

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**George Eliot's Sympathy and Duty:
The Nature and Function of Sympathy and Duty in George Eliot's Fiction
in relation to Nineteenth-Century Theories of Egoism, Altruism and Gender
and Twentieth-Century Feminist Object-Relations Theory.**

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by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of
John Gordon Jones 1956-1994
for his constant role of lover, husband, friend.

‘To the Husband whose perfect Love
has been the best source of her insight and strength
this manuscript is given by his devoted Wife,
the writer’

George Eliot to G.H. Lewes
Dedication to *Romola*

And to the memory of my father
Arthur Abbotts
1917-1998
who gave me an education
and, it seems, passed on his willpower and stubbornness

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Abbreviations

GEL – The George Eliot Letters

GEJ – The Journals of George Eliot

OED – The Oxford English Dictionary

Part I: Evolving a Doctrine of Sympathy and Duty

Introduction

The many critical works discussing George Eliot's oeuvre examine the novels from every conceivable approach, with much opposition and contradiction between critics. Despite this history of critical opinion, one near-universal belief is that Eliot's 'doctrine of sympathy' is the major force behind the fiction (Noble 1965; Doyle 1981). It is not my aim to deny this tradition, but to examine exactly what 'sympathy' means. What did George Eliot consider the nature and function of sympathy to be; what did she intend by employing it in her novels; and what do the texts still say to readers about sympathy? Steven Marcus acknowledges:

I had gotten just to the...discussion of the meaning and function of sympathy in George Eliot, when it struck me that actually I didn't know what I was talking about. I had read George Eliot often and closely enough to believe that I understood what she meant by it; and I had read enough of the comment on her to understand what her commentators understood her to mean by it, but what in fact was sympathy itself? (1975, 33).

Every time a critical essay unthinkingly refers to George Eliot's 'sympathy', we need to ask what is 'sympathy itself'? In addition, who administers it in the novels, who receives it, who does not, and why? What impedes - or encourages - the action of sympathy? Do the novels advocate sympathy beyond the text, and if so, by what formal

methods? Finally, does an extended analysis of sympathy approximate to the critics' unexamined orthodoxy?

A second, generally accepted assumption is that 'duty' was an absolute for George Eliot, although 'duty' is rarely defined. Many critics see selflessness condoned in the novels and presented as duty, particularly women's selflessness. For them, there is 'no doubt that Eliot viewed [women's] self-sacrifices as heroic...women give themselves to succour those close to them' (Uglow 1987, 91). However, Eliot's novels do not advocate wanton self-sacrifice to any 'duty', and such an interpretation is not viable once the irony and latent readings of her texts are appreciated. This creed of self-sacrifice is not manifest in Eliot's own attitudes, particularly after her father's death (*GEL* II, 97). While she praised the fulfilling of obligations, she demurred at, for example, 'a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcass' (*GEL* I, 268). Here Eliot is referring to Rochester's marriage to Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, but at the time of writing she was 'chained' to her dying father. She never complains directly about father or family. Her father's demands came before her 'own pleasure' (*GEL* I, 256, 263), but such self-denial was often difficult (*GEL* I, 121, 223-4). This duty of caring was a chosen moral obligation, yet she clearly understood the individual's struggle between egoism and altruism, particularly if an obligation was neither chosen nor morally valid. This dilemma is repeatedly investigated in her novels. Sympathy and duty in Eliot's works demand parallel analysis; their interaction is so profound that neither can be adequately investigated in isolation. This thesis will therefore interrogate the place of duty in Eliot's work, its nature, function and value, and its relationship to sympathy.

As Eliot was aware, sympathy and duty are complex ethical concepts, malleable, evolved over time, and variously manifested in all aspects of life. Since she inherited centuries of debate, I first investigate some possible philosophical influences. An evaluation of Spinoza, Comte, Feuerbach, Spencer and Darwin then follows, analyzing their views on sympathy, duty and gender for contributions towards Eliot's own beliefs. Victorian women such as Eliot were developing their own perspectives and increasingly questioned their evolving role of 'Moral Mother', which demanded 'sympathy' and 'duty' while excluding them from all definitions and decisions. Eliot's personal experience of 'sympathy' and 'duty' also requires consideration. The main aim of this work is to assess what Eliot's texts convey regarding sympathy and duty in relation to the roles and personalities of men and women. This analysis considers her own intentions, the contextual influences to which the texts were subject, and a re-reading of the texts from the perspective of current feminist theories of gender and personality construction, specifically the feminist object-relations theories of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan. Eliot's texts explore and advocate those concepts that are her 'sympathy' and 'duty' via her characters, themes, narrative structure and form, and via her increasingly relational yet autonomous narrators. However, what is explored and advocated escapes Eliot's control, and the sympathy and duty within the texts may have quite different meanings for a modern reader. The second part of this work therefore consists of a close re-reading of Eliot's novels in relation to these various analyses of sympathy and duty.

Throughout her life, George Eliot's letters reflect sympathy as central to her moral code and art. When writing to Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1869, she suggested that a more perfect religion 'must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which

of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot' (*GEL* V, 31). Further, her review of Wilhelm von Riehl's books demonstrates her belief in the artist's sympathetic role as sacred: 'Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-man' (Eliot 1992, 263-4). Published in 1856, this essay is an early public statement of Eliot's belief that 'If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies it does nothing morally' (*GEL* III, 111) was present in Eliot's first published fiction, 'Amos Barton', and expanded in letters of 1857 (II, 403) and 1859: '[T]he 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 the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures' (III, 111).

