflating their interests with divine providence. Edward Casaubon's are explicit:

> For he had been as instructive as Milton's 'affable archangel'; and with something of the archangelic manner he told her how he had undertaken to show (what indeed had been attempted before, but not with that thoroughness, justice of comparison, and effectiveness of arrangement at which Mr Casaubon aimed) that **all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed**. Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm footing there, the vast field of mythical constructions became intelligible, nay, luminous with the reflected light of correspondences.[330]

Eliot's rendering of this task as a conceit hints at her response to the tone and substance of the undertakings of both Strauss and Feuerbach, as well as other polemicists of her era. Casaubon sits for a portrait during his honeymoon in Rome. As he is painted as Thomas Aquinas by Will Ladislaw's German artist-friend, Neumann [German: new-man], Eliot subverts Casaubon's Protestantism and establishes him as conspicuously less than Aquinas as theologian. Neumann's capacity for artistic vision reveals Casaubon's nature, as I explore further in chapter ten. Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies* attempts a similar project to Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, which was what saw Aquinas canonised and named 'Doctor of the Church' in the fourteenth century, owing to Pope John XXII and the Dominican Order's support for his teaching.[331] Despite Casaubon's shortcomings in Christian conduct and scholarship, he maintains his clerical appointment in Middlemarch, and continues to enjoy the affluence associated with it.

These patterns also bear out in the notebooks that Eliot kept while writing *Middlemarch.* Pratt and Neufeldt's introduction to their 1979 transcription of the Berg and Folger notebooks[332] delineates the themes of Eliot's reading during the writing of *Middlemarch*, including several books that correlate functionally with Edward Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies*. Pratt notes in his 1966 dissertation that many of these works were, like the *Key to All Mythologies*, never finished, due to their ambitious scope and human physical limitations. This ongoing preoccupation in Eliot's notebooks demonstrates that she

[329] *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Ed. Terry Pinkard and Michael Baur, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[330] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 19.
[331] Jean-Pierre Torrell , and Benedict Guevin, "The Summa Through History," in *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception* (USA: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 94-95.
[332] These two notebooks were kept as records of Eliot's reading during the writing of *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

was especially aware of form in relation to *Middlemarch*. She made a conscious choice to offer sympathetic mutual understanding of lived experience as sacred text or as a kind of *Key to All Mythologies.* Eliot was invested to connect to real life, rather than allowing it to be defined through the casuistic mechanisms of the realm of polemics, which was frequently fractious and combative.

These casuistic mechanisms are diverse and widespread, in *Middlemarch*. Edward Casaubon appropriates respect within the Middlemarch community, using his persona as a scholar and religious leader. This respect is more performative than earnest, however. Dorothea inflicts dogmatic yoking on her sister, Celia, at the beginning of the novel in her reaction to the jewellery they inherit. This restrictive tendency becomes a potent force of entrapment once she weds herself to it, against Celia's perceptive counsel. That is, if Dorothea was better able to understand the experiences she had inflicted on her sister, instead of universalising her perspective, she would have avoided a painful marriage. This Casaubon 'respectability' stands in stark contrast to Dorothea's (and Mary Garth's) natural capacity for scholarly pursuits, especially given the ways in which Arthur Brooke and others pass over them and instead prefer their less adequate husbands. Casaubon justifies his lack of availability by professing to concentrate on his *Key to All Mythologies*, conflating his self-alienation with scholarly dignity arising from special, exclusive knowledge. He romanticises his poor perception:

> I am fastidious in voices, and I cannot endure listening to an imperfect reader… 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. But I find it necessary to use the utmost caution about my eyesight.[333]

Casaubon defers perception of his surroundings in undertaking his great work. Over the course of the novel, he superficially accepts Dorothea for her pliability and submissiveness, rather than allowing her the intimacy of assisting him with his scholarly work. Dorothea initially accepts his self-romanticisation, in lieu of matrimonial romance, aiming 'To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth—what a work to be in any way present at, to assist in; though only as a lamp-holder.'[334] Ironically, Dorothea *is* successful in holding up a lamp to the nature and significance of her husband's work. Casaubon rejects his young wife and withdraws from her as it becomes evident that she can truly see him, thus reacting against the truth of human experience, especially that of

[333] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 12.
[334] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 12.

relational intimacy.

'If we knew ourselves, we would not judge each other harshly' Eliot ventured in her first novel, *Scenes of Clerical Life*.[335] Fifteen years later, in *Middlemarch*, she illustrates this principle still, in that Casaubon does not know himself, and stands as a mouthpiece for a society that issues harsh judgement on Dorothea. Thus Eliot renders a microcosm within a microcosm, representing English society in Middlemarch society, and Middlemarch in Casaubon:

> His experience was of that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known: it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity. And Mr Casaubon had many scruples: he was capable of a severe self-restraint; he was resolute at being a man of honour according to the code; he would be unimpeachable by any recognised opinion.[336]

Despite knowing Edward Casaubon better than anyone, Dorothea's is not a 'recognised opinion.' With bitter—and admittedly, delicious—irony, Eliot's pronouncement on such conduct is that Casaubon's textual legacy ends up being the punitive codicil he adds to his will. The codicil is intended to obstruct Dorothea from seeking her happiness in remarriage, a pitiable legacy in comparison to the promised *Key to All Mythologies*. This legacy also included instructions to Dorothea to complete this work for him, in ways that he would not allow her when it would have resulted in marital intimacy.[337] He thus becomes a metaphor for the promises of theological systems, in contrast to the conduct of theological enforcers. This resonates with Eliot's reading of Thomas Aquinas' theological legacy,[338] as I explore in chapter ten.

Casaubon's search for the *Key to All Mythologies* is a version of what Feuerbach and Aquinas undertook in their theological exploits; this is identified by Felicia Bonaparte as 'the central metaphor of the book':

> Like Lydgate, who seeks to find the primal tissue which is the secret of biological life, Casaubon, although he does not know it, searches for nothing less than the secret of life's

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[335] George Eliot, "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, no date [first pub. 1857, this edition *c.*1890), 175.
[336] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 298.
[337] George Eliot elected to finish off George Henry Lewes' *Problems of Life and Mind* for him after his death, electing to publish the volume under his authorship rather than her own. I would love to see it republished as a coauthored work.
[338] I hope that my readers will bear in mind that discussion of Eliot's representations of Aquinas are not intended as pronouncements on the historical Aquinas. I am referring, in these discussions, to a textual construction. See my article, Elise Silson, "'You Are a Poem': Poetry, Revelation, and Revolution in George Eliot's Middlemarch," *St. Mark's Review*, no. 251 (2020): 57-74.

> meaning, a metaphor through which mankind attempts communally to order the chaos of experience and so to shape a coherent vision of human existence.[339]

I have not been able to locate a reference in *Middlemarch* to a 'primal tissue', though Lydgate does hold a 'Key'-like belief in science (which he renounces comparatively humanely). The most suitable symmetry available between Lydgate and Casaubon is their abstraction and objectification of their wives, although they undertake this differently from one another.

Casuistry and Power

Nicholas Bulstrode exercises the broadest and most overtly forceful control of all *Middlemarch* characters. In this, he functions similarly to Peter Featherstone, as their bids for control arise from the financial dependencies they establish. The town banker, Nicholas Bulstrode, insidiously extracts social homage from his community. This financial control is buttressed by religious control. Bulstrode's fundamentalist moralising is especially ugly when the source of his money is considered. These latter patterns follow on from his use of perfomative Calvinistic religion to usurp a young heiress who became estranged from her family when she had 'run away' to 'go on the stage'.[340] Bulstrode comes to be treated like a son by the Dunkirk family, partly by helping the very vulnerable Mrs Dunkirk to look for the daughter following the death of both her husband and her son. Bulstrode knowingly obstructs this Miss Dunkirk from hearing from her parents, taking her inheritance instead. Eliot provides this origin story once her readers are already deeply familiar with Bulstrode's interpersonal habits, most notably through his behaviour in relation to the much-needed fever hospital in Middlemarch.

Bulstrode aggressively seeks the appointment of a conservative chaplain for the hospital: 'Nobody had anything to say against Mr Tyke, except that they couldn't bear him, and suspected him of cant.'[341] In a similar manner to Edward Casaubon, Mr Tyke seeks a kind of control that is characterised by pseudo-transcendent alienation, to such an extent that he never actually appears in-person within the text. These modes of distancing are satirised bids for transcendence that correlate with the blinkered immaturities in chapter four of this thesis. Mr Tyke is excluded from Eliot's usual sympathetic representations, as he remains absent: nothing is presented to redeem him in any way. In relation to both Miss Dunkirk and Mr Tyke, Bulstrode's position in the world of Middlemarch leans on absent figures, rather

[339] Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination*, (Great Britain: Harvester Press, 1979), 16.
[340] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 661.
[341] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 190.

than immanent connection and relationship. He obstructs the perceptions of those around him and actively yokes others by twisting the community's sense of who and what is virtuous and beneficial, thus extracting social and financial power.

Bulstrode most tangibly yokes Lydgate, by exerting pressure on him to act against his better judgement, as Lydgate casts the deciding vote in choosing a chaplain at the hospital. The position of chaplain is one of significant influence, and Lydgate's private conversations with the more suitable Camden Farebrother mean that he must choose directly between advancement-by-patronage, and his own moral awareness. Farebrother remains cordial to Lydgate, even when Tyke is chosen, and this graciousness is redemptive. Farebrother is aware of details about Lydgate that he could exploit, but he does not do so,[342] instead warning Lydgate:

> you must keep yourself independent. Very few men can do that. Either you slip out of service altogether, and become good for nothing, or you wear the harness and draw a good deal where your yoke-fellows pull you. But do look at these delicate orthoptera![343]

Farebrother asks Lydgate to see that they fare as brothers in the *Camden*[344] of their common life together, demonstrating a limber awareness of both the sensitivities of community life, and the scientific requirements of medical work. His name gestures towards Psalm 23, suggesting that his action in community is holy and appropriate:

> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
> He makes me lie down in green pastures;
> he leads me beside still waters;
> he restores my soul.
> He leads me in right paths
> for his name's sake.
>
> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
> I fear no evil;
> for you are with me;
> your rod and your staff—
> they comfort me.
>
> You prepare a table before me
> in the presence of my enemies;
> you anoint my head with oil;
> my cup overflows.
> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
> all the days of my life,
> and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
> my whole life long.

[342] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 183.
[343] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 184.
[344] Welsh. Winding valley.

It is very evident that Farebrother would be an exemplary chaplain, and this scriptural resonance hints at his holiness to readers familiar with these texts. Psalm 23 is arguably the most well-known of all the biblical psalms, as it frequently arises in various liturgies across Christian traditions. He also lives very peaceably with the women of his family, an opportunity for learning that Lydgate overlooks in his youthful arrogance:

> In short, it was plain that a vicar might be adored by his womankind as the king of men and preachers, and yet be held by them to stand in much need of their direction. Lydgate, with the usual shallowness of a young bachelor, wondered that Mr Farebrother had not taught them better.[345]

The glaring contrasts between Farebrother and Bulstrode are adjudicated within the plot, as Bulstrode is disgraced by the dirty money that he has leant on to oppress others. His wife is shown, early on, to lack discernment and exercise uncritical prejudice, for example in her anti-Catholic comments quoted above. However, this same capacity for unquestioning loyalty enables her to maintain her commitment to her husband amid his disgrace. Thus, even without strong critical faculties, she displays a sacred, sympathetic solidarity with her husband that the narrator relates with tenderness:

> They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent. Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could not say, 'How much is only slander and false suspicion?' and he did not say, 'I am innocent.'[346]

But, like Casaubon, Bulstrode is essentially friendless. People's 'fellow-feeling'[347] towards them is blunted by their selfishness and lack of empathy. Both are condemned for leveraging religion for power, which leaves them naked in their loneliness. In contrast, natural consequences socially elevate those individuals who do good for its own sake, rather than as a means of performing religiosity:

> 'You are a conscientious man, Mr Garth – a man, I trust, who feels himself accountable to God. You would not wish to injure me by being too ready to believe a slander,' said Bulstrode, casting about for pleas that might be adapted to his hearer's mind...
>
> 'I would injure no man if I could help it,' said Caleb; 'even if I thought God winked at it. I hope I should have a feeling for my fellow-creature. But sir – I am obliged to believe that this Raffles has told me the truth. And I can't be happy working with you, or profiting by you. It hurts my mind.'[348]

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[345] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 181.
[346] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 806.
[347] 'There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow men.' Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 668.
[348] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 746.

This passage highlights Caleb's ethos as self-protective, naturally self-nourishing, and wholesome for him. He is wise in his avoidance of the pain that he would feel as a result of ethical transgressions. Bulstrode feels 'a certain amount of anger beginning to mingle with his humiliation before this quiet man who renounced his benefits,'[349] and is thus shown to be sinning in his desire to transcend other human beings. He seeks to be mystified and is thus laid low and shamed.

Other characters, nonetheless, suspend their own self-interest to reach out to fallible patriarchs. These guiding characters are more perceptive, albeit fallibly so. Those characters who engage in compassion towards others are able to grow enough to collaborate, thus enacting potent—albeit limited—social progress in Middlemarch society. This progress originates, primarily, in the ardent nature of Dorothea Brooke, but also features strongly in the sympathetic and attentive ministries of Camden Farebrother, and Caleb and Mary Garth. These characters learn from their own experiences, and are extended in that awareness through sympathetic consciousness of other people's experiences. The resulting web of sympathetic understanding becomes the fabric of healthy society.

Eliot represents various attitudes and behaviours that are barriers to the embodiment of progress in community. Peter Featherstone exercises malevolent control as a means of sadistic self-gratification. He uses his property and wealth coercively against his family, especially Mary Garth, his niece. His failing health becomes a focal point for the dysfunction of this dynamic, and rather than exercising patriarchal leadership, he attempts to punish them, using Mary as a shield and messenger. This is another example of the instability that results from one person 'yoking' another, which I have already described between Dorothea and Celia, Edward and Dorothea, and Nicholas and Tertius. Mary exercises potent discretion in her dealings with her uncle as he nears death, when he assumes that she will mirror his greed and collude with him in a complication of his estate by introducing a second will. This incapacity to collaborate ultimately excludes him from feeling any sense of belonging in the family he seeks to control. He is left powerless and dies in isolation—a fate that is among the worst that Eliot would pronounce on anyone. Both Edward Casaubon and Peter Featherstone attempt to control others using their wills after their deaths: neither of them is effective in this, and their attempts to use textual legacies to control others are not executed. This textual impotence echoes free-thinking refusals to execute the decrees of polemicists like Aquinas, as

[349] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 746.

to how we must live after their passing.

Returning to the papal threads running through *Middlemarch*, Peter comes from the Greek for 'rock.' Saint Peter is the disciple of Christ considered to be the origin of the papal lineage (sometimes referred to as the cornerstone of the Christian church in Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions). Featherstone's house, Stone Court, is the concentration of the property of a stony-hearted family. Being a 'feather' stone, however, he does not ultimately carry the weight that he expects to: it is diffused by Mary. True to her name, Mary originates Christ-like attributes, to effect positive change. This internal gestation of social potency is shared by Theresa of Avila, Dorothea's spiritual analogue (see also chapter ten), and shows the dichotomy established in *Middlemarch* between embodied spirituality (gestational, abiding, relational, communal) and the demands of patriarchal religious hierarchies (desiccated, hardened, cold, isolating). Mary's surname, Garth, comes from the Welsh word for 'enclosed yard.' Mary shares the immovable benevolence of her father, Caleb,[350] that vastly impacts their surroundings for the common good. Their patterns of delineating moral boundaries are potently regenerative and protective, as I explore in chapter twelve. Plot, characterisation, historicity, and nomenclature intersect to demonstrate the origin of social progress in even the most toxic and polluted space. Despite being financially powerful, the texts of these small popes of *Middlemarch* are shown to be powerless. This shift occurs when people subjected to them determine that these patriarchal wills—both textual and relational—are not relevant or suitable enough to define how their community should function. Eliot's observation reverberates out from these fictional relationships into the broader historical contexts of *Middlemarch*.

Providence, Patriarchy and Privilege

> A man's mind—what there is of it—has always the advantage of being masculine, —as the smallest birch-tree is of a higher kind than the most soaring palm,[351] —and even his ignorance is of a sounder quality. Sir James might not have originated this estimate ; but a kind Providence furnishes the limpest personality with a little gum or starch in the form of tradition.[352]

Eliot consistently links reliance on divine providence with incapacity to face up to the natural

[350] Hebrew. Faithful.
[351] See Chapter 10 for an exploration of the significance of the palm in Theresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*. In short, she uses the palm as a metaphor for the internal layers of the self, and likens self-realisation and spiritual advancement as the peeling back of many layers of the self, to discover the sweet and tender part within.
[352] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 17.

consequences of immoral behaviours. In *Silas Marner*, Dunstan Cass construes his access to Silas' gold as an extension of his 'sense of security' that 'springs from habit'.[353] Arthur Donnithorne, in *Adam Bede*, leans on divine providence in his belief that he will be saved from disgrace when he seduces Hetty. The patriarchs of Middlemarch behave as men who have been conditioned to believe similarly. These patterns are frequently reinforced by older patriarchs, especially Arthur Brooke, Dorothea's uncle, and by miscellaneous nameless Middlemarch citizenry. The anonymity and thus blind consensus among the local community carries an air of propaganda.

Each patriarch is introduced according to the interpretive paradigm they use to leverage towards their own interests, as I have touched on. These characters each posit their own constructions of the ways of the world, to justify their authority and entitlement. In Bahktinian terms, the patriarchs of Middlemarch attempt to employ unitary language. In Antonio Gramsci's language, they enact hegemonic culture, which, while not homogenous, is enforced using patriarchal power-sharing dynamics. Arthur Brooke's decision to further Edward Casaubon's interests in the Casaubon marriage, rather than supporting Dorothea, demonstrates the destructiveness of this dynamic. Notably, Fred Vincy grows out of this culture of entitlement, through the pain of his spectacular financial embarrassment.

In theological terms, this humiliation could be called a forced demystification, as Fred's gambling initially leaves him beholden to his uncle, Peter. His decision to gamble arises from his extravagant tendency to lean on providence, rather than good conduct, to secure his future. Tertius Lydgate engages in similar magical or superstitious thinking, not about a religious faith-object type of providence, but about his own potential to effect positive social change as an enlightened scientific thinker and medical expert. In this way, rather than constructing 'good' and 'evil' characters, Eliot shows her characters at diverse points of maturation. This human progress is described using metaphors like waking from sleep, or having sight restored. These descriptors can readily be linked with Strauss' sense of mystification and demystification.

The notion of 'providence' resurfaces continually in these characterisations, as well as in other Eliot novels, as patriarchally invested men conflate their privilege with being preferred by God. Eliot demonstrates that it is the patriarchy, in *Middlemarch*, that frequently obstructs or reverses what she sees as social progress. Critics frequently note that, even in the most unregenerate of her characters, Eliot shows these shortcomings as originating in internal

[353] George Eliot, *Silas Marner* (UK: Signet Classics, 1960), 42.

frailty and confusion. She endorses the grace extended by compassionate characters, by embedding corresponding grace into the narrative voice. She thus traces the origins of—and frames the potential solutions to—the internal miscalibrations modelled by immature characters. In doing so, she recommends perceptive compassion as a powerful means of social regeneration, which is available to everyone in their relationships, including the reader.

This redemptive, regenerative dynamic occurs across Eliot's full corpus, as Orr observes:

> Mr Irwine [cleric in *Adam Bede*] is like George Eliot herself, whose art loves her characters despite what they believe in or even how they behave. When she talks about her art, she is talking about religion; when she tells her reader, echoing The Book of Common Prayer, that here is a man "with whom I desire you to be in perfect charity."[354]

It is notable that as much as the narrative voice manifests this charity towards the unregenerate patriarchs of *Middlemarch*, the natural laws of cause and effect that Eliot constructs in the novel are—by narratorial providence—enactors of justice.

Arthur Brooke, Edward Casaubon, Peter Featherstone, and Nicholas Bulstrode each hold considerable power within Middlemarch; their perspectives largely define the lives of the younger protagonists: Dorothea Brooke/Casaubon, Tertius Lydgate, and Mary Garth, particularly. The limitations that these men apply to these younger characters largely constitute the fetters that must be shed in order to attain both individual and communal fruition. This tragically accentuates that it is primarily by their deaths—rather than any capacity for change—that their toxic control is ameliorated. Bids for control extend from beyond the grave, with limited potency, but significant toxicity nonetheless, especially in the codicil Edward Casaubon adds to his will to restrict Dorothea's freedom to be loved by Will Ladislaw after his death. Thus, Casaubon's own attempt at providence includes his ostensibly authoritative decree. He is ultimately ineffective. He is not able to provide a fitting vocation for Dorothea, because he is incapable of sympathising with her.

The natural consequences of these immoral behaviours are frequently at odds with public awareness and public expectations, which proffers a satisfying sense of poetic justice. This delineation between community consensus about moral and religious authority, and the true loci of wisdoms and virtues, holds diverse possible interpretations that are notably left open. The overall sense is that progress can be enacted within a community, even without the full community being cognisant of the available possibilities. Readers name these dynamics

[354] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution*, (USA: Northwestern University Press, 2018).

according to their own perspectives, some holding that Eliot's narratives function in line with Christian perspectives. Others hold that in these systems, religious perspectives are debunked and subverted. This wide range of available interpretations highlights the openness of Eliot's realism, and encourages readers to live fully, even without consensus behind them.

The role of religious engagement in Dorothea's *Bildung* is distinctive, steeped in distant Christian stories while cut off from any manner of communion, either with God or fellow Christians. In this sense, it is essentially negative until she transitions out of abstraction of her spiritual values, into embodiment. This disconnection is unique to *Middlemarch* in Eliot's oeuvre. The sense of spiritual displacement that Dorothea experiences is conspicuous in contrast to Theresa of Avila's belonging within her order of nuns, Daniel Deronda's connection to Mordecai and Mirah, and Felix Holt's close bond with the Methodist minister, Rufus Lyon. In contrast to Maggie Tulliver, particularly, Dorothea's prayer life is conspicuously unrepresented despite her religious fervour. The only point at which she begins to pray in order to seek intimacy and reassurance from God, she is significantly obstructed by her supposed duty to her husband.

Fred's view of providence is similar of Arthur Donnithorne's pattern of self-justification in *Adam Bede*, to *Brother Jacob*, and to Godfrey Cass in *Silas Marner*. It is a mark of privilege and moral laxity, far more than any evidence of spiritual virtue:

> When Fred got into debt, it always seemed to him highly probable that something or other – he did not necessarily conceive what – would come to pass enabling him to pay in due time. And now that the providential occurrence was apparently close at hand, it would have been sheer absurdity to think that the supply would be short of the need: as absurd as a faith that believed in half a miracle for want of strength to believe in a whole one.[355]

Despite Fred's comprehensive lack of moral strength in *Middlemarch*, Mary is faithful to him as a friend, and then later as a wife, and thus aids him in spiritual regeneration. No social collateral is given to Mary, even amid her extraordinary achievements. This invites readers to question the validity of a system within which exemplary women are frustrated, while relatively ignorant, morally weak men are favoured: 'But when Mary wrote a little book for her boys, called *Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch*, and had it printed and published by Gripp & Co., Middlemarch, everyone in the town was willing to give the credit of this work to Fred, observing that he had been to the University, 'where the ancients were studied', and might have been a clergyman if he had chosen.'[356] Fred's redemptive attribute is his respect for Mary, which enables him to learn from her. The result is a witty critique of

[355] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 139.
[356] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 890.

women's subjection—especially in marriage—that still leaves space for the beauty of their love for each other.

Thus, in this plot, progress is only partially effected. Social conventions and assumptions only partially provide for Mary, and in clearly showing this, Eliot contributes her own pressure towards more nuanced awareness. The intimate narratorial tone of *Middlemarch* presents solidarity with Mary as the only reasonable position, thus inviting readers to disrupt the ignorance of 'everyone in the town' in their own embodiments of progress. Eliot describes consensus in her 1868[357] essay, 'Notes on Form in Art' by asserting that 'in a complex organism [in] which no part can suffer increase or diminution without a participation of all other parts in the effect produced and a consequent modification of the organism as a whole.'[358] That is, Eliot communicates in both *Middlemarch* and 'Notes on Form in Art' that the whole community loses out when consensus does not recognise those who are worthy and unworthy of influence.

This education and empowerment of the reader is far more important to Eliot than the prosecution of a polemic; the openness of *Middlemarch* is fundamental to its purpose. As Orr observes:

> It is important, then, to affirm for George Eliot's stories the possibility of differing interpretations, because just such hermeneutic openness is essential to her aesthetic, even as it was essential to Christ's storytelling. One reader may in fact see her stories as affirming Feuerbach's religion of humanity, and another reader may not. The only thing one can say for certain is that she leaves the theological meaning a matter of interpretation, demanding only that readers recognize the personal message of love and charity. And perhaps in this regard, oddly enough, she is imitating the message of the Gospel: as Adam says, it isn't notions and doctrines, but actions and feelings that count.[359]

Eliot also uses the above contrasts to remind her readers of the capacities of men to exercise responsibility in their impacts on the women they live alongside. Fred Vincy models (imperfect but earnest) appreciation of Mary, and Will Ladislaw is set apart by his special capacity to 'see' and 'read' Dorothea (see chapter ten). Edward Casaubon is a potent warning of what a man may be if he remains degenerate in his perception of others, especially his wife. His attachment to divine providence as a legitimating mechanism is especially pronounced:

> Providence, in its kindness, had supplied him with the wife he needed. A wife, a modest young lady, with the purely appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex, is sure to think her

[357] That is, during preparations for the writing of *Middlemarch*, which was published 1871-2.
[358] George Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art," in Rosemary Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1868]), 358.
[359] Marilyn Orr, "Incarnation, Inwardness, and Imagination: George Eliot's Early Fiction," *Christianity and Literature* 58, no.3 (2009): 25.

> husband's mind powerful. Whether Providence had taken equal care of Miss Brooke in presenting her with Mr Casaubon is an idea which could hardly occur to him. Society never made the preposterous demand that a man should think as much about his own qualifications for making a charming girl happy as he thinks of hers for making himself happy. As if a man could choose not only his wife but his wife's husband![360]

As I have already touched on, providence, for Dorothea, is a combination of her uncle, Arthur Brooke, siding with Casaubon's interests in the courtship, and later in the Casaubon marriage. These two patriarchs choose Dorothea's husband for her, not solely in the initial decision, but also in their complicity in Casaubon's behaviours towards her. His prejudice against her is fuelled by his attachment to his misperception of Dorothea's capacities and needs. In this, he fails to provide a suitable life for her, thus failing spectacularly in the oversight role that he leverages to dominate her. Flowing from the metaphors of the wills that I have already discussed, Casaubon courts Dorothea—and even proposes to her—using textual communications, rather than being with her in the flesh. He maintains intimacy only with his prejudices and filtered conceptions, and as such hides from intimacy and collaboration with Dorothea. This is especially ironic, given that his will requests that she complete his research after his death, even though he would not allow her to assist alongside him. This denial of Dorothea's nature paralyses her agency until she overcomes it, signalling both the dynamic of their relationship and the primary origin of women's suppression within Victorian society: that is, prioritisation of arbitrarily prescribed social roles over human realities.

In this pattern, Nicholas Bulstrode attempts to conjure providence to protect him from being exposed as a fraud, thus showing the consequences of his self-centred prejudices. He expects that his late and meagre efforts should outweigh the rights of others to justice:

> [Bulstrode's] belief in these moments of dread was, that if he spontaneously did something right, God would save him from the consequences of wrong-doing. For **religion can only change when the emotions that fill it are changed; and the religion of personal fear remains nearly at the level of the savage**.[361]

The narrator makes these observations just as Bulstrode—in his fear—refers to his business with Will as 'sacredly confidential.'[362] Bulstrode's 'sanctity' is arbitrary and predatory: it serves him only, and is not intended be reconciled to any model of progress. Eliot is warning her readers about this kind of religious bullying, while also expressing solidarity with those who have experienced injustice as its consequence. In this scene, Will's claim on Bulstrode

[360] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 297.
[361] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 665.
[362] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 666.

is 'not a legal claim,'[363] but a moral one. In contrast to Bulstrode, Will does not overstate this claim, but rather is reserved and temperate, showing similar attributes to the finer men of Middlemarch. For example, Bulstrode is shown as the inverse of Caleb Garth, especially his work ethic. Sir James' judgement of Will Ladislaw on the grounds of his lack of money and connections[364] is unfair alongside his private conduct with Bulstrode. Thus Eliot continues to white-ant hegemonic sources of power and legitimation in English society.

Bulstrode persists, despite the anguish that it creates in him. He experiences a materialist hell, within which the consequences of his actions can be categorised as divine judgement and/or natural cause-and-effect, depending on the reader's position. As circumstances are increasingly oriented against him, he is brought into public disgrace. Those subjected to him are emancipated:

> Foreseeing, to men of Bulstrode's anxious temperament, is often worse than seeing, and his imagination continually heightened the anguish of an imminent disgrace... In vain he said to himself that, if permitted, it would be a divine visitation, a chastisement, a preparation; he recoiled from the imagined burning; and he judged that it must be more for the Divine glory that he should escape dishonour.[365]

In the absence of a presiding judge, Middlemarch society illustrates the importance of individual integrity and perception, in navigating community life and relational ethics. Eliot very clearly shows the folly of superficial dependence on providence, and sets these in ultimate subjection to the power of internal moral strength. These plot resolutions in *Middlemarch* communicate a hopefulness that is less present in the endings of some of her other novels, especially *The Mill on the Floss*. At the time that *Middlemarch* was written, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor were gaining real traction in seeking the enfranchisement of women. In holding the inadequacy of the Middlemarch patriarchy alongside the embodied progress of young women and men in Middlemarch, Eliot creates a space within which her readers can reflect on what they also witness in their own communities, suggesting next steps for progress, without reaching so far ahead as to be extravagant.

Divine Call in *Middlemarch*

The motif of martyrdom in the first half of *Middlemarch* emphasises the squandering of life that is inherent to outdated approaches. As the Middlemarch patriarchy unravels, Dorothea and other younger characters are spared from their unjust decrees. The reader experiences

[363] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 668.
[364] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 672-3.
[365] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 739.

relief at these emancipations. The intertextual links between Strauss' *Life of Jesus* and *Middlemarch* are most evident in Eliot's 'Prelude', within which she frames the explorations of sainthood, sanctity, spiritual authority, and vocation that extend throughout the rest of the novel. Marilyn Orr identifies this as an examination of the established social order, undergirded by religiosity and enforced by the religious patriarchy of the era. Even as early as Cecil's 1934 exposition, critics have noted Eliot's choice to deploy realism as her vehicle for social analysis and criticism, rather than other rhetorical methods:

> George Eliot does not set out to convey an emotional impression at all. What interests her are those features in her scene that distinguish it from other places—the neat prosperity of cottage and parsonage, the "rich and marly" soil, the fact that the women were clean, the children's clothes unpatched. And it is by her clear perception of these things, the precision with which she isolates them, that she makes her scenes real to us And she further enriches her picture by indicating behind these visible features the causes, historic, social and physical, which are their origin.[366]

In this real space, rather than in the extravagances of hagiographies, Eliot begins her novel. The young Theresa of Avila makes her way across the moors with her brother, to seek martyrdom as a kind of romanticised adventure. She is brought home by her uncles. Dorothea is, similarly, reined in and defined by her own uncle. Ironically, this does not prevent her from experiencing a kind of martyrdom in her repressive marriage. Mary Garth's uncle, Peter Featherstone, entraps Mary through very foolish and malicious controlling behaviours, thus similarly failing in the role that gives him his authority. In both this prelude, and the remainder of the novel, uncles are those men who are traditionally responsible for protecting young women using their patriarchal wisdom and oversight. Knöpflmacher noted this lack of functional 'avuncularity' in 1975.[367] Fathers are largely absent in *Middlemarch*, except for the inattentive Mr Vincy, and the fettered Caleb Garth. Overall, the capacity of patriarchs to judge the needs of young women is comprehensively undermined, and Caleb, as the only attentive father, supports Mary in following her own good judgement: a faculty he maintains, even in his disempowered social station.

In this prelude, Eliot elegantly indicates what she accepts about 'sacred' history, and what she wishes to challenge. Theologically, this functions similarly to Strauss' undertaking regarding the life of Jesus. Thus, demystification functions as a textual mechanism within her realism, elevating lived experience—including experiences of both faith and doubt—as the central concerns of theological consciousness, rather than the establishment of a

[366] Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London: Constable, 1966 [1934]), 297-8.
[367] U.C. Knöpflmacher, "Middlemarch: An Avuncular View," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30, no.1 (1975): 53-81.

'mystical', constructed, systematised polemic. Rather than an avoidance of the task of *Wissenschaft*, I posit that Eliot's realism is the culmination of her systematic method, in seeking to be deeply *useful* and truthful in her contribution to discourse. She demonstrates the embodied characteristics of progress, instead of prescribing a polemical rhetoric to issue theological decrees. This demystification is simultaneously personal, theological, political, and poetic.

Twenty-first century readers differ in their theological literacy from Victorian readers. The biblical and hagiographical texts that *Middlemarch* gestures towards are currently less familiar. Theresa of Avila's autobiography, *Libro de la Vida*, describes her call as an epiphany; a vision. This account is not mentioned in the prelude to *Middlemarch*, however, Will Ladislaw is described as being like a Bernini cherubim: a reference to a sculpture depicting the call of Theresa of Avila, in line with the Theresa's account.