As Steven Marcus suggests, definitions of sympathy are not easy. Prior to his definition-crisis, he describes sympathy forcefully as 'the power of entering into and sharing the minds of other persons...it is *the enabling* social sentiment, it is the sentiment beyond all others of unification and solidarity'. Yet ultimately, Marcus sees Eliot's sympathy as a form of social control; he sees it manipulated as her defence against passion, violence, and a senseless changing world (1975, 36-7). But this is not my reading. Another critic to consider sympathy central to George Eliot's fiction is Houghton, who places her firmly within the mid-Victorian cult of benevolence (1957, 278). For him, Eliot's texts - unlike those of Dickens - do not descend into sentimentality because she founds her sympathy on understanding rather than feeling. Sentimental pity is self-indulgent, 'whereas George Eliot's benevolence presupposes a forgetfulness of self' (278). Yet while Houghton's account is perceptive, the notion of sympathy as self-forgetting denies the mutuality which Marcus' definition conferred. In the vanguard of the Eliot scholarship revival, Houghton furthers the myth of her

sympathy as selflessness. Noble's work on *Scenes of Clerical Life* agrees that understanding is the true basis of sympathy and is 'achieved through an imaginative extension of the self' (Noble 1965, 63). He argues that in the 'Scenes' sympathy is the emotion that ties and elevates humans, while selfishness and lack of imagination are the greatest obstacles to sympathy (68). Yet when considering 'Janet's Repentance', Noble insists - despite the mutuality of Janet and Tryan's suffering - that 'selflessness' must be 'the goal towards which Janet moves in her struggle for redemption' (86). Selflessness is a dimension that critics simply must add. The opening of Chapter 5 of 'Amos Barton' outlines Eliot's moral approach for Noble (66). The reader is exhorted to a sympathy and understanding for all lives different from our own and encouraged to understand, to feel, and then to extend sympathy to others via the imagination. However, the narrator never asks for, or expects, selflessness.

Few critical works specifically analyse sympathy in the novels. In *George Eliot* (1985b), Elizabeth Ermarth aims to remedy misconceptions concerning Eliot's 'idea of community ... the delineation of moral life, the conception of sympathy' and mistaken beliefs concerning Lewes's influence (i). Ermarth concentrates on the influence of Feuerbach on Eliot's conception of sympathy and community, and is one of the few to register the importance of Spinoza's *Ethics*. However, the many other influences upon Eliot are not examined. In 'George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy', Ermarth claims that Eliot's 'sympathy depends absolutely upon a division in the psyche, a split in consciousness that permits two conflicting views to exist simultaneously. This mental division is the material of conscience' (1985(a), 23). Ermarth derives this view from Feuerbach's account of the 'I/Thou'. While Feuerbach talks of man's self-division during prayer, and of the 'thou' as the other, or *alter ego*, this state does not constitute a split psyche (24). Further, ideas about man's recognition of himself as part of a species,

the importance of multiple humanity and the other as part of conscience were already important to Eliot from the work of Spencer, Spinoza and Adam Smith. It is imperative to establish the overall influences on Eliot before arriving at conclusions about her sympathy. Finally, although I concur with Ermarth's stress on the importance of difference in Eliot's works, the free action of sympathy depends on more than 'the recognition of difference' (25). Meanwhile, Mary Ellen Doyle analyses how George Eliot's moral aim to encourage sympathy in her readers affects the artistry of her work, and regards rhetoric as Eliot's main formal technique. Doyle defines sympathy as: 'simple pity'; or 'a sense of mental or moral compatibility'; and the reader's understanding of a character as a result of 'deep intellectual and imaginative union' (Doyle 1981, 20, n9). While these distinctions are important, there is little consideration of Eliot's own definition of sympathy.

Critic Timothy Pace considers sympathy as central to Eliot's creed: ('My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy' [*GEL* II, 403]), and that the extension of sympathy to her readers via her art was a major aim (1986). However, he cannot understand the exhortations and strategies used by Eliot's narrators to encourage the reader to sympathy. If 'the single universal truth supporting [her] creed is expressed in Eliot's insistence on the individual's innate capacity for spontaneous sympathy' (81), then surely this should not require encouragement. The first question then, is whether Eliot considered sympathy to be innate and spontaneous, as Pace claims (76). In support of this claim, Pace cites Eliot's apparent distinction in her Riehl essay, between a lower and a higher capacity (77) for sympathy:

The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment (Eliot 1992, 263).

This statement deserves closer analysis.

As Pace observes, George Eliot does not claim ‘the power to expand the faculty of sympathy’ (76); however, I claim she wishes to stimulate it. She aims to develop the reader’s understanding by providing varied experiences, and to extend imagination by repeatedly having readers experience, understand and *feel*. The first sympathy, which, according to Pace, Eliot criticises as mechanical and limited – “sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity” – I consider to be capable of understanding and reasoning, and responding to the more abstract “appeals founded on generalizations and statistics”. However, it may lack the feeling and imagination necessary for sympathy with those who are ‘different’. By contrast, the minds that require “a picture of human life such as a great artist can give” are the trivial and the selfish minds who may lack understanding, reason and imagination. They need to be surprised “into that attention to what is apart from themselves”, and encouraged towards a sympathetic imagination which I believe is akin to Spinoza’s ‘intuition’. For Eliot, it was the artist’s responsibility to stimulate benevolence by arousing the ‘nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right’ (*GEL* VII, 44). Further on in the Riehl essay she actually says: ‘We want to be taught to feel’ (1992, 264).

Contrary to Pace's view, the sympathy George Eliot perceives, even if innate, is not quick to act in all situations - like Aristotle's virtues, it requires practice. In 'Amos Barton', when the narrator states, 'I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles', the intention is to encourage. Pace's Hegelian claim that Eliot had an 'ideal of an immediately-felt sympathy [which] establishes for her the reality of a vital collective existence for human beings' (77) is excessive. Crediting Eliot with a belief in spontaneous pan-sympathy is dangerous; even Comte accepted that the altruistic virtues needed to be cultured and exercised. When discussing Dickens' work, Eliot describes as a 'miserable fallacy' the idea that 'the working classes are in a condition to enter at once into a millennial state of *altruism*, wherein everyone is caring for everyone else, and no one for himself' (Eliot 1992, 265). Eliot does regard sympathy as paramount and employs her work to encourage it. However, what exactly her sympathy constitutes is still problematic. If she considers it innate, it obviously requires stimulation and practice, and it is questionable whether she regards any group, such as women or the working classes, as having a monopoly on sympathy. I aim to demonstrate that she requires a sympathy by all, for all, but that it has to be worked for. There is also little evidence that selflessness is essential for her sympathy. Elsewhere Eliot observes that 'We should distrust a man who set up shop purely for the good of the community' (Pinney 1963, 154-7), and certainly 'Such "disinterested officiousness"... stands opposed to true acts of sympathy' (Ermarth 1985(b), 23).

The myth of George Eliot's belief in an 'absolute' duty stems largely from Frederic Myers' recollections of her 'sibyl...in the gloom' persona, for he represents her as discussing '*God, Immortality, Duty*' and pronouncing:

with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable the *second*, and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third*...it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates (1881, 62).

Rosemary Ashton's trenchant dissection rejects this presentation of Eliot 'as an Evangelist of a new and gloomy Gospel'. Yet Ashton states that 'perhaps George Eliot did say what Myers reports her as saying; it certainly accords with her views' (1996, 334). Her views on God and immortality maybe, but what duty, whose duty, and duty to whom, is under discussion here. This is the woman who refused to go to church, who consorted with atheists, who translated heretical works, who had several affairs, and who ultimately lived openly with a married man. Further, in all of her works George Eliot has heroes and heroines who are castigated by their communities for neglecting what is deemed to be their duty. Many are judged immoral, yet the narrators' multi-level tales repeatedly reveal them to be more dutiful and moral than their community. In his novel *Nemesis of Faith*, which Eliot reviewed favourably in 1849 (Eliot 1992, 15-17), J.A. Froude talks of the duty of the clergy and that they do not know it. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot gives ample illustration of such dereliction of duty, while later novels explore moral corruption yet often sanction behaviours that many would consider a flouting of conventional duty. Eliot never advocates unthinking, selfless duty to men, church, masters, or mores.

Life had led George Eliot to develop her own personal deontology before she came to write fiction. In her review of R.W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect* in 1851 (Eliot 1992, 18-36), she praises the author for his exploration of 'the true basis and

character of religion and morals' (20), and concurs with his assumption of an 'undeviating law in the material and moral world' (21). Further, she agrees that while science accepts this law, it is 'perversely' ignored in relation to ethics, religion and social organisation. Eliot claims that 'human duty' consists of the study and obeying of this 'law of consequences' (21) which impresses sanction or prohibition on all our deeds, yet involves reason and feeling. Following Mackay, her essay asserts that all areas of life and study are related and that religion and philosophy both involve reason and the emotions. Religion was not just a matter for the sentiments, and its representation as such by the Victorian Church meant that "the sentiments are over-excited; the judgement becomes proportionately languid and incapable, [and] the connexion between the theory of practice and duty is unobserved, and dogmas are blindly learned without regard to their origin or meaning" (Eliot 1992, 22, quoting Mackay). Eliot demands greater inquiry into religion, morality and their laws and reasoning. This quest is a human duty in which full knowledge and understanding are essential regardless of all claims of sanctity, for without it duty is misunderstood. The laws relate to all aspects of life, internal and external, reason and feeling, and their complex inter-relationship. With reference to *The Mill on the Floss*, Ashton says that 'duty, like the passion to which it is here opposed, is a complex idea. It is not a stern extrinsic law to be obeyed in spite of everything, but is itself bound up with love – love of the past, of roots, of family of friends' (1990, 62).

In critical essays on Eliot, duty is rarely defined or analysed. Seemingly, it is a commonly understood virtue. In 'The Sacred Nature of Duty', Frederick Karl insists that Eliot 'demonstrates through all her heroines that one must live for others', yet he ignores the dangers of selflessness (1956, 256). Meanwhile, Eliot's heroines do not exhibit duty as mid-Victorian society would define it; ladies' conduct books, such as

those by Sarah Stickney-Ellis, saw women's nature, selflessness, and duty as one. According to Karl, Charles Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* 'helped [Eliot] to replace God with duty and Christ with moral justice' (277), but this does not clarify Eliot's duty.

The effect of Myers' essay was 'most insidious' (Barrett 1989, 8) with Eliot seeming to demand a dour, sacrificial, all-encompassing duty from all. Yet repeatedly the novels illustrate how duty born of sympathy is impeded by conventional societal duties such as religious duty, family duty, or duty to community or calling. Too often in the novels the duty of conformity or tradition wins, with disastrous consequences, *especially* when there is an expectation of selflessness. The message is submerged, but such sacrifices are never approved, and are ironically condemned, while selfishness is never condoned. Yet the legacy of conservative criticism on George Eliot promotes the belief that she 'advocates "sublime resignation"' (Barrett, xi) to undefined duty.