> In [the angel's] hands I saw a large golden spear, and at its iron tip there seemed to be a point of fire. I felt as if he plunged this into my heart several times, so that it penetrated all the way to my entrails. When he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out with it, and left me totally inflamed with a great love for God. The pain was so severe, it made me moan several times. The sweetness of this intense pain is so extreme, there is no wanting it to end, and the soul is not satisfied with anything less than God.[368]

Similarly, others have identified Theresa of Avila as Dorothea's 'heroic prototype,'[369] alongside Eliot's assertion that there have been many Theresas throughout history, who

> With dim lights and tangled circumstance... tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by **no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul**... Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off, and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognizable deed.[370]

Existing scholarship around these analogues, particularly Theresa, comes to diverse conclusions about their function. One of the more limited readings is that they are a means of pointing out, through irony, the limited spiritual insight of the immature Dorothea, particularly her attempts at asceticism as a means to social or spiritual status.[371]

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[368] Teresa of Avila, "Libro de la Vida," in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, vol.1. Trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), 197.
[369] Lerner, as cited in Hillary Fraser, "St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in Middlemarch," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 40, no.4 (1986): 400.
[370] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.
[371] See Sherry Mitchell, "Saint Teresa and Dorothea Brooke: The Absent Road to Perfection in Middlemarch," *Victorian Newsletter* 92, (1997): 32-37; Franklin Court, "The Image of St Theresa in Middlemarch and Positive

Eliot establishes the theme of nature in *Middlemarch*'s 'Prelude' by formally deviating from canonical accounts of becoming saintly in her description of Theresa of Avila. Theresa's 'epos' befits her ardent nature, establishing her as Dorothea's 'heroic prototype.'[372] However, Dorothea is without a social context that will allow her full expression of that nature.[373] The question is raised, then, whether Dorothea will be one of the many Theresas who are born into situations that stifle their natures, or whether she will find the means (or *a* means) to live her own epos. Theresa's life, for Eliot, is represented as an expression of a nature she was born with, rather than a response to a divine call. This establishes a realist mode for Eliot's interpretation of the spiritual value of Theresa's life. This realist language differs fundamentally from Theresa's language in her writings, within which she attributes her giftings to supernatural provision—providence, you could say—rather than Theresa herself being exceptional. Eliot's deconstruction of 'Providence' as it is leveraged in Middlemarch society is in sharp contrast.

Within this realist prelude, with Theresa's heart 'beating to a national idea'[374]—rather than anything explicitly related to God—Eliot subverts Theresa's own account of her spiritual call. Theresa's professed epiphany correlates stylistically with biblical call-accounts, for example that of the prophet Isaiah:

> I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"[375]

These call accounts are customary beginnings for biblical narratives and epistles, serving to legitimise the authority of the speaker, on the grounds that they have been chosen by God. An example from the New Testament:

> Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be

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Ethics," *The Victorian Newsletter*, (1983): 21; Robert Damm, "Sainthood and Dorothea Brooke," *The Victorian Newsletter* 35, no.35 (1969): 18.

[372] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.

[373] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.

[374] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.

[375] Isaiah 6:1-8, NRSV.

> saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.[376]

Integral to Christian textual traditions, then, is a pattern of recounting a call narrative in order to legitimise a person's actions as part of God's action in the world. Within this paradigm, spiritual authority arises from the action of the Holy Spirit: that is, by providence.

So, the absence of such a call in *Middlemarch*'s prelude is conspicuous in relation to the traditions that I have described, and conspicuous within the novel more broadly. Eliot attributes both Theresa's and Dorothea's uniqueness and social potency to their respective natures, rather than any event wherein they are supernaturally called by God. Rather, Eliot bestows a relatively normal childhood on Theresa. The form of this assertion leaves a tension between possible readings, much as lived experience tends to: readers can interpret that even before she was called, Theresa's nature was such that she sought ways to serve God exceptionally by martyring herself. Or, the desire to go out and be martyred could be read as a childlike impulse; a mark of immaturity. In both readings, Theresa is distinguished by her *nature* rather than her *call*. The origin of this nature is, like Dorothea's, ambiguous and not presented as definitively unique in a mystical sense. This reconfiguration opens possibilities for any reader experiencing a sense of limitation within their socio-political context: in *Middlemarch*, Eliot demonstrates that it is superfluous—even immoral and damaging—to seek to establish oneself as the font of divine utterances.

Dorothea shares Theresa's nature, whatever its origin. However, despite nominations, ordinations, inheritances, appointments, and professions of spiritual and moral authority in *Middlemarch*, there is no actual single individual that fills this role. From the very beginning of its prelude, Eliot renders the legitimising voice of God mute in *Middlemarch*. Her characters do not receive spiritual direction, comfort, provision, or adjudication from anywhere except each other. The world of *Middlemarch* is self-contained and largely unregenerate. The wisdom of the ages, alluded to in references to the saints (particularly to Thomas Aquinas and his works relating to the theological foundations of the universe) and 'ancients' are simultaneously reduced and elevated to the status of human experience, rather than being propelled by any external divine intervention. The religious signification of *Middlemarch* is ground-breaking, particularly in Victorian novels, according to Nixon, who notes that Eliot's

[376] 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, NRSV.

> entire corpus interacts meaningfully with nineteenth-century religion and religious discourse. Victorian autobiography, the genre of the crisis of faith, and arguably the most representative nineteenth-century literary form, employs structurally plots of religious conversion modeled either after Augustine (Hopkins's "lingering-out sweet skill") or Paul (Hopkins's "át ónce, as once as a crash"). In other words, the Victorian bildungsroman is structured around a conversion plot—"God's active transformation of the passive Christian... Transformation into the perfect unity of God turns into the development of one's unique self.'[377]

This is a potently melioristic distinction, which focusses on systemic failures rather than a magical or superstitious understanding of divine providence.

In Eliot's other novels, discussions between priests or clerics and protagonists are integral to the characters' development of their sense of significance and context. Dorothea, however, is conspicuously without such support. Her engagement with religion is isolated and rudderless, never intersecting with a faith community beyond her severely limited sense of fellowship of marriage. This aspect of *Middlemarch*'s setting contrasts with Rufus Lyon's support of Felix Holt, Daniel Deronda's support of Gwendolen Harleth, Dinah Morris' support of several other characters in *Adam Bede*, and Dolly's support of Silas Marner. Gillian Beer posits that *Middlemarch*'s narrator is Dorothea's priest:

> The contract of reader and writer appears to be between equals, yet reserves to the writing an authority beyond whose span it is not possible for the reader to function. In Comte's *Catechism* (1858) the debate is divided between the woman who enquires and the priest who answers. Here woman and priest are combined in narrative discourse. Precisely because so many different kinds of explanation are afforded, it is hard for the reader to counter-interpret.[378]

Like a priest, the narrator of *Middlemarch* continually contextualises Dorothea in relation to her spiritual heritage among the virgin saints of the Roman Catholic canon (signified by the romanised titles employed – Santa Clara, Santa Barbara, rather than Saint Claire, Saint Barbara). By choosing the narrator as the voice for these contextualisations, Eliot highlights that there are things that need to be said about Dorothea's significance that are overlooked by the clergy in the novel. These clergy, by their silence and laxity (partially excepting Farebrother), are shown to be deficient in their capacities to lead their community in its experiences of gender and marriage. The prologue establishes Theresa as analogous to Dorothea in *nature*, but the narrator-priest,[379] in their transcendent absence from the plot, cannot catechise Dorothea as to her right place in society. The result is that Dorothea remains disconnected; uninitiated; illegitimate within her context. She is unbaptised in her community in relation to her nature, to use Christian theological terms.

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[377] Jude Nixon, "Framing Victorian Religious Discourse: An Introduction," in *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4.
[378] Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 192.
[379] Beer, *George Eliot*, 192.

> There is a certain social desertion and loneliness that are even regarded as characteristic of their [middle-class women's] lot... The pursuits of men, the movements of industry, the progress of science—in short, the whole ongoings of the outer world, are to her but a phantasmagoria, destitute of reality... there is entailed upon her a constant sense of alienation from society.[380]

Eliot establishes Middlemarch society as status-conscious and driven by superficial markers of legitimacy. References to English political and social systems link Eliot's critique of this fictional society with the realities of English society. Within these large-scale dynamics of inequality and complexity, Eliot does not distance broad social analysis from personal particularities, demonstrating that individual relationships and personal agency constitute the overall social fabric in both Middlemarch and in the real society.

The legendary/heroic/mythical and the pedestrian are also juxtaposed in *Middlemarch*. As I have described, the narrator defines Theresa's nature as something she was born into. The fulfilment of her 'epos' is delayed by patriarchal intervention until she is of age, in *Middlemarch*, but in historical accounts, she was obstructed so that she could be married.[381] This is a functional inversion of Mr Brooke's effort to obstruct Dorothea's martyrdom in her wish to marry Casaubon. Alongside the undeserving veneration offered to patriarchs and their heirs, Dorothea and Mary are both ridiculed and denigrated for their dedication to reading early theology and associated stories, despite their conscientiousness. Thus, while Dorothea and Mary engage themselves fully in earnestly seeking to learn from both the present and the past, they also are hindered by social expectations about their potential and purpose. The action of their uncles in the patriarchy, instead proclaim their obligations to less committed (and less suitable) men.

Arthur Brooke: Brokering the *Status Quo*

Arthur Brooke is the uncle and legal guardian of Dorothea, in *Middlemarch*. He is dubiously distinguished by a broad interest, combined with a lack of deep understanding on any topic. A chronic dabbler, he nonetheless dominates conversations by interrupting the superior insights of others. He frequently directs the plot by making poorly-informed and disconnected orations that are utilised by less innocent patriarchs to ratify their privilege. There is an element of paternal sweetness to his character, which highlights the inefficacy of his good intentions towards those he is responsible for. He is most acutely damaging in his

[380] J.D. Milne (1857), as cited in Beer, *George Eliot*, 158.
[381] See footnote in Allison Peers (trans. and ed.), *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila* (New York: Image Books), 66.

support of Edward Casaubon's suppression of Dorothea after their marriage, and in his comprehensive failings as a landlord. In Brooke, Eliot diagnoses the social damage enacted by even the most absent-minded, well-meaning privilege. Brooke negatively demonstrates that it is accurate perception and responsiveness that qualifies someone for community leadership, rather than age and gender. Eliot thus establishes Brooke's self-characterisation as a knowledgeable, far-seeing patriarch as a constructed fiction. His 'fictional character might help us to reveal the fiction of character.'[382]

Brooke's early introduction in the novel is a soft and seemingly harmless exploration of a well-meaning but clueless paternal figure. Over the course of the novel, his aphorisms increase in their harmfulness to Dorothea, as he habitually and uncritically views her as a means of satisfying her husband's whims, rather than a person with desires and needs in her own right. Speaking in aphorisms and platitudes, he is an embodied example of what Strauss objected to in Baader's writings. This blinkered habit deprives Dorothea of much-needed advocacy and support; he inadvertently sides with other patriarchs rather than Dorothea. This arises from a consistent reduction of other characters to their social roles in his inattentive, generalised approximation of a social understanding. This costly absence of skill almost sees him lynched by his own tenants on his own land. Thus, his social status as a landowner is shown to be extremely flimsy in the real sense. Eliot displays familiar wit in ultimately situating him in a political career, and Arthur becomes less harmful, not through growth in his understanding, so much as the growing capacity of those around him to manage him and thus limit his negative impact.

Natural consequences for Brooke arise as he calls on Mr Dagley, his tenant, and gets told to watch out for Reform. More benignly than for other patriarchal power-brokers, he learns that his perception is unsuitable: 'He had never been insulted on his own land before, and had been inclined to regard himself as a general favourite (we are all apt to do so, when we think of our own amiability more than of what other people are likely to want of us).'[383] Immediately after this exchange, Dorothea upstages him as an orator. This natural capacity arises from her sincere, informed, and pragmatic concern about local housing standards. The idea of vicars, of vicariousness, and these miscarriages of responsibility and social

[382] Sarah Ahmed, "Willful Parts: Problem Characters or the Problem of Character," *New Literary History* 42, no.2 (2011): 231. Ahmed's discussion of Eliot is limited, however, to Maggie Tulliver (*The Mill on the Floss*) and Gwendolyn Harleth (*Daniel Deronda*), as examples of willfulness and rebelliousness in Eliot's fiction. Ahmed notes, particularly, influential authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, who was greatly affected by Maggie Tulliver, especially her unjust death (249).
[383] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 426.

protection/representation are fundamental to Eliot's qualms with the patriarchy. These men carry on with the same kind of ethic as the privileged men of Eliot's other stories, while natural leaders and reformers like Dorothea and Mary Garth truly see others, and are moved to compassion in this seeing. As Eliot notes, 'There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men.'[384]

Martyrdom, Matrimony, and the Empty Sanctuary

In conspicuous contrast to her uncle, Dorothea doubts her own vision despite conscientious work in developing it. This doubt is particularly inflamed as she seeks to martyr herself in subjection to her husband. She conflates obedience to him with obedience to God, just as she has been conditioned to do:

> Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance: how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory? Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary – at least the alphabet and a few roots – in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian. And she had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband; she wished, poor child, to be wise herself.[385]

What Dorothea is embodying here is the conflict between her natural vocation, and what her social role asks of her. This conflict stems from her limiting marriage. Rosamond also touches on this understanding of marriage as martyrdom when she calls religion a kind of mourning. Dorothea's initial instinct, arising from her social conditioning to conflate matrimony with divine service, is to dissolve her selfhood into asceticism:

> the mental act that was struggling forth into clearness was a self-accusing cry that her feeling of desolation was the fault of her own spiritual poverty... she had contemplated her marriage chiefly as the beginning of new duties: from the very first she had thought of Mr Casaubon as having a mind so much above her own, that he must often be claimed by studies which she could not entirely share; moreover, after the brief narrow existence of her girlhood she was beholding Rome, the city of visible history, here the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar.[386]

This sentiment resonates with an adage of Theresa's that I explore in chapter ten, 'Let me suffer, or let me die.' Eliot later references the mistreatment of wives and martyrdom of widows as signs of social degeneracy in earlier cultures, suggesting that any tendency

[384] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 664.
[385] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 63.
[386] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 204-5.

towards this in English society is degenerative[387]: corresponding conduct within Greek society, at some phases, is described in the Berg notebook as 'barbarism.'[388] This resonates with Eliot's categorisation of religions of fear and suppression as a kind of savagery, quoted earlier.[389]

With Casaubon's death, narratorial references to Dorothea's devotional activity *and* to her martyrdom are displaced by references to her nature, indicating that she is growing towards accurate self-perception. In parallel with this shift, the self-idolatrous religions of Bulstrode, Casaubon, and other influential men are highlighted, for example in the process of the selection of a chaplain for the new hospital. Even after Casaubon's death, Sir James self-centredly comments that he dislikes remarriage of widows, with his decree that it is 'degrading.'[390] He offers no qualification, despite the burden it places on Dorothea. This insensitivity is the inverse of Mary and Dorothea's painstaking efforts to live in a socially beneficial and productive manner. Casaubon's hypocrisy provides a means for comment on the Church of England's influence in English society. Bulstrode correspondingly (and equitably) enables critique of Dissenters and Methodists, who were potential objects of hope beyond the Church of England. Links between money, business and perceived legitimacy are highlighted by community discussions around the election. Eliot is clear that the proclamations of powerful figures in *Middlemarch* arise within a deeply irrational, unbalanced, and self-referential system.

This irrationality peaks in chapter sixty, which relates a scene with Mr Trumbull the auctioneer, who leverages these superficial markers of respectability. He appeals satirically to the threat of insulting religion, while obviously doing so himself. This irony distils the contradictions inherent to the use of religion for personal gain in *Middlemarch*, reducing these patterns of behaviour to crude and greedy manipulation, that capitalises on superstition:

> Six pounds – six guineas – a Guydo of the first order going at six guineas – it is an insult to religion, ladies; it touches us all as Christians, gentlemen, that a subject like this should go at such a low figure.[391]

The validation provided by religious affiliation is eroded in the reader by the foolishness of the characters who accept it within the novel. The notions and situations that are reacted against are similarly nonsensical: 'furnished indeed with such large framefuls of expensive

[387] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 234.
[388] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook]. 1869-1876. George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York, 54.
[389] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 665.
[390] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 874.
[391] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 652.

flesh-painting in the dining-room… Mrs Larcher was nervous until reassured by finding the subjects to be Scriptural.'[392] Mrs Larcher's reaction correlates, for example, with the silliness of the medical perspectives articulated in negotiations about the hospital chaplain. As characters are taken in by these vulgar caricatures of religion, it is shown that the mechanisms of respectability and religiosity are tightly interwoven with capitalist parisitisms. More serious occurrences deprive the Middlemarch community of better conditions, for example the rejection of the wise and affable Camden Farebrother as chaplain for the hospital. This rejection is essentially part of Bulstrode's political plot to control the hospital, but the public propaganda version is attributed to Farebrother's mild tendency to gamble occasionally. The accusers—Casaubon, Bulstrode, and Featherstone, most notably—are, in their natures, far less respectable than those they seek to attack and control.

Confronting Pharaoh, Preparing for Exodus

Throughout her biography and her writing, Eliot distinguishes between the leveraging of others that occurs in superficial religiosity, and sincere, benevolent faith. This distinction arose in her correspondence after her translation of Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, and continued to be drawn into sharper focus throughout her writing. Following her translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, this aspect of Eliot's development surged ahead. This trajectory has continued beyond Eliot's time into contemporary understandings of iconoclasm, idolatry, and inequality. As the socialist Jewish scholar, Abraham Heschel, articulates in *The Prophets*, 'What is an idol? Any god who is mine but not yours, any god concerned with me but not with you, is an idol.'[393] It should not be assumed that Eliot's position is unorthodox or anti-faith simply because she undermines false assertions of religious power in *Middlemarch*. Such an assumption is imprecise, and does not take into account the very diverse faiths and interpersonal behaviours of her characters. It also overlooks that defining faith and holiness is very much the concern of people who incorporate these concepts into their worldviews. Even if Hegel and Feuerbach are correct in their assertions that faith will, in time, mature into an awakened humanity-without-religion, this is not the present reality, and religious thought continues to have enormous social impacts, especially as it continues to be leveraged by authoritarian nationalists throughout the world. This is an ongoing dynamic that has rarely—if ever—been entirely suspended.

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[392] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 644.
[393] Rabbi Abraham Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays in Human Existence* (Canada: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1959), 86.

As Eliot represents the demystification of this religious exclusion for Dorothea—the exclusion of women from authority and autonomy; exclusion of the non-ordained from the mystical role of the religious authority—she repeatedly returns to death imagery. The religious traditions and histories that Casaubon studies are variously likened to a 'funeral procession,'[394] to 'shattered mummies,' and 'crushed ruins.'[395] Similarly, descriptions of his personage refer to his old age, desiccation, and frailty. He is distinguished primarily by his inability to emotionally connect with other characters, even in the most superficial ways. He is a dead man walking, and this deadness seeps out to damage those around him, especially Dorothea:

> there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been lower than she had believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character, and made him defeat his pride by shocking men of ordinary honour.[396]

These exorbitant claims for subjection correlate with those placed on Mary Ann Evans, which she resisted by moving to London. Casaubon's death marks the death of Dorothea's need to subordinate her youth and her intellectual vibrance—her 'ardent nature'[397]—not just to Casaubon, but to these traditions. His death marks the beginning of her process of embracing, rather than suppressing, this ardent nature as she grows into a creative flexibility in expressing her fundamental nature. Farebrother's liberal civility contrasts sharply with Casaubon's demeanour: 'Very fine! You talk as if young women were tied up to be chosen, like poultry at market.'[398] Thus, these figures are assembled around Dorothea and her *Bildung* in remembrance of the companions of the young Evans, including those 'uncles' (her father and brother) who sought to draw her back from her calling. Casaubon and Featherstone both die in the middle of the novel, which undermines their self-centralisation by demonstrating that they are secondary to the ongoing development of Dorothea and Mary, especially. These deaths—and the ongoing *Bildungen* of the characters who had been subjected to these men—offer hope that extends far beyond these initial suppressions.

In the Berg notebook, Marian Lewes records Edmund Spenser's poem, conveying the significance of Dorothea's (and her own) eventual emancipation:

> Thrice happy she that is so well assured
> Unto herself. & settled so in heart,

[394] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 205.
[395] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 512.
[396] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 528.
[397] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, *passim.*
[398] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 547.

That neither will for better be allured,
No fears to worsen with any chance to start,
But like a steddy ship, doth strongly part
The raging waves, & keeps her course aright;
No aught for tempest doth from it depart,
Nor aught for fair weather's false delight.
Such self-assurance need not fear the spight
Of grudging foes, the favour seek of friends;
But in the stay of her own stedfast might
Neither to one herself nor other bends.
Most happy she that most assured doth rest
But he most happy who such loves best.[399]

This poem directly precedes a section of notes about Bryant's *A New System; of an Analysis of Ancient Mythology: wherein an attempt is made to divert tradition of Fable: & to reduce the Truth to its original purity*. In this section, Marian Lewes emphasises the way in which 'Bryant combines abundant scepticism with abundant confidence in his own power to lay open the kernel of latent truth concealed in fable.'[400] She objects to his presumption in attempting this key to all mythologies, which overlooks the rich diversity of faith-approaches throughout history. This diversity is represented positively in the notebook, as an expression of the ways in which different communities have expressed their commonly held social responsibilities.

Dorothea's *Bildung* intersects with Eliot's own, as I explore throughout this thesis, especially in chapter ten. Just as Dorothea's maturity drives the maturation of the Middlemarch community, Eliot's maturation enables the collective maturation of her readers. While this diffuse impact may well be 'unhistorical,' as Eliot signals in the initial and final passages of *Middlemarch*, it is nonetheless significant: more significant than the sharpest polemic, in light of this diffusion. Another expression of this diffusion could be the socialisation of progress, as communities are rebuilt by the erosion of unsuitable systems and structures, not by violently lurching revolutions, but by the embodiment of progress, in compassionate relationship.

Conclusion

Eliot demonstrates the behaviours and perspectives that hinder the embodiment of progress, in *Middlemarch*. The Berg notebook demonstrates that she drew on both personal and historical, corporate lived experience. She engages temperament and sensibility as her means

[399] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook], George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York, 80.
[400] Eliot, *Berg Notebook*, 81.

of inviting readers towards specific historical awareness, to demonstrate what would constitute progress within the specific cultural moment that *Middlemarch* was written. Like Strauss, Feuerbach, Marx, and many of Eliot's other contemporaries, she challenged obsolete, obstructive ways of thinking, by demonstrating their human consequences. The polemical formats of these writers were borrowed from the establishment that they sought to question, and thus still exhibited the combative and arrogant tone of those they sought to criticise, especially Strauss. The bulk of Eliot's genius—and thus her extraordinary success—was her capacity to develop, through careful and faithful attention, a deep familiarity with the thoughts and feelings of others. In doing so, she directly opposed the desecration of sympathetic collaboration, demanding that society grow beyond the sympathetic numbness of its unqualified patriarchs.

8. London: Collaborations, Criticism, and Traumatic Collegiality

Introduction

After her father's death, Evans began boarding at the house of John Chapman at 142 Strand, London. Here, she began writing for and co-editing for Chapman's freethinking periodical, *The Westminster Review*. In this setting, Evans' connections broadened considerably, as did her textual awareness, but she never acclimatised fully to life in London:

> I know you are enjoying the country. I have just been having the joy myself. The wide sky, the not-London, makes a new creature of me in half an hour. I wonder then why I am ever depressed – why I am so shaken by agitations. I come back to London, & again the air is full of demons.[401]

She was nonetheless invigorated by a rare diversity of opinions and values among contributors to *The Westminster Review*, coming together to openly discuss many radical questions and topics, spanning social and political theory, higher criticism,[402] literary reviews, theology, economics, educational theory, gender theory and suffrage, ethics, philosophy, and evolutionary science. Eliot's sense of sound perception in dialogue as the embodiment of social progress resonates with the potential of this setting. Her resistance to unqualified polemical decrees also arose here.

Her reviews display incisive attentiveness. She persevered in understanding the internal logic and contextual value of each work she reviewed, and provided support as an editor with similar respect and care. These analyses show her early cognitive flexibility and agility. This matured into an unparalleled awareness of the systems and social forces present in the individuals and communities constituting English society. Alongside these scholarly capacities, she had complex personal experiences of the inequalities and moral frailties of Victorian society. She gracefully integrated her awareness of both discursive currents and practical manifestations of diverse ways of thinking and relating in her novels.

Evans and her colleagues experienced transitions and disruptions within a hegemony

[401] George Eliot, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. 16 Blandford Square, [London], Aug.19, 1863. 4l.* George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 101-2

[402] The study of the literary methods and sources discernible in a text, especially as applied to biblical writings.

of conservatism and assertive regulation. In this sense, the role of religion in social regulation in England at this time had much in common with the German situation. As scientific observations disrupted some of the assertions of religion, society changed rapidly. Science had dispelled many of the mysteries that were previously seen as spiritual concerns, and the need to delineate and define the religious sphere became increasingly pressing. These undertakings resonated with the project of *The Westminster Review* and surrounding community, in London, where Evans now lived. These affiliations were risky, but also promised a freedom of expression and exploration that was necessary for Evans to develop her sense of scholarly integrity.

Traumatic Collegiality

Evans began lodging with the Chapman family in January of 1851. Their strong rapport nettled Chapman's wife and his mistress, who both also lived there. Evans retreated to Rosehill from March until September of that year. Her correspondence with Chapman during this time demonstrates some defensiveness about how their relationship was perceived. Biographical speculation varies on the topic, sometimes lapsing into sensationalism. Archival material is inconclusive, and I am not interested to speculate. Relevant letters show a highly pragmatic collaboration between Evans and Chapman, wherein Evans' capacity for analysis and interpersonal strategy was showcased beautifully. One letter stands out as an anomaly, and does not read as if it was really aimed at Mr Chapman:

> Dear Mr Chapman… On further consideration I consent to continue the Catalogue, since I am ashamed of perpetual vacillations, on condition that you state or rather, I should hope, restate to Mrs. C. the face that I am doing it not because I 'like,' but in compliance with your request. You are aware that I never had the slightest wish to undertake the thing on my own account. If I continue it, it will be with the utmost repugnance, and on the understanding that I shall receive no remuneration.
>
> Yours etc,
> Marian Evans.[403]

'Remuneration', in Evans' handwriting, is rendered with a somewhat performative flourish on the original manuscript, whereas Eliot's other letters are written in measured and controlled script [image redacted due to photo permissions]:

Evans' other letters to Chapman during 1851 have entirely different tone and content, demonstrating that she had rapidly moved into an indispensable editorial role. Chapman's

[403] George Eliot, *ALS to [John] Chapman. Rosehill [Coventry] April 4 [1851] 3p.*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 348.)

success in publishing was largely due to her influence from then on, evidenced by the prompt collapse of his publishing venture when they parted ways in 1855. For example:

> My dear friend:
>
> If, as I suppose, you intend to rewrite the letter to Mill, would it not be better if the 1st Paragraph read thus—"joint aims, so as best to further the main purpose of the future proprietor, which is, to make the Review the organ of the ablest and most liberal thinkers of the time." For "organ" in the 2d paragraph read "medium." I wish, too, you would leave out the dashes, which weaken instead of strengthening the impression on the reader. In the 3rde Paragraph for "I am convinced <u>that</u>" read "that, I am convinced"; for "gratefully received," which sounds too much like a craving for alms, read "duly valued." "Securing air" is an absurd expression and is of course a slip of the pen. I should like the 4th Paragraph better if it began thus—"In the sketch submitted to you there is perhaps an unnecessary air of conservatism." I think Mr. Lombe is a capital man, who knows what he means and will not pay for what he does <u>not</u> mean. I do not see that he wants "smoothing down," or that he is a person on whom the process should be tried. Hickson's method with him seems not to have answered, since according to Mr. Lombe's account there had been letters of remonstrance from him, threatening to remove his support unless his views were more fully represented. Why should you shirk the direct fulfilment of his proposition?—the obtaining as good articles as possible on his chosen subjects—since he seems to choose well. I thoroughly agree with him about the hereditary "legislators." I suppose when he wrote this letter he had not received your last.[404]

Mr Lombe's 'hereditary legislators' belong to the political era of *Middlemarch*, as the article referred to is the opening article of *The Westminster Review's* first issue, titled 'Representative Reform.'[405]

Amid these relational matters and professional complexities, Evans undertook the emotional labour traditionally doled out to women. It is within this role that Theresa of Avila was first named in relation to Eliot. It seems that Mark Rutherford may have been the origin of the unusual spelling of Theresa that Eliot uses in *Middlemarch*. Ashton quotes Rutherford's autobiography, which

> tells a possibly made-up or at least elaborated story of Mark Rutherford making a mistake over the number of books he was to sell and misunderstanding the content of a letter he had been asked to write… He falls 'a prey to self-contempt and scepticism'. In this state of mind he goes to 'Theresa's' (Marian Evans's) room to read proofs with her. When she discovers another mistake by him, he faints, awaking to find Theresa sponging his face with cold water. He unburdens himself to her, telling of his overwhelming sense of failure and 'sobbing convulsively' in her lap.[406]

With demands for factuality aside, this account conveys Rutherford's perception of what, in

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[404] George Eliot, *ALS to [John Chapman] Rosehill [Coventry] June 15, [1851] 2 leaves*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 351-353.)
[405] John Blackwood, "John Blackwood to GE, London, 14 June 1857," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 352.
[406] Rosemary Ashton, *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), 171.

the prelude to *Middlemarch*, is described as Theresa's 'ardent nature.'[407]

Chapman's publishing decisions carried an air of contrarian controversy, and Evans tempered this skilfully. The community surrounding Chapman's house in London was unified primarily by its diverse heterodoxy. Each had their own experiences of the consequences of their heterodoxy, and it was within this environment that Evans continued her own process of maturation. In this capacity, she watched other thinkers make their contributions, and experience injurious reactions: shattered careers, exiles, criminal charges, and even imprisonment. Firm adherence to the freethinking creed of thorough inquiry frequently made martyrs of her contemporaries, the vast majority of whom were men. As a young woman, it was necessary for her to tread even more carefully, as there were very few contexts within which she could experience collegiality, if this context was cut off from her.

Similarly, the English translation of *The Life of Jesus* was reviewed as being 'The most pestilential book ever vomited out of the jaws of hell' by the Earl of Shaftesbury.[408] Perhaps due to her gender, Marian Evans was not singled out as culpable in her connection to the project. Thus, in evaluating Eliot's decision to focus on reviewing the work of other writers between her translations of Strauss and Feuerbach, it is important to take note of both a methodological choice to write fiction instead of polemics as her major works, and an awareness of the pitfalls associated with broaching polemical topics in a more direct way. This aspect of Eliot's choice to write fiction has been broadly examined, especially by critics who follow on from early assertions that the young Evans lost her faith during the process of translating Strauss: an anti-faith position would need to be camouflaged very carefully, and was particularly dangerous for women, who were frequently deprived of their (already sparse) freedoms. However, it does not necessarily follow that Eliot wrote as she did as a foil for the retaliation of the establishment against what they considered faithlessness.

There is a pronounced difference in the reception of Eliot's novels when compared to the experiences of her contemporaries, most notably J.A. Froude in his publication of *The Nemesis of Faith* in 1849.[409] Froude was subjected to a long process of vilification that included the burning of his books at Oxford, and the destruction of his career. Froude's approach and temperament was more conciliatory than Strauss', but both shared a sense of responsibility to demythologise belief structures, and this threatened the systems of legitimation that undergirded their respective social systems. Strauss' identification of the

[407] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963 [1871-2]), xvi.
[408] Gregory Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Question*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 77-79.
[409] Ashton, *142 Strand*, 59.

Gospels as narratives rather than literal histories, in and of itself, was ground-breaking, and was met with fierce resistance within the theological establishment. The socio-political impact of this recalibration was deferred somewhat, brought to a head in Karl Marx's responses to Ludwig Feuerbach's follow-on work, *The Essence of Christianity*. Given that Froude's *Nemesis* was published the year after the communist revolutions, his thinking was a deeply-felt threat.

In Germany, these texts disrupted systems of authority and social regulation in Germany. Reactions against Strauss were also due to his tone:

> The notion of the mythus… being thus shown to be applicable to the narratives of the New Testament, why should we not dare to call them by their right name; why—that is to say in learned discussion—avoid an expression **which can give offence only to the prejudiced or the misinformed**?[410]

These discursive wars were interlaced with the real wars of the nineteenth century, and with the politics of revolutions and conservative counter-actions. Theological discourse during this time functioned very differently to how it does now: these were inadvertently manifestoes, far more than they were private reading about private faith.

Within London circles, James and Harriet Martineau were siblings who did not warm readily to Evans. Harriet was irritated by Evans' reserved and fastidious temperament, which contrasted with her own fiery and flamboyant tendencies. Harriet Martineau's correspondence brims with morsels of discovery about others. Evans, since her 'early life' continued what Bodenheimer calls her 'young Evangelical ban on "evil speaking,"' which continued as 'George Eliot's strenuous personal resistance to gossip.'[411] This resistance was reflected in her tendency, throughout her life, to write 'elaborate notes of remorseful apology to persons with whom she had allowed herself talk of a kind her conscience disapproved.'[412] A penitential letter to Barbara Bodichon in 1869 shows Eliot's thinking after an exchange she regretted, but possibly nobody else noticed:

> I am always rather miserable when I have chanced to seem flippant & irrelevant to one who deserves respect. & I felt yesterday that in speaking of Mr. ? my joking way of saying he was a

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[410] David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot [1840-1], Lives of Jesus Series, ed. Leander Keck (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1973), 58.
[411] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "George Eliot and the Power of Evil Speaking," *Dickens Studies Annual* 20, (1991): 202.
[412] Bodenheimer, "George Eliot and the Power of Evil Speaking," 203. For a deeper understanding of Eliot, shame and emotional repair, please refer to two publications by Joseph Adamson: "'Error that is Anguish to Its Own Nobleness': Shame and Tragedy in The Mill on the Floss," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 63, no.4 (2003): 317-31; and "Emotional Rescue: Shame and the Depressive Posture in George Eliot," *PsyArt: A Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, (2009): no pagination, 18 pages. The second of these articles is especially descriptive of Eliot's anxieties about the quality of her writing, drawing this biographical matter together with Maggie Tulliver's insecurities in *The Mill on the Floss*.