An initial hypothesis on Eliot's notions of duty and sympathy is possible. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* describes duty as 'that which one must do, or that which can be required of one', which rather implies something already owed. Interestingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of 1642, has 'duty' as the *action* which was due, while 'obligation' was the *bond* by which one was bound to carry out the action. This sense still holds and, I believe, corresponds to the 'duty' which George Eliot had in mind. Thus duty is only 'peremptory and absolute' when one is already under an obligation to carry it out. What is therefore under debate here is which moral obligations George Eliot does and does not sanction. Her essay on Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect* suggests that this choice is determined by the 'inexorable law of consequences' (1992, 21), which is in turn influenced by the many

and complex natural laws. Natural or undeviating law for Eliot corresponds to the laws of science. She is following Bray, Comte and Spencer in suggesting that the laws of science and nature apply to everything, everywhere. To break the laws will produce the inevitable and appropriate consequences. Understanding, reason and emotion, and all inner and outer environments affected, as are both individuals and communities, and all factors contribute to decisions about duty. Hume identified obligation with a subjective or sentimental pressure. Meanwhile, Kant describes obligation as the necessity to act in a certain way as dictated by reason. Kant discriminates between perfect duties that allow no choice - such as *not* killing or harming others - and imperfect duties which allow choice in the manner by which they are accomplished.¹ I consider Eliot's definition of duty to involve a choice of obligation, to be informed by reason - as Kant describes - yet to be more informed with feeling, and the implications of the natural laws. Her 'imperfect' choice not to live with her widowed sister Chrissey was dictated by both reason and feeling, for she could earn more money and thus help more if she was working, but would run mad if forced to live with her family and accede to sentimental duty. George Eliot came to accept that she had an obligation of benevolent duty to Humanity – a duty of sympathy - yet she was not selfless. The philosopher Schneewind describes both George Eliot and Spinoza as intuitionist thinkers (Atkins 1978, 68): they are in control and choose the optimum option available according to knowledge and reason as informed by their emotions, but they ignore the pressure or sanctions which correspond to Hume's idea of convention or sentimentality. By dramatising the claims of convention versus an 'intuitionist duty' in her novels, Eliot encourages such reflection in her readers.

¹ Generally, ethicists now identify 'negative duties' such as not killing or harming others and 'positive duties' of benevolence.

Sympathy is the disposition to share in another person's feelings to the extent of forming a sense-impression of their emotions. It is 'the propensity to think and feel in tune with the feelings and opinions that we observe in others' (Mautner 1996, 419). Sensitivity, tolerance, understanding, pity and condolence are aspects of sympathy, and while all play their part in George Eliot's concept, this is not yet enough. Ethics is the study of morality, particularly of goodness and right action (Audi 1995, 244-5), and for ethicists sympathy is a part of duty - the obligatory and expected right action of men and women who live together in fellowship or community. Empathy, like sympathy, is a complex emotion. Adam Smith argued that such moral sentiments allowed human society to exist; they aid the creation of the social relationship that facilitates peaceful co-existence (Oatley and Jenkins 1996, 90-92). Empathy, a term coined by the psychologist Titchener in 1909 from the German '*Einfühlung*', is the power of projecting one's personality and fully understanding the object of contemplation; it is the power to feel oneself into a situation via the senses, knowledge and imagination. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* defines empathy in *contrast* to sympathy. With sympathy one's identity is preserved while feeling *with* the other, but with empathy there is a tendency to lose oneself *in* the other: 'The concept of *Einfühlung*' is more than to understand; it is to 'apperceive the meaning of expressions of experience in relation to their context' (Audi, 219). Freud argued that empathy enabled us to understand "“what is inherently foreign to our ego”" (quoted in Wispé 1987, 25); this is a sentiment particularly relevant to Eliot's analysis of outsiders in the small communities her novels inhabit, a sentiment encompassing the tolerance and understanding of 'difference' encouraged by Spinoza, Comte and Feuerbach. Sympathy is also often confused and conflated with altruism, both in general and in relation to George Eliot. Auguste Comte created the term 'altruism', but this is far more than sympathy or empathy. It is the ethical view that people should act in the interest of

others; it is 'behaviour that promotes the welfare of others without conscious regard for one's own self-interests' (Hoffman 1981, 124). Altruism is a far more extreme form of benevolence and often demands self-sacrifice. However, the value and status of altruism is questioned by ethicists, as self-interest often precipitates those actions described as altruism. Many of Eliot's texts have examples where a differentiation between selflessness, benevolence and self-interest is required.

My initial conclusion is that George Eliot's concept of sympathy, as manifested in the novels, has more in common with empathy. Eliot wants an understanding and imaginative sympathy that allows a caring identification – a transcendence of difference - possibly with practical and emotional help and support. But this is not a demand for altruism. However, I deduce that much critical comment assumes and expects altruism, and where selflessness occurs in Eliot's fiction, it is assumed that Eliot or the text condones it. Generally critics do not distinguish between altruism, empathy and sympathy. What is expected of readers is also rarely examined; the formal methods by which sympathy is encouraged may be considered, but not what is expected or encouraged. An undefined sympathy appears to be acceptable. Again this is not accurate enough. An examination of Eliot's influences leads to the conclusion that sympathy, and particularly empathy, requires knowledge, understanding, reason and imagination. A wide experience and constant practice also helps – which is where fiction can assist. As Eliot remarks: 'To make men moral, something more is requisite than to turn them out to grass' (1992, 263). Eliot's work makes sympathy, caring, and even righting the wrongs of the world a responsibility of all individuals in society, even a duty, but not at the expense of self.

Chapter One – Eliot's Intellectual Inheritance

Eliot inherited a vast repository of philosophy, theology and natural science, although we do not know exactly what she read. Given the contents of her library (Baker 1977), the evidence of her reading of *German* philosophy alone (Ashton 1980; McCobb 1982), the breadth of her research for the *Westminster Review*, as well as her numerous references in notebooks and letters, there is evidence of a formidable knowledge of philosophy, including an understanding of ideas on sympathy and duty. Yet Eliot was not a philosopher; she was self-taught, often reading works in translation, and lacking friends with whom to discuss the work. I take heart from her experience as I attempt to pick my way through centuries of alternating accounts of egoism and altruism. I am not a philosopher, yet it is necessary to explain simply many different theories which provide readings towards a sympathy and duty that may have inspired George Eliot.² Critics often restrict themselves to the belief that Eliot acquired her ideas of sympathy mainly from the romantic heritage, or they refer to the theories of benevolence developed by Shaftesbury, Hume or Adam Smith (Houghton 1957, 273; Noble 1965, 56-60). But Eliot's sources are more complex. It is hints of influence I wish to explore here, and while my interpretations may be faulty and subjective, I also take heart from the knowledge that 'even Kant misread' Hume's work (Tice and Slavens 1983, 107). Eliot may not have read some of these works, but this chapter is an introduction to possibilities and probabilities; I am imagining what philosophy may have said to an intellectual woman who was searching for a creed to live by; it is also a personal journey.

² The background reading for this section on the history of philosophy is derived from the various texts quoted throughout the chapter.

Plato regarded ethics as a conflict between reason and the passions, and this stance set the stage for many of the major philosophical disputes to come. In Homeric and Aristotelian ethics, altruistic virtues were not highly regarded. Goodness was merely an aspect of carrying out roles; thus, a leader was 'good' if he displayed leadership qualities - and these were not altruistic. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the pursuit of happiness and man's advance are the aims of moral thinking. The right action was therefore the use of reason, not sentiment. He believed that virtues are acquired and improve with practice (Urmson and Rée 1989, 29-30), but the virtues discussed are courage or temperance; sympathy was unmanly and irrational. Despite Socratic pleas for altruism, many virtues we value now in the West only gained eminence later, with Christianity, while until the Renaissance any opposition between egoism and altruism was not debated, since 'in medieval views no distinction was made between what I would owe to myself and to others, since all good was generally held to be formed by divine love and directed by divine command' (Tice and Slavens 1983, 399). The Judeo-Christian tradition was the main source of ethical teaching. Judaism provided the laws and commandments which prescribe obligations; while initially, Christianity provided few ethical rulings other than loving our neighbour as ourselves. This creed encourages benevolence, although perhaps self-interest is uppermost. However, the emphasis in the Judeo-Christian tradition was on the needs of the community, and benevolence and adhering to obligations were necessary if people were to live together successfully. George Eliot was crucially aware of this point as she surveyed her moral inheritance. But for her morality was no longer immutable. If a moral code had evolved once people first began to interact, then a newly evolved ethics was now required as communities in the nineteenth-century experienced cataclysmic change.

From the end of the Middle Ages two strands of ethical theory began to unwind. Either humans were ‘animals’ in whom reason happened to predominate, so that calculated acts ensured self-interest; or natural man’s emotions led him to be good, recognise good, and do good. René Descartes (1596-1650) argued that only reason could be relied upon. However, in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649) he also related our emotions to our thinking part, arguing that the emotions tell us what is important to the inside, and thus linking the two strands of ethics. The Renaissance, the Reformation and the influence of Machiavelli and Martin Luther led to a further reassessment of man’s nature and morality. As individualism grew, reason predominated, and community-based values came under siege, as Comte describes. In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) assumed constant war between solitary individuals bent on self-interest, and he argued that reason could ameliorate this situation only if humans restrained their egoism and co-operated. Eliot would later appreciate from evolution that man is never solitary, but exists in relation as members of family, community or species, as feminist ethicists are currently asserting (Koehn 1998, 5, n13). Hobbes’ solution was to strive for peace – as long as all individuals do – and simultaneously accept certain limits to liberty. Benevolence is absent, or was a disguise for self-interest, as individuals invested power in a chosen Sovereign to whom duty was owed in exchange for peace. Hobbes’ philosophy is not Eliot’s benevolent concern for humanity, yet the debate over egoism and altruism opened up from his interrogation of dominant Christian values and demands for unquestioning benevolence.

The importance of equality, freedom, and individuality grew during the English Revolution, asserting ‘the individual conscience in opposition to institutional authority’ (Hesse 1995, 68). Simultaneously, feelings grew in importance as empiricism deposed the dominance of the rational mind (Bate 1961, 129). The work of John Locke (1632-

1704), the founder of British empiricism, presented a major reassessment of human reason and morality. Eliot and Lewes had read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) (Baker 1977, xxxvii), and Eliot's reviews for the *Leader* show the breadth of her knowledge of all philosophy, including Locke (Eliot 1992, 133-137). He dismissed all rationalist notions of knowledge being innate or *a priori*, insisting that knowledge derives from sense experience. His main importance for Eliot may be the suggestion of a form of intuition, or imaginative way of viewing in the mind, which records early impressions as if innate. Such an explanation of seemingly *a priori* knowledge compares with current ideas of psycho-social structuring, where lasting attitudes are constructed in a child's early months. British empiricism was receptive to the importance of the imagination, which complemented reason and became its working partner. Morally, Locke believed that all men are equal and free, and that there was a law of nature which it was our duty to obey, and uphold 'natural rights' for all, by all. He was also an early feminist, believing that women were equal to men with differences being psychologically constructed and capable of change. Although women were no longer regarded as equivalent to animals or slaves, there was always a difference of degree; women were rarely beings of stature. For the benefit of all, Locke advocated a 'social contract' whereby an impartial authority ensured natural laws with three legislators to assist: God, democratic government, and convention. Eliot's novels frequently question these three legislators. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's initial imaginative and sympathetic attachment to Casaubon is encouraged by his similarity to a painting of Locke (1998 [1874], 16).