> "general writer" might have seemed a sarcasm to him personally, when in fact, it was rather a spurt on the condition of the literary world in answer to Mr. Burton's "What is he?"
>
> The rector seems to me worthy of high esteem so far as I have seen anything of him, & his tête-a-tête talk is really valuable & unusually genuine.
>
> Pardon me for troubling you with an explanation of something which is necessary rather for my own ease of mind than for any good of yours.[413]

James Martineau authored the best-known English review of the Strauss translation, in the *Westminster Review* in April 1847:

> The appearance of Dr. Strauss's work, in 1835, can have taken by surprise no one acquainted with the course of Biblical literature during the last half-century. The instantaneous effect produced by it was a start, less of astonishment, than of realized expectation. So completely were tendencies of the age, in themselves distinct and independent,—the historical researches of Niebuhr, the mythological speculations of Heyne, the metaphysics of Hegel, as well as the internal condition of Scripture criticism itself—converging towards such a result, that we have no doubt the 'Life of Jesus' did but disappoint, by anticipating, many a like project already floating through the German brain.[414]

James Martineau's criticism of Strauss echoes similar sentiments to those of his sister towards Marian Evans, in that he felt there was insufficient novel thought and method in what Strauss had to say for it to be stimulating. However, he did note that 'we can testify that the translator has achieved a very tough work with remarkable spirit and fidelity.'[415] James went to study Hegel at Tübingen the following year, which suggests that he was, like Harriet, predisposed to performative nonchalance, and was more impacted by Strauss than his review suggests.

Following the European revolutions of 1848 and the subsequent suppressions of those revolutions, Karl Marx moved to London in August 1849. He experienced severe financial difficulties that led him to seek out Chapman, to form a publishing relationship. Evans had herself recommenced boarding with Chapman in September 1851, to enable a closer working relationship. Chapman was also under financial stress at this time. As his key strategist, Evans dined often at his home, privately advising on both relational and technical aspects of managing *The Westminster*. Marx, as a young man, had made early contact with Feuerbach regarding an English translation of *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* that his close friend, Friedrich Engels, had purportedly commenced. This was of no consequence in the London context, and Evans' awareness of the significance of the book, combined with her experience translating Strauss, ensured that no working relationship arose between Marx and

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[413] George Eliot, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. The Priory, 21. North Bank, Regents Park, Monday, [Jun. 14, 1869]*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.5, 44-45.)
[414] James Martineau, "Strauss and Parker," *The Westminster Review* XLVII, no.139 (April 1847): 161.
[415] Martineau, "Strauss and Parker," 161.

Chapman.

Beyond the Light of the Chimney

Evans moved out of Chapman's house and into her own lodgings in January of 1853. The practicalities of her accommodations had come to weigh on her, and her health was impacted. In November 1852, she wrote to the Brays that 'I am ready to vow that I will not live in the Strand again after Christmas. If I were not choked by the fog, the time would trot pleasantly withal, but of what use are brains and friends when one lives in a light such as might be got in the chimney?'[416]

Around the time of her thirty-third birthday (22nd November 1853), Evans intimated in correspondences that she had begun spending time alone with George Henry Lewes. Shortly after this, she entered negotiations with Chapman to translate *The Essence of Christianity*. Ashton observes that it was advertised in *The Leader*[417] that it would be published along with an original volume by the 'translator of Strauss' titled *The Idea of a Future Life*.[418] This latter volume was never published. The tone of Evans' letters to John Chapman became to crisp and frigid:

> I bitterly regret that I allowed myself to be associated with your Series, but since I have done so, I am very anxious to fulfil my engagements both to you and the public. It is in this sense that I wish you to publish Feuerbach, and I beg you to understand that I would much rather that you should publish the work and *not* pay me than pay me and not publish it. I don't think you are sufficiently alive to the ignominy of advertising things, especially as part of a subscription series, which never appear. The two requests then which I have to make are first, that you will let me know whether you can, *as a matter of business*, undertake to supply me with the necessary books, and secondly, that you will consider the question of Feuerbach as one which concerns our *honour* first and our pockets after.
>
> I have been making a desk of my knee[419] so I fear some of my words may be illegible, **which will be a pity because of course you can't substitute any half as good**.
>
> Yours faithfully,
> Marian Evans.[420]

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[416] George Eliot, "GE to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, [London, 13 November 1852]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 67. Rosemary Ashton on page 171 of her book, 142 Strand quotes a letter from Evans to Combe: 'Alas! For the pure air I was breathing with you a month ago. My room here has the light one might expect midway up a chimney, with a little blaze of fire below, and a little glimmer of the sky above.' Unfortunately, she attributes the quote to page 66 of Haight in her endnote on page 347. As much as it is a stimulating passage, there is no letter to Combe containing these words in the Haight volumes.

[417] Issue IV (1853): 600.

[418] Ashton, *142 Strand*, 195-6.

[419] Many of Eliot's private letters, throughout her life, make apologies for her handwriting on account of this tendency. The apologies are warranted; her usual handwriting is very readable, in contrast.

[420] George Eliot, "GE to John Chapman, London, [2 December 1853]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 130-1.

In these stretching circumstances, Evans produced a fine translation of *The Essence of Christianity* which, like her translation of *The Life of Jesus,* continues to be the default for English readers. The privacy afforded by her living situation made space for her relationship with Lewes to deepen, and this is evident in her advocacy for his philosophical and scientific writing in her letters, especially to Chapman.

Sara Hennell had remained a close friend since their years together in Coventry, and provided sympathetic support during the project, just as she had during Evans' translation of Strauss, a decade earlier:

> Thank you, dear Sara, for your note. It made me sit down more cheerily to my work this morning. I felt some reluctance to ask [you] to read Feuerbach because I feared he might repel you, but *now*, I may tell you, that I shall feel it a real comfort to have your *prospective* sympathy while I am writing, so be assured you will have the whole cargo of MS. It will be a great one before you get to the end. There are 100 mortal pages of appendix, of closer print than the rest! Your impression of the book exactly corresponds to its effect in Germany. It is considered *the* book of the age there, but Germany and England are *two* countries. People here are as slow to be set on fire as a *stomach*. Then there are the reviewers, who set up a mound of stupidity and unconscientiousness between every really new book and the public. Still I think the really wise and only dignified course for Mr. Chapman would be to publish it in his *Series* as he has announced it.
>
> Thine ever
> Pollian.[421]

Evans was correct about *The Essence of Christianity*'s English reception: in fact, her integration of Feuerbach's ideas into her realist fiction—notwithstanding the work's impact on European history, through Marx—remains Feuerbach's primary legacy in English discourse (see especially chapters nine and twelve).

Conclusion

In London, Evans quickly gained the respect and admiration of those around her. She displayed a nuanced and strategic relational awareness that she integrated into her business contributions, to further the collaborations of her contemporaries, despite pronounced risk. Her sensitivity to political and discursive currents throughout Europe—but especially in Germany—equipped her to make incisive publishing decisions. Despite tendencies to reduce her contributions to the influence of those men that she worked alongside, her correspondence demonstrates that she was indispensable to Chapman's success, particularly. This connected and perceptive self-realisation resounds throughout the *Bildungen* she later wrote.

[421] George Eliot, "GE to Sara Sophia Hennell, London, January [1854]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 137.

9. Calculation and Ardour: German Higher Criticism, Perception, and Progress

> I differ *toto coelo* from those philosophers who pluck out their own eyes that they may see better; for *my* thought I require the senses, especially sight; I found my ideas on materials which can be appropriated only through the activity of the senses.[422]

> Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance: how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory? Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary—at least the alphabet and a few roots—in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian. And she had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband; she wished, poor child, to be wise herself.[423]

Introduction

There is a distinct coherence within Eliot's *Bildung*, and the overlapping conceptions of progress in *Middlemarch*, *The Life of Jesus*, *The Essence of Christianity.* This unity also encompasses Hegel's preceding *Science of Logic* and *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, both of which were fundamentally influential on Strauss and Feuerbach. This unity supports a monist understanding of perception and interpretation: that any rigorous way of knowing will point towards a facet of the truth of reality. In this sense, monism and Bakhtin's dialogical awareness are functionally harmonious: both involve the drawing-together of diversity; the liberation of difference from opposition. However, both Eliot and Bakhtin break with monist perspectives in their understanding of dialogue and progress as always in-process, rather than being able to be decisively concluded. This premise is shown in *Middlemarch* to be integral to progress towards healthy, collaborative community dynamics: a redistribution of power that resonates with Marx's writing, but with a fundamentally different tone and fundamentally different results. Eliot's revolutions, in contrast to Marx's, are (inter)personal

[422] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, xxxiv.
[423] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963 [1871-2]), 63.

from-the-ground-up shifts: gradual cultural nudges towards progress, rather than violent (and consequently unstable) lurches. The ideal, for Eliot, is progress towards flexible, regenerative, ongoing dialogue, rather than dialogue towards establishment of a unitary voice.

These differences in praxis distinguish Eliot, as she invites her readers to enact peaceful cultural revolution. Her readers are encouraged to thoughtfully exercise their own discretion, even if that goes against social consensus, in order to make society more truthful, compassionate, and fair. Specifically, gracious mercy towards immature but powerful people is an important means of wider-scale community growth and nourishment. While this is certainly not something Eliot represents as a universal Christian practice, the natural justice that is embedded in *Middlemarch* and her other novels correlates with values expressed in the Christian poetry in the Berg notebook, as I show in chapter ten. This present chapter examines the unity of these monist perspectives in supporting Hegel's understanding of progress as the work of the Holy Spirit in creation. In Hegel's thought, the Holy Spirit is in total unity with the laws of science, and he sees this grounded outworking in the entirety of the flow of history. This perspective differs substantially from dualistic, oppositionist positions that distinguish between supernatural and natural occurrences, attributing the former to God's work in the world, and describing the latter as fallen and unregenerate. These monist perspectives will not sit well with all readers, but for this group of writers, they formed a cohesive set of observed principles that harmonised new scientific findings and observations with valued understandings of epistemology, morality, and community.

Demystification as Progress

Middlemarch was published twenty-seven years after Evans' English translation of *Life of Jesus*, and seventeen years after her translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity.* It is the culmination of Eliot's formation as a writer. The chronological distance between the projects disqualifies any simplistic attempt to link these three texts, nonetheless it is widely accepted by critics (following on from Lord Cecil's 1935 biography) that translating Strauss contributed fundamentally to a 'loss of faith' for Evans, as I have acknowledged but opposed throughout this thesis. This rhetoric suggests that Strauss' hearty volume, in tandem with the irresistible secular logic of Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, exorcised the young Miss Evans of her epistemologically lax (yet obsessive) evangelical faith, thus paving the way for her to finally and decisively move forward out of religiosity and into life as a secular thinker without religious encumbrance. These critics have gone on to attribute the materialist ethos that manifests in Eliot's realism to

an impervious atheist mindset in the author herself, without clarifying what they are signifying by 'atheist', or what texts may have lead to this position. However, this mindset, while understandably attractive as a streamlined articulation of Enlightenment values and aspirations, is mythological for both Strauss and Eliot. As such, this myth is open to a similar set of critiques to those made by Strauss in his *Life of Jesus*, extended in Eliot's realism, and by later theorists including Michel Foucault. Namely, that histories are stories, and bear textual examination, especially when they shape our critical lens.

To seek to read what Eliot read—let alone respond to each text—would be outside the scope of a life's work for most intelligent thinkers (see Appendix, which shows a very extensive list of writers, grouped by discipline/school). In all but her earliest correspondence,[424] she displays a compunction to jettison any viewpoint without considering it deeply, and even then, she is careful to attend to the potential strengths of the voices with which she engages. It is this dialogical tendency that enabled Eliot to write such diverse characters with equitably applied sympathy and respect. Biographically speaking, the advent of this tendency appears in correspondence from her time in Coventry, where she maintained her close contact in the form of regular, transparent, and warm letters to her earlier tutor, Maria Lewis. Lewis had been a central support and moderating influence regarding Evans' evangelical faith, as I discuss in chapters three and five. Throughout the intensitely formative shifts she experienced alongside Unitarians and other freethinkers in Coventry, Evans maintained a loving respect for Lewis. Similarly, she showed this respect to her father and brother amid deep examination and criticism of the faith values and ideas that they sought to impart to her. Even as Evans became aware that she did not fit with her former mode of faith—most controversially in her decision to cease attending church, to the deep distress of her father—she also came to a deepened knowledge of the function of faith and religious affiliation in relational matters. Rather than 'losing' her faith in Coventry, Evans embarked

[424] An early letter from Mary Ann Evans to John Sibree includes some quite unflattering conflations of Judaism and a 'Jewish temperament' and certain social problems, as well as some observations about the progress of human evolution towards a merging of the races, except for negroes, whose physical unattractiveness, from Evans' perspective, seemed to guarantee that their race would remain separate from others. Later correspondence between Marian Lewes and Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) show a distinct shift away from these tendencies relating to racial prejudice, and the nuance and grace of *Daniel Deronda*, similarly, shows George Eliot's conscientious approach to challenging thought fallacies and shortcomings in her views of others.

The research Eliot undertook towards the writing of *Daniel Deronda* was recorded in her *Miscellanies* notebook, held in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, and the *Daniel Deronda* section of the notebook was researched definitively in Jane Irwin (ed.), *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). This notebook is a fascinating examination of the research processes and reflections that undergirded George Eliot's novel writing.

on a deepening and broadening of her thought on religious, spiritual, and sociological matters. She continued this process of maturation through careful attention to scholarship across a splendid breadth of sources. Regular church attendance or questioning attitudes are not strict or clear markers of any spiritual state unless we are to hold to very narrow filters indeed.

Evans' translation of Strauss in Coventry—and her work reviewing and editing in London—drew her into extended reading and discussion about progressive theologies. Hegel's work was fundamentally influential in this area, most markedly for his observation that faith is not static, but has shifted according to cultural conditions throughout history. Eliot understood religion to be the origin of the 'working-out of higher possibilities,'[425] along similar Hegelian lines to Strauss and Feuerbach, which is shown in her notes about different belief systems in the Berg Notebook. She considered humanity to be capable of progressing towards communal religious expression that would fully effect social regeneration. For Eliot, progress occurs when perception is attuned to lived realities, rather than being displaced by blinkered transcendentalism. Progress from blindness to attuned perception, and from there, into compassionate and situationally fruitful collaboration, forms Eliot's *Bildungen*. The removal of these barriers to true sight—idealisation of others as means for self-gratification, being the most recurrent blindness, but also asceticism and martyr-impulses—correlates with what Strauss and others terms as demystification; the removal of an enchantment or illusion:

> Hegel, like Kerner, plays on the valences of "demystification," but to the opposite effect. The orthodox and Pietists in his day appeal to superstitious ideas about clairvoyants, ghosts, and exorcisms, but Christianity's real miracles are that it "drives out" and "banishes" these illusions. In his view, Christianity is from its inception and at its core a demystifying religion.[426]

Marx is referring to this illusory or sedating type of religious consciousness when he calls religion 'the opiate of the people'. Eliot qualifies Marx's statement in a letter to Barbara Bodichon, where she distinguishes between religion as a numbing distraction, and religion as a focal point for progressive collaboration.[427]

Eliot's articulation of progress closely follows the formulations outlined in *Problems of Life and Mind*, particularly the fourth volume, that she took notes for as she was writing

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[425] George Eliot, "GE to Mme Eugène Bodichon, London, 26 December 1860," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.3, 366.
[426] Thomas Fabisiak, *The "Nocturnal Side of Science" in David Friedrich Strauss's Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, (Georgia: Emory University Graduate Division of Religion, 2015), 6.
[427] George Eliot, *ALS 4pp 16 Blandford Square, Feb.15, 1862*, in folder '138 ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. [1853] – Aug. 18, 1880. 26 Folders,' George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, 12-14.

Middlemarch. Hegel's earlier work, *Wissenschaft der Logik* [Science of Logic], was published in 1812-6, and presented a very similar formulation of the nature of progress as it concerns personal identity:

> Self-identity is the immediacy of Reflection. It is not the kind of Self-identity which is Being or also Nothing, but that kind which constructs itself into unity,—not a reconstruction out of an Other, but this pure construction out of and in self, which we have just examined : Essential Identity. In so far it is not abstract Identity, and not the product of a relative negation taking place outside it, and leaving the distinguished entity separated from it but in other respects subsisting external to it as before. On the contrary Being and every determinateness of Being has transcended itself, not relatively, but in itself : and this simple negativity of Being in itself is neither more nor less than Identity. In so far as Identity is as yet the same as Essence.[428]

Feuerbach draws most heavily on Hegel in this sense of the essence of religion as being the essence of truthful self-awareness, which includes awareness of the self in relation to other people. Correspondingly, in *Middlemarch*, true perception—and true embodiment of Identity, following on from that—arises in understanding the separate, subjective self. In this distinction, the self is empowered to live out its essence, distinct from determination by an Other. Within the Hegelian school, this is transcendence: the shedding of the old, blind self. This is distinct from conceptualisation of transcendence as rising above other people.

Feuerbach was averse to being conflated with Hegel. Nonetheless, he noted:

> This philosophy has for its principle, not the Substance of Spinoza, not the *ego* of Kant and Fichte, not the Absolute Identity of Schelling, not the Absolute Mind of Hegel, in short, no abstract, merely conceptional being, but a *real* being, the true *Ens realissimum*—man; its principle, therefore, is in the highest degree positive and real.[429]

In doing so, Feuerbach extended Hegel to make the nature of this internal transcendence more explicit than before. This understanding of transcendence is in opposition to any theology that posits special revelation, such as that professed by Nicholas Bulstrode. Hegelian transcendence internalises processes of maturation, rather than attributing them to separate spiritual/divine agency. It is in this sense only that Eliot is atheist: like Hegel, she saw the work of God as *in* the world, not as an external interference. This is demonstrated in the poetry of her *Middlemarch* notebook, and in her description of Christ as embodying perfect solidarity, in her letter to John Sibree Jnr.[430]

Weir paraphrases this shared sentiment in his definition of monisms, more generally, as a group of diverse philosophies 'against dualistic understandings of human reality, [that]

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[428] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, vol.2, trans. W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966 [1812-6]), 37-38.
[429] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957 [1854]), xxxv.
[430] Eliot, "GE to John Sibree, Jr., [Foleshill, 8 March 1848]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 252-3.

seek to analyse nature and culture from a single vantage point.'[431] Monism is not overtly political within these definitions. Nonetheless, the prioritisation of experiential, materialist means of interpreting reality gave rise to vast polemical shifts during the nineteenth century. By shifting the epistemological foundations of society away from under-examined—yet assertively ratified—religious traditions and abstract theological moralities and hierarchies, materialist contributions to discourse facilitated the rise of the natural sciences as the central means of interpreting lived realities. Central to these materialities is an idea that arose within monism: that many perspectives—and many voices—must be taken into account, for progress to be embodied within specific communities and specific lives. This idea is antithetical to projects like Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies*, within which he sought to dissolve the dialogical nature of sacred histories and mythologies by offering his one definitive interpretation. Dorothea and Will hint at this when they note that Casaubon's work would be much improved if he knew German.[432] This dialogical openness is not integral to all monistic frameworks, however. Women's voting rights and eugenics have both been propelled by monist thought. The primacy of compassionate consideration of diverse experiences and perspectives remains: progress cannot be embodied without dialogue.

Feuerbach's Atheist Body of Christ

In many regards, the initial German reception of *The Essence of Christianity* was similarly controversial to Strauss' *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*. Feuerbach's other works included a critique of Hegel's philosophy (1839), *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*[433] (1843), and *Das Wesen der Religion*[434] (1851). This corpus was fundamentally disruptive to Christian hegemonies. Receptions of his work within the theological community were correspondingly astringent. Feuerbach acknowledges this with some degree of bitterness in the preface to the second edition of *Das Wesen des Christenthums,*[435] which remains evident, even with Eliot's moderation of his tone:

> I have only found the key to the cipher of the Christian religion, only extricated its true meaning from the web of contradictions and delusions called theology;—but in doing so I have certainly committed a sacrilege. If therefore my work is negative, irreligious, atheistic, let it be remembered that atheism—at least in the sense of this work—is the secret of religion itself; that religion itself, not indeed on the surface, but fundamentally, not in intention or according to its

[431] Todd Weir, "The Riddles of Monism: An Introductory Essay," in Todd Weir (ed.), *Monism: Science, Philosophy, Religion and the History of a Worldview*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.
[432] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 221.
[433] German. Principles of the Philosophy of the Future.
[434] German. The Essence of Religion.
[435] German. The Essence of Christianity.

> own supposition, but in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature.[436]

Ironically, Feuerbach continued in his own *Bildung,* effecting internal growth while also positing his polemic as authoritative: such is the tone of polemics. The trajectory of Feuerbach's thought, leading into the writing of *The Essence of Christianity*, can be traced in previous works published in *Deutsches Jahrbuch*[437] in January and February of 1842, as well as 'Charakteristiken des Modernen After-Christenthums'[438] (also in *Deutsches Jahrbuch*). As a significant influence on his writing during this phase, he mentions two articles by Pierre Bayle: 'Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Menschheit',[439] published in Ausbach in 1838, and 'Philosophie und Christenthum',[440] published in Mannheim in 1839.[441] He comments:

> In these works I have sketched, with a few sharp touches, the historical solution of Christianity, and have shown that Christianity has in fact long vanished, not only from the reason but from the life of mankind, that it is nothing more than a *fixed idea*, in companies, our railroads and steam-carriages, our picture and sculpture galleries, our military and industrial schools, our theatres and scientific museums.[442]

This fixed idea refers to religion as a power apparatus, rather than spirituality as a means of growth and regeneration. This distinction bears out in Eliot's fiction, the latter being what Hegel was referring to as the work of the Holy Spirit, as I have discussed above.

Eliot's contribution to progress in the Hegelian sense was her advocacy for individualised spiritual perspectives, based on lived experience within community. She felt that Strauss had only seen part of the picture, but valued his contribution nonetheless:

> I am never pained when I think Strauss right, —but in many cases I think him wrong, as every man must be in working out into detail an idea which has a general truth, but is only one element in a perfect theory.[443]

Strauss' writing reflected his deep belief in the knowability of things that had previously been mysterious: he sought, in his *Life of Jesus,* to apply rational thought to the biblical accounts of the life of Jesus, in order to delineate the origins and functions of the assertions and

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[436] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xxxvi.
[437] German. German Yearbook.
[438] German. Characteristics of Modern After-Christianity.
[439] German. A Contribution to the History of Philosophy and Humanity. Bayle (1647-1706) wrote much earlier in French, so it seems likely that Feuerbach was drawing from German translations of entries in his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697) [French. Historical Dictionary of Criticism].
[440] German. Philosophy and Christianity.
[441] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xliv.
[442] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xliv. Original italics.
[443] Jane Eberwein, "Dangerous Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: Mary Ann Evans, Emily Dickinson, and Strauss's Das Leben Jesu," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 21, no.2 (2012): 5-6. Sources for this quote have not been checked.

narratives contained therein. That is, 'to substitute a new mode of considering the life of Jesus, in the place of the antiquated systems of supranaturalism and naturalism' because 'the orthodox view of this history became superannuated earlier than the rationalistic, since it was only because the former had ceased to satisfy an advanced state of culture, that the latter was developed.'[444] Later, in 1855, Evans' explorations included translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, which had proved to be formative for Engels and Marx. Young Marx had written to Feuerbach about Engels' undertaking of an English translation of the same book in 1844.[445]

Eliot's mode of challenging accepted social values and power structures in *Middlemarch* resonates with Strauss. By adapting her formal approach away from Strauss', Eliot offered her thinking in a far more open and peaceable form. Her works facilite moral and spiritual reflection, beyond the mere 'calculation' of polemics. The following words are the last section of the last book that Eliot had published, which she chose from one of her notebooks:

> The impulse and act made [Marcus Curtius'] heroism, not the correctness of adaptation. No doubt the passionate inspiration which prompts and sustains a course of self-sacrificing labour in the light of soberly estimated results gathers the highest title to our veneration, and makes the supreme heroism. But the generous leap of sympathy in us beholders, that we may not fall completely under the mastery of calculation, which in its turn may fail our ends for want of energy got from ardour. We have need to keep the sluices open for possible influxes of the rarer sort.[446]

Eliot's formal choices arose out of empathy for the plights of Strauss and his contemporaries. It is fundamentally important to examine Eliot's lived experience of translating Strauss and witnessing the reception of *Life of Jesus*. Her decision to write realist novels as a means of exploring these ideas displayed a creative integration and reinterpretation of Strauss' undertaking in her own thought. It is no triviality that her approach garnered a wide and appreciative readership. Popular responses to *Middlemarch* consistently mention its beauty and sophistication, as well as its deep yet accessible ideological resonance. As Eliot notes:

> It is foolish to be for ever complaining of… uniformity, as if there were an endless power of originality in the human mind. Great and previous origination must always be comparatively rare, and can only exist on condition of a wide massive uniformity. When a multitude of men have learned to use the same language in speech and writing, then and then only can the greatest masters of language arise. For in what does their mastery consist? They use words

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[444] From the preface to the first German edition of David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot, ed. Leander Keck (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1973), li.
[445] Karl Marx, "To Ludwig Feuerbach (in Bruckberg), [from] Paris, 38 Rue Vaneau, August 11, 1844," in Saul Padover (ed.), *The Letter of Karl Marx*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 34-5.
[446] George Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwell and Sons, 1884), 381-2.

> which are already a familiar medium of understanding and sympathy in such a way as greatly to enlarge the understanding and sympathy. **Originality of this order changes the wild grasses into world-feeding grain**. Idiosyncrasies are pepper and spices of questionable aroma.[447]

The polemical form of Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, from a tonal and formal perspective, reflected the 'wide massive uniformity' of his context, arising out of the theological and philosophical traditions preceding him. Within this form, authors state their positions in order to overcome the errors of preceding texts, and to exhaustively overwhelm any opponents to the polemicist's position. Somewhat ironically, these texts are primarily used in the training of clergy and other ministers: those whose vocations are often understood as sympathetic companions for people in their *Bildungen.* The theological academic apparatus will ideally be geared towards provision of a paradigm for the theological community to impart its wisdom to the general populace, through education and pastoral engagement. The perverted relationship between church and state that arose in the *Staatsdiener* system demonstrates the difficulties in bringing this about in reality. Borrowing terms from Eliot, we could call this calculation at the expense of ardour.

Strauss wrote *The Life of Jesus* within this system. His ideas were formulated as he observed believers living out their beliefs, and the rhythms and patterns of theological educational contexts, where he made his home from the age of thirteen. There is a strange incongruity, perhaps, in establishing such an alienated context as the means of equipping ministers to live among the difficulties and complexities of everyday human life. This style of theological text is criticised across society—including within the churches—as disconnected, inaccessible… even useless. Nonetheless, such an attempt to identify universalities was characteristic of the nineteenth century. Such was the attraction of classifying theology as *Wissenschaft*: the aim was the consistent, replicable reduction of complex systems to universalised principles and laws. This series of attempts had very mixed success, while collectively serving an irrevocably useful purpose: by attempting broad systematisations, nineteenth-century thinkers undertook the experimentation necessary to distinguish the humanities from scientific and mathematical areas of research. However, within this impressive collective achievement were many failed attempts to systematise unsuitable subjects.

Returning to the task of *Wissenschaft*, we can examine the differences between Eliot's and Strauss' ways of approaching faith and belief, in order to appreciate Eliot's contribution

[447] George Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, 374-75.

more deeply and sensitively. In his *Life of Jesus*, Strauss presents a series of *findings* from a data set. The data set is the gospel text—in all its opacity—and less directly and openly, his lived experiences, that he sought to bring into harmony with his systematised theological beliefs. In approaching the question of 'Who was Jesus?', he stays firmly in the locus of the gospel texts, and then extrapolates out from that space his correction of the theologies of the people among whom he lived. The relational fallout is difficult to overstate. Strauss' text speaks at, over, down-to, but never alongside: in terms of tone, his empiricism seeks to overcome his opponents and colonise their awareness, rather than to sympathetically come alongside, collaboratively.

Middlemarch is the closest that Eliot came to writing out her own spiritual perspective and experiences. The Berg notebook includes her critique of Bryant's *Analysis of Ancient Mythology*,[448] a polemic that is very close in form to Edward Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies*. In her short criticism of Bryant's work, Eliot objects to his *tone*: his 'arrogant' assertion that he has, in the richness of shared mythologies and shared histories, found the one unifying, purifying principle and paradigm to which all can be reduced. Either side of this criticism are Marian Lewes' notes on this richness: on Goethe, the Vedas, Jewish history (the latter sections of the notebook were used for *Daniel Deronda*), Homer, Blake (see chapter ten), and a passage on 'Physical Science'. The latter section is filled with wonderment at findings relating to states of matter and the behaviour of light and vapours, freely integrating discussion of the history of science, and the previously held view that all things that could not be seen were of the spirit realm.

While these sources are eclectic, there is an overarching pattern extending from Marian Lewes' freedom of inquiry. Her theological understanding is elegant in its breadth and openness. Her integration of Christian principles into her outlook is seamless, open, respectful, and humble while also being deeply rigorous. It is this rigour of reading, studying, and noting that sets her apart, especially in her decision to write the way that she did. The appendix at the end of this thesis maps a set of readings in the Berg notebook that, alongside her long series of essays and reviews for *The Westminster* demonstrates that she was well situated to contribute her own polemic. Certainly, her contribution to George Henry Lewes' published works on early cognitive science has been understated. She chose a way of

[448] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook]. 1869-1876. George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York , 81.

writing in relationship, alongside, in dialogue, through sharing and elucidation of what faith *feels* like, what doubt *feels* like, and how both things can be beautiful, and enriching, and formative within 'general culture.'[449] She sought to write in ways that would resonate with life as it is, rather than ways that would burden her readers with unattainable utopias. And yet, she was fundamentally invested for writing to effect cultural melioration:

> To lay down in the shape of practical moral rules courses of conduct only to be made real by the rarest states of motive and disposition, tends not to elevate but to degrade the general standard, by turning that rare attainment from an object of admiration into an impossible prescription, against which the average nature first rebels and then flings out ridicule. It is for art to present images of a lovelier order than the actual, gently winning the affections, and so determining the taste. But in any rational criticism of the time which is meant to guide a practical reform, it is idle to insist that action ought to be this or that, without considering how far the outward conditions of such change are present, even supposing the inward disposition towards it. Practically, we should be satisfied to aim at something short of perfection… While on some points of social duty public opinion has reached a tolerably high standard, on others a public opinion is not yet born ; and there are even some functions and practices with regard to which men far above the line in honourableness of nature feel hardly any scrupulosity, though their consequent behaviour is easily shown to be as injurious as bribery, or any other slowly poisonous procedure which degrades the social vitality.[450]

Thus, the extravagance of constructing texts that attend to absolutes, utopias, and realised eschatologies[451] grated on Eliot, both for its arrogance and its inefficacy towards social progress. Her constant contact with the polemics and critical discourse of the nineteenth century familiarised her with both the systems and criticisms themselves, and the difficulties and pitfalls of seeking to comprehensively summarise and explain human spiritual formation and experience. Her analysis of this task is summarised in her first realist novel, *Adam Bede*:

> So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin—the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings—much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth.[452]

While Eliot's contributions were made from within close relationships with the free-thinking community, she found its combative culture of discourse limited in its usefulness. Notably, she referred to reviewing as a low form of authorship, consisting of 'deductions of vanity and

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[449] Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwell and Sons, 1884), 362.
[450] Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, 353-54.
[451] An eschatology is a theory of the final phases of history, generally a culmination.
[452] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, (London: Ward, Lock & Co., no date, *c.*1890 [first pub. 1861]), 136.

idleness which draw many a young gentleman… instead of the sorting and copying which his small talents could not rise to with any vigour and completeness.'[453]

Eliot was not the first to articulate the lack of practical connection between polemics and real life. It was a felt gap, articulated by Marx in his discussion of Strauss and Feuerbach, that 'It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, their criticism with their own material surroundings.'[454] Marx certainly initiated a full-contact connection with those materialities through the revolutions of 1848, but the forcefulness of these shifts meant that they were not stable in their outcomes. Eliot's connection of these same theologians with material surroundings was based around the modelling of dialogical connections and mutual collaboration. A cache of letters from her readers held at the Berg Archive shows that she inspired people to persevere in their respective contexts, to find what limited but potent good they could do in the world. The closing paragraph of *Middlemarch* suggests that this impact was closely aligned with her intentions:

> the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life…[455]

Ardent Textuality and the 'Societal Concept'

> The majority of the most learned and acute theologians of the present day fail in the main requirement for such a work [as this], a requirement without which no amount of learning will suffice to achieve anything in the domain of criticism—namely, the internal liberation of the feelings and intellect from certain religious and dogmatical presuppositions; and this the author early attained by means of philosophical studies. If theologians regard this absence of presupposition from his work as unchristian, he regards the believing presuppositions of theirs as unscientific.[456]

Michel Foucault's 1969 essay on author function differentiates between the figure of the author, as constructed by the reader, and the historical, actual writer. Similarly, Strauss sought to differentiate between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history, identifying the former as constructed culturally within doctrine, and differentiating that constructive process from the undergirding metaphysical reality. The doubling between the author constructed

[453] George Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, 354.
[454] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976 [1845-6]), 36. Quote is from volume one of the original work, which was written solely by Marx.
[455] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 896.
[456] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, lii.

within the reader and the historical writer corresponds, functionally, to the doubling between the originating Creator/undergirding λόγος[457] and the representations of that figure within textual doctrines.