Empiricists such as Locke had begun the trend that placed knowledge in advance of metaphysics, the metamorphosis central to Comte's philosophy. The rise in scientific research during the seventeenth century also propelled study towards the

complex question of human moral and social life - towards psychology and evolution – and a concern with benevolence (or altruistic sentiments) accelerated as the shift from reason to feeling gathered pace. An ethics of naturalism also arose, proclaiming that good stems from human nature. The greatest expression of this position is in the work of the ‘moral sense’ theorists, particularly the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), who argued for a sensibility that negotiated between empiricism, reason and feeling and detected morality according to the responses of this ‘moral sense’ to pain or pleasure. Shaftesbury, in his *Investigation Concerning Virtue and Merit* (1699), stressed the importance of ‘affections’, where sympathy was an instrument of virtue *and* an act of the imagination which allowed the self to identify with others. He asserted that humans were innately benevolent and that benevolence gave rise to a good life if the passions were well-directed. A moral feeling labelled conscience maintained virtue. Sympathy was another moral feeling which, like conscience, exists in humans because we are social beings and have to balance our needs and desires with others, it is the ability to feel the sufferings and joys of others *as part of a greater whole*, which presages Feuerbach’s work. Shaftesbury’s account of this striving towards a head-heart balance has great resonance with Eliot’s novels, particularly that *all* humans can be benevolent. Combined with imagination, sympathy allowed humans to achieve identification one with the other, which is a creativity reflected in Eliot’s novels, for Shaftesbury believed that creativity or imagination was the mind’s capacity to produce original ideas from received perceptions.

The feeling of confidence in an ‘inner sense’, conscience, sympathy or God-given morality gradually came to dominate British thought by the late eighteenth century. Sympathy and imagination became increasingly important, with Shaftesbury’s work entering the German tradition; the Romantics later revived his ideas. James

Arbuckle, a disciple of Shaftesbury's, argued that we cannot act morally unless we are able to enter into the feelings of the other (Bate 1961, 133). Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), in his *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* (1725), saw benevolence and self-interest as clearly opposed, with benevolence paramount and innate. Reason provided information and knowledge via the senses - forming simple and complex ideas - but not moral judgement, so that Hutcheson sought an empirical basis for moral judgement via Shaftesbury's hypothesis of an affective and morality-perceiving 'inner sense' which apprehends virtue and finds it pleasant. Two inner moral senses are proposed, which have a basis in rational behaviour and apprehend perceptions of ethics and aesthetics. Hutcheson considered all morally good motives to be benevolent, 'that is, an affection that seeks as its object the good of another' (Roberts, 7). The affections of benevolence and self-interest are all-present and humans can choose to be benevolent or egoistic (Roberts, 11-12), with the moral choice made when the affection is *chosen* in response to the sense input. Hutcheson argued that virtue is pleasant and vice is not, so that our moral behaviour is almost an aesthetic choice. However, much depends on our experiences, so that benevolence may be encouraged or repressed. Hutcheson believed humans were essentially benevolent because of our social nature and heritage. He thought it natural to be benevolent to close family and friends, while the ability to extend benevolence even further is the highest virtue (Roberts, 13-14), a belief reflected in Spencer's work. In his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Hutcheson's theory of man's 'inner sense' perception of beauty and morality as internal and intuitive led to speculation that such perceptions were imaginative rather than rational. Burke and the associationists soon began to call this inner sense the imagination (Engell, 40).

The work of David Hume (1711-1776) furthered the demotion of reason as the moral arbiter, but also suggested that happiness did not stem from a God-given moral sense. Eliot was familiar with Hume's philosophy: Herbert Spencer's 1853 essay for the *Westminster Review*, 'Universal Postulate', covers Hume's work, while the Eliot-Lewes Library houses a copy of Hume's complete works (Baker 1977, 100, no 1069). Further, Lewes would have discussed Hume during the revisions of his philosophical biography. The critic W.E. Henley debates in 1890 whether Eliot's books are novels or philosophical treatises and suggests they were dictated "to a plain woman of genius by the ghost of David Hume" (*GEL* I, ix). Haight dismisses this claim, but perhaps Henley saw influences that have escaped critics, for there is much in Hume's philosophy that would appeal to George Eliot.

Hume's conception of our nature had an organic, almost evolutionary bias, and his naturalism later made him a favourite with the Darwinians. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) Hume described an original and complex theory of meaning and moral sense responsible for guiding human behaviour and motivation, which stressed the importance and centrality of the passions and the imagination. Hume asserted that we cannot found knowledge on information from our senses alone. We have to examine our own individual psychology and how exactly it structures acquired information into knowledge, and thus conditions our beliefs and morals. All thought is based on single, simple sensory impressions which become compounded as a result of our individual psychologies; the many impressions form complex ideas which depend on the strength of the imagination, the amount of experience, the wealth and type of sensations, and the individual input from the passions. Thus knowledge is individual, complex and varied. The forces between impressions are 'associations' or imagination. If we form an impression that we are amused with a friend's witticism, this response

becomes associated with an impression (we imagine) that we are fond of the friend. Thus Dorothea associated Casaubon with Locke and imagined similar virtues. For Hume, the imagination was far more important than reason, which is why he saw it as central to passion and belief-formation. The causes of all passions are pleasure and pain, which are themselves ‘impressions of reflections’ and are thus based on our thoughts of what gives us pleasure or pain.

Book III of the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), indicates Hume’s belief that man’s social condition produces sympathy, which is defined as “the propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (Van Holthoon 1993, 36, quoting Hume). Thus morality is felt by the passions according to pleasure or pain not reasoned, although reason has an input as part of a complex of psychological influences. In the *Treatise*, Hume devises an associationist mechanism to describe how our capacity for sympathy helps us perceive the emotional state of others. The passion centred on the self, and the feelings which derive from the actions and judgements of others, are both associated with pain and pleasure, and we mediate between all these emotions via sympathy. It is a sympathy which may become empathy, for if our sensibility and imagination are strong enough, the idea we form of the emotion we experience becomes the actual feeling which we observe in another. Any natural relationship or connection is more likely to provoke sympathy, as development takes place in family or community groups where selfishness has given way to benevolence, as living in social groups becomes safer and social interaction develops. We tend to adopt the frame of mind of those around us because of sympathy with the familiar, with our family and society. However, while this process leads to friendliness and community feeling it can also lead to conformity and constraint. Herbert Spencer’s

work reflects Hume's influence, and George Eliot was familiar with these ideas, particularly the importance of imagination in sympathy, the identification within family and community, yet also the antagonism and the urge to non-conformity. Hume's ideas of virtue are also relevant to Eliot's work; he considered natural virtues such as compassion and modesty to be invariant across cultures. However, there are artificial virtues, such as conforming to convention for the good of the state, community or family. Justice was a major artificial virtue of convention for Hume, important for the protection of property rights and promises, for the protection of all contracts, and for government. These artificial virtues all feature in Eliot's novels as bastions of society to be questioned as society changed.

Hume's friend, Adam Smith (1723-1790) was better known as the author of the *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Yet Smith, a philosopher of considerable influence, developed a complete system of ethics, suggesting that morality was based on the central tenets of imagination and sympathy. In his *Theory of Modern Sentiments* (1759), he developed Hume's work to explore a distinctive 'doctrine of sympathy'. Imagination was essential and without it sympathy could not function (Bate 1945, 147). The imagination was perceived as a mental power that influences and creates using all the materials from the senses, plus impressions, sensibility, and the input of the passions. In particular, the imagination creates connections to achieve sympathetic identification. It is an ordering and organising power, an endless searching for sense in the chaos of the mind. With the scientific and artistic imagination, ideas and ultimately creativity result from an aesthetics of sorting and filing on the part of the imagination. Meanwhile, the imagination dealing with self and others attempts to render our myriad impressions of other and self, coherent. This is imaginative identification, or sympathy. Sensory impressions about others and their behaviour and experiences are ordered and

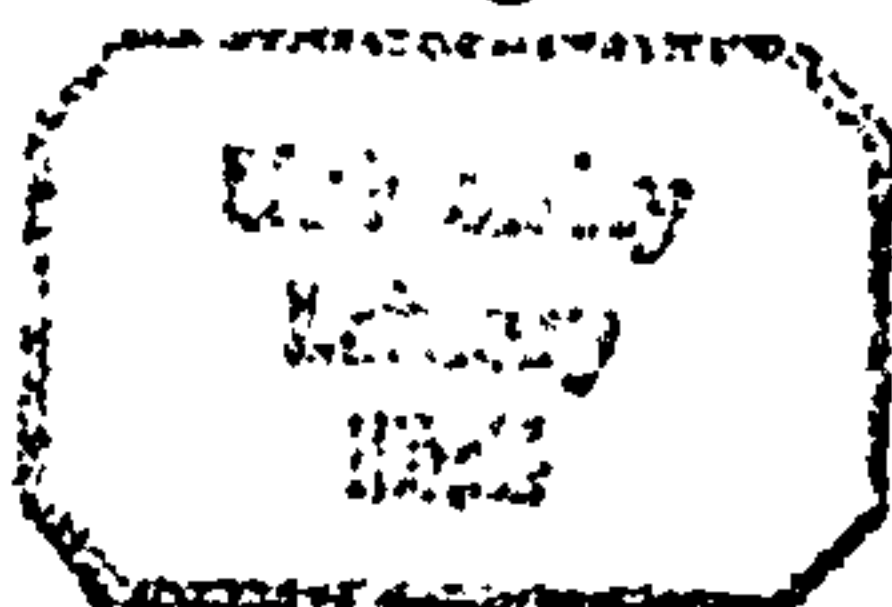
compared to other ideas by the sympathetic imagination. This is how we appreciate and eventually understand the state of mind of others. It is then possible to form moral decisions - for example, to decide if someone's actions are justified by their circumstances; thus we excuse and sympathise with Godfrey Cass once we understand his upbringing and inheritance.

This leads to Smith's moral theory. In order to interact successfully, humans require observation skills and an understanding of what is observed. Sympathetic imagination facilitates this awareness as it imagines and imitates, or mirrors in the mind, the observed situation of the other. This process creates the 'other' as a mirror and leads to the realisation that one is also being observed and assessed, which leads to the need for self-assessment in order to pre-empt judgement by others. Society, Smith argues, exists for us to measure ourselves by, which results in the development of the conscience - another mental power derived from the work of sympathy - which becomes the imagined ideal spectator, or other, to measure ourselves by. This reasoned conscience is Smith's main contribution to moral theory as it, along with public opinion, becomes the means of arbitrating on how we can pursue our own interests without hurting those of others. Smith believed that ultimately the conscience allowed us to step outside ourselves and judge ourselves as we would others. The power of the sympathetic response was so awe-inspiring for Smith, that he declared the feeling of sympathy to be a constant pleasure. His argument is that the passion that sympathises with the observed experience may be pleasurable or painful depending on what is observed, but the emotion which arises from realising the perfect coincidence of these passions is always agreeable. It is the 'pleasure of understanding' (Van Holthoon, 45). Smith saw sympathy becoming empathy and moulding the moral judgements. Such sympathy he considered natural, but he also recognised the effects on it of habit and

custom, for it could easily be enhanced or erased. This consideration echoes in Eliot's work, for where a strong family or community life are lacking, then the prerequisites for sympathy - others, observation, experience, understanding and imagination - are not available. Hence the urge to encourage sympathy via her fiction.