Strauss categorised his (also constructed) historical Jesus as *Schwärmer*, a word associated with the madness of fanaticism. This is the same word he used for the 'demoniacs'—people with schizo-effective mental illnesses, plagued by voices, trances and hauntings—that practitioners like Kerner sought to cure. By categorising Jesus in this way, he sought to exorcise Christianity of its superstitions and illusions, thus grounding it and bringing it to its senses, rather than obliterating it. As he explains in one of his numerous prefaces:

> The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts. The certainty of this can alone give calmness and dignity to our criticism.[458]

This delineation between truth and fact (and his assertion of his reading as fact) centrally depends on Strauss' identification of myth as expressions of experiential truths in the form of narratives, serving to demonstrate fundamental abstract principles that are valued by the group of people that value that myth. Strauss, drawing on Gabler and Schelling, asserts that a narrative can be accepted as mythus

> when it proceeds from an age in which no written records existed, but in which facts were transmitted through the medium of oral tradition alone; secondly, when it presents an historical account of events which are either absolutely or relatively beyond the reach of experience, such as occurrences connected with the spiritual world, and incidents to which, from the nature of the circumstances, no one could have been witness; or thirdly, when it deals in the marvellous and is couched in symbolical language. Not a few narratives of this description occur in the Bible.[459]

Strauss goes on, at very great length, to identify and attribute a variety of types of myth to the gospel narratives: Historical *mythi* that are 'narratives of real events coloured by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural'; Philosophical *mythi*, 'such as clothe in the garb of historical narrative a simple thought, a precept, or an idea of the time'; and Poetical *mythi*, as a blend of the former two, 'and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination, in which the fancy of the poet has woven

[457] Greek. *Logos*. Biblically, 'word', often with connotations of religious law/God's decrees. Also the name for Jesus in the first chapter of John's Gospel, establishing Christ's solidarity as God's defining word to humanity.
[458] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, lii.
[459] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 52.

around it.'[460] The constituting substance of *Life of Jesus* is Strauss' application of these categories to the gospel accounts, and in doing so, he ostensibly resolved several of the key difficulties presented to gospel readers, especially the diversity of the gospel accounts:

> Schelling and the idealists, through Baur, had taught Strauss to look for the idea expressed in the myth; now Hegel suggested to him that one must look for the concept in the representation (in the Gospel story).[461]

That is, for Strauss, his most valuable contribution was that 'the innumerable, and never otherwise to be harmonized, discrepancies and chronological contradictions in the gospel histories disappear, as it were, in one stroke.'[462]

Eliot never sought to resolve these innumerable contradictions, either in approaching gospel histories, or in making sense of lived experienced. Her construction of Edward Casaubon communicates her feelings about such an undertaking. In displaying the humility of sitting with these tensions—in all their ambiguity—she instead reflected on what mode of writing could enact incomplete social progress. Poetically, this satisfies Hegel's dialectical theory, which posits that it is inherent to progress—as it is lived out, not just as it is argued about—that the stages of Abstract-Negative-Concrete are passed through. That is, an alienated model (the religious oligarchies of the early nineteenth century) is opposed (i.e. in reactions such as Strauss' demythologisation, Feuerbach's polemics, and Marx's revolutions), and these alienated models and oppositions are moderated and corrected by the fitting response (attention to materialist, lived experience, pointed to but not embodied in Feuerbach's materialism, and textually enacted through Eliot's embedded narratorial acceptance of progress within lived experience). This set of progressions is embedded into Eliot's *Bildungen*, which intimately model diverse iterations of growth processes, displaying consistent characteristics.

Subsequent responses to Feuerbach's works have focussed largely on the notion of this central 'fixed idea' of God as the origin of all good.[463] Ameriks' writing, particularly,

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[460] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 52.
[461] Leander Keck, "Editor's Introduction," in Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, lvii.
[462] Strauss, *Life of Jesus,* 57.
[463] See, for example Kimberly van Esveld Adams, "Feminine Godhead, Feminist Symbol: The Madonna in George Eliot, Ludwig Feuerbach, Anna Jameson, and Margaret Fuller," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, no.1 (1996): 41-70; Karl Ameriks, "The Legacy of Idealism in the Philosophy of Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard," *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 258-81; Karl Barth, "An Introductory Essay," in Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), x-xxxi; Frederick [sic] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976); Susan Hill, "Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no.3 (1997): 635; U.C. Knöpflmacher, "George Eliot,

traces the links between Feuerbach and Kierkegaard as points in a wider arc, which may have been part of Orr's decision to discuss Eliot in relation to Kierkegaard in her *Theopoetics of Evolution*. It is using this theological point that we may trace the deep permeation of Feuerbach's work across a substantial expanse of discourse, as identified by Vögelin, as I will explore in chapter fourteen. This 'fixed idea' was not static, however, but took a different form depending on how the locus of political/dogmatic power defined it at any given stage, like what Antonio Gramsci's 'cultural hegemony.' As we follow the discursive threads attached to Feuerbach's work, we quickly realise that the theological establishment across Germany recognised that Christianity's social and cultural function—its *material reality*—was being questioned in a way that was both potent and unprecedented. Its bids for control resonate with those of Edward Casaubon towards Dorothea.

While the metaphysics of Middlemarch function to clearly exclude the presence of an interventionist God, and certainly do not drive the plot to any kind of comprehensive resolution, they still reflect a sense of spiritual potential that is inherent to humanity. There are no epiphanies from on high in *Middlemarch*. Nixon attributes this to a Feuerbachian ideology within the book, where divinity resides within humanity as part of its nature. When expressed fully, this nature is the locus of the potency of religious expression (which is traditionally attributed to the power of God rather than humanity). This attribution bears out. Middlemarch society is 'fallen' in Feuerbachian terms. It is Casaubon's unregenerate, closed nature that is both the cause and the penalty of his wretchedness, because of his inability to show due reverence for his divine potential, and that of the people around him. He becomes 'desiccated'; devoid of life-force and sapped of his natural divinity despite his position in the institution of the Anglican church. Will Ladislaw, by contrast, is vitalised by his sense of humanity's potential/divinity, and this enables him to live graciously and effectively as he worships the potential in Dorothea (see chapter ten). The primary difference between the two men is their capacity to appreciate the divinity of their fellow humans, to borrow Feuerbach's terms.

> In the first part I prove that the Son of God is *in religion* a real son, the son of God in the same sense in which man is the son of man, and I find therein the *truth*, the *essence* of religion, that it conceives and affirms a profoundly human relation as a divine relation; on the other hand, in the second part I show that the Son of God—not indeed in religion, but in theology, which is

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Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism," *Victorian Studies: A Journal of the Humanities, Arts, and Sciences* 7, (1964): 306-09; Alister McGrath, "The Intellectual Foundations: Feuerbach, Marx and Freud," in *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, (London: Random House, 2004); Bernard Reardon, "Feuerbach," in *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 82-112; Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

> the reflection of religion upon itself,—is not a son in the natural, human sense, but in an entirely different manner, contradictory to nature and reason, and therefore absurd, and I find in this negation of human sense and the human understanding, the negation of religion.[464]

Feuerbach is differentiating here between knowing about Jesus through lived religious experience and through theological or doctrinal calculation, expressing value of both.

Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, structurally speaking, runs through various iterations of the ways in which Christian traditions and sacraments collectively point towards their highest expression. For Feuerbach, this highest expression is universal to the sacraments and ways of Christian life, as all of these aspects give flesh to the realisation that in appreciating God's nature we are, essentially, realising our own potential and capacities for good. Feuerbach's examples of goodness return constantly to those things that nourish and cause individual happiness. The happiness and fulfilment of the individual, for Feuerbach, is to be found in the effective and useful living-out of community life, which represents not just the fulfilment of the individual, but also the establishment of community dynamics that foster sacramental, regenerative relationships.

The resultant emphasis is one of vibrant relationality as the foundation of spiritual maturity and fulfilment, an emphasis that has been drawn on by some of the most influential thinkers of Western history, including Karl Marx, and Karl Barth. Marx's response to Feuerbach was to assert that religion could offer some social cohesion at a rudimentary level, but that it ultimately fettered people in their realisation of their potential. Marx posited that religion was too often used as a means of transgressive social control to be ultimately useful. In the first volume of *German Ideology,*[465] Marx gave a systematic and complex criticism of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. This summary of Feuerbach intersects with Eliot's themes in *Middlemarch*:

> Feuerbach's "conception" of the sensuous world is confined on the one hand to mere contemplation of it, and on the other to mere feeling: he posits "Man" instead of "real historical man"… In the first case, the *contemplation* of the sensuous world, he necessarily lights on things which contradict his consciousness and feeling, which disturb the harmony he presupposes, the harmony of all parts of the sensuous world and especially of man and nature. To remove this disturbance, he must take refuge in a double perception, a profane one which perceives "only the flatly obvious" and a higher, philosophical one which perceives the "true essence" of things. He does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity… but the product of industry and the state of society; and, indeed, [a product] in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole

[464] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, xxxvii.
[465] *The German Ideology* was co-authored with Friedrich Engels, but the first volume was written by Marx.

> succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs.[466]

If tangibility of social impact is the measure of the significance of a theological contribution, then it is difficult to overstate Feuerbach's importance. *The Essence of Christianity* was published in 1841, the same year as Evans commenced her translation of *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*. In 1844, Marx wrote to Feuerbach to express his vibrant enthusiasm for Feuerbach's work, intimating that Friedrich Engels was in the process of translating *The Essence of Christianity* into English, and describing the vibrant reception the work received when read among working men. For Marx,

> I am pleased to find a chance to be able to assure you of the distinguished respect and—excuse the word—love that I have for you. Your *Philosophie der Zukunft*[467] and the *Wesen des Glaubens*[468], despite their limited scope, are at any rate, of more weight than all the present day German literature put together.
>
> In these books—I do not know whether intentionally or not—you have given socialism a philosophical foundation, and the communists too have understood these works in the same way. The unity of man with man, which is also rooted in the actual difference among men, the concept of the human species, pulled down from the heaven of abstraction to the real earth—what else is this than a *societal* concept![469]

In 1845 Marx finished a series his 'Theses on Feuerbach', that were later published in Engels' 1888 volume, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Theology.* Marx went on to co-author *The German Ideology* with Friedrich Engels in 1846, and the first volume of this three-volume work was entirely dedicated to Marx's response to Feuerbach's theology (it was not published commercially until the early twentieth century). These preparatory works led to the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, by which time Marx was living in exile. The ensuing revolutions of 1848 permanently disrupted existing systems across Europe, despite being interrupted by conservative counter-revolutions.

The Essence of Christianity explored material lived experience as the epistemological foundation of thinking about the nature and value—the essence—of true religion:

> If the whole of religion is contained in the Sacraments, and there are consequently no other religious acts than those which are performed in Baptism and the Lord's Supper; *then* I grant that the entire purport and positive result of my work are bathing, eating, and drinking, since this work is nothing but a faithful, rigid, historico-philosophical analysis of religion—the revelation of religion to itself, the *awakening of religion to self-consciousness*.[470]

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[466] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 45.
[467] *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* [Principles of the Philosophy of the Future].
[468] *Das Wesen des Glaubens im Sinne Luthers* [The Essence of Faith in Luther's Sense].
[469] Karl Marx, "To Ludwig Feuerbach (in Bruckberg), [from] Paris, 38 Rue Vaneau, August 11, 1844," in Saul Padover (ed.), *The Letters of Karl Marx*, 34-5.
[470] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xl-xli.

Self-consciousness has an overlapping signification here: elsewhere in his preface, Feuerbach states that 'theology is anthropology.'[471]. Thus religion's self-awareness is one and the same with humanity's self-awareness: 'religion… in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and divinity of human nature.'[472]

In line with Feuerbach's assertions, in *Middlemarch*, the capacity of each character to engage in the 'bathing, eating, and drinking' of community life is synonymous with their capacity for broader sacramental, religious, and ethical understanding: that is, the degree to which characters can engage self-consciousness determines their capacities for constructive community participation. Eliot does not, however, limit herself to the individual in her representation of the impact of self-consciousness and self-unconsciousness in *Middlemarch*. Her plot establishes individual consciousness and collective consciousness as fundamentally linked, as the blinkered and disconnected members of the Middlemarch social system engage destructively with that system, leading to inequalities and painful alienations.

Textual and Embodied Intimacies

There are many further intertextual operations that Eliot undertakes in *Middlemarch*, originating in the realms of religion and politics, particularly where those considerations overlap. Even a surface reading of the first chapters of *Middlemarch* includes many mentions of Dorothea's reading, and her near-silent awareness of these textual aspects as she defers to the dinner conversations of *Middlemarch* men. Dorothea's desire for true depth of textual insight is linked to her admiration for Edward Casaubon, and the seduction of intimacy with textual traditions stands in for interpersonal intimacy.

Throughout *Middlemarch*, textual allusions signal beyond the novel, layering different historical figures, political scenarios, and theological configurations. This layering brings both individuals and discursive structures into contact, enriched and critiqued using characterisation and interpersonal dynamics. Through the lens of *Middlemarch*, Eliot undertakes a deeply connected criticism of the 'holy text' of the English social order that she grew up within: it is in this sense that *Middlemarch* itself *is* higher criticism. The strokes with which she paints her portrait of social regeneration in that epoch, mirror the discursive strokes by which she established her own contribution and sense of social agency.

Thus, Eliot's discursive methodology is not so much dialectical as dialogical, the latter being a term deployed by Bakhtin in the early twentieth century. Eliot's choice to work

[471] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xi.
[472] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, x.

dialogically means that she renders diverse voices, epistemologies, and social agendas in dialogue, rather than venturing one key polemic. That is, dialectic funnels argument, whereas dialogue lets argument stay open. Kara Pickens has offered the most apposite research in this area, focussing on nineteenth-century shifts in hermeneutics (especially those enacted by Strauss and Feuerbach) as they functioned to 'revision Victorian conceptions of womanhood' by linking these biblical narratives with the personal experiences of women who read novels.[473] Pickens integrates the work of Paul Ricœur to explain that 'discovering the meaning of the symbol with re-enactment and experience' is the foundation of 'the hermeneutic exercise of symbolic interpretation' as 'connected not only to language but also to one's own bodily experience.'[474] Similarly, I focus on the empowerment of Eliot's readers in their embodied interpretations of their cultural histories, which included the literal struggle to enable women to vote. These embodied interpretations were enacted primarily within the realm of Christian symbology. Pickens potently identifies 'endless interplay between text and experience, or word and flesh, as novels reflected the embodiment of re-visioned biblical symbols'[475]: this drawing-in by George Eliot (and, Pickens shows, Elizabeth Gaskell) is fundamental to the enfranchisement of Victorian women readers. My thesis explores Eliot's establishment of dialogue across diversity to explore moral enfranchisement as the foundation of systemic social regeneration. Enfranchisement of women into these social processes—enacted dialogically—is fundamental to Eliot's understanding of social progress.

In a similar sense to Strauss, Feuerbach sought to 'perfect' religion, rather than abolishing it.[476] Feuerbach's eschatology required the absorption of other fields of study into this true, progressive religion, leading to a unity of all fields of exploration towards unification. 'Religion, as Feuerbach understood it, is essentially the relation, founded deep in the emotions, between man and man.'[477] Marx posited his socialist theory as this true religion, inadvertently exporting some of the complexities of veneration of religion into the complexities of cultish adherence to revolutionary ventures. The violent and restrictive counter-revolutions against the spread of Communism, post-1848, did not deter Marian Evans from pressing her publisher John Chapman to sponsor her translation Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* in 1854, in light of the book's importance for social regeneration.

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[473] Kara Lynne Pickens, "The Reinterpretation of Biblical Symbols through the Lives and Fictions of Victorian Women: 'To Come within the Orbit of Possibility,'" University of Glasgow, 2012, i.
[474] Pickens, *To Come within the Orbit of Possibility*, 31.
[475] Pickens, *To Come within the Orbit of Possibility*, 32.
[476] Friedrich Engels, as cited in Reardon, "Feuerbach," 82.
[477] Reardon, "Feuerbach," 82.

Eliot's redeployment of Feuerbach's materialist humanism in her fiction rearticulates Feuerbach's intention to reunite the experienced truth of human experience with awareness of the divine good:

> This philosophy… corresponds to the real, complete nature of man… It does not… regard the *pen* as the only fit organ for the revelation of truth, but the eye and ear, the hand and foot.[478]

Rather than positing a distant revelation as the right means of knowing the nature of the divine, Feuerbach reiterates throughout *The Essence of Christianity* that the divine is known within human experience, rather than mediated to humanity by an exclusive set of religious teachers. Thus, within Feuerbach's theology, *any* person's experience is a valid locus for revelation of the divine good. This assertion fundamentally undermined power structures legitimised by religious elitism, most dramatically, in the revolutions of 1848.

Eliot's dismantling of the legitimacy of the English patriarchy in *Middlemarch* is undertaken along similar theological lines, as I showed in chapter seven. Her resistance was cultural rather than overtly political, as political events of the time are mentioned in the periphery of the novel, without clear understanding or meaningful endorsement from characters. Politics, in *Middlemarch*, is about Arthur Brooke's specific relationship with his specific tenant; Dorothea's interest in housing issues relates to her specific cottages; Lydgate and Bulstrode's decisions relate to their specific hospital, and so on. Thus no movement has a mouthpiece. Instead, Eliot shows the complexities within which political decisions and statements arise, along with the webs of social connection and implication that surround them. *Middlemarch* shows diverse (and shifting) perspectives in community, in contact with one another. This enables the social impacts of these ways of seeing, from a systemic and an interpersonal perspective, to be identified and critiqued.

This formal decision invites the reader to apply their own filters and relate their own experiences to diverse personal points of contact within the narrative, thus enfranchising the reader towards achievable outcomes in their own discursive formation. This dialogical, relational, sympathetic approach stands in strong contrast to the discursive ultimatums issued by nineteenth-century polemical texts, which fostered combative, factional dynamics within public discourse, and resulted in the exile of many controversial thinkers with whose ideas Eliot sympathised. Evans saw the difficulties experienced within her communities in England—both in the Midlands, in her early life, and also among the London freethinkers—and she wrote texts that integrated her reflections on what those communities needed in order

[478] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, ix.

to work more harmoniously and fruitfully. This choice to write novels offered George Eliot a safety that would not be afforded to her if she had more overtly proclaimed her scholarly sympathies. By the time she wrote *Middlemarch*, she had witnessed reactions against many of her freethinking contemporaries, including Strauss and Feuerbach, as well as many writers from the circles that contributed to *The Westminster Review*.

In her characters, Eliot presents diverse approaches to Christian faith, particularly, to undermine uncritical use of that label as an indication of respectability and legitimacy. By demonstrating the social outcomes arising from diverse faith approaches, Eliot posits that social progress and social degradation result from individual capacities for empathy and relational intimacy, arising from capacity for reflective self-awareness, which, in turn, bears the fruit of connected sympathetic awareness and regenerative social participation. These abilities are attributed to characters that are not initially enfranchised in the social setting represented in *Middlemarch*, but become empowered in their community by establishing trust and collaboration, thus simultaneously dismantling dynamics of coercion, deception, and inequality. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot posits that this type of power is integral to social progress, and suggests, through her formal choices as much as any other aspect of the text, that the most suitable means of undertaking such progress is in sympathetic representation and responsiveness, rather than polemics. For Eliot, art represents the highest expression of this sympathetic representation.

Conclusion

These dynamics and ideas are evident in Dorothea's transition from deferral to Casaubon as a source of vicarious legitimacy, into her empowerment to live out her ardent nature. Within this understanding, spiritual maturation is not a matter of hierarchy, where one special spiritual person transcends ordinary people. In *Middlemarch*, the frailty and immaturity of Bulstrode, Casaubon, Featherstone and others clearly show Eliot's disdain for claims of this type. Rather, for Eliot, transcendence occurs within the self, wherein the self transcends its own shortcomings (e.g. Dorothea, Fred Vincy, Rosamond, and Tertius Lydgate).

Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies* warns against speaking over others about the meaning of sacred narratives. I have summarised the ideas in various polemics, above, that intersect with Eliot's undertaking in *Middlemarch.* And yet, in quoting polemical works that require translations and transcriptions, even of short passages, a tension arises between *Middlemarch* and these other works. This tension occurs in the realm of the embodied experience of the reader, rather than within the *ideas* that are articulated in these texts. It

cannot be said that these works say the same thing, even though the propositions they support are harmonious. The relationality of *Middlemarch* distinguishes it, both internally, as her characters work out progress together (e.g. Fred Vincy assisted by Mary and Caleb Garth, Tertius Lydgate assisted by Dorothea and Camden Farebrother), and externally, as Eliot gestures her consideration for the sanctity of the experiences and distinctives of her readers.

Where Eliot does warn against behaviours and dangerous thought-errors, she does so by showing their natural consequences, rather than through remonstrance. Those characters who prioritise their opinions over the perception and autonomy of others are revealed as frauds who damage society. The lasting contribution of *Middlemarch* is in its resonance with these dynamics as they continue to be embodied within societies. There is a timelessness to these social observations, especially the difficulties when people hold on to power because they fear powerlessness, rather than because they can truly see their contexts and companions.

In earlier drafts of this thesis, I attempted to use my training as a theologian to move towards a systematised resolution, bolstered by Hegel, Aristotle, Strauss, and Feuerbach. It was noted by an early reader that, in this project, I risked emulating Edward Casaubon to move in this direction. On reflection, it seems far more important to consider what it would mean to continue to sit with the narratives of this thesis, and to consider what this story-reading can indicate about what is fruitful now. Not to find the key to all mythologies, though. Mythologies function dialogically as unifying focal points for collaboration, in ways that polemics rarely can. Art and religion, at their best, both undertake this function: they furnish communities with shared visions that serve as focal points for the negotiation of shared values and undertakings.

The texts described in this chapter were influential for both George Eliot and Karl Marx, but the sensations and social impacts of their works are vastly different. Marx's revolutions were violent conflicts between established systems and amendments to these systems. Marxist progressivism is still characterised by resistance and struggle. *Middlemarch* has an extraordinary degree of intertextual overlap with Marx's work, and yet the sensations of these textual worlds are close to inverse, despite their shared purposes. Eliot's poetic demonstrations of the mechanics of quiet—yet potent—revolutions and regenerations resonate with my sense of my Franciscan monastic calling, but also with the secular thought of atheist critics. I have no wish to privilege my reading, but rather, to open my eyes to what Eliot presents to her readers. I want to approach her art perceptively, and in that maturation, to respond more fruitfully to the context in which I live. I will admit that this

sensation did not arise in reading Feuerbach, Strauss, or Marx, but we have been enriched by their contributions, nonetheless.

10. 'You are a Poem': Poetry, Revelation and Revolution in *Middlemarch*[479]

Introduction

> 'But you leave out the poems, said Dorothea. 'I think they are wanted to complete the poet… I am sure I could never produce a poem.'
> 'You *are* a poem—and that is to be the best part of a poet…'[480]

The above passage occurs as Dorothea is on her honeymoon with Edward Casaubon, who is culpably absent from life to work on his *Key to All Mythologies* in the Vatican libraries. He returns briefly to sit for a portrait, as a model for Thomas Aquinas. His absence from ardent companionship (and marital consummation, it could be inferred) with his young wife is a powerful metaphor for the alienation of the Aristotelian style of polemic from embodied connection.

Dorothea models for a portrait of Clare of Assisi[481] in this passage: Clare's links with the Franciscan monastic tradition carry associations of working, bare-footed, with the poor and the sick. This bare-footedness shares the materialist commitment to non-transcendent holiness, especially holiness as friendship,[482] as Feuerbach emphasised. Will Ladislaw (who marries Dorothea after Casaubon's death) and Dorothea converse on the difference between *knowledge about* and *knowledge by living out*. In this exchange, scholastic polemical explorations are secondary to the truth of artistic representation, in that the latter captures the felt reality of lived experience. The fact that this art is, in the novel, the religious art of Rome invites corresponding distinctions between *knowledge about* faith and love and the *living out* of divine love.

The frames of reference for European society—and the colonising European diaspora—were shifting quickly, with ramifications for the social roles, rhythms, and relationships that had been relatively stable for the preceding centuries. Philosophies that

[479] A version of this chapter has been published: Elise Silson, '"You Are a Poem": Poetry, Revelation, and Revolution in George Eliot's Middlemarch," *St Mark's Review*, no. 251 (2020): 57-74.
[480] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (LondonOxford UP, 1963 [1871-2]), 256.
[481] Eliot's spelling.
[482] Tara Soughers, "Holiness as Friendship with Christ: Teresa of Avila," *HTS* 72, no.4 (2016): 1-5.

jettisoned religious dogma as the central means of validation for beliefs, viewpoints and social influence became more widely entertained, as scientific and rational thought gave rise to more extravagant belief in human potential and the capacity for 'progress'. The substance of progress has always been contested.

Secular humanism attained some degree of autonomy in subsequent generations and movements, but in the advent of the ideas articulated by the New Hegelian philosophers and theologians, normative social values were still extrapolated out of Christian theology. Strauss, particularly, sought to apply a 'scientific' (*Wissenschaft*) methodology in substantively appraising the gospel narratives, with a view to sorting the various gospel accounts, according to historical origin. He distinguished between narratives that were impossible according to the (still very rapidly developing) laws of science, and those that were part of broader folklore and thus were inherited by the biblical writers. In other words, Strauss applied a Hegelian epistemology to evaluate the historical validity of Christian faith in supernatural events.

Marian Lewes' study of different social movements in the lead-up to writing *Middlemarch* emphasised the social functions of diverse belief systems, specifically Greek, Egyptian, Jewish, and Vedic systems, as recorded in her *Miscellanies* notebook (known more widely as the Berg notebook). This social emphasis correlates with what she took on from Feuerbach's thought, in that his materialist emphasis in evaluating spiritual efficacy was, for him, linked centrally with his idea of the 'essence' or central purpose of the Christian faith. This style of exploration is extended in the notebook, integrating discussions of Greek worship practices and family authority structures, for example, in the same section as discussion of the Greek political system.[483] Similarly, she notes choral singing, in another section, as 'a means of intensifying the habits of social order.'[484] In contrast to these notes about other faiths, rather than summarising Christian history or positing key doctrines, she quotes obscure Christian poetry.

The Berg and Folger Notebooks

Eliot kept two books of notes to chronicle her reading while she was writing *Middlemarch*. The Folger notebook was her travel notebook and is held at Princeton, and the Berg notebook (at the New York Public Library) was for home reading. The Berg notebook is the central

[483] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook], George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York, 50.
[484] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook], 88.

source for this research. These notebooks have received very little attention since their much-delayed transcription in 1976, due to some cataloguing anomalies. There is another notebook, *Quarry for Middlemarch* that has received far more attention, largely due to its more explicit title connecting it to the novel. Both the Berg and Folger notebooks primarily contain poetry from Greek, Vedic, and Jewish traditions, recorded as a set of mythologies, a set of cultural touchstones for religious and social cohesion for the cultures that Eliot was researching. These reading notes also analyse the social impacts of the religious beliefs of these people groups, focussing particularly on the experiences of women, access to education, and other aspects of systemic enfranchisement. The more detailed sections describe changes to these societies over time. The Jewish historical sections, later in the notebooks, formed the background for Eliot's last major novel, *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876.

Both notebooks begin with George Grote's *History of Greece*, a work which extends from Hegel's understanding of the history of philosophy, in relation to the social function of the Greek poetic mythos. Grote describes the poet as simultaneously holding the functions of 'religious teacher, historian, and philosopher, all in one.'[485] Eliot notes elsewhere that 'The supremacy given in European cultures to the literatures of Greece and Rome has had an effect almost equal to that of a common religion in binding the Western nations together.'[486] Such a description resonates with Eliot's explorations of the Jewish poetic mythos, elsewhere in her *Middlemarch* notebooks, as well as her notes on the Vedic myths. Grote asserts in his first volume that:

> Gods, heroes and men—religion and patriotism—matters divine, heroic and human—were all woven together by the Greeks into one indivisible web, in which the threads of truth and reality, whatever they might originally have been, were neither intended to be, nor were actually, distinguishable.[487]

Given Eliot's preoccupation with Greek thought in the notebooks, Aristotle's observation from his *Poetics* seems especially pertinent:

> The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probably or necessary… Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals whereas those of history are singular.[488]

Thus, it is evident that Grote draws directly from the Greeks' own understandings of what

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[485] George Grote, *The Grecian Mythical Vein when Compared to That of Modern Europe*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1862), 450.
[486] George Eliot, "Value in Originality," in *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwell and Sons, 1884), 374.
[487] Grote, *The Grecian Mythical Vein*, 380.
[488] Aristotle, *Poetics*, (London: Dent), 17.

their poetry represented.

In *Middlemarch*, Eliot signals poetry's universality, *within* the singularity of a realist narrative. In chapter fifteen, the narrator comments that, rather than concerning themselves with trying to describe the universe, 'all the light [they] can command must be concentrated on this particular web'[489] of human experience. Again, Eliot is drawing out the materialist, teleological perspective of causality and responsibility. This kernel of this chapter is the Casaubons' honeymoon in Rome, wherein Dorothea suddenly 'sees' her new husband, as well as suddenly 'seeing' the truth of art, for the first time. This is her awakening, rich with significations about the nature and form of art, as she begins to re-vision the embodiment of progress, for herself.

The Berg Poems

> *La Religion doit diriger la Société vers le grand but de l'amélioration la plus rapide possible du sort de la classe la plus nombreuse et la plus pauvre.*[490]

The front cover of the Berg notebook simply says 'Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters'. This chapter includes the first exploration of a poem in this notebook that captures the essence of Eliot's understanding of holiness and maturity, William Smith's 'Christian Resignation'. I will first contextualise this poem within the content of these notebooks. The other two poems from the notebook in this category, both by William Blake, were recorded before Blake attained popularity in the early twentieth century, in a similar sense to Theresa of Avila's building resurgence from the 1880's onwards. They each fit with the prophetic, poetic awareness that Eliot understands to be integral to authorship, flowing from Romantic understandings of the function of art.

Eliot includes three Christian poems in her Berg notebook, alongside her explorations of other sacred poetry. Their context offers them as exemplars of religious expression. Two are from William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*: 'The Divine Image', and 'London'. Between the two is the relatively unknown poem by William Smith, 'Christian Resignation', although Blake's work was also not widely known at this time. The divine image is that of

[489] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 148.
[490] French. 'Religion really should lead society towards the great goal of the fastest possible improvement of the lot of the most numerous and poorest class.' George Eliot, "The Folger Notebook," in *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks*. ed. John Clark Neufeldt, (Berkeley: California University Press, 1979 [1869-76]), 20. The quote is from M. Lours Reybaud's *Études sur les Réformateurs Contemporains, ou Socialistes Reformes* [Studies on Contemporary Reformers, or Socialist Reforms].

compassion, in the forms of mercy, pity, peace and love, as universal points of connection that transcend religious and cultural divides. The following is a transcription from the notebook, replete with capitalisation anomalies.[491]

The Divine Image

To mercy, pity, peace, & love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For mercy, pity, peace, & love
Is God, our Father dear;
And mercy, pity, peace, & love
Is man, His child & care.

For mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face;
And Love, the human form divine;
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where mercy, love, & pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.[492]

The second of the Blake poems, 'London', similarly models compassion across diversity. It emphasises the sanctity of human suffering, amid the 'chartered' social structures that are failing the poor and the vulnerable:

London

I wander through each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.

[491] Eliot numbered leaves, rather than pages, in the Berg notebook, sometimes skipping sections in her numbering, and also restarting the numbering at one point. John Pratt and Victor Neufeldt published a transcription of both the Folger and Berg notebooks in 1979. The introduction to this volume is excellent.
[492] George Eliot, *Miscellanies: Greek and Hebrew Matters* [Berg Notebook], 1869-1876, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York, 78. Emphasis added.

And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackening church appalls,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlots curse
Blasts the new-born infants' tear
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.[493]

These two poems further reinforce Eliot's resistance to 'mind-forg'd manacles' that restrict the progress of her characters in *Middlemarch*, and her presentation of mercy and sympathy as antidotes to that restriction.

Social Meliorism and Christian Resignation in *Middlemarch*

> Wit seizes on unexpected and complex relations… it detects an unsuspected analogy or suggests a startling or confounding inference… there is no really fine writing in which wit has not an implicit if not an explicit action.[494]

Throughout these two notebooks, the social melioration enacted in *Middlemarch* is gaining momentum. In these notes, Eliot is preparing to construct Dorothea herself as a poem. She is not just creating a deontology; a set of statements about what doctrines are suitable to produce a correct life. Eliot is reinforcing the *living out* of a young woman's life as being, in and of itself, a means of social regeneration and religious teaching. Arguably, Dorothea herself is George Eliot's prophetic utterance: she is both poem and poet. This has the reflexive function of establishing *Middlemarch* as both realist novel and fable, in a similar

[493] George Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 79.
[494] George Eliot, "German Wit: Heinrich Heine," in *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1855]), 218.

way to Dorothea's doubling as exemplary and ordinary.

Smith's 'Christian Resignation' bridges between the 'Divine Image' as sacred compassion, and the more revolutionary and inflamed observations of 'London', providing a multi-layered comment on the dynamics that Eliot renders in Dorothea's *Bildung*. Again, from the Berg notebook:

Christian Resignation

There is a sweetness in the world's despair,
    There is a rapture of serenity,
When severed quite from earthly hope or care,
    The heart is free to suffer or to die.

The crown, the palm, of saints in Paradise,
    My wearied spirit does not crave to win;
Breathe in thy cup, O Christ, of agonies__
    Breathe thy deep love & let me drink therein.

To weep as thou hast wept, I ask no more,
    Be mine the sorrows that were known to Thee;
To the bright heavens I have no strength to soar,
    But I would find thee on thy Calvary.

William Smith.[495]

Eliot makes no notes about the poem or its meaning. It is followed, on the same page, by:

> Let the sweet life pass sweetly by,
> The same, the same, & every day the same.
>   Idem.

The transcription of the notebook does not note its provenance or its significance or its context. The poem is reproduced in volume twenty-five of *The Contemporary Review* with the words, 'To one of his nieces here he confided the following verses, full of deeply pathetic meaning, in reference to some theological question which had arisen betwixt them.'[496] The latter quote is from a poem called 'Thorndale', which Smith wrote the summer following his marriage in 1861,[497] which suggests a correspondence of sentiment with George and Marian Lewes. This poem is likely to have been sent to George Henry Lewes, who was a colleague of Smith's. Later in this article, the writer observes:

> 'It is this unity,' he says, 'that brings us to the great truth that a Divine Idea lies at the origin of all things.' To the old subtlety, never better put than by Hume— What right has thought or

[495] Eliot, *Miscellanies* [Berg Notebook], 78-79.
[496] J. Tulloch, *The Contemporary Review*, (London: Strahan and Co., 1875), 381.
[497] Tulloch, *The Contemporary Review*, 386.

> intelligence thus to stand at the head of all things? Must not the ordered creation already exist as a condition for the manifestation of Thought? And why should the human mind more than any other development of Nature be conceived as typical of the Divine?[498]

Hume is referring, here, to the primacy of intellect in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*.

A surface reading of 'Christian Resignation' conveys commitment to materialist interpretation of of human suffering, rather than the transcendentalism of soaring to 'the bright heavens'. Smith insists that his experience of Christ is his experience of suffering solidarity rather than ascension: the '*Imago Dei* who reverses hierarchies and dismantles oppositions,' as Anderson describes.[499] What has nowhere been noted about 'Christian Resignation', however, is that it consists of lines from Theresa of Avila's descriptions of the 'Prayer of Union' in *The Interior Castle*, which conveyed her tangible experience of 'immanent transcendence.'[500]

The first stanza alludes to the humility that arises in the first room of the inner dwelling, as the suspension of 'earthly hope or care' leaves the believer 'free to suffer or to die'. Theresa's well-known adage, 'Let me suffer or let me die,' communicates her commitment to sharing in the suffering of Christ through humility, and the turning-inward of the soul to seek Christ in the deepest spaces.

The crown and the palm both represent, in *The Interior Castle* symbols of 'wherein the King abides', the palmetto having 'many outer rinds surrounding the savoury part within.'[501] Theresa employs the image of the honey bee, industrious in its constant back-and-forth between the 'sweetness of the world's despair' that Smith refers to and the sustaining divinity of Christ. Smith uses this image of flight in the last stanza to indicate that the fulfilment of this intimacy is not in a transcendentalism that leaves behind human suffering, but that the full revelation of Christ's divinity is in his kenotic[502] revelation at Calvary.

The Theology of *Middlemarch*

These poems convey a Christology that is emphatically intertwined with the challenges of humanity's pedestrian experience. We see the same definitions of holiness and sanctity in

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[498] Tulloch, *The Contemporary Review*, 391.
[499] Mary Margaret Anderson, "Thy Word in Me: On the Prayer of Union in St. Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no.3 (2006): 338.
[500] Anderson, "Thy Word in Me," 338.
[501] Teresa of Avila. "Libro de la Vida," in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, vol.1, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), 37 (1.2.8); page 17 of *Middlemarch* likens men to birch-trees (straight, solid, simple) and women to 'palms'
[502] Greek. *Kenosis*. 'Self-emptying', used in theology to refer to God's self-limiting action by accepting crucifixion in the gospels, for example.

these poems as we do in *The Essence of Christianity*: that the central holiness of Christ is his sacrificially embodied solidarity with humanity, and that this unrelenting sympathetic awareness is what both constitutes and substantiates divine love. So, the voice in *Christian Resignation* is uniting itself to this divine love by expressing a decision to 'weep as thou hast wept' and to 'ask no more', rather than leveraging religious legitimacy to exert social control or attain special status.

These patterns of reflection arise in humility, developing into sympathetic awareness of the other, culminating in suspension of self-gratification for the sake of participation in collaborative social regeneration. They are foundational to the formation of Eliot's characters, especially in *Middlemarch*. These patterns arise in Dorothea, Fred Vincy, Tertius Lydgate and Rosamond as they grow from immature, blinkered, self-referential conduct that endangers each of them, to this other maturity that arises from Eliot's awareness of spiritual growth, which she has adopted from Teresa of Avila. Eliot is careful to distinguish between empowered self-limitation in Middlemarch, as modelled by Farebrother, and the self-destructive asceticism of Dorothea's early states.

Perhaps, if Eliot had found more satisfaction in translating and analysing polemics, she might also have been satisfied with Thomas Aquinas' scholasticism in *Summa Theologiae*. It seems, however, that her early experiences of faith did not result in the atheism that some scholars attribute to her. Rather, she determined to limit herself—like William Smith and Theresa of Avila—to material solidarity with human suffering, including the tangles of religious corruption. Thus, *Middlemarch* integrates Christological imagery and the transitions of Christian mysticism into a narrative that remains open for interpretation. In that openness—and in the materialist theologies of Strauss and Feuerbach—the reader may or may not recognise the sacred divine. Eliot is gentle enough to leave the question open.

Eliot's realism contributes amicably to the materialist cause, not just by reiterating polemical ideas, but by formally embodying her sense that faith perspectives vary considerably according to the temperament and objectives of each individual. She does this by representing diversity in her characters, thereby allowing the reader autonomy in judging the validity of those perspectives, within her representations of their situational suitability. Rather than speaking over the reader using polemical pronouncements, Eliot invites reflection on the suitability of diverse faith approaches within relational scenarios. This, in turn, enriches the reader's capacity to engage similar evaluations of the suitability of religious and interpersonal approaches in real life, external to the scaffolding provided by Eliot's realist narrative frameworks. By establishing this dialogue (rather than a dialectic or a polemic),

Eliot sidesteps the epistemological extravagance of orating a unitary ideological and epistemological position, thus enabling critique of these positions on functional, social grounds rather than seeking to synthetically systematise them.

Thus, the syntheses that constitute *Middlemarch* are crafted towards sympathetic connection with the reader, through Eliot's attempt to create a believable, realistic system of people and circumstance. It is in this regard that Eliot most closely adheres to the principles of honesty and humility that are integral to her ethics:

> So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin—the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings—much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth.[503]

Eliot takes pains to draw her real lions, and abandons renditions of the griffin, majestic as the fantasy of the mighty and impervious system is, in our confusing and limiting humanity.

Chandler, in his *Archaeology of Sympathy*, observes that 'each vehicular medium is associated with a mode of probability, a style of world-making. Broadly speaking… there are two kinds of narrative vehicles and modes of probability; for shorthand we call them romantic and novelistic.'[504] In *Middlemarch,* however, Eliot groups romanticism and religiosity together, both functioning as visionary undertakings, relating to the nature and capacities of the self and society. Eliot clearly differentiates between true and untrue religion, fundamentally on the grounds of whether a religious outlook facilitates or impedes a person's *Bildung*. Self-realisation and healthy social interaction are intertwined, and Eliot insists that deontological, dogmatic propositions cannot be 'correct' if their teleological, practical, social outworking is morally unpalatable. Mrs Farebrother, the matriarch, says so that 'When you get me a good man made out of arguments, I will get you a good dinner with reading you the cookery book. That's my opinion, and I think anybody's stomach will bear me out.'[505] Orr aptly observes that for Eliot, 'Love, pity, constituting sympathy, and generous joy with regard to the lot of our fellowmen' are, themselves, the substance of the heroic impulse and the

[503] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, (London: Ward, Lock & Co., no date, *c.*1890 [first pub. 1861]), 176.
[504] James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 215.
[505] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 180.

highest human capacity: the divine good, manifest in humanity.[506]

Thus, for Eliot, Christianity is not a dogmatic singularity, but rather is the designation of the cultural context within which its characters undertake their *Bildungen*. Religion, in this novel, is variously introspection, attentiveness, abdication of responsibility in favour of providence (privilege), social responsibility, deferral of agency, and superstition. Piety and dogmatism are in no way the test of holiness, but rather, empathic connection and humble truthfulness are represented as spiritual maturity. They are also represented as means of social progress, thus articulating Hegel's sense—mediated through both Strauss and Feuerbach—that religious progress is social progress, and that the fulfilment of religiosity is the advancement of the common cause of humanity.

In defining holiness as essentially relational and connective, Eliot differs from writers in the postmodern feminist tradition that draw on Simone de Beauvoir's characterisation of Teresa of Avila in *The Second Sex* to describe sainthood as 'a perfectionism that disavows bodily realities.'[507] Rather, Eliot's understanding of sainthood and holiness centres on relationality and union: with God/the divine good as expressed in the sacred need and capacity for relationship[508] that permeates the sacraments and holy life overall, as expressed throughout Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. As Soughers states,

> While friendship was characteristic of the saints, this type of relationship was not restricted to a spiritual elite. Rather than reserving friendship with God for those great friends of God mentioned in her *Life* or even great contemplatives among the vowed religious, Teresa argued that this friendship, this holiness, is possible for all Christians through friendship with Christ, and it is not just the property of the 'saints'.[509]

This friendliness is exemplified in Dorothea Brooke as evidence of Feuerbachian holiness.

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[506] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution*, (USA: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 56.

[507] See Susan Stiritz and Britt-Marie Schiller, "Transforming Feminine Categories: Genealogies of Virginity and Sainthood," *Journal for the American Psychoanalytic Association* 53, no.4 (2005): 1135. Stiritz also contributed a chapter to a book on this topic that I have been unable to locate, titled *Self and Community in George Eliot: Dorothea's Window*, ed. Patricia Gately, Dennis Leavens and D. Cole Woodcox. In this book, a review by Wright relates, Stiritz states Eliot drew on excerpts from Anna Jameson's books on the saints in writing *Middlemarch*, but as Wright notes, there are many texts in these notebooks that also would have impacted Eliot's reading. Wright does relate that Stiritz 'somewhat overstates her case, writing strangely of the 'Protestant bias in English studies' which 'marginalizes material specific to the Catholic tradition'.' I can't speak definitively about such a bias, but as I note in this thesis, the political and social prejudice against Catholics in the late nineteenth century seems a more demonstrable and relevant prejudice to articulate. See Terence Wright, "Review of Perspectives on Self and Community in George Eliot: Dorothea's Window. Ed. Patricia Gately, Dennis leavens and D. Cole Woodcox," *George Eliot Review* 30, (1999).

[508] For closer examination of this conception of holiness in the writings of Teresa of Avila, please see the following: Tara Soughers, "Holiness as Friendship with Christ: Teresa of Avila," HTS Theological Studies 72, no.4 (2016): 1-5; and Mary Anderson, "Thy Word in Me: On the Prayer of Union in St. Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no.3 (2006): 329-354.

[509] Tara Soughers, "Holiness as Friendship with Christ" 2-3.

She shows her capacity to connect her saintly nature with her relational behaviours. For Eliot, and for Feuerbach, holiness is a person's capacity to show gracious benevolence towards others, thus observing that person's sanctity. Mutual benevolent recognition is the foundation of social and religious progress, in *Middlemarch.* This recognition is true sight.

Artistic Reiteration and Epochal Echoes

Eliot's sophisticated integration of religious signifiers in *Middlemarch* presents several sets of culturally embedded textual histories, overlaying them and critiquing them through interpersonal interactions in the novel. For contemporary readers, many of these signifiers are stripped of meaning by historical distance, despite being part of normative awareness at the time *Middlemarch* was written. However, Eliot also summons many of these signifiers from the peripheries of English cultural awareness, as a means of teaching her audience. Her methodology, in this regard, follows the recommendations of Strauss and Feuerbach, who looked for the cultural meanings of Christian faith practices in order to examine their soundness and usefulness in negotiating real life.

The mechanics of this drawing-together are primarily intertextual, and these layers of signification are diversely meaningful or invisible, depending on the textual awareness of each specific reader. This textual play lends itself especially well to deconstruction of the 'sacred text' of Middlemarch's constructed social order, which reaches for legitimacy through association with biblical texts, ancient philosophy ('Stoics and Alexandrians'[510]), and analogy with historical religious figures. Much of Eliot's humour plays in the gaps between seemingly superficial narratorial observations, and the texts with which she links, beyond the novel. Most notably, Eliot returns frequently to the figures of Saint Teresa of Avila and Thomas Aquinas, who are introduced as analogues for Dorothea Brooke/Casaubon, and Edward Casaubon.

In this sense, *Middlemarch* also functions as fable. Eliot highlights the significance of fable in her 1868 'Notes on Form', drawing together scientific cause-and-effect and Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> The old phrases should not give way to scientific explanation for speech is to a great extent like sculpture, expressing observed phenomena and remaining true in spite of Harvey and Bichat. In the later development of poetic fable the ἀναγνώρισις[511] tends to consist in the discernment

[510] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 87.
[511] Greek: *Anagnorisis*. A moment of sudden realisation in a play. A shift from ignorance to knowledge: the opening of one's eyes.

> of a previously unrecognized *character*, and this may also form the περιπέτεια[512], according to Aristotle's notion that in the highest form the two coincide.[513]

In chapter fifteen of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea undergoes ἀναγνώρισις, or awakening, to a broad set of realities. As she becomes aware of the layering of signifiers in the paintings and other art of Rome—including that of Neumann, Will's artist-friend—she becomes aware of the flux of meaning between the particular and the broader whole. Thus, when Will tells Dorothea that she is, herself, a work of art ('You are a poem'), he is functioning as a textual device that links the development of the self with Eliot's understanding of what art and poetry are. She continued to reflect on these ideas, including them in the final notes she selected for publication at the end of her life:

> as knowledge continues to grow by its alternating processes of distinction and combination, seeing smaller and smaller unlikenesses and grouping or associating these under a common likeness, it arrives at the conception of wholes composed of parts more and more multiplied and highly differenced, yet more and more absolutely bound together by various conditions of common likeness or mutual dependence. And the fullest example of such a whole is the highest example of Form: in other words, the relation of the multiplex interdependent parts to a whole which is itself in wholes. Thus, the human organism comprises things as diverse as the finger-nails and tooth-ache, as the nervous stimulus of muscle manifested in a shout, and the discernment of a red spot on a field of snow; but all its different elements or parts of experience are bound together in a more necessary wholeness or more inseparable group of common conditions than can be found in any other existence known to us. The highest Form, then, is the highest organism, that is to say, the most varied group of relations bound together in a wholeness which again has the most varied relations with all other phenomenon.[514]

Thus, Eliot's ἀναγνώρισις for Dorothea is essentially a new awareness of the layered complexities of the systems surrounding her, which she substitutes for her previous myopic outlook. This, in turn, enables her to enact her περιπέτεια which is framed as self-authorship and textual enfranchisement, as I will explore.

There has been limited critical attention to the specific signifiers and emphases that I have outlined directly above, even though the complexity of *Middlemarch* has been noted extensively by critics. Gillian Beer comments that in *Middlemarch* 'we have access to a world compacted of meaning, yet so profuse that we need not even expect to raise all connections into consciousness. This quality of latency means that the exhaustiveness of exploration does not enclose or imprison text and reader.'[515] This observation can also be taken to be true of *Middlemarch*'s characters as they read the world around them: it is not

[512] Greek: *Peripeteia*. A sudden turning point; a plot twist.
[513] George Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art," in *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1868]), 358.
[514] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art," 356.
[515] Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 193.

intended that the reader will have a full command of the significations of *Middlemarch*, but rather, Eliot's formal choice demonstrates 'the relation of the multiplex interdependent parts to a whole which is itself in wholes.'[516]

The expansive whole of *Middlemarch* necessitates a very clear delineation of the realm of signification that my analysis will attend to. Specifically, these Roman Catholic analogues are tightly linked with England's highly politicised religious history.

> At the end of the eighteenth century, the Catholic population in Britain was small, amounting to about 1 percent of the total population, and they were still living under the Penal Laws, a set of parliamentary acts that prevented them from holding government office and limited their property rights. This population included some old and aristocratic Catholic families who had suffered through many years of persecution. But in 1800, the number of Catholics under the British Parliament's jurisdiction multiplied overnight. The Act of Union with Ireland added about five and a half million Catholics to the total. Irish voters were certain to elect Catholic parliamentary representatives, none of whom could be seated in Parliament, and this would undoubtedly inflame an already tense Irish population. Still, more than a quarter of a century passed before Catholic Emancipation, as it was called, became a reality in 1828.[517]

The use of these Roman Catholic analogues throughout *Middlemarch* recalls that the Victorian Church of England obstructed the enfranchisement of women and Catholics. While Eliot's Victorian readers would have been fluent in England's politicised religious history, her significations and allusions in *Middlemarch* may require some qualification for the twenty-first century reader.

> Certainly, she disguised it, compromised it, resisted it; but George Eliot created her art out of a cluster of rebellions, particularly against social, moral and aesthetic conventions... Against the judgements of a complacent society, she wrote of the unnoticed heroism of those it defeated.[518]

Eliot's choice of religious imagery is especially potent, considering that *Middlemarch* was written in the two years (1868-70) after the First Vatican Council in Rome. This served as a formal means for the Roman Catholic Church to respond to the complex theological debates of the 19th century. In particular, the wording of the *Incipit*[519]of the *Dei Filius*[520] was amended to resist 'Branch Theory', which posited that the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church and Anglican Common (Church of England) could be linked together as the One Catholic (literal meaning, 'universal') and Apostolic Church referred to in the common central credal statements of these churches. Vatican I also reinforced the doctrine of papal

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[516] Beer, *George Eliot*, 193.
[517] Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion*, (Westport and London: Praeger, 2008), 45.
[518] George Levine, "Introduction: George Eliot and the Art of Realism," in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.
[519] Latin. Opening.
[520] Latin. Son of God. Refers to the dogmatic constitution of the Roman Catholic Church.

infallibility,[521] which, ironically, carries a similar tone to the asserted (but not actualised) infallibility of Middlemarch patriarchs. This parallel holds English Protestant power dynamics up to many of the same criticisms that were articulated to justify discrimination against English Catholics.

Despite being set several decades before Vatican I, at the time of the Reform Bill, *Middlemarch* draws these two historical moments alongside each other. These were highly politicised moments that effected deep social change around ideas of legitimacy, authority, and economic participation. Eliot's representation of English provincial life during the reconfigurations that accompanied by the first Reform Bill highlights the breadth of opportunities that were open to young men, while reinforcing the centrality of class in English social order. The dissociation of the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church during the sixteenth century was a matter of pride to English protestants[522] from then on, and this Victorian prejudice against Roman Catholics was entrenched in normative English national identity:

> From our very infancy, on the knees of our mothers, we have been taught to believe, that to be a Catholic was to be a false, cruel and bloody wretch; and "popery and slavery" have been wrung in our ears, till, whether we looked on the Catholics in their private or their public capacity, we have inevitably come to the conclusion, that they were every thing that was vicious and vile.[523]

'Moreover, many people believed that, because of their allegiance to the Pope, Catholics could not be loyal subjects of the English monarch; indeed, an earlier Pope had excommunicated the monarch [Henry VIII, during the sixteenth century] and released Catholics from their vows of loyalty to the English crown.'[524] Roman Catholic faithfulness to the idea of papal infallibility was a point of ridicule and even hatred in English society; 'many pages' of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* and other evangelical periodicals were filled with 'No Popery' rhetoric.[525] Ascribing to the views of one powerful man (the pope) about the nature of religious legitimacy rather than the Anglican tenets of Faith, Reason and Tradition was held to be an unforgivable perversion—a gaping epistemological vulnerability. Eliot thus demonstrates that the attributes that were attacked in Roman Catholic thought and associated nationalisms, were versions of the issues that also retarded social development in English contexts. As Nixon observes, Englishness comprises a particular kind of

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[521] Melnyk, *Victorian Religion*, 47.
[522] Melnyk, *Victorian Religion*, 44.
[523] Willliam Cobbett [1824], as cited in J. Daniel Hammond, "The Shadows of Vanity: Religion and the Debate over Hierarchy," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 67, no.3 (2008): 429.
[524] Melnyk, *Victorian Religion*, 44.
[525] Melnyk, *Victorian Religion*, 45.

character(istics) and characters. British national identity, like Victorian discourse, was thus constituted through exclusion, enacted largely around religion.[526] Eliot invites the reader to undergo their own eye-opening realisation (*Anagnorosis*), in order that they may change direction in their own *Bildungen*.

Redefinition and Reformation: Religious Histories in *Middlemarch*

Theological awareness does not have a singular locus in *Middlemarch*. The web of wholes within wholes in this novel is a painstakingly rendered panorama of diverse functions and impacts, which invites the reader to appreciate that faith can be many things. Eliot is concerned not with finding one singular truth, but rather, seeks to hone perceptions within these separate wholes, in order that the larger whole—society—will attain a nuanced and inclusive consensus. As Orr recognises,

> In an important essay of 1851, her review of R.W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, George Eliot explicitly refutes the Comtean view that "human progress" means "devot[ing] our energies to the actual rather than the retrospective," affirming instead Mackay's "survey of the past," which shows "how each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and to its stage of development."… In the same essay she affirms "Mackay's faith" in what theologians came to call progressive revelation, which he sees, she writes, as "co-extensive with the history of human development."[527]

This progressive revelation was considered by Feuerbach and Eliot to be exercised primarily through religious participation, not in the sense that it could only occur within the provision of religious institutions, but rather, that contemplating and seeking the common good is the substance of religious life. Within this system of thinking, the divorce of this true function of religion from religious practice is the origin of the perverse violence of religious history:

> Religion is the relation of man to his own nature,—therein lies its truth and its power of moral amelioration;—but to his nature not recognised as his own, but regarded as another nature, separate, nay, contradistinguished from his own: herein lies its untruth, its limitation, its contradiction to reason and morality; the chief metaphysical principle of human sacrifices, in a word, the *prima materia* of all the atrocities, all the horrible scenes, in the tragedy of religious history.[528]

In *Middlemarch*, then, the spiritual darkness and blindness of characters is also a lack of understanding about the true nature of religion, and therein the true nature of human progress. Poetry—and all art—is *essentially* the articulation of religious consciousness, and vice versa.

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[526] Jude Nixon, "Framing Victorian Religious Discourse: An Introduction," in *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.
[527] Orr, *Theopoetics of Evolution*, 14.
[528] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957 [1854]), 197.

> A Form being once started must by and by cease to be purely spontaneous: the form itself becomes the object and material of emotion, and is sought after, amplified and elaborated by discrimination of its elements till at last by the abuse of its refinement it preoccupies the room of emotional thinking; and poetry, from being the fullest expression of the human soul, is starved into an ingenious pattern-work, in which tricks with vocables take the place of living words fed with the blood of relevant meaning, and made musical by the continual intercommunication of sensibility and thought.[529]

Thus, the suppression of Dorothea's nature is also the suppression of her capacity for education, is also her spiritual and religious suppression. The sacred text to be understood and illuminated is not handed down by the patriarchy, but rather, it is selfhood.

Theresa of Avila models the religious revolutionary self, in *Middlemarch*. Eliot describes Saint Theresa's epoch before leading into *Middlemarch*'s setting, in a manner that conspicuously glosses over Theresa's historical biography and textual contributions. By constructing her as Dorothea's spiritual analogue throughout the novel, Eliot invites the reader to investigate (or recall) these descriptions and understandings for themselves, without prescribing an interpretation of Theresa's very unusual life experiences. *The Inner Castle* is the primary point of interest for Eliot's engagement, in order to draw Theresa's *Bildung* into tangible contact with *Middlemarch*.

Theresa of Avila was born in Spain in March, 1515.[530] Spain was expanding its territories, and the outlawing of the Jewish and Muslim faiths made it necessary for her Jewish ancestors to convert to Christianity to avoid execution by the Spanish Inquisition. Theresa's

> father, while still a youth, an uncle, and her grandfather were reconciled to the Inquisition in Toledo for the sin of secret Judaising, causing the family to flee to Avila where they could begin anew and where they were able to purchase a patent of nobility, something not technically possible for a family with impure bloodlines, that admitted them to the lower gentry. Teresa's mother's family were 'Old Christians', and Teresa was raised in a devout Christian household.[531]

Families that converted were, nonetheless, severely limited in their social and economic participation for several generations following conversion. Women were viewed as particularly frail and prone to temptation from the devil (justified by the Genesis account of the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden). For this reason, there were only two sanctioned vocational choices for Theresa and other young women: marriage or holy

[529] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art," 359.
[530] Tara Soughers, "Holiness as Friendship with Christ: Teresa of Avila," *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no.4 (2106): 1.
[531] Soughers, "Holiness as Friendship with Christ," 1.

orders.[532] These limitations were strictly enforced, and any feminine lapses could have mortal consequences for both women and their families.

Theresa chose holy orders, and wrote prolifically. Her contribution potently bolstered the Catholic counter-reformation of the sixteenth century, especially in Spain. Her most influential work, *The Interior Castle*, is a practical guide to mystical connection with the divine, wherein the internal spiritual self is likened to a castle, at the centre of which, in the very centre of Theresa's truest self, she attained mystical union with the divine. Significantly, Dorothea realises on her honeymoon that the 'large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither…'[533]

Theresa's understanding of holiness as friendship with the divine[534] contrasts distinctly with the theology asserted in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas, who is identified as Edward Casaubon's analogue in *Middlemarch*. Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* presents a systematic hierarchy of sin, also positing, conspicuously, that the most effective social remedy for heresy was execution.[535] This theology was integral to the legitimisation of the Spanish Inquisition. Theresa pays obeisance to Aquinas throughout her writing, to the point of conspicuous hyperbole. This was, arguably, a strategic decision to avoid being pronounced an enemy of the church, which resonates with Dorothea Brooke's own means of self-legitimisation. Both Theresa and Dorothea were drawn out of this abdication into fuller spiritual agency. In this regard, both were revolutionaries.

Theresa drew the attention of Inquisitors when, during spiritual ecstasies, she began to levitate. She consequently came under suspicion of witchcraft, despite her textual self-effacement. It is not the purpose of this thesis to evaluate these accounts—just as I refrain from evaluating accounts of mesmerism and transcendental experiences documented by Strauss—but the social impact of Theresa's reformation of the Carmelite order and associated social regeneration is inarguable. Thus, the 'Prelude' to *Middlemarch* can reasonably be read as ironic when its narrator describes Theresa as benefitting from a 'coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul'[536] and notes, by way of contrast, that 'Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing,

[532] T.F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society, 1400-1600*, (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 239.
[533] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 208.
[534] See Soughers, "Holiness as Friendship with Christ," for an adept exploration of this concept in Theresa of Avila's writing.
[535] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2, q.64, a.2; also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Chapter 146.
[536] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.

whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognisable deed.'[537] Readers familiar with the life of Theresa of Avila may reasonably take the analogy between Theresa and Dorothea—both women of their respective times, experiencing their limitations yet exercising socially regenerative agency—as evidence of the enormous scope of their potential as socio-political actors.

Composing the Poem: Dorothea's Self-Authorship

Eliot's understanding of the self as a vessel for sacred potential incorporates her awareness of communality as holiness. Thus, any religious leader who is incapable of such functions is not a qualified religious authority, for her. Churches and clergy are not uncritically accepted as authoritative, but rather, Celia's baby is described as sacred, when the Brooke family is planning how to best spend the baby's first few months: 'it was offered that they should all migrate to Cheltenham… with the sacred ark, otherwise called a cradle.'[538] Eliot is referring to the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament, where the spirit of God resided while the Israelites were in the desert, and which was later installed in the very inner sanctum of the temple in Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, Jesus conveys that the Holy Spirit no longer resides in the Ark of the Covenant, but rather, has come to live within humanity. In Rome, Will Ladislaw is likened to the cherubic messenger in Bernini's sculpture of the call of St Theresa. In this statue, the angel pierces Theresa's breast with a spear, and she is simultaneously wounded and called by God, marked-out by her pain. Will is functioning as divine messenger to Dorothea in assisting her to understand her own call to perceive God, not through transcendentalist mysticism, but through the fulfillment of her ardent nature, drawing her out of denial and subjugation. He does this by accompanying her as her eyes are opened to the pluralities of signification in art: the layering of literal significations through depiction, as well as the many layers of connection beyond. This chapter of *Middlemarch* fleshes out Eliot's 1868 essay:

> Even those who use the phrase [Form] with a very dim understanding, always have a sense that it refers to a structure or composition, that is, to the impression from a work considered as a whole. And what is a structure but a set of relations selected and combined in accordance with the sequence of mental states in the constructor, or with the preconception of a whole which he has inwardly evolved? Artistic form, as distinguished from mere imitation, begins in sculpture and painting with composition or the selection of attitudes and formation of groups let the

[537] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, xvi.
[538] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 572.

> objects be of what order they may. In music it begins with the adjustment of tones and rhythm to a climax, apart from any direct imitation. But my concern is here chiefly with poetry which I take in its wider sense as including all literary production of which is the prerogative and not the reproach that the choice and sequence of images and ideas—that is, of relations and groups of relations—are more or less not only determined by emotion but intended to express it.[539]

In 'Book Four: Three Love Problems', Casaubon's unholiness and deadness is similarly emphasised, just before Will comes to Middlemarch. Dorothea's subjection to Casaubon is demonstrated to be absurd. It is reiterated that she is 'innocently at work towards the further embitterment of her husband,'[540] even as she seeks to respond to her mistaken sense of divine call to please him. To borrow words from Eliot's essay, Casaubon's form was not able to climax, and was similarly impotent to unify his whole with the larger whole, despite his attempt to define it—and the meaning of other people's divinity—authoritatively. This shortcoming is *essentially* his incapacity to identify as Dorothea's companion and partner in life. A similar criticism that can also be made of his analogue, Aquinas, and of other polemicists. Neither Theresa nor Dorothea falls short in this way.

The analogy between Dorothea and Theresa delineates Dorothea's *Bildung* as a discovery of this sacred potential within herself. Theresa wrote her own epos, despite the context within which she found herself. Dorothea comes to attain similar agency: in realising in Rome that she is a poem, she also realises that she is both an art form and a sacred text. This form and textuality is not limited by the unpalatable prescriptions and arguments of the patriarchy, but by the grace with which she is anointed to come to know herself and her vocation, in relationship and community. Casaubon personifies the self-interest of religious patriarchy. The process of their marriage is his demystification before Dorothea. Simultaneously, it is the process of her realisation that the subject of his studies was 'a tradition... itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins.'[541] This is simultaneously the demystification of Rome, for Dorothea, 'the city of visible history, here the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in **funeral procession** with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar.'[542]

Casaubon's death is accompanied by the reading of his will, and Dorothea is simultaneously humiliated by his codicil seeking to disinherit her if she remarries to Will Ladislaw, and insulted that she is only left with instructions for completion of his *Key to All*

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[539] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art," 356-7.
[540] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 397.
[541] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 512.
[542] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 205.

Mythologies following his death. Dorothea had begun in self-effacement and deference to this 'great work', thinking that her prospective husband was equipped to complete the project that was his excuse for his alienation from her:

> For to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education, Mr Casaubon's talk about his great book was full of new vistas; and this sense of revelation, this surprise of a nearer introduction to Stoics and Alexandrians, as people who had ideas not totally unlike her own, kept in abeyance for the time her usual eagerness for a binding theory which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connection with that amazing past, and give the remotest sources of knowledge some bearing on her actions.[543]

Dorothea's laying aside of his polemic parallels Eliot's own decision to write about life as it is lived, and to enjoy the 'fellowship of high knowledge that was to make life worthier', rather than herself sifting through the artless illustration of doubtless principles that she was so often exposed to:

> sifting of these mixed heaps of material, which were to be the doubtful illustration of principles still more doubtful. The poor child had become altogether unbelieving as to the trustworthiness of that Key which had made the ambition and the labour of her husband's life. It was not wonderful that, in spite of her small instruction, her judgement in this matter was truer than his: for she looked with unbiased comparison and healthy sense at probabilities on which he had risked all his egoism. And now she pictured to herself the days, and months, and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins – sorting them as food for a theory which was already withered in the irth [sic] like an elfin child... Dorothea had so often had to check her weariness and impatience over this questionable riddle-guessing, as it revealed itself to her instead of the fellowship in high knowledge[544] which was to make life worthier... had she not wished to marry him that she might help him in his life's labour? – But she had thought the work was to be something greater, which she could serve in devoutly for its own sake.[545]

Will, in contrast to Casaubon, constantly aches after Dorothea's esteem, because he truly sees her. 'To ask her to be less simple and direct would be like breathing on the crystal that you want to see the light through. And there was always the other great dread – of himself becoming dim and ray-shorn in her eyes.'[546] Will's love for Dorothea constantly reinforces the possibility of something other than what Casaubon offers her; something other than her being cowed and silenced. This serves as a powerful preamble to the political career that he undertakes once wedded to Dorothea. Her power and influence in this endeavour

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[543] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 87.
[544] There can be no doubt that Eliot found 'fellowship in high knowledge' in her relationship with George Henry Lewes. Harriet Beecher Stowe started writing to Marian around the time of publication of *Middlemarch*, and noted that she felt that her husband was a bit of a Casaubon, and suggested that perhaps George Henry Lewes might be the origin of the character. Marian responded so pointedly that this was not the case, that Harriett was still apologetic and embarrassed a decade later. These letters to 'Marian Lewes' are held at the Berg archive at the New York Public Library.
[545] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 512.
[546] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 393.

suggests that his politics represent a practical gateway into a new epoch, within which Dorothea and her ilk's vocational scope is suitably widened. Despite both Will and Dorothea's exemplary motivations, Casaubon pettily seeks to isolate and silence both. Dorothea tries to acclimatise to this control by deference, rather than investigation. In this, she sins. The reader is thus invited to reflect on similarly unsuitable configurations within their own social contexts:

> Dorothea, early troubling her elders with questions about the facts around her, had wrought herself into some independent clearness as to the historical, political reasons why eldest sons had superior rights, and why land should be entailed: those reasons, impressing her with a certain awe, might be weightier than she knew, but here was a question of ties which left them uninfringed. Here was a daughter whose child – even according to the ordinary aping of aristocratic institutions by people who are no more aristocratic than retired grocers, and who have no more land to 'keep together' than a lawn and a paddock – would have a prior claim. Was inheritance a question of liking or responsibility? All the energy of Dorothea's nature went on the side of responsibility – the fulfilment of claims founded on our own deeds, such as marriage and parentage.[547]

Casaubon's rebuke of Dorothea's sincere desire to understand her subjection, makes it extremely clear that 'womanly influence' is not all it's cracked up to be:

> Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgement on subjects beyond your scope. Into the questions how far conduct, especially in the matter of alliances, constitutes a forfeiture of family claims, I do not now enter. Suffice it, that you are not here qualified to discriminate. What I now wish you to understand is, that I accept no revision, still less dictation within that range of affairs which I have deliberated upon as distinctly and properly mine…[548]

This is after gentle, loving words from Dorothea. Casaubon, with an attitude echoing papal infallibility, seeks to keep them in the dark, commenting that his control is 'providential,'[549] even though he is referring to Dorothea's money, rather than his own. It is in this context that Dorothea comes closest to explicit prayer: an anomaly within the wider novel:

> Hearing him breathe quickly after he had spoken, 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. But nothing else happened, except that they both remained a long while sleepless, without speaking again.'[550]

As Dorothea begins to ache for an imminent, loving husband, she reaches out to hope for a similar kind of God. As with our own lives, it is left to the individual whether to take the plot of *Middlemarch* as evidence of answered prayer, or to interpret this night of silence as the absence of a loving, immanent God. Dorothea perseveres in shedding her spiritual blindness,

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[547] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 397.
[548] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 401.
[549] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 400.
[550] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 401.

and this passage incorporates darkness as a metaphor for the obstructions being inflicted on her. Despite his unresponsiveness to Dorothea, Casaubon attributes blame to Will, that he 'sow her mind with disrespect, and perhaps aversion'.[551] Casaubon uses this fear to justify his vindictive behaviour towards Will, and his deliberate deception of others in relation to his capacities as a scholar and a husband: it is not within the realm of possibility that he consider Dorothea's opinion or experiences of him.[552] This alienated control is blind to Dorothea's nature, and as such is profane. Eliot thus accentuates the enormous gap between embodied spiritual progress, and the impacts of these controlling, casuistic systems.

Once Casaubon dies, Dorothea begins to awaken in her ardent nature, once again, musing that 'effective magic is transcendent nature; and who shall measure the subtlety of those touches which convey the quality of soul as well as body.'[553] Dorothea's vibrancy in this new season is resplendent. Having lived through her marriage and its associated darkness and desiccation, she is acutely attuned to the value of things that her earlier performative asceticism had rejected:

> 'Sir James has been telling me that he is in hope of seeing a great change made soon in your management of the estate – that you are thinking of having the farms valued, and repairs made, and the cottages improved... Oh, how happy!' – she went on, clasping her hands, with a return to that more childlike impetuous manner which had been subdued since her marriage. 'If I were at home still, I should take to riding again, that I might go about with you and see all that! And you are going to engage Mr Garth, who praised my cottages, Sir James says.'[554]

Dorothea is not suddenly autonomous. Applications for the living at Lowick are sent to her uncle, rather than to her, for example,[555] but as she increasingly articulates her perceptions, she becomes progressively more powerful. She thus shifts from deference to and veneration of Casaubon and his mystical texts, to the realisation that *she* decides what she will write, and what that this will occur within her own reflection:

> One little act of hers may be perhaps smiled at as superstitious. The *Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs Casaubon*, she carefully enclosed and sealed, writing within the envelope, *I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in?—Dorothea.'* Then she deposited the paper in her own desk.[556]

Since the 1874 publication of Walter Richard Cassell's *Supernatural Religion: The Synoptic*

[551] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 402.
[552] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 403.
[553] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 415.
[554] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 415.
[555] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 522.
[556] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 574.

Gospels, 'synoptical' has most frequently referred to the gospels of the new testament: the collected perceptions of the gospel writers, in their diverse relationships with Jesus. However, at the time of *Middlemarch*'s publication, it did not have this association, referring most often to comprehensive indexes of attributes and values, functioning as interpretive matrices, especially in the sciences. Casaubon's 'synoptical tabulation' is the inverse of what he professes it to be. Instead of providing a sweeping and comprehensive perspective, it is merely evidence of his incapacity to see what is important, especially in terms of their marriage. He accepts assistance with his writing over his dead body, so to speak, but since Dorothea's primary motivation in offering her help was intimacy, his belated acceptance of Dorothea's help is his final alienation from her. The presumption of writing a synopsis of all mythologies is left hanging, as Dorothea goes on with the work of writing *herself*, having come to realise the import of Will's utterance to her: 'You are a poem.'[557]

Truth, Rhetoric, and the Necessity of Syllepsis

Eliot's representations of ego, oppression, and spiritual emancipation resonate, again, with Feuerbach's observations:

> That which we has designated as the practical or subjective view is not pure, it is tainted with egoism, for therein I have relation to a thing only for my own sake; neither is it self-sufficing, for it places me in relation to an object above my own level. On the contrary, the theoretic view is joyful, self-sufficing, for it places me in relation to an object above my own level. On the contrary, the theoretic view is joyful, self-sufficing, happy; for here the object calls forth love and admiration; in the light of the free intelligence it is radiant as a diamond, transparent as a rock-crystal. The theoretic view is æsthetic, whereas the practical is unæsthetic. Religion therefore finds in God a compensation for the want of an æsthetic view. To the religious spirit the world is nothing in itself; the admiration, the contemplation of it is idolatry; for the world is a mere piece of mechanism. Hence in religion it is God that[558] serves as the object of pure, untainted, *i.e.*, theoretic or æsthetic contemplation. God is the existence to which the religious man has an objective relation; in God the object is contemplated by him for its own sake. God is an end in himself; therefore in religion he has the significance which in the theoretic view belongs to the object in general. The general being of theory is to religion a special being. It is true that in religion man, in his relation to God, has relation to his own wants as well in a higher as in the lower sense: "Give us this day our daily bread;" but God can satisfy all wants of man only because he in himself has no wants,—because he is perfect blessedness.[559]

That is, Dorothea transitions from what Feuerbach would call a religious, unæsthetic view that Eliot refers to as blinkered, torpor, clouded, short-sighted, throughout her various novels.

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[557] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 256.
[558] Feuerbach and Marian Evans' depersonalisation of God in their language is notable, as it deviates from theological convention. God was almost invariably 'He' and 'Whom' in Christian theological language up until this time. The gender-neutrality of these terms leaves expression of the divine nature and power open to all of humanity, in Feuerbach's theology.
[559] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 196.

Dorothea grows to express her theoretical impulses as part of her regenerate, æsthetic expression of her 'free intelligence' that is 'radiant as a diamond, transparent as a rock-crystal'. This 'theoretic or æsthetic contemplation' is facilitated by Will's artistic awareness, and it is thereby that Dorothea comes to understand herself both as a textual form, and is also brought into focus as a textual form constructed by Eliot. Within this configuration, as the author of Dorothea, Marian Lewes articulates her form as a whole connected to other wholes, and as such, as connected to the *Bildungen* that she wrote and embodied for herself.

These tensions are examples of syllepsis, which is 'the condition of textual uncertainty operating between the literal and figurative levels.'[560] Syllepsis is fundamental to the mechanics of *Middlemarch*, and, more broadly, to the understanding of form in art as the whole connected to and within other wholes, as a kind of analogue for the self. It particularly applies to the tension between the historical transcendentalist mythos of Theresa of Avila and Eliot's representation of her, and, in turn, Dorothea's construction and living-out of her ardent nature. These ambiguities function similarly to the relationship between supernatural and natural experience, and between religious awareness and the rest of life. Rather than seeking to delineate authoritatively between these things, Eliot instead becomes increasingly limber in her sylleptic capabilities. So, rather than 'sifting these mixed heaps of material', as Dorothea also was commissioned to do, Eliot committed herself to 'literary production of which is the prerogative and not the reproach that the choice and sequence of images and ideas—that is, of relations and groups of relations—that are more or less not only determined by emotion but intended to express it.'[561] As she intimated in a widely-quoted letter, 'Writing is part of my religion, and I can write no word that <does not clothe my [deep?] faith.>[562] is not prompted from within.'[563]

In contrast to syllepsis, 'diegetic' representation is that which is restricted to the internal world of the narrative: 'Indeed, it is to our own capacities for reflection that such works make their ultimate appeal, quite explicitly at times, and this sense of practical engagement has consequences for how we might answer even a basic question like "what happens" in these works.'[564] Keck identifies that F.J.W. von Schelling was very influential

[560] James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 215.
[561] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art," 356-7.
[562] Quote reflects Haight's transcription.
[563] George Eliot "GE to Sara Sophia Hennell, Richmond, 19 August [1857]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 377.
[564] Chandler, *Archaeology of Sympathy*, 206.

on Baur, who was very much valued by Strauss, in asserting that 'philosophical myths present ideas in visual, palpable form, and hence are not expected to be taken at face value as factual history, but are expected to persuade one of their truth.'[565]

Conclusion

Middlemarch is a kind of myth of English provincial life, simultaneously true and fictional. In presenting these truths—especially of the nature and impacts of the English social system, and its relation to other social systems with similar failings and limitations—Eliot opens the question of 'unhistorical' acts. These 'unhistorical' contributions are related to the non-mythical lives of her readers, inviting them to see their struggles and potential in Dorothea as both saintly exemplar *and simultaneously* unhistoric woman. These layerings and redeployments resonate with the ideas of progress that I explored earlier in this thesis, as readers are invited to participate in the cycle of authorship and self-definition, rather than being displaced or excluded by those who profess authority over such questions. Orr describes this empowerment as 'incarnational':

> Equally important is the notion of incarnation, both in its ethical and sacred modelling of integrated humanity and in its modelling of the aesthetic goal of making the words of her art become flesh, in a figurative sense. For, despite her withdrawal from the institutional church, she continues to believe in the incarnation as the basis for human values and relations.[566]

And yet, for other readers, this emancipation thoroughly excludes religiosity and supernatural awareness from Eliot's thought. Such questions remain open for the reader, as each is invited to work out their own resolution of both the syllepses in *Middlemarch*, and outside of it..George Eliot was no Edward Casaubon, after all.

[565] Leander Keck, "Editor's Introduction," in David Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's The Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus Series, (Philadelphia, USA: Fortress Press, 1977), liv.
[566] Orr, *Theopoetics of Evolution*, 4.

11. Weimar and the Easy Yoke: Matrimony and Synthesis

> We get our knowledge of perfect Love by glimpses and in fragments chiefly—the rarest only among us knowing what it is to worship and caress, reverence and cherish, divide our bread and mingle our thoughts at one and the same time, under inspiration of the same object.[567]

Introduction

In *Middlemarch,* Eliot represents plural approaches to faith and belief. These approaches arise diversely, according to the experience of each individual. In constructing this diversity, Eliot exercises sympathy and respect, embodying the openness (and necessary boldness) that she articulates in the Christian poetry in her notebook. This openness arose out of Eliot's experiences of marital intimacy, and her enjoyment of vibrant and sympathetic intellectual connections within the free-thinking community, especially in Germany after translating Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* in 1854. Her freedom to live in a *de facto* marriage with George Henry Lewes was inspired, largely, by Feuerbach's exploration of the sanctity of marriage: not from a legalistic perspective, but according to the sacred nature of sincere connection. Thus, through these experiences of this translation process, she came to sharpen her awareness of the relational, interpersonal attributes that she associated with spiritual maturity, favouring these over cultural mores. Rather than promoting a single dogmatic position as 'correct', she instead committed herself to thoughtful perception of unhistorical contexts and lived experiences, making allowances for the fact that within these experiences, individuals come to diverse conclusions about what is good and necessary.

This position arose out of a faith in humanity's collective capacity to embody progress, which integrates a Hegelian commitment to the unfolding revelation of the nature of existence and experience across all fields of inquiry, including both theology and the natural sciences. Within this process of inquiry, Eliot applied an ethic of respect for the validity of each individual's *Bildung*. More generally, she considered social progress to hinge not on passivity and conformity, but rather on shared commitment to sympathetic communitarianism.

[567] George Eliot, "Religious Love," in *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwell and Sons, 1884), 376.

> It is worth repeating that powerful imagination is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation, and a creative energy constantly fed by susceptibility to the veriest minutiae of experience, which it reproduces and constructs in fresh and fresh wholes [sic]; not the habitual confusion of provable fact with fictions of fancy and transient inclination, but a breadth of association which informs every material object, every incidental fact with far-reaching memories and stored residues of passion, bringing into light the less obvious relations of human existence.[568]

Germany, Lewes, Liszt, and Spinoza's *Ethics*

Evans' translation of *The Essence of Christianity* was published in July of 1854. On the 20th of that month she travelled to Germany with Lewes, where he worked on his *Life of Goethe*. Evans continued to write articles for *The Westminster Review* in tandem with a translation (from Latin) of Spinoza's *Ethics*. During this journey, they socialised with German nobility and the pianist, Franz Liszt, who was described very enthusiastically by George Henry Lewes:

> My great delight was to watch Liszt and observe the sweetness of his expression. Genius, benevolence and tenderness beam from his whole countenance, **and his manners are in perfect harmony with it**… I sat near him so that I could see both his hands and face. For the first time in my life I beheld real inspiration—for the first time I heard the true tones of the piano… There was nothing strange or excessive about his manner. His manipulation of the instrument was quiet and easy, and his face was simply grand—the lips compressed and the head thrown a little backward. When the music expressed quiet rapture or devotion a sweet smile flitted over his features; when it was triumphant the nostrils dilated. There was nothing petty or egoistic to mar the picture.[569]

Liszt entertained the pair throughout their time in Weimar. He lived there with Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, whom Evans refers to as 'his wife' in a letter to Charles Bray during that visit.[570] However, in a similar manner to Evans and Lewes, Liszt and Sayn-Wittgenstein were unable to marry due to papal obstructions of a divorce from her first husband. Considering the comfort and warmth expressed by Evans during this stay in Weimar, Lewes chose their accommodations well, as they helped her acclimatise to the inaccessibility of a lawful marriage to them back in England.

> I am happier every day and find my domesticity more and more delightful and beneficial to me. Affection, respect and intellectual sympathy deepen, and for the first time in my life I can say to the moments "Verweilen [S]ie, [S]ie sind so schön."[571]

Liszt eventually ended up taking a vow of chastity as part of his Rule of Life in the

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[568] George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, (London and Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1879), 112.
[569] George Henry Lewes, "GHL to Thomas Carlyle, Weimar, [19 October 1854]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, , 177-8.
[570] George Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, Weimar, [16 August 1854]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, , 171.
[571] 'Linger, you are so beautiful.' Refers to Goethe's *Faust*, Part I, line 1,700: 'Verweile doch! du bist so schön!' Quoted in George Eliot, "GE to John Chapman, Weimar, 30 August 1854," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 173.

Franciscan tradition, maintaining an ongoing friendship with Sayn-Wittgenstein.

The interactions between established traditions and new approaches were not simply private matters, but impacted society on many levels. These movements manifested diversely in different contexts: in the United States, new explorations of human rights were undertaken, such as in the Presbyterian-spiritualist Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (pub. 1852), which questioned slavery so sympathetically and effectively that it became an important touchstone for the anti-slavery movement.[572] Marian Evans and George Henry Lewes prioritised the character of their relationship over established Christian cultural traditions. They made these decisions within the freethinking community, both in England and abroad, particularly their friendship with Liszt during their time in Weimar.

Back in London, Evans' absence further compounded Chapman's financial woes. Chapman's distress was deepened by the death of his father. Evans sympathetically acknowledged this in a letter, within which she also requested that he assist her in preparing an article for *The Leader* (a journal started by Lewes with Thornton Hunt, the man with whom Lewes' wife had also lived de-facto during their marriage). The Lewes marriage had dissolved over time, but they were unable to divorce, due to his refusal to condemn the relationship, and ongoing cordiality with Hunt.[573] My archival work in New York found that throughout Lewes' correspondence with Hunt in establishing *The Leader*, he calls Hunt 'brother', signing most letters, 'God bless you.'[574]

By October of 1854, rumours had spread in London such that it became necessary for Evans to clarify her decision. She wrote first to Charles Bray, much to Sara Hennell and Cara Bray's distress at being excluded:

> Since we left England he has been in constant correspondence with his wife; she has had all the money due to him in London; and his children are his principal thought and anxiety. Circumstances, with which I am not concerned, and which have arisen since he left England, have led him to determine on a separation from Mrs Lewes, but he has never contemplated that separation as a total release from responsibility towards her… I have seen all the correspondence between them, and it has assured me that his conduct as a husband has been not only irreproachable, but generous and self-sacrificing to a degree far beyond any standard fixed by the world.[575]

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[572] Eliot enjoyed long and cordial correspondence with Beecher Stowe; the latter's letters heavily featured descriptions of her family's spiritualist experiences alongside reflections on justice and the Christian faith. Interestingly, the two were held together comfortably by Beecher-Stowe. These letters are held at the Berg Archive, and include passages describing these spiritual experiences, which were ommitted from published transcriptions.
[573] Barbara Hardy, *George Eliot: A Critic's Biography*, (New York: Continuum, 2006), 64.
[574] George Henry Lewes, *7 ALS to Thornton Leigh Hunt [v.p., ca. 1849] 2 folders*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York.
[575] Eliot, "GE to John Chapman, Weimar, 30 August 1854," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 178-9.

Soon after this, in November, Lewes and Evans moved to Berlin, where they began to establish their work patterns together, writing alongside each other every morning until their 'heads [were] hot,'[576] before spending the afternoon outside the home. These patterns became fruitfully entrenched. Evans worked on her translation of Spinoza, prioritising it over her a piece on the 'Ideals of Womankind' for Chapman. Evans initially pitched a piece to Chapman, as a substitute, called 'Woman in Germany', promoted with a sense of new enthusiasm and idealisation of German history. This seems to have arisen from her travel experiences, even though she did not wish to write 'simply about the German woman, who is not a very fertile subject (metaphorically speaking).'[577] Neither piece eventuated, but the translation was completed.

Evans' interest in Spinoza enabled further exploration of questions raised by Strauss and Feuerbach about what faith was, if it was not entirely what the institutionalised church represented it as being. This was especially pertinent to relationships between church and state. Further to these social questions were Evans' linked material experiences and internal processes, including faith. Her bond with Lewes was central to their mutual intellectual development, and over time, as she began to write her novels as explorations of observed principles, and he continued writing philosophically and engaging in broad scientific inquiries, they came together in a potent collaboration to produce Lewes' *magnum opus*: *Problems of Life and Mind*.

Moira Gatens refers to the 'not false error'[578] of Eliot's Christian characters, which motivates her heroines, particularly, towards potent 'impartial goodness' as it was conceived of in Strauss' thought. This 'impartial goodness' is identified by Strauss as the foundation of Christ's sanctity.[579] Some of these Christians function as philosophers and some as prophets, in line with Spinoza's definitions of same, particularly among her ministers and faith leaders. These definitions appear in chapters thirteen and fourteen of Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise*, which Eliot had translated in the late 1840s, as noted in correspondence from Charles Bray. Bray had also been among those to request her translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*.[580]

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[576] Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, Berlin, 12 November 1854," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 186.
[577] Eliot, "Letter to John Chapman, Berlin, 9 January [1855]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.6, 190.
[578] Moira Gatens, "Compelling Fictions: Spinoza and George Eliot on Imagination and Belief," *European Journal of Philosophy* 20, no.1 (2012): 83.
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[580] Eliot, "GE to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, Geneva, [4 December 1849]," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 321.

Spinoza argues for a 'strict separation of faith and theology from philosophy… The prophets were not philosophers but rather men of extraordinary imaginative power who made a strong impression on the minds of ordinary uneducated people in order to persuade them to follow a common moral code.'[581] This moral code, for Spinoza and for Eliot, is encapsulated in the Golden Rule of the Gospels: to do unto others, as you would wish for them to do unto you.[582] Dinah Morris (*Adam Bede*), Will Ladislaw and Dorothea Brooke/Casaubon (*Middlemarch*) function prophetically, according to this definition, as does Malachi in *Daniel Deronda*. Amos Barton speaks more as a philosopher, as does Edward Casaubon, but as their audiences are not able to bridge the gaps between their knowledge bases, both are unsuccessful communicators with limited positive social impact: their respective limitations originate from their lack of that 'impartial goodness' that would allow them to appreciate the needs and sensations of the other.

Moving Towards Novel-Writing

The lively and rigorous engagement established between Lewes and Evans in Germany, continued in uninterrupted harmony until Lewes' death from cancer in 1878. The magnitude of the internal shift undergone by Evans because of this relationship cannot be overstated. Her confidence in the natural rightness of the relationship—bolstered by Feuerbach and Spinoza's defences of intuitive, naturalistic morality rather than constructed moral religious doctrines—emboldened her to continue to reside with Lewes in Dover on their return to England in March of 1855. They spent significant time resolving accommodations and practicalities in 1855 and early 1856, and during this time a publisher was sought for the Spinoza translation, following Chapman's descent into insolvency in her absence. This descent was complicated by the death of Chapman's cousin in September of 1854, which opened further opportunity for James Martineau and a Mr Hodgson to escalate their attempts to take over *The Westminster Review*, citing Chapman's financial mismanagement. However, in his characteristically charismatic way, Chapman was able to negotiate for an exceptional contribution from Carlyle for the January 1855 issue, titled 'The Prinzenraub: A Glimpse of Saxon History'. This renewed confidence in him as editor of *The Westminster* enabled him to quash Hodgson and Martineau's attempts, for a time. His financial situation was later stabilised somewhat using contributions from Harriet Martineau, James' sister.

[581] Benedict de Spinoza, *Spinoza's Works: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Tractatus Politicus*, revised edn., The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza, vol.1, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), 80.
[582] Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 159-60.

Harriet enjoyed a close friendship with Chapman, which deepened in Evans' absence. Several correspondences from Evans to the Brays and to Chapman during her time in Weimar and Berlin include extended assertions from Evans that Martineau's claim to have received a letter from Evans intimating key details about her relationship with Lewes was a fabrication. Harriet's claims were made freely and broadly, which was certainly a key factor in the widespread awareness of Evans and Lewes' new relationship, and her communications with Chapman relating to this fascination were nothing new. An excerpt from a letter—marked 'Private', which was unusual— from Evans to Chapman in 1853:

> How came you to mention to Miss M[artineau] that you saw the proof of Mr. Lewes's book in "Miss Evans's room"? I think you must admit that your mention of my name was quite gratuitous. So far you were naughty—but never mind.[583]

Tracy Rosenberg identifies similarities between Eliot's reception in the 1870s-80s and her reception by feminist scholars in the 1970s.[584] Rosenberg notes that Elizabeth Gaskell wrote letters to Eliot during Autumn of 1859, the content of which 'echoes a larger question: how could a woman who had lost her belief in Christianity write a novel that had been widely believed the work of a clergyman'? Gaskell came to hypothesise in these letters that Eliot must be innately moral in order to be able to successfully portray morality, 'no matter how strong the intellectual power of the writer.'[585] Gaskell came to surmise, 'I think the author must be a noble creature; and I shut my eyes to the awkward blot of her life'.[586] Harriet Beecher-Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, also corresponded with Eliot, frequently articulating the assumption that Eliot maintained a Christian faith, in between her lengthy anecdotes about her own faith and its intersections with Mesmeric and spiritualistic practices. Eliot does not appear to have felt any compunction to make a clear statement of her faith position to either, and neither set of assumptions should be taken as evidence of Eliot's own private feelings. Public opinion regarding Eliot's private life had the potential to deeply affect her reception as a writer. Rosenberg explores the cold reception of Mary Wollstonecraft on account of her personal sexual conduct, 'whose writings were expunged from nineteenth-century public discourse because of irregularities in her personal life.'[587]

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[583] George Eliot, *ALS To [John Chapman], [London?] 1853*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. (Transcription: Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 132. Haight tentatively dates the letter December 17th.

[584] Tracey Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot: George Eliot's Reception and the Ideal Woman Writer," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 3, no.1 (2007): no pages.

[585] Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot," paragraph 4.

[586] Rosenberg is citing Gaskell from Haight's *George Eliot Letters*, but gives only the page number 594, not the volume. None of the volumes is so long.

[587] Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot," paragraph 5.

Eliot, in contrast, was celebrated and accepted. Wollstonecraft was made sense of, in the end, as a woman who 'suffered from an excessive femininity, a nature too much in need of love to be overly concerned with external social forms.'[588]

Biographical accounts of Eliot and Lewes' relationship display a range of biases, according to what each biographer finds acceptable, Rosenberg notes, thus 'interpreting Eliot within codes of acceptable conduct became an essential element of her reception.'[589] Most laboured of these was the biography written by John Cross, Eliot's husband of under a year at the time of her death. It has since been found to include fabricated correspondence. Eliot was aware, herself, of the need to sanitise the narrative surrounding her authorship, hence her choice of a masculine pen-name, which is examined by Smith.[590]

Evans continued to develop through earnest and perceptive engagement with the scholarship of theologians, political theorists, polemicists, and scientists through her reviews and essays. These explorations informed her view of healthy religion as that which insisted on the primacy of lived experience, and interpreted using rational faculties.

> As for the "forms and ceremonies," I feel no regret that any should turn to them for comfort, if they can find comfort in them: sympathetically, I enjoy them myself. But I have faith in the working-out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other church has presented, and those who have strength to wait and endure, are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls—their intellect as well as their emotions—do not embrace with entire reverence. The highest "calling and election" is to *do without opium* and live through all our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance.[591]

Middlemarch explores the working out of higher possibilities between its characters. It challenges the dogmatic formulae that its characters have been bound to accept, to also challenge that binding in its readers. In *Middlemarch* particularly, Eliot observes that this binding is enacted through culturally entrenched social conditioning, and are either ratified or disrupted by relational approaches. These ratifications and disruptions are closely intertwined with religious signifiers and expressions that draw them into intimate contact with textual, socio-political, literary, theological, and visual-artistic histories. Thus the micro-context of *Middlemarch* becomes a critique of these wider historical currents. Conversely, Eliot's formidable awareness of these patterns, rather than being woven together into a single polemic, are woven into her characters and their relationships to one another, establishing a dialogical network.

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[588] Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot," paragraphy 6, paraphrasing Kegan Paul.
[589] Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot," paragraph 7.
[590] Sherri Catherine Smith, "George Eliot, Straight Drag and the Masculine Investments of Feminism," *Women's Writing* 3, no.2 (1996): 97-111.
[591] Eliot, "George Eliot to Barbara Lee Bodichon, Dec.1860," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.7, 366.

The Essays of 1855-6

Satiated by these earlier studies, by her joyous intimacy with Lewes, and by the fullness of cultural experiences and discourse (especially her engagement with Lewes about Goethe and *Bildungsroman*) that she had enjoyed during her travels, Eliot's attention veered decisively to novel-writing. While previously she had engaged almost exclusively in mediating her understanding of other thinkers and their writing, the secure, supportive intimacy she enjoyed with Lewes, and the vibrant and lively intellectual community that she enjoyed in Germany as she was introduced to his networks, gave rise to a new confidence in articulating what she observed in the temperaments, relationships, and systems around her.

Her 1855 essays were diverse and plentiful, created in this community. Most of them were about German considerations: 'The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*' was a response to Lewes' *Life of Goethe*, written in Germany; 'Liszt, Wagner and Weimar'; 'The Future of German Philosophy'; and 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine' (in 1856). Aside from these essays were several review-style essays that followed on formally from Evans' earlier contributions to *The Westminster Review*.

One essay is conspicuous in this phase of Evans' writing for its direct criticism of the specific religious approach of one Dr Cumming, an evangelical preacher who elicited distinct ire from Evans. 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming' was published in *The Westminster Review* as a means of challenging Dr Cumming's use of religion to 'easily attain power and reputation in English society.'[592] The remainder of the essay elucidates the pathology of these tendencies from a social wellbeing perspective. This essay is pre-eminent in its display of Evans' growing willingness to openly articulate the fallible humanity of religious power brokers, to question the legitimacy of that power.

Correspondingly, in 'The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*', Evans poses the question, 'is *Wilhelm Meister* an immoral book? We think not: on the contrary, we think that it appears immoral to some minds because its morality has a grander orbit than any which can be measured by the calculations of the pulpit and of ordinary literature.'[593] Here, Evans reflects Spinoza's sense of what constitutes sacred literature, by exploring its social value through sympathy. Within this short and somewhat overlooked essay, Evans makes an indispensable statement about effective and ineffective explorations of morality in literature, observing that

[592] George Eliot, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming," in Rosemary Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1855]), 138.
[593] George Eliot, "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister," in Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works*, 129.

when telling a story to a child, the fastest way to cause that child to disengage is to display an intention to teach or 'moralize'. Evans observes the reason for this as being that 'the child is aware that you are talking *for it* instead of *from yourself*, so that instead of carrying it along in a stream of sympathy with your own interest in the story, you give it the impression of contriving coldly and talking artificially. Now, the moralizing novelist produces the same effect on his mature readers.'[594] So, in the first instance, she is observing the potentially negative aesthetic impact of moral exploration within a text, if undertaken too heavy-handedly.

Evans further ventures that there is nothing inherently moral in any writer's choice to distribute rewards and punishments to characters on the basis of their moral conduct, according to notions of justice 'on which the novel-writer would have recommended that world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation.'[595] (Similarly, polemical moralising is not assumed to be, in itself, a moral act.) Further, she defends the importance of Goethe's 'truthful' representations of the experiences of 'vitiating irregularities' in their private lives.[596] This truthfulness is a means for Goethe's readers to explore Wilhelm's growth out of these frailties and failings, and through this exploration, better understand their own paths to growth. Thus, this essay summarises her awareness of the need to sympathetically represent the full breadth of real human experience, rather than a sanitised and idealised version.

These insights sharpened Evans' sense of what the future moral and ideological growth of society should look like, which she articulated in 'The Future of German Philosophy'. This essay is essentially a summary of Otto Friedrich Gruppe's philosophical contributions for English readers, focussing primarily on Gruppe's book of the same name. Professor Gruppe's pseudonym, 'Absolutus von Hegelingen', conveys his philosophical origins and leanings. This essay can be read, partly, as Evans' articulation of why she wished to write realist fiction, from a philosophical standpoint, and why she chose not to write systematised polemics or *Wissenschaft*. She begins the essay with the following quote from Gruppe:

> 'The age of systems is passed . . . System is the childhood of philosophy; the manhood of philosophy is investigation'

She qualifies this by continuing:

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[594] Eliot, "Wilhelm Meister," 130.
[595] Eliot, "Wilhelm Meister," 130.
[596] Eliot, "Wilhelm Meister," 131.

> we quote this dictum from the outset in order to propitiate those readers who might otherwise turn away with disgust from the mention of German philosophy, having registered a vow to trouble themselves no more with those spinners of elaborate cocoons—German system-mongers.[597]

So, while Evans invested deeply her understanding of German philosophy and Hegelian theologies, she also understood the limitations of those built systems, just as she had outlined the limitations of those closer to her within English society. In Gruppe, she identifies a versatile facility that is unique to them both: Gruppe wrote well across both literary and philosophical forms, and in doing so, demonstrated to Evans the utility of employing both in parallel.

Gruppe's contribution in 'The Future of German Philosophy' was primarily epistemological, advocating for a 'Reformation of Logic' that Evans describes as 'the essential preliminary to all true progress.' This reformation challenged the universalisation of Leibnitzian and Kantian philosophy, on the grounds that these asserted universals are only ever speculative, and are never clearly demonstrable using material awareness. Rather, 'A system of logic, says Herr Gruppe, which assigns the first place to general ideas, and makes them prior to judgement, inverts the true order of things. The true object of investigation is the formation of ideas from judgements.'[598]

The essay moves forward into the observation that once these investigations take place, a reciprocity arises between the judgement of particular stimuli, and the adjustment of the abstract, general ideas (beliefs, doctrines, theories) that are held as the best functional fit to negotiate one's way through life. That is, experience informs belief/theory, which in turn steers investigation using experience, and so on. Thus, Gruppe argues, and Evans supports, the proper realm for philosophy to be undertaken is in reflection on life itself: that is, 'the investigation of Psychology, with its subordinate department Aesthetics; to Ethics; and to the principles of Jurisprudence. A sufficient task!'[599] This, then, was the task undertaken by George Eliot. In doing so, she sought to fill the self-identified gaps in those works that preceded her:

> in the very first chapter, where I develop the necessary consequences of the standpoint of Feeling, I allude to Jacobi and Schleiermacher; in the second chapter I allude chiefly to Kantism, Scepticism, Theism, Materialism and Pantheism; in the chapter on the "Standpoint of Religion," where I discuss the contradictions between the religious or theological and the physical or natural-philosophical view of Nature, I refer to philosophy in the age of orthodoxy, and especially to the philosophy of Descartes and Leibnitz, in which this contradiction presents

[597] Eliot, "The Future of German Philosophy," 134.
[598] Eliot, "The Future of German Philosophy," 135.
[599] Eliot, "The Future of German Philosophy," 137.

> itself in a peculiarly characteristic manner. The reader, therefore, who is unacquainted with the historical facts and ideas presupposed in my work, will fail to perceive on what my arguments and ideas hinge; no wonder if my positions often appear to him baseless, however firm the footing on which they stand.[600]

Gatens has established strong connections between Eliot's sense of practical philosophy as literature in her writing about Eliot and Spinoza, but I have not found any reference to Gruppe in Gatens' writing.[601] Deutscher summarises Gatens' expansive contribution in the article, 'Counter-Intelligence and Blunders in the Philosophical Novel', noting especially the capacity of the novel to show processes rather than static points.[602]

On September 12th, 1856, she finished her essay, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', within which she evaluated the task before her, mostly negatively, but also incorporating positive statements about the purposes of literary novels, and about the social impact of the quality of women's authorship. This essay differs from Evans' other essays in its focus on specifically feminine responsibilities and challenges. As I have noted above, Chapman had already invited contributions from Evans on women's issues, most explicitly in his request for an article on the 'Ideals of Womankind,' which Evans evaded, suggesting instead an essay called 'Woman in Germany,' which never eventuated (Evans' suggestion was made in a letter in January 1855). Evans suggested an article on 'Silly Women's Novels' in a letter to John Chapman in July of 1856 after a discussion with Lewes. She promoted it as a 'vehicle of some wholesome truth as well as some amusement', partly on the grounds that other articles that she had in her 'head would require more reading and preparation that [she was] able to give them [that] quarter.'[603] This reticence to invest more deeply in *The Westminster Review* is at least partly due to the spreading of her attention at this time, as she was also contributing, with Lewes, to *Blackwood's Magazine* and also *The Leader*. This gradual withdrawal from *The Westminster* also reflects Chapman's inattention, as he was 'up to the

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[600] Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, xliii.
[601] The sources by Moira Gatens that were read for this thesis are: "The Politics of "Presence" and "Difference": Working through Spinoza and Eliot," *Visible Women: Essays on Feminist Legal Theory and Political Philosophy*, ed. Susan James and Stephanie Palmer (Portland: Hart Publishing, 2002); "Freedom and Determinism in Middlemarch, or Dorothea, the Lunatic," *Sydney Studies in English* 29, (2003); "Gender and Genre: Marian Evans, George Henry Lewes, and 'George Eliot'," *Angelaki* 13, no.2 (2008): 33-34; "The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot," *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no.1 (2009): 73-90; "Compelling Fictions: Spinoza and George Eliot on Imagination and Belief," *European Journal of Philosophy* 20, no.1 (2012): 74-90; "Imagination and Freedom: Spinoza's 'Hard Path' and George Eliot's Artful Bridge," *Humanities Australia* 3, (2012): 62-75; and, co-authored with Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza Past and Present*, (London: Routledge, 1999).
[602] Deutscher, Penelope. "Counter-Intelligence and Blunders in the Philosophical Novel (George Eliot and Moira Gatens)," Philosophy Today 63, no.3 (2019): 781.
[603] Eliot, "GE to John Chapman, Tenby, 20 July 1856," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.2, 258.

ears in his medical studies,'[604] funded mainly by Harriet Martineau, who was happy to step into the breach in various regards.

Evans displayed broader patterns of being extremely private. 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' presents a means of opening dialogue around her novel-writing plans. Her relationship with Barbara Leigh Smith (later Mme. Leigh Smith Bodichon) was deepening at this time, following publication of Leigh Smith's *Brief Summary of the Laws of England concerning Women*. A similar deepening was occurring in Evans' awareness of the social utility of novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which had been published in 1852. Leigh Smith corresponded frequently with Evans from 1853 onwards, and Beecher Stowe from 1869 onwards. Leigh Smith's relationship with Evans was particularly warm and open, and their correspondence continued for the rest of Evans' life. Within these letters, Evans—who transitioned to using the name Marian Lewes—openly wrote about her happiness in her relationship with Lewes, her maternal attachment to her stepsons, and the challenges of her intellectual context.

George Eliot the Novelist

There is no shortage of summaries of Marian Lewes' years as George Eliot, the novelist, and with this in mind, this section will be brief. On the 23rd of September, 1856—just over a week after finishing her essay on lady novelists—she commenced writing 'Amos Barton', the first part of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, published in *Blackwood's Magazine*.[605] *Adam Bede* was published in 1859, and Eliot was drawn out of anonymity when a baker's son called Joseph Liggins neglected to deny authorship of *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1856-7). Bodenheimer's chapter on this controversy is especially readable. The matter was settled in a letter from Harriet Martineau to 'Mrs. Bracebridge', which is kept at the Berg archive:

> I do not like the little I know of Miss Evans… but this makes one the more, and not the less, anxious that she should not be wronged in the best department of her life and character. Whatever may be her faults, I could no more doubt her having written a book which she called her own than you or I could doubt each other in a similar case. But of course this personal certainty goes for very little or nothing with strangers: but it will satisfy Mrs. Gaskell & stop her very injurious sayings on the subject, if you will simply confirm that Mr. B. and you are satisfied of Miss Evans's authorship of the two books.[606]

Chapter fifteen of *Adam Bede* is a treatise on realism. It is notable that the same year, Eliot published *The Lifted Veil*, which is not written within the realist mode. This gothic

[604] Eliot, "GE to Charles Bray, Tenby, 6 August 1856," in Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.6, 260.
[605] Uglow, *George Eliot*, xv.
[606] Harriet Martineau, *ALS To Mrs. Bracebridge. Ambleside, Oct. 25, 1859. 2 Leaves*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York, 1.

novella explores the burden of special, sympathetic awareness for Latimer, who 'has prescient visions of future events and telepathic access to the thoughts and feelings of those around him. His insights into what he describes as the pettiness, stupidity, and egotism of other people alienate him from all society.'[607] He falls in love with Bertha, the one person whose mind he cannot read, because he assumes the best of her in her silence. As I have also outlined regarding *Middlemarch* in the preceding chapter, Albrecht identifies in *The Lifted Veil* that 'At various points in the novella, Latimer compares Bertha to a piece of writing, often a piece of writing he cannot read or comprehend, in order to designate her inaccessibility. The illegible or incomprehensible writing to which Bertha is compared is a metaphor for the other's irreducible otherness, just as Latimer's telepathy is a metaphor for the appreciation of that otherness as such.'[608] Like unreadable works of writing that seem good, Bertha turns out to be driven by her own agendas, at Latimer's expense. The isolation and disillusionment of Eliot's special awareness is felt in this work; the epigraph to the 1874 edition (added two years after the publication of *Middlemarch*) is a poetic summary of her ethos throughout her fiction:

> Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns
> To energy of human fellowship.
> No powers beyond the growing heritage
> That makes completer manhood.

Susan Hill's 1997 article on Eliot's translation of Feuerbach similarly shows that understanding must be empathic to be moral. Hill describes translation as 'a complex interpretive act in which the translator is not only transforming words but mediating cultural values as well. In this schema a good translation is one that captures equivalent meanings, rather than simply equivalent words, in the target language.'[609] Thus, even though Latimer has access to the literal content of those human texts that he can read, he is unable to find meaning in his life because he is unsuccessful in mediating cultural values… much like Casaubon, despite his claims to understand and see.

The Leweses took an extended trip to Rome in 1860, following publication of *The Mill on the Floss*, which Goldberg noted as linking poetry and moral thinking in their 1982 article. The purpose of the trip was to undertake research for *Romola*, which was serialised in 1862-3. This time in Italy gave Eliot particular insight into the resistance of liberalism and

[607] Thomas Albrecht, "Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot's The Lifted Veil," *English Literary History* 73, no.2 (2006): 438.
[608] Albrecht, "Sympathy and Telepathy," 456.
[609] Susan Hill, "Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no.3 (1997): 637.

materialism that led to the first Vatican council, which informed the religious awareness in her fiction from this time onwards, especially as it related to national identities.[610] These themes pervade *Romola*, and it prefigures much of what is undertaken with more subtlety in *Middlemarch*, as Eliot 'has Romola conduct her own experiment in institutional religion, from which she emerges with a sense that her personal, noninstitutional kind of religion is holy.'[611] Despite *Middlemarch*'s popularity, Eliot referred to *Romola* as her best novel. However, *Romola*'s setting in Florence during the Italian Renaissance meant that it was unfamiliar for her English audience, and it did not sell well.

Romola was followed by *Felix Holt, the Radical*, which was, in turn, criticised for its overtly political bent. In a letter from George Henry Lewes to Blackwood, their publisher, Lewes relates the following anecdote:

> My dear Blackwood,
>
> I have asked Mrs Lewes [George Eliot] to let me answer your pleasant letter because I wish to give you a 'bit' I overheard as we crossed to Calais. Seated beside me on the deck was a nice elderly lady (stylish) before whom stood a superb crinoline (also British) imparting her vision over things in general & at last abiding with literature. The following is verbatim:
>
Crinoline:	Have you read 'Armadale' yet?
E.L.	Not yet.
C.	It's very clever! Such well drawn characters! I like Wilkie Collins.
E.L.	I see we are to have a book by Adam Bede soon.
Crinoline, impressively,	Yes. But I'm sorry she's gone into that!
E.L., gently	What, the radical?
C.	Yes, I don't think politics good in novels.
E.L.	Nor I. But she has such a beautiful mind I feel quite confident of her whatever she may take up.

> Crinoline apparently not sharing this sentiment or by a specific levity of mind wafted to other subjects. I lost my interest in the conversation.[612]

The above exchange may have given rise to the following passage, she selected for inclusion in her final collection of essays and notes—a better synoptical tabulation than Casaubon's—that was published in 1884, following her death in 1880:

> It is foolish to be for ever complaining of… uniformity, as if there were an endless power of originality in the human mind. Great and previous origination must always be comparatively rare, and can only exist on condition of a wide massive uniformity. When a multitude of men have learned to use the same language in speech and writing, then and then only can the greatest masters of language arise. For in what does their mastery consist? They use words which are already a familiar medium of understanding and sympathy in such a way as greatly to

[610] See Mark Allison's "Utopian Socialism, Women's Emancipation, and the Origins of Middlemarch," *English Literary History* 78, no.3 (2011).
[611] Orr, *Theopoetics of Evolution*, 57.
[612] George Henry Lewes, *ALS To [John] Blackwood. Schwalbech, June 30 1866*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York.

> enlarge the understanding and sympathy. Originality of this order changes the wild grasses into world-feeding grain. Idiosyncrasies are pepper and spices of questionable aroma.[613]

Marian Lewes' essays before and after *Middlemarch* show that she aimed to effect social change with her writing, but the quotes above clarify that she was not interested in novelty for its own sake. Her letters show that she had apprehensions about her capacities, as she prepared to write *Middlemarch*, knowing that the stakes were very high. She felt that poor writing on her part could jeopardise the cause for all women of scholarly natures:

> What I should like to be sure of as a result of higher education for women—a result that will come to pass over my grave—is, their recognition of the great amount of social unproductive labour which needs to be done by women, & which is now either not done at all or done wretchedly. No good can come to women more than any class of male mortals, while each aims at dong the highest kind of work, which ought rather to be held in sanctity as what only few can do well. I believe—& I want it to be well known—that a more thorough education will tend to do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions & employment, & to propagate the true Gospel that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit—to do work of any sort badly. There are many points of this kind that want being urged, but they do not come well from me, & I never like to be quoted in any way on this subject.[614]

Thus she was mindful of her responsibilities and capacities, and considered it her moral responsibility to contribute appropriately and thoughtfully. These reflections prepared her to write novels with exceptional nuance and attention to detail.

It is evident that, over the trajectory of her novel-writing career, Eliot gradually attuned herself to the palates of her English audiences, which enabled her to successfully publish *Daniel Deronda* in 1876. This last novel's Jewish protagonist, Daniel, and his spiritual guide, Dinah, together lead Gwendolyn Harleth, the respectable (albeit coquettish) Englishwoman in her painful developmental process of spiritual development. To enact such development outside of Christian religious constructions—in a similar way to the embedding of Roman Catholicism in *Middlemarch*—revealed Eliot's overarching sense that the purpose of religion is to guide in the realisation of the self and its moral enfranchisement. This last novel received the most mixed response of any Eliot wrote. It was most warmly received by those educated men who studied Hebrew as a means of deepening their understanding of Jewish heritage, who were also interested to engage with new theologies, especially German higher criticism:

> For these men, Deronda became a kind of romantic hero, a figure of identification, a role model. one enthusiast was Eliezer Ben Yehudah, a major force in the revival of Hebrew as a

[613] Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, 374-5.
[614] George Eliot, *ALS to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. Carclew, Hesketh Road, Torquay, [Apr.6, 1868]*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York. Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, 425. Haight dates this letter March 28th, 1868, and notes that an extract published by Cross dates it at April 6th.

> spoken language, who found in the novel support for his linguistic ideas years before they became commonplace. An 1889 biography tells of how he came across portions of Deronda in a Russian journal: "He read [them] with great love; their effect on him was strong and endowed him with hope and courage." For such readers, still a small minority even among eastern European Jewry, Eliot's novel was both a source of encouragement and a speech act, giving voice to hitherto half-formed ideas and incipient national feelings.[615]

Dekel links this attraction in with the trajectory of the Zionist movement that originated around this time, as reflection on Judaism and progress gathered momentum. See also Dekel's book, *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Moment*.

Daniel Deronda showed the diverse functions of religion, separately to Christianity. Eliot's notes for this novel were kept in the latter parts of the Berg and Folger notebooks, the earlier parts of which were kept as *Middlemarch* was being written. Her representations of the relational functions of Judaism are harmonious with the other religions in this notebook, including Christianity. Her capacity to show the value of the Jewish faith for the Jews pressed towards an elusive inclusivity in Victorian society.

Conclusion

Marian's Lewes' relationship with George Henry Lewes was a sympathetic, connective sanctuary, within which Feuerbach's sense of holy matrimony was as fully realised as any relationship I have ever read about. They were wholly devoted to one another, and the combination of intellectual and domestic harmony deepened into George Eliot's profound unification of theoretical and lived understandings. The Leweses continued to enjoy vibrant scholarly connections, especially with the German liberal community, and these ideas and associated political awareness permeated Eliot's novels. Over the course of Eliot's development as a novelist, she became increasingly attuned to social consensus, both in its shortcomings and in its capacity to be shaped by her art. Her adept representation of English society, in *Middlemarch*, is an expression of her sympathy for her English readership: this sympathetic connection allowed her to draw close enough to begin to demystify some of that society's most entrenched social hindrances.

[615] Mikhal Dekel, "'Who Taught this Foreign Woman the Ways and Lives of the Jews?': George Eliot and the Hebrew Renaissance," *ELH* 74, no.4 (2007): 787.

12. Epochal Awareness and Open Futures

> The grand error of life is, that we look too far: — we scale the Heavens, we dig down to the centre of the earth, for systems, and we forget ourselves.—Truth lies before us; it is in the highway path; and the ploughman treads it with his clouted shoon.
>
> Nature defies the rule and the line; —Art raises its structures, and forms its work on their aid; but Nature has her own laws, which Art cannot always comprehend, and Criticism can never reach.[616]

Introduction

The conclusion of *Middlemarch* realistically represents the distance between social and political progress and the realisation of ideal conditions: something that first-wave feminists, particularly, objected to. The *Bildungen* of its characters enable them to find their respective places in the Middlemarch social order, but Eliot reminds her readers that the progress is still in-process and incomplete. This incompleteness serves the rhetorical function of declaring that there is more work to do, both immediately after the historical moment represented in the novel, but also more distantly, in the *Bildungen* of the readers themselves. By demonstrating the internal progress that could be achieved by some of her characters, Eliot suggests the origins and hindrances available to the reader as they—like Dorothea, especially—continue to write the poem of the self.

Eliot models characteristic grace towards this incompleteness, not as an afterthought, but as a deliberate gesture of recognition that contrasts with polemical bids for complete explanations and perfect behaviours. She shows in the conclusions of the various *Bildungen* of *Middlemarch* that progress does not have to be perfect to be beneficial, which maintains contact between the modelling in the narrative, and the limitations experieced by Eliot's readers.

Remembrance, Light, and Warmth

Eliot observes in her 'Notes on Form' that an art form—especially a text—is a whole within itself, alongside other wholes, and within larger wholes. Similarly:

[616] Laurence Sterne, *Letters of the Revd Mr Laurence Sterne* (Vienna: R. Sammer, 1797), 174.

> Lydgate turned, remembering where he was, and saw Dorothea's face looking up at him with a sweet trustful gravity. 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 judged in the wholeness of our character. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it.[617]

This larger whole is articulated in the quote above, as Dorothea's compassionate and attentive perception of Lydgate enables him to 'begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses'. The root of the word 'ardent' is the same as that for 'flame' in both Latin and French; as Dorothea is illuminated from within, 'aflame' in her charity, this light, in turn, dispels Lydgate's darkness and warms him. As he is judged in the wholeness of his character, he is seen according to his nature and intentions, rather than his incompleteness, having momentarily forgotten this ardent, aspirational nature.

Dorothea also returns to her ardent nature when, after Casaubon's death, she recalls her love for riding, and for the other things that she fell asleep to in her enchantment, as she idealised Casaubon. This awakening is a demystification; a release from an enchantment or a spell or a possession; a coming back to oneself. It is akin to what Strauss hoped for his readers, in what he saw as misreadings of religious mythologies. It is also what Marx sought to effect in his revolutionary acts: to awaken society to its forgotten nature; to restore it to its true nature of collaboration and equity. Similarly, Feuerbach's identification of a relational 'essence' and self-actualising function to Christianity sought to strip back to the crux of what religion was for, in order to purify it from the violence and authoritarianism that had come to pollute it, and the lives of the people who valued it. Each sought to offer hope to their readers.

Eliot identifies the potential pitfalls of such undertakings in *Middlemarch*, even while integrating the wealth of her philosophical studies in constructing that form. Edward Casaubon's incomplete *Key to All Mythologies* was too broad and too extravagant an undertaking to be completed, and yet Edward remained enthralled by its possibility: his unattainable, ideal marker of progress. There is no remembrance of whatever initial ardour gave rise to the project; his inflexibility arises from his alienation from his surroundings: even though he seeks to solve *die Welträtsel* on behalf of his community, his sacrifice comes to nothing, reduced to automatic repetition of scholarly behaviours with no real purpose. He martyrs himself for a text that never comes to fruition, and thus becomes part of the shattered mummies and empty tombs of religious history that Eliot describes in Rome. He is not able

[617] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963 [1871-2]), 818.

to bring anything other than darkness to Dorothea and others, because he has no flame—no divine spark—within him, that he can share, for their mutual illumination and warmth. If a parallel is drawn between Casaubon's *Key* and these other polemics, Eliot seems to be warning that unless a sense of progress is united to a concern for the other, it will not be fruitful, and that it must be connected and mediated effectively in order to be of benefit to its readers.

Dorothea, in her earnestness, kindles charity within herself as she learns to value her own capacity for self-authorship. In doing so, she kindles similar capacities and awareness in those around her. Eliot is careful not to reduce the progress of all her characters to the central shift within Dorothea, but rather, constructs a matrix of collaboration and mutuality that enacts the collective *Bildung* of Middlemarch society. She thus identifies inclusive, perceptive, moral empowerment as the origin of social progress, and offers this ardent charity to her readers, within their own unhistoric epics. This shift in focus is the essence of her formal choice to write novels rather than polemics. Rather than positing one unitary argument to impart a single perspective to the reader (or demand a rebuttal), Eliot presents diverse people with diverse temperaments, challenges, and situations, existing in community. This dialogical novelistic form enables her to sidestep issuing decrees about which are the 'correct' philosophical principles, and instead attend to the affective spaces within which individuals, relationships, communities and nations are formed. These priorities are not at all at odds with the work of Strauss or Feuerbach, but Eliot's formal choices opened up her thinking to a much wider breadth of readership, who were able to connect with her texts far more diversely and peaceably, towards social melioration.

Life and Text

The relationship between life and text is a central motif in *Middlemarch*, as Eliot experiments with their diverse configurations in relation to one another. Major characters in *Middlemarch* are variously characterised according to the world-views that they ascribe to, as I have described in earlier chapters. Holding uncritically to an external, artificial worldview that skews or obstructs compassion and accurate perception of others is a consistent signifier of immaturity in Eliot's novels. A character's *Bildung* can be defined, in these novels, as their project of editing and revising their world-view to enable more fitting responses to lived situations and experiences.

Casaubon is the clearest warning in the novel about the consequences of poor text/life integration within an individual, but other characters also enable examination of text/life

configurations. Arthur Brooke, from his earliest appearance in the novel, is only able to attain the most superficial of readings of both people and texts. 'Understanding' is his recurrent signal of his respectability, and yet, he is incapable of reading the implications of the social scripts that he holds to, both in what he says and how he lives. Eliot warns that reading and understanding are ongoing necessities, and that the use of texts to suppress dialogue may lead to situations like being lynched by one's tenants, no matter how much we think we know about what they need. It is this imprecision that causes Arthur Brooke to side with Edward instead of Dorothea, as the marriage begins to encounter difficulty. Rather than being equipped by his textual privilege to listen attentively and speak usefully out of that understanding, Arthur is a parody of an educated man, despite his conciliatory proclamations.

Bulstrode appeals to social scripts rather than published texts in his decrees, suggesting with unparalleled coldness that the wealth he holds (both financial and in terms of his position within God's elect) is of more value than the experiences and insights of those around him. In this, he is a thief, both literally and relationally: he is brought to shame as a strong judgment of the kind of religious authority that Eliot was most disgusted by. Thus, Bulstrode's characterisation warns readers against more subtle versions of similar tendencies: the linking of these strict evangelical judgements with hidden moral incompetence is a stern pronouncement against this style of epistemology.

Fred Vincy is afforded access to educational opportunities, as well as financial privileges. His squandering of both subjects him to predatory patriarchs, and despite this foolishness, public consensus in Middlemarch finds him exemplary. Fred demonstrates that it is not access to education, in and of itself, that equips a person to grow towards understanding. He is not illuminated by experience or textual contact, because he is blinded by his own whims. His love for Mary Garth—and his humbling realisation that he is not entitled to her hand—is what stimulates his growth. Their marital collaboration originates in their mutual ardour, and in Mary's generosity in contributing the wisdom that she works hard to secure for herself:

> But when Mary wrote a little book for her boys, called *Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch*, and had it printed and published by Gripp & Co., Middlemarch, everyone in the town was willing to give the credit of this work to Fred, observing that he had been to the University, 'where the ancients were studied', and might have been a clergyman if he had chosen.[618]

Plutarch's association with Mary is a very slick textual play, that situates the social scripts of *Middlemarch* as ephemeral and ungrounded. Plutarch's *Moralia* includes a section on

[618] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 889-90.

'Bravery of Women' that Eliot alludes to here, which begins thus:

> If, conceivably, we asserted that painting on the part of men and women is the same, and exhibited paintings, done by women, of the sort that Apelles, or Zeuxis, or Nicomachus has left to us, would anybody reprehend us on the ground that we were aiming at giving gratification and allurement rather than at persuasion? I do not think so.
>
> Or again, if we should declare that the poetic or the prophetic art is not one art when practised by men and another when practised by women, but the same… will anybody have the power justly to impugn the demonstration because these lead on the hearer, joyous and delighted, to have belief in it? No, you could not say that either… Since, however, many deeds worthy of mention have been done by women both in association with other women and by themselves alone, it may not be a bad idea to set down first a brief account of those commonly known.[619]

The configuration of Fred and Mary's relationship illustrates the principle that Plutarch is describing. It is the capacity of male characters to attune themselves to the natural capacities of the women around them who attain emotional maturity in *Middlemarch*. Eliot is thus observing that if Middlemarch consensus included substantive awareness of 'the ancients' rather than the blind approximations provided by ill-equipped patriarchs, things would function far better. Mary's social participation is presented as a potential route to this community growth, and her teaching of her boys offers a sense of promise, as she raises them with the same wisdom with which she has helped Fred, their father.

Will and Dorothea's marital collaboration also offers hope. Will's artistic visionary capacity is the nature that he needs to mature in. In perceiving Dorothea's natural capacity for the formation of social texts, he finds his best application by amplifying and opening those texts up for broader perception. Will is demonstrating Eliot's understanding of art as a means of drawing together wholes, to include them within the larger whole: which she does textually, in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea is able to enact her natural capacity as a spiritual guide as she 'holds up a lamp' to Will's political work, thus 'saving' Will from a futile future:

> It is undeniable that but for the desire to be where Dorothea was, and perhaps the want of knowing what else to do, Will would not at this time have been meditating on the needs of the English people or criticising English statesmanship: he would probably have been rambling in Italy sketching plans for various dramas, trying prose and finding it too jejune, trying verse and finding it too artificial... observing that, after all, self-culture was the principal point; while in politics he would have been sympathising warmly with liberty and progress in general. Our sense of duty must often wait for some work which shall take the place of dilettantism and make us feel that the quality of our action is not a matter of indifference.[620]

In its early introduction, as Dorothea's courtship with Casaubon began, the image of the lamp-holder is passive and subservient. In its realisation with Will, its associations are

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[619] Plutarch, "Bravery of Women," in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 3, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (London: William Heinemann Ltd.), 477.
[620] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 492-3.

intrepid and decisive. As poet and poem, Dorothea is declared a prophetess within her cultural milieu.

Some critics have expressed frustration at Eliot's emphasis on marriage in resolving her narratives,[621] although Moretti states that the marriage plot is the prevalent culmination of *Bildungsromane*. As Fred and Mary had their little ones among the thistles of their largely unregenerate social system, there is potential in their children, and similarly, in the 'sacred ark' of Sir James and Celia's child, to contribute, in turn to effecting social progress outside of those collaborations.

> Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic; the gradual conquest of irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common.[622]

This language of 'climax', like so much of *Middlemarch*, hearkens back to Eliot's 'Notes on Form in Art', with reference to music, noting that the early phases of a piece of music are the setting out of the terms within which the piece will climax. This corresponds to Eliot's understanding of what constitutes a fully-formed self.

As both Eliot and Moretti have indicated, any character's *Bildung* is necessarily limited by the opportunities available to them within their contained context. In his comparison of English and French *Bildungsromane*, Moretti identifies a tendency for the former to focus more often on the individual's maturation through social acceptance and the taking up of a defined role, while the latter more often focuses on maturation through pushing against social norms and roles. Moretti explicitly discusses the ways in which Eliot's *Bildungen* are far more complex; part of this complexity is Eliot's repeated emphasis of how characters are excluded from full membership of society. Her realism resists the representation of individuals capable of living up to these standards/types/roles. Elizabeth Gemette's linking of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and *The Mill on the Floss* identifies them both as texts where social settings exclude protagonists from participating in social roles. Henry Alley describes 'incompletion' as a primary theme in *The Mill on the Floss*, and, in line with Moretti's sense of *Bildungsroman* as critique of the social roles available in any social system, argues that 'its central interest lies in the incompletenesses and imbalances of education, both in the broad, psychological sense of the word, and the stricter, more

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[621] See Tracey Rosenberg, "The Awkward Blot: George Eliot's Reception and the Ideal Woman Writer," *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies* 3, no.1 (2007): no pagination.
[622] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 889.

academic sense.'[623] So, it can be said that a *Bildungsroman* is a functional exploration of the capacity of a social system to afford a context for individuals to learn what is required in order to fulfil their natural potential. Eliot clearly elucidates the points of vulnerability within the Middlemarch social system as it provides habitat for its citizens.

Perhaps the closest anybody comes to living out the ideal role presented to them is Rosamond, who, 'with her equivocal name—mystical rose of the world and worldly rose—is a tragic satire on the ideal woman as described in much Victorian writing; in particular, on what constitutes 'women's work' and 'women's influence.''[624] However, in this idealised role, Rosamond is unsuited to her real context, and this reliance on underhanded influence through feminine charm causes her—and those around her—a great deal of pain before she is able to grow out of it somewhat, thus demonstrating that role prescriptions are similarly detrimental across genders, even when they result in power over others. Rosamond displays a skewed sense of value in her relationships with men, especially, as she *uses* them according her pre-decided role for them, rather than relating to them as people. This establishes some symmetry between the Lydgate and Casaubon marriages, clarifying that it is the dynamic that is the problem, rather than solely 'men'.

Dorothea's maturation correlates with discrete phases, alongside her development of her agency. Initially, her characterisation centres on her abstinence and non-participation, and this correlates with descriptions of numbness, blindness, and a torpor that is described in several other of Eliot's novels within her descriptions of characters during conservative/Puritanical phases. As Dorothea moves forward, however, and develops her own agency in effecting social change—as she seizes the means of producing social currency in the form of human connection, to borrow Blumberg's terms[625]—she also seizes the capacity to minister spiritually. Thus, she provides not only her self-realisation in assisting in the marital distress of Rosamond and Tertius Lydgate, but she also moves into the capacity to behave not just as saint (in its associated alienation) but into the role of priest or pastor, in living effectively in the world.

Dorothea is not Eliot's only character to display this function as evidence of virtue, health, and efficacy. While Julia Swindells has criticised the mechanics of this ministerial

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[623] Henry Alley, "The Complete and Incomplete Educations of The Mill on the Floss," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 33, no.4 (1979): 183.
[624] Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 153.
[625] Ilana Blumberg, "Stealing the "Parson's Surplice" / the Person's Surplus: Narratives of Abstraction and Exchange in Silas Marner," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 67, no.4 (2013): 492.

function, objecting to Eliot's choice for change in the Lydgates' marriage to be effected through woman-to-woman contact, the absence of a man in the transactions leading to the deepening of this fellowship can also be readily interpreted as feminist, in that no manly pastoral intervention is required in order to 'solve' the problem. Swindells' critique is as follows:

> Dorothea, unlike Dinah [in *Adam Bede*], has her own problems. There is an element of reciprocity in the tears. The formulation, though, is essentially the same. Woman mediates woman for man. Womanhood must correct itself. We women, the inference is, should recognize our gender-specific responsibilities. Man does not have to worry. Man does not have to intervene. Woman will fix woman for him.
>
> In loving service, the virtuous woman mediates the ideology of service in woman, for man. Thus George Eliot extends the authorial, masculine persona, in presenting woman as a problem *for* man, but a problem *of* woman.
>
> The uniting of Dinah and Hetty, the uniting of Dorothea and Rosamond, are structured as powerful moments of redemption, of spiritual climax. Social taboos rightly collapse. Emotional honesty, ostensibly, rules. In contrary movement, though, is the complete capitulation of the supposed sinner, the utter complicity of the writer with the catalytic acceptance…What is absent is any space for woman to have grounds for challenging the accommodation, and any space for demanding of a man a shared responsibility in constituting problem and solution. What is absent is a potentiality for change to the ground rules of domestic attitudes. What is absent is a potentiality for change in the relations between women and men.[626]

Swindell's reading overlooks the potency and value of mediation in Eliot's fiction. Feuerbach stressed that marital harmony was the highest expression of human goodness and human potential: our most potent expression of healthy spirituality. Of all of Feuerbach's values, it is easiest to demonstrate that Marian Evans valued his interpretation of the significance (and definition) of marriage.[627] If, as Blumberg has posited, the truth of fellow feeling is of the highest value in Eliot's fiction, then marital success, for Eliot, is a cornerstone of social progress, rather than a triviality. It is in this context that mature characters demonstrate that 'the moral duty of mankind is to temper its natural egotism with altruism', showing that 'The true object of our reverence, therefore, is our fellow human beings'.[628] It follows, then, that for Eliot, mutual spousal devotion is an example of humanity's highest capacities.

In *Middlemarch*, the text or poem of selfhood is formed in the *Bildung* of each character with varying degrees of sophistication, and within this paradigm, characters mature

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[626] Julia Swindells, "George Eliot: Man at Work and the Masculine Professional," in Michelle Standworth (ed.) *Victorian Writing and Working Women,* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), 55-6.
[627] Rosemary Ashton, *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006), 197.
[628] Blumberg, "The Parson's Surplice," 492, summarising Ludwig Feuerbach.

only insofar as they are able to effectively author themselves. This way of constructing characters means that some lives are written well despite challenges and distress, such as Dorothea or Silas Marner, for example. Eliot's narrators convey her esteem for characters who develop within themselves, and who are effectively able to 'read' or 'translate' their surroundings, to co-author themselves within shared stories.

This dynamic is both diegetic and sylleptic: it is true within these novels, but also signifies Eliot's own self-writing and self-understanding. The success of this self-writing for any 'author' includes their evaluation of the myths, truths, wisdoms, and misconceptions that are presented to them in writing their *Bildung*. Eliot emphasises the sanctity of this process, and characters like Bulstrode and Casaubon, in their violations, are described as sources of spiritual darkness and hindrances to life and growth. Throughout German higher criticism, the incarnation recurs as an expression of unity between mythos and lived experience, and it is this attribute that Orr responds to when she describes Eliot's writing as 'incarnational' throughout her 2018 book, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution*. Leander Keck's summaries of Strauss' thought are helpful here:

> Even if a philosophical myth should rest on a reliable historical tradition, this conjunction of idea and history transforms the historical event into a philosophical myth because now the event serves a higher truth. On this basis, the incarnation is the mythological expression of the idea that God and man are one, and is not a report of what occurred at a point in time.[629]

Eliot's treatments of texts and authority in *Middlemarch* positions *mythos* as social texts of diverse kinds. These texts precede the text of self being generated at any time. For example, the *mythos* being read or interpreted by Dorothea includes the scripting of her gender roles and matrimonial obligations, as well as Arthur Brooke and Edward Casaubon's scripting of whether she is even qualified to write her own story.

Editing the Systems

> There is perpetual action and reaction between individuals and institutions; we must try and mend both little by little.[630]

As this collective of 'ardent souls'[631] enact social progress in Middlemarch, the conservators of the old ways of thinking and behaving engage in dialogue about their fears and concerns.

[629] Leander Keck, "Editor's Introduction," in David Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's The Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus Series, (Philadephia, USA: Fortress Press, 1977) lvi.
[630] George Eliot, "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," in Nathan Sheppard (ed.), *The Essays of George Eliot, Complete* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, no date [1855]), 199.
[631] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 584.

Eliot constructs these as arising out of muddied understanding that opposes progress, for example when Caleb Garth

> told his wife that Mrs Casaubon had a head for business most uncommon in a woman. It must be remembered that by 'business' Caleb never meant money transactions, but the skilful application of labour...
>
> 'But womanly, I hope,' said Mrs Garth, half suspecting that Mrs Casaubon might not hold to the true principle of subordination.[632]

Caleb reassures his wife using the kind of evidence that will resonate with her, by citing the angelic quality of Dorothea's voice as evidence of her feminine nature. Within this same chapter, the narrator draws in steam-powered rail travel as a metaphor for progress, simultaneously suggesting that Dorothea's progress/awakening/maturation into social and economic activity is closely intertwined with the question of Dorothea's nature. Nonetheless, 'Women both young and old regarded travelling by steam as presumptuous and dangerous,'[633] and similarly, there is caution about Dorothea's power and speed. The 'Prelude' to *Felix Holt* frames railways as an icon of progress in similar terms: relentless, rhythmic, high-speed progress. Caleb engages dialogue well, in responding to his wife:

> Caleb paused here, and perhaps the greatest orator could have chosen either his pause or his images for the occasion.
>
> 'But, come, you didn't mean any harm. Somebody told you the railroad was a bad thing. That was a lie. It may do a bit of harm here and there, to this and to that; and so does the sun in heaven. But the railway is a good thing.'[634]

And it is thus that he stands as an exemplar for the capacity for progress to be effected through domestic discourse, within what Eliot refers to as the 'home epic.'[635]

The clarity of Dorothea's voice—described as angelic by Caleb—is both auditory and rhetorical. This purity of utterance is no less feminine for its power, which hinges on its capacity to invite earnest reflection. In this sense, again, Dorothea's poetic faculties overlap with the prophetic, as they convict her hearers regarding their need to effect social change:

> in a voice as clear and unhesitating as that of a young chorister chanting a credo 'because you mean to enter Parliament as a member who cares for the improvement of the people...' Dorothea had gathered emotion as she went on, and had forgotten everything except the relief of pouring forth her feelings, unchecked: an experience once habitual with her, but hardly ever present since her marriage, which had been a perpetual struggle of energy with fear. For the moment, Will's admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men. But nature has sometimes made sad

[632] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 588.
[633] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 589.
[634] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 597.
[635] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 889.

> oversights in carrying out her intentions; as in the case of good Mr Brooke, whose masculine consciousness was at this moment in rather a stammering condition under the eloquence of his niece. He could not immediately find any other mode of expressing himself than that of rising, fixing his eye-glass, and fingering the papers before him.[636]

Even at the novel's conclusion, Dorothea is described as maintaining a 'child-like'[637] faith, which motivates her to go out in the fields to offer practical, attuned help to people in poverty. Dorothea thus concludes the novel in a similar manner to how it begins with Theresa: going out into the fertile outer world, to see what fruit her ardent nature will bear.

Imperfection and Flux

It is little wonder that Eliot considered marital discourse to be the origin of social progress, considering how fruitful it was for her, personally. *Middlemarch* was written in parallel with the first volume of George Henry Lewes' *Problems of Life and Mind*, the notes for which were made by Marian Lewes. They are handwritten in a notebook in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library in bright purple ink, in an uncharacteristically hurried script. This notebook is a very evocative object: alongside Marian Lewes' reflections on the intimacy and soulfulness of their bond, the energy of their discussions is rendered on the page in the same purple ink that she began to use part-way through her *Miscellanies* notebook, during the writing of *Middlemarch*.

The latter volumes of *Problems of Life and Mind* were published after G.H. Lewes' death, by Marian, in 1878.[638] Its first volume, particularly, examines ideological, intellectual and identity formation from the perspective of the impact of sensory stimuli on cognition. George Eliot's characterisation—especially the *Bildungen* of her characters—became far more nuanced and diverse in *Middlemarch* as her thought deepened around how it is that people *become*. Within *Problems of Life and Mind*, the Leweses observe that thought is not linear, and cognition is not a series of fixed, sure impressions: pre-empting affect theory, which is just now gaining popularity.[639] Rather, it exists in flux, as a series of approximations, garnered from approximate stimuli. This understanding of cognition opposes definition of faith, doubt, and unbelief as static positions, instead appraising them as

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[636] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 417.
[637] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 41.
[638] Marian Lewes (George Eliot) worked with George Henry Lewes on this project, finishing the volume for him posthumously *in memoriam*. Outside her essays, which are primarily literary rather than scientific, it represents her closest involvement in the writing process of a polemical work.
[639] See Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); "Willful Parts: Problem Characters or the Problem of Character," New Literary History: A Journal for History and Interpretation 42, no.2 (2011): 231-53.

loosely held points of contact with an ever-shifting sensory landscape. Indeed, it is in this flux that Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* and everything else she produced; it is in this flux that Strauss sought to make his contribution to thought; and it is in this flux that each of us forms and shifts.

Formation of ideology is experiential, as posited in *Problems of Life and Mind*, and as such the search for the historical Jesus, the search for the conclusive epiphany, and thus the search for the static idealogue are evasive. However, by seeking out the experiential origins of notions and beliefs—an idea that resonates with Strauss' attempt in *The Life of Jesus*—people can open their eyes and respond to their real contexts, as Aristotle described in his *Poetics*. Strauss examines the critical tipping points leading to the Gospel accounts as they were presented in the biblical texts of his era. Lewes (and Eliot), examine from the other end, where, within individuals, beliefs and knowledge and values are formed, including moral and spiritual values. Both texts examine origins and processes, with a breadth of concern that was Romantic in its attempt at universality.

Within *this* paradigm, the nature of doubt becomes something other than the enemy of religion and faith. Rather, doubt becomes part of a necessary process of focussing and sharpening perception, in order to constantly adjust and grow within the lived, real experience of life. Hegel wrote along these lines and was drawn on by Strauss, Feuerbach, and Eliot in their appraisals of the place of faith in the nineteenth century and beyond. Polemics like those of Strauss and Feuerbach include textual mechanics that issue a rhetorical ultimatum to the reader, either to assent or defend the reader's own perspective. Both Strauss and Feuerbach, in line with rhetorical conventions at the time, employed highly combative language in venturing their positions. For example:

> The notion of the mythus… being thus shown to be applicable to the narratives of the New Testament, why should we not dare to call them by their right name; why—that is to say in learned discussion—avoid an expression which can give offence only to the prejudiced or the misinformed?[640]

Marian Evans' correspondence to Sara Hennell during both translations articulated her appreciation for Strauss and Feuerbach's theological contributions, alongside her reticence to render their vitriolic tone in her English translations. Despite their tonal—and associated formal—deficiencies, she was keen for both writers to reach English audiences.

Eliot both incorporated and revised these writers into her own exposition of the nature

[640] David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined,* trans. Mary Ann Evans [George Eliot] (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1973), 58.

and origins of progress. It would be impossible to attend to the full intertextual palette of *Middlemarch* in a doctoral thesis. With these limitations in mind, I will now summarise Eliot's theoretical contribution, deploying the term in the Feuerbachian sense, as visionary and prophetic, much akin Dorothea's poetic contribution. Within this, however, my summary is secondary to the real body of Eliot's poetic contribution. Throughout his writings, Marx identifies the natural socio-political ramifications of Strauss and Feuerbach's theologies, observing in 1843-4 that:

> Man is the world of man – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification… Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.[641]

To paraphrase Marx, the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is simultaneously a demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition—namely, religiosity—that requires illusions. For Eliot, however, religion could be many things, and earnest, charitable religion is represented in her novels as being integral to the understanding of each person's fundamental nature. For Eliot, religion can be to awaken the charitable flame to warm and illuminate discourse: be that directly interpersonal, or textual, or a syllepsis where they are incarnationally intertwined.

Eliot's understanding extends from her capacity to see the truth of the German Higher Critical *mythos* that she responded to, integrating that whole with the separate whole of her own life experience, including her personal experiences of faith and doubt. In this sense of mutual inter-dwelling, these harmonised wholes themselves show the principles articulated by Feuerbach, that 'Atheist though Feuerbach may be, Engels was correct in saying that his aim was not to abolish religion but to 'perfect' it and that he believed that even philosophy itself would have to be absorbed in religion.'[642] This idea hearkens back to Old Testament understandings of prophetic ministry, as articulated in Jeremiah 31:31-4, which also features in Keck's comments on Strauss in the next section:

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[641] Karl Marx, "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm no pages written 1843-4.
[642] Bernard Reardon, "Feuerbach," in *Religious Thought of the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 82.

> The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Flowing out of this, and into Eliot's awareness also, is the principle that 'Religion, as Feuerbach understood it, is essentially the relation, founded deep in the emotions, between man and man.'[643] While Feuerbach is emphatically categorised as a heterodox thinker in theological circles, his articulation of true religiosity as what I would call *Perichoretic*[644]—a term normally used to refer to the Triune God—resonates deeply with orthodox understandings of the mutual inter-dwelling of the members of the Trinity. That is, in healthy community, humanity functions incarnationally as separate wholes harmoniously inter-dwell and cooperate within a greater whole, in a manner that regenerates and illuminates that which it touches. Eliot models the impact of interpersonal sympathy in *Middlemarch*, powerfully rendering both social potential and the sources of limitations placed on social progress. Each of these limitations originates in human selfishness: in the failure of the sympathetic impulse, or in the incapacity of the individual to suspend self-serving and self-centred behaviours. In Feuerbachian terms, the divine potential of the individual is overlooked in favour of the idolatry of self.

The decentralisation of religious power that was undertaken by both Strauss and Feuerbach was redeployed in *Middlemarch* within Eliot's understanding of spiritual progress. Eliot's *Bildungen* all involve increasing enfranchisement of individual perception of the divine good, and increasingly benevolent agency arising from the capacity to truly see the experiences, difficulties and struggles of the other, within social contexts. In both Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* and throughout Eliot's novels (especially *Middlemarch*), this finds its ultimate fulfilment in collaborative, sympathetic relational intimacy, often expressed in marital union. Eliot's understanding of moral maturity as sympathetically translation and, thereby, empathic responsiveness, is articulated by Hill in terms of Eliot's sense of responsibility to understand in order to accurately translate others. [645] Hill identifies

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[643] Reardon, "Feuerbach," 82.
[644] Greek. 'Rotation.' It refers to the dance-like mutuality of the members of the Trinity, in Christian theology.
[645] Susan Hill, "Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no.3 (1997): 635-53.

this same impulse towards accurate understanding as fundamental to Feuerbach's materialist theology. Eliot's fundamental concern in *Middlemarch* is to demonstrate sympathetic attentiveness as indispensable to relationship and decision making, for the common good. Within this understanding, any idea of progress or holiness that is not socialised and inclusive—that overlooks the divine value within each human—cannot possibly be progressive. These filters continue to offer themselves as potent means of evaluating human action and discourse, from the personal and domestic, to state governance and international relations. But, as history has shown in the time since Feuerbach wrote, these shifts occur in flux, and not all change is progress.

Strauss and Impartial Goodness

Nonetheless, it is this connectedness that grounds *Middlemarch*, giving a sense that its narrator—like Eliot herself—sees beyond its setting to understand its place in a far broader picture. This sense of contextualisation and integration models that readers can, through putting themselves in a greater whole of history and community, contribute to social progress in their own context, even when that contribution is 'unhistorical', as the conclusion of *Middlemarch* emphasises.

Strauss sought to equip his readers to reflect critically on the texts that were foundational to their worldviews, by examining where these ideas and texts had come from. The enmeshment of Church and State in Germany at that time meant that Strauss' critique was also an indirect critique of the power dynamics within German society: the theological establishment did not consider Strauss' efforts to be a gift, and he lived out his life in exile as a result. Strauss' experiences are common among the freethinking writers in Eliot's circles, and she herself experienced the cost (and benefits) of breaking with the *status quo* out of a desire for authenticity. Characters in *Middlemarch* together form a system within which they maintain, challenge, and reconfigure their community's power structures.

There was some irony to the reactive, combative tone that Strauss employed in *Life of Jesus,* given his desire to encourage his readers to prioritise rational thought and material experience. This was not lost on its young translator:

> Differing as it does from the views of most theologians and the remainder of the public, precisely on a matter for which a different opinion is accustomed to pass as godlessness, it could, upon first acquaintance, only evoke in unprepared minds a vague astonishment, passing over into horror… This sort of reply is on no higher a plane than those screams often heard

> from women upon the sudden report of a shot… perchance a reasonable and clearheaded man may intervene…[646]

What was missing in Strauss (aside from a progressive understanding of gender) was an awareness of his own partial perspective, and its limitations, as part of a broader whole. In contrast to Strauss, Eliot deployed dialogical exploration rather than polemical, in producing her novels. That is, pre-empting Bakhtin, she identified that within society, rather than nominating a single clear-headed man to solve society's challenges through a polemical decree, more stable and attuned social dynamics arise when solutions are established through sympathetic dialogue.

Another important aspect of Eliot's thought that links with Strauss is the impartial goodness of her mature characters. Dorothea, Caleb, and Mary each naturally embody this trait, and other characters grow towards it:

> Especially important is Matthew 5:43-48[647], which is unquestionably authentic, [Strauss] claims, because the church could not have coined such a generous saying. Here then we have the fundamental feature of Jesus' piety: he perceived and thought of the heavenly Father as "impartial goodness," something he could not have derived from the Old Testament, but only from within himself; in the impartial goodness of his own being he knew himself to be in harmony with God. This all-encompassing love which overcomes evil with good he transferred to God. Moreover, if all men are God's sons, then they are brothers; hence the golden rule contains the fundamental idea of humanity… Consequently Jesus was indifferent to anxiety for food or clothing, ready to turn the other cheek, and to forgive without limit. Thereby Jesus actualized in himself the covenant written on the heart (Jeremiah 31:31).[648]

This impartial goodness is fundamental to Dorothea's statement of faith to Will, within which they actualise the principles of faith that Eliot held to, including the reticence to define it at the expense of practising it:

> 'No, don't think that,' said Dorothea. 'I have no longings.'
>
> He did not speak, but she replied to some change in his expression. 'I mean, for myself. Except that I should like not to have so much more than my share without doing anything for others. But I have a belief of my own, and it comforts me.'
>
> 'What is that?' said Will, rather jealous of the belief.
>
> 'That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil - widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with the darkness narrower.'
>
> 'That is beautiful mysticism – it is a –'
>
> 'Please not to call it by any name,' said Dorothea, putting out her hands entreatingly. 'You

[646] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, lv.

[647] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,[a] what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

[648] Keck, "Editor's Introduction," lxxiii.

> will say it is Persian, or something else geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much – now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already. I only told you, that you might know quite well how my days go at Lowick.'
>
> 'God bless you for telling me!' said Will, ardently, and rather wondering at himself. They were looking at each other like two fond children who were talking confidentially of birds.
>
> 'What is your religion?' said Dorothea. 'I mean – not what you know about religion, but the belief that helps you the most?'
>
> 'To love what is good and beautiful when I see it,' said Will. 'But I am a rebel: I don't feel bound, as you do, to submit to what I don't like.'
>
> 'But if you like what is good, that comes to the same thing,' said Dorothea, smiling.
>
> 'Now you are subtle,' said Will.[649]

Eliot's sense of true religion is demonstrated here in Dorothea's attainment of spiritual maturity. Dorothea has undergone lifelong spiritual progress, having been 'finding out [her] religion since [she] was a little girl'. Her maturity is in realising—both internally and externally—that her religion is one with her care for those around her. This realisation arises in her realisation of her agency, and her turning away from her earlier abdications, in her relationship with Edward Casaubon. She finds her strength and purpose in empathic advocacy. It bears repeating, for emphasis, and for the 'love [of] what is good and beautiful': 'That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with the darkness narrower'. Dorothea resists Will's impulse to name or categorise this belief, instead insisting that its value is in its embodiment. For Dorothea, this could be seen as an extension of her resistance of Casaubon's scholasticism. For Eliot, polemics at the expense of embodied, relational practice is a similar kind of hindrance. This commitment to widening the skirts of light is phrased, in Strauss' work, as commitment to impartial goodness. Strauss and Feuerbach agreed that this impartial goodness marked Jesus' attainment of harmony with the divine. Eliot's representation of Dorothea's maturity shares the same markers.

Camden Farebrother's spirituality is also one of impartial goodness, which he offers in his friendship with Tertius Lydgate, even after Lydgate neglects to appoint him as hospital chaplain. Rather than overseeing in a papal or presiding manner, Farebrother displays the apostolic behaviour of serving and abiding with his parishioners.[650] This mode of holiness is even extended towards Bulstrode by his wife, in the depth of their shame. The poetic beauty of this kindness encourages Eliot's readers to embody grace, even towards the least

[649] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 420.
[650] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 187-199.

deserving. Farebrother's ultimately enables him to provide for his family, which is his main concern throughout the novel. In this, his reaches maturity, and yet is 'unhistoric' in his achievements.

Historicity and Unhistorical Achievements

Eliot engages several distinct historical milieus in *Middlemarch* that, when overlayed, contextualise and critique one another. These function as points of critique and contextualisation, offering companionship and connection as readers engage in their own processes of perception, reflection, and maturation. These milieus are summarised below. The identification and analysis of these threads correlates functionally with David Strauss' Higher Critical method: by approaching *Middlemarch* in terms of these intertextual and historical signifiers, the reader is immersed in Eliot's awareness of the texts and cognitive modes that constitute spiritual and relational growth. By examining contradictions between the ostensibly authoritative patriarchy in *Middlemarch* and the scholarly and theological origins of these assertions of authority, Eliot renders an alternative revelatory mode to those statements: the truth of embodied feminine experience. This 'unhistoric' focus displaces bids for transcendence. The text thus speaks to personal particularities as readily as it speaks to expansive historical and textual webs, highlighting that these latter webs are themselves constituted by human experience and reflective consideration of that experience. This awareness serves to re-humanise textual histories. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot identifies the origins of social regeneration as individual agency and self-awareness, even for unhistoric members of society.

Eliot frames her sense of 'epoch' in the Prelude to *Middlemarch*, returning to the idea throughout the novel, always with reference to young women: first Theresa of Avila, then also Dorothea, Mary, and Rosamond. The epochs entwined with *Middlemarch* are threefold: its internal chronological setting; the setting within which it was written; and the epochs of the texts it integrates, such as the life of Theresa of Avila, and the time of the 'Stoics and Alexandrians'. Implicitly, there is the additional layer of Eliot's autobiographical experience. Critical attention has focussed on the former two considerations, and discussion of this third set of considerations has been a distinctive emphasis of this thesis. These three epochs overlay onto and interweave with each other. These intricacies facilitate criticism of English social systems through a literary form that leaves space for the reader to engage with the text within their own reading (and according to their own intertextual and cultural awareness), rather than having conclusions prescribed polemically.

These historical narratives of two Doctors of the Church—Theresa of Avila and Thomas Aquinas—are drawn together with English political reform (including Catholic Enfranchisement) in the 1820s and 1830s, the time at which *Middlemarch* is set. In overlaying these two sets of considerations, Eliot gently reminds her readers of the scope of possibility for social change by elucidating both the potential for—and the limitation inherent to—that specific set of shifts. This linking of religious reform/progress with political reform/progress exemplifies what Dorothea refers to as 'desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is.'[651] Eliot's flexibility in bringing diverse kinds of progress in contact with each other, opens up consideration of what is 'perfectly good' in a radically inclusive way. My focus is the diverse perspectives and thought processes employed by characters to either legitimise/sacralise undeserved power within that system: that is, to understand their social responsibilities in contributing to the regeneration and reform of that system.

My primary interest in English political reform in *Middlemarch* has been as a bridge between the personal development and empowerment of Theresa of Avila, and the Great Reform Bill of 1832. Theresa's empowerment of individuals in their own spiritual governance, within *Middlemarch*, is linked with the Reform Bill's power to effect greater political equity in England. Amid a social system constituted by fallible and often self-serving individuals, Dorothea becomes a potent agent of social change, despite her work being categorised as 'unhistoric' in the book's final passage. Dorothea's maturation vicariously regenerates her immediate social milieu, not through the violent style of revolution that Europe experienced in 1848 with the advent of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, but through a peaceable and relational regenerative process. This *Bildung* follows the pattern of Theresa's *Interior Castle*, and the mechanics of Middlemarch's social system readily integrate with the principles demonstrated in this volume, particularly regarding the rendering and development of the novel's characters. Thus, *Middlemarch* becomes Eliot's 'show, don't tell' of political philosophy, integrating materialist theology, complete with her observation of how much more Dorothea could have done, if her surroundings were not so limiting. This limitation encourages readers in their own partial capacities to embody progress.

Representation of the Reform Bill epoch links with the increased attention to women's voting and property rights arising from the election of John Stuart Mill in 1865. In Italy,

[651] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 419.

around the same time, the Catholic hierarchy moved against the influence of materialism and Branch Theory. These conflicts came to a head at the First Vatican Council (1869-60), which also intermingled with pressures for a nationally unifying religious approach, like that of Spain during the Inquisition, as I have touched on. The central thrust of this council was to assert papal infallibility, to reassert the Catholic church's political dominance. Cardinal Fillipo Guidi offered that the tradition of the church was held corporately, in the custody of its bishops, in response to which Pope Pius IX exclaimed, 'I am the tradition!' Frequent references to Catholic saints throughout *Middlemarch* invite draw readers to seek better understand those Catholic modes of representation, for example in Eliot's use of the Italian *Santa* rather than 'Saint', and the setting of the Casaubons' honeymoon in Rome. The First Vatican Council was functionally ended in 1870 when French troops left Rome to defend territories relating to the Franco-Prussian war. However, the Council was not formally closed until 1960, in preparation for the Second Vatican Council, at which Theresa of Avila was declared a Doctor of the Church: equal in rank to Thomas Aquinas. Eliot's demystification of Theresa and Aquinas is also her demystification of religious nationalisms and their strictures.

The characters in *Middlemarch* display capacities and patterns that one would expect of early nineteenth century gentry. This sense of normalcy is integral to Eliot's realism, within which Morris asserts (referring to *Daniel Deronda*) 'There are no acts of artistic sabotage... to make us doubt the temporal and spatial certainty of the world represented.'[652] This certainty, Morris continues, empowers Eliot within 'a long political tradition of realist writing' geared towards a 'powerful depiction of suffering and injustice' that acts 'as a vehicle for social reform and change.'[653] Thus, Eliot's use of realism situates *Middlemarch* in a very old, ideologically subversive tradition:

> The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary... Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals whereas those of history are singular.[654]

'The energizing principle of George Eliot's art was realism' George Levine writes, 'and realism is a mode that depends heavily on reaction against what the writer takes to have been a misrepresentation.'[655] Eliot's energised realism in *Middlemarch* includes her painstaking rendering of religious context. This invites critical treatment of the unique intersection of

[652] Pam Morris, *Realism*, New Critical Idiom Series, (London: Routledge, 2003), 20.
[653] Morris, *Realism*, 21.
[654] Aristotle, as cited in Morris, *Realism*, 52.
[655] George Levine, "Introduction: George Eliot and the Art of Realism," in George Levine (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

ideology with the social—particularly the political—functions of Victorian religious practice. Specifically, Eliot represents religion as fundamental to the preservation of Victorian systems of power, legitimation, and exclusion that determined the social roles of different groups, particularly regarding their political enfranchisement. Through these connections, Eliot undermines the false binaries of male and female, Anglican and Catholic, sacred and secular, faith and doubt, thus expressing an ideology that values the liberation of difference from opposition. Through this liberation—a process that underpins Dorothea's demonstration of human potential—Eliot's realism performs its ideological function, by demonstrating the value of equality in embodiment of social, political, and vocational progress within society.

Alongside Eliot's Straussian sense of holiness as impartial goodness, Eliot's weaving in of Roman Catholic histories in *Middlemarch* imparts a sense of history ebbing and flowing, rather than ascending towards some climactic perfection. In particular, by likening Dorothea to canonised women in the shared history of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, she shows that those earlier women had (in some ways) more opportunities for fulfilment of their exemplary natures despite living centuries earlier. Eliot thus highlights the lack of social progress for Victorian women, even after the second Reform Bill of 1867.[656] By employing the italianised 'Santa' rather than the English, 'Saint' to refer to these women throughout the text, Eliot affiliates their sainthood with Rome and Roman Catholics rather than the English church, thereby emphasising the continuation of these monastic traditions for women in cultures with Roman Catholicism as the main religion (for example Italy), and their discontinuation in English society. When Dorothea awakens to the histories portrayed in the art of Rome, Eliot is, perhaps, gently hinting at her proximity to nineteenth century Italian nuns, who lived out their *Epen* in relative autonomy and tranquility, with their society's veneration rather than marginalisation (albeit having renounced their womanhood in order to attain this veneration). As Dorothea models for an artistic representation of Clare of Assisi and Edward models as Thomas Aquinas, Eliot draws analogies between their respective social functions, suggesting that these fictional constructs are potentially also assertions about the natures of these historical figures. Clare focussed on improvement of the lives of disadvantaged people through material assistance, whereas Aquinas contributed his expansively dogmatic theological work, *Summa Theologiae.*

Such is the realm of signification for *Middlemarch*. Eliot's situation of *Middlemarch* within Victorian religious discourse seeks to further nuance, rather than supersede, criticism

[656] Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 153.

relating to Dorothea Brooke's search for vocation. Eliot's novels are steeped in representations of religion,[657] and Beer notes that its complexity transcends full exploration in any single criticism which might otherwise 'enclose or imprison text and reader.'[658] Similarly, the chronological breadth of its intertextual connections offers a sense of the long view of history: the kind of overarching historical awareness that Hegel described in his writing. Eliot situates *Middlemarch* in religious discourse, using Dorothea's *Bildung* as a lens to focus exploration of the sociohistorical and political significance of religion. At the same time, Eliot is forward in delineating the historical situation and connectedness of her novel, and thereby cuts through the promises of social change associated with the Reform Bills to remind her readers that the changes effected are not enough, and that the moment of history they find themselves is finite in its effects to democratise English society. Explorations of the significance of *Middlemarch*'s historical context are virtually inexhaustible, as Beer has said. It is the particularity of *Middlemarch*—especially Eliot's faithful representation of personal, limited perception and influence—that brings it so close to universality. It is Christ's immersion in humanity's limitations and contradictions that confirms his divinity, in the theological texts that influenced Eliot.

These expansive historical and theological connections serve, in part, to highlight parallels between the story of the enfranchisement of English Catholics, and the potential for a similar horizon of opportunities for English women. These representations delineate systems of legitimation and dismissal that perpetuate institutions represented in characters like the desiccated Edward Casaubon, the 'dog-in-the-manger'[659] banker, Nicholas Bulstrode, and the immature, privileged Fred Vincy, who 'everyone in the town' felt 'might have been a clergyman if he had chosen.'[660] The fictional, yet realistic, scenarios raised within *Middlemarch*'s plots follow, for the most part, relatively straightforwardly from this historical linkedness. Lydgate's hospital, Bulstrode's financial power, Brooke's ideological distance from his tenants and the associated friction, Rosamond's conquests, Casaubon's scholarship, and Will Ladislaw's career: all of these threads connect neatly with Eliot's realist mode, forming the various parts of what Henry Staten calls the 'irrepressible expression of the

[657] Nixon, "Framing Religious Discourse: An Introduction," in *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), passim.
[658] Beer, *George Eliot*, 193.
[659] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 136.
[660] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 890.

book's unblinkingly materialist substratum.'[661]

Despite Eliot's careful construction of *Bildungen* within this materialist substratum, early feminist writers still considered her 'culpable'[662] for not expanding her horizons further for her female protagonists. She pre-empted this pressure to write ideal women in idealised contexts in her essay, *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists*:

> Silly Novels by Lady Novelists are a genus with many species, determined by the particular quality of silliness that predominates in them—the frothy, the prosy, the pious, or the pedantic. But it is a mixture of all these—a composite order of feminine fatuity—that produces the largest class of such novels, which we shall distinguish as the *mind-and-millinery* species. The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own right, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond. Her eyes and her wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb *contralto* and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues. Or it may be that the heroine is not an heiress—that rank and wealth are the only things in which she is deficient; but she infallibly gets into high society, she has the triumph of refusing many matches and securing the best, and she wears some family jewels or other as a sort of crown of righteousness at the end. Rakish men either bite their lips in impotent confusion at her repartees, or are touched to penitence by her reproofs, which, on appropriate occasions, rise to a lofty strain of rhetoric… The men play a very subordinate part by her side.[663]

To write such flimsy fictions would be to obstruct readers from connecting their own non-ideal selves and experiences with the worlds of Eliot's novels. Eliot's commitment to realism in these representations is not ideologically neutral: she establishes a specific social and metaphysical order in *Middlemarch* that produces rich meaning, centred on her attention the realities of human experience:

> my stories always grow out of my psychological conception of the dramatis personae… 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 judgement, pity, and sympathy. And I cannot stir a step aside from what I 'feel' to be 'true' in character.[664]

This commitment is simultaneously realistic and artistic. It safeguards the usefulness of Eliot's novels, by situating her narrative possibilities within the real limitations of human circumstances. In respecting the realities of limitation, Eliot qualifies herself to speak about the realities of potentiality. As Goethe observed, 'The real is narrow, the possible is

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[661] Henry Staten, "Is Middlemarch Ahistorical?" *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 115, no.5 (2000): 1000.
[662] Julia Swindells, "George Eliot: Man at Work and the Masculine Professional," in Michelle Standworth (ed.) *Victorian Writing and Working Women* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), 56.
[663] George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in Rosemary Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Works*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 178-9.
[664] George Eliot, "GE to John Blackwood, Richmond, 18 February 1857," in Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters 1852-1858*, 299.

immense.'

Conclusion

Throughout *Middlemarch*, actions are shown as expressions of worldviews. These different worldviews incorporate characters' attitudes towards power and social responsibility. Some of these perspectives deliberately ratify existing inequalities, while others arise out of empathic awareness of social dynamics and collective wellbeing. These representations open polemical systems and hegemonic worldviews to evaluation in terms of their human impacts. Spiritual and social maturation are represented as true perception of self—that is, sound epistemology—which gives rise to humility and constructive agency, in community.

This approach smoothly integrates representations of private patterns of thought with outward relational interactions. These relationships, in turn, constitute the social system of *Middlemarch*. The novel is explicitly set within the particularities of the first English Reform Bill. Eliot deploys frequent and far-reaching intertextual references that extend beyond the specific temporal and cultural setting of the novel, in order to link the novel's setting and events with other periods of history, and the insights of other writers. In these functions, *Middlemarch* is a vessel for many of the hopes of the nineteenth century for social progress.

Conclusion: Narrative Actualisation and Epic Particularities

> There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men.[665]

In writing this thesis, diegesis and syllepsis have been held in tension throughout, in order to include both textual and lived considerations, as they have contributed to the many *Bildungen* that intersect around and within *Middlemarch*. Many individuals—both characters and historical figures—have been shown, each effecting their own processes of change within contexts that were largely defined by those who came before them. Readers of this thesis will, themselves, be in-process in this way. These are the thematic considerations of *Middlemarch* that this thesis has sought to speak about.

Hegel's construction of the Abstract-Negative-Absolute progression in dialectical thought (following on from Kant's Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis construction), identified a thread of progress, as texts are engaged with and revised, resulting in changes in how people live. There is something of this rhythm, rippling through *Middlemarch* and its peripheral *Bildungen*, in the sense that progress is born of a person's response to what has come before them. But Hegel's contribution was incomplete, not least for its inaccessibility, and I am grateful for the patience of my readers as I have reintroduced German theological and philosophical considerations alongside what stands independently as such a compelling creative work.

George Eliot understood better than most, what it meant to earnestly seek to comprehensively approach the work of Hegel, Strauss, and Feuerbach: her genius was her capacity to redeploy these perspectives in a way that brought them into fuller contact with the human experiences that they sought to enrich. This research has been a simultaneous examination of these writers, alongside some Eliot biographies, and *Middlemarch* itself. It was a late realisation that the phases of maturation in *Middlemarch* lend themselves so readily to consideration alongside Eliot's personal *Bildung*, suggesting that it can be read as a kind of memoir. Throughout her *Bildungsromane*, Eliot's characters frequently begin by living uncritically—blindly—in their conditioned social interpretation and worldview. As

[665] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (London: Oxford UP, 1963 [1871-2]), 664.

they each seek to live inflexibly according to that perspective, they find that it was prescribed by people who lived separate lives to them, and as such, needed different things. I, like many readers, am not unfamiliar with the sensation of hearing a compelling and authoritative voice that, over time, is shown to be without any true authority.

Over the course of the writing of this thesis, Cardinal George Pell was prosecuted and then released from prison. Donald Trump has had wide support from those who find his hyperbole reassuring and compelling, and this style of rhetoric has found wide support in the nationalism of the religious right wing in the USA. The final days of writing included Joe Biden's inauguration. In Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison is fumbling reports of rape and sexual assault in Parliament House. As distant as the Spanish Inquisition, and the Italian *Risorgimento*, and women's suffrage may now seem to us, these patterns of political and religious legitimation continue to exert pressure on the individuals living in our historical moment. The idea of progress—be that religious, economic, or polemical—has, itself, come to hold similar attributes to many preceding cults and movements, and it is important to remember that we continue to have freedom—albeit systemically limited freedom—to continue to define progress for ourselves, in dialogue.

Middlemarch still manages to offer up relevant answers, one hundred and fifty years after its publication, and over a thousand years after the Stoics and Alexandrians that Eliot includes in its peripheries, to demonstrate these observed principles. These world-riddles are old riddles, and we answer them again and again, slightly differently in our distinct cultural and personal epochs. Each iteration of these patterns shows that in each approaching our own *Bildung*, we must open our eyes to the truths of our own situation, and to the situations of those around us, and seek to work compassionately for our common good, mindful of the nature of each person, rather than assenting to the factional labels decreed by those who seek to control us: be those religious, or political, or both.

In *Middlemarch*, Eliot demonstrates that holiness is not measured by how ornate a doctrinal knot we can make of ourselves and each other. Rather, she reminds us that holiness is our capacity to reverently witness the truth of our humanity, and that its measure is the tenderness with which we see and enfold one another. In doing so, we make history together.

Appendix - Manuscripts from Berg Archive

The following images are photographs taken by me at the Berg Archive at New York Public Library. The first set are from The Berg Notebook, and the latter are from a bombastic anti-semitic letter kept inside the front cover of a volume of *Silas Marner*. The contrast between the letter and this novella is very pronounced.

The first set of images from The Berg Notebook (front cover showing the label, *Quotations, Latin, English& Greek – and Hebrew matters*). The pages included in this appendix show a 'Calendar' that forms the rear section of the notebook, listing writers and historical figures in subject/discipline groupings. Rather than being a 'Calendar' in the sense of a chronology, the groupings are more along the lines of a ledger or account book (according to the Latin origin of the term). So, in this sense, it is a chronicling of the 'wealth' of each of these areas of thinking.

The section headings are:
I. Moses: Initial Theocracy
II. Homer: Ancient Poetry
III. Aristotle: Ancient Philosophy
IV. Archimedes: Ancient Science
V. Casar: Military Civilisation
VI. Saint Paul: Catholicism
VII. Charlemagne: Feudal Civilisation
VIII. Dante: The Modern Epic
IX. Gutenberg: Modern Industry
X. Shakespeare: Modern Drama
XI. Descartes: Modern Philosophy
XII. Frederick: Modern Policy
XIII. Bichat: Modern Science

Each of these groupings includes thinkers across history, rather than being contemporary to the figure listed in each heading. They are very diverse groups; some names that feature often in Eliot's writing are underlined, which seems to signal that they are important to Eliot. It would be interesting to index these names to references in Eliot's fiction. The seem likely to refer to what she read during this time. Notably, Christian saints appear in several groups, including Francis of Assisi in 'Feudal Civilisation'.

Archival listing, for access at the Berg Archive, New York Public Library:

Eliot, G. Holograph notebook with label "Miscellanies" on spine and "Quotations, Latin, English & Greek – and Hebrew matters" on front cover, unsigned, dated 1868. 305p. 20cm.

[Images redacted due to photo permissions]

The following images show a letter to John Sibree Jnr that I photographed at the Berg Archive, at the New York Public Library. The letter was written after the translation of *The Life of Jesus*, but before Evans' palliative nursing of her father. The letter is uncharacteristically hubristic and includes some unfortunate references to racial matters. This letter shows some degree of bigotry, which George Eliot grew out of, over time. The letter was found tucked inside the front cover of a copy of *Silas Marner*: the contrast between these two texts is sobering.

Manuscript reference:
George Eliot, *ALS to John Sibree, Inserted in Eliot, George. Silas Marner. Edinburgh & London, 1861*, George Eliot Collection, Berg Archive, New York Public Library, New York.

[Images redacted due to photo permissions]

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