Smith argued that only the imagination could allow us to feel the pains - and pleasures - of others by suggesting what it would feel like to ourselves. Although our sympathy may not accord completely with the feelings of others, 'we sympathise with what we know; and the wider our knowledge and experience, the wider is the scope of our sympathy' (Bate 1945, 151). Smith considered it better to extend sympathy to the community, or even all humanity, rather than limit it to family (Smith, 37). This forges links with Eliot's discussion of both family bonds and the reception and tolerance of outsiders, for our strongest sympathies are aroused by what we most admire, or are familiar with. Thus family and community, even objects, landscapes, rhythms and places become points of sympathetic identification, as Eliot demonstrates repeatedly in her work. The influence of Smith's work was enormous, particularly on the Romantics. His premise that the imagination recreates in our own minds and emotions what another is feeling 'darted down like a shaft of sunlight in a century that, since Hobbes, had been darkened with moral systems based on self-interest' (Engell, 151).

The works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) mark a significant change in this journey through the possibilities for Eliot's philosophical influence. As a young woman she had devoured Rousseau's oeuvre. When Emerson visited Rosehill in 1848, she credited Rousseau's *Confessions* for her habit of deep reflection (*GEL*, I, 271, n6), while William Hale White reported her 1853 opinion that to be able to read Rousseau was worth all the trouble of learning French (Haight 1968, 65, n 4). Ashton suggests



that Rousseau's work helped to save Eliot from despair in 1848 (1996, 67). Rousseau rejects the Christian idea of original sin, and when George Eliot's own belief was first in retreat the idea of 'natural man' as *tabula rasa* was wonderfully antithetical to Calvinist notions. While Eliot did not accept Rousseau's ideas unconditionally and acknowledged that his 'views of life, religion, and government' might well be 'miserably erroneous' she nevertheless declared that his 'genius has sent that electric thrill through my intellectual and moral frame' which inspired and suggested new combinations of thought (*GEL* I, 277).

Rousseau proposed an ideal society based on total voluntary subjection to the common will of the community. Like Comte, Rousseau never doubts that there is a single common good and that the needs and desires of all citizens could coincide if uncorrupted. The general will could produce a supportive society, but instead the perversion of the social contract creates despotism, inequality (MacIntyre 1998, 185), and the education, social rules, conventions and false duty that had destroyed man's innate capacity for sympathy, as described in his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality* (1755). Western civilisation had become limited, distorted and controlled and needed different perspectives free from these false values. Kant said that he had learned from Rousseau to recognise the sharp difference between mores and morality (Tice and Slavens, 110), a distinction that George Eliot constantly draws in her novels. It was a passionate demand for freedom from corruption and artificiality that drove Rousseau and attracted Eliot.

Rousseau saw man as an original, innocent nature that has been distorted, and he believed that all men – not just the élite - must become self-governing moral agents. On realising the immorality of society, an individual is justified in withdrawing and

forging their own moral pathway. Any blanket adherence to imposed laws and duties is slavery, while adherence to the law that one prescribes for oneself is freedom. To achieve such a state, both reason *and* feeling are needed. Many lack the knowledge, understanding, feeling and imagination to be sympathetic, as do many of Eliot's characters - these are to be understood and treated with tolerance. Eliot was already familiar with this argument from Spinoza's work, but her reading of Rousseau accelerated her shift towards feeling (Dodd 1990, 105), although she also analysed reason alongside this mutual, balanced exploration of emotion - particularly women's emotions. Rousseau's work sanctioned and encouraged the consideration of head and heart that is mirrored in Eliot's work, but even in her earliest letters it is obvious that Eliot already had the powers of observation, imagination and sympathy to analyse reason and emotion. That Rousseau also praised the ideas and insight of the less 'constructed' and sophisticated members of society, such as children, artisans, and peasants, has obvious links with Wordsworth's poetry, Comte's doctrines, and Eliot's concern with 'ordinary people'.

Rousseau's radical moral divergence from his predecessors was in dissolving the opposition inherent in self-interest and benevolence. His argument is that natural man merely aims to achieve a type of life where needs are satisfied and he can live in relationship with others. Self-interest is present as the dominant force essential for self-preservation, but it also provides 'an awareness of a reciprocal relationship of the self to others' (MacIntyre 1998, 186), and thus the possibility of a more complex morality. Such a reciprocal relationship suggests the 'self-in-other' that was to become central to Eliot's own doctrine. In his ideas on the reformation of society by the accession of the 'general will' Rousseau includes a concern for individuals and society as bound together in relationship, arguing that any person is a point of interconnection within a

web of social relationships. This knowledge of self-in-relation promotes sympathy, and his account of sympathy influenced the Romantics and compares to the idea of ‘negative capability’.

Via her novels, Eliot examines damaging social and political institutions, particularly family and social conventions, education, and a patriarchy which oppresses and represses women – although Rousseau was not alert to the oppression of women. Redinger suggests that what Eliot valued in creative literature was ‘a delineation of human passion with which she could empathise’ (1975, 153), and that Rousseau provided this for Eliot’s writing, in addition to awakening her to new perceptions of man and nature and thought and feeling. Eliot was partly seduced by Rousseau’s utopia and encouraged to turn to Voltaire and Saint-Simon, which led eventually to Comte (Dodd, 107); however, her initial admiration was not eroded, and in 1876 she and Lewes made a pilgrimage to Les Charmettes in order to visit Rousseau’s rooms, while their evenings were spent in reading his works aloud to each other (*GEL* VI, 265, n3).

George Eliot read and debated on Kant (1724-1804), and her 1855 essay ‘The Future of German Philosophy’ suggests a comprehensive understanding of his works (Eliot 1992, 133-37). When discussing Sara Hennell’s *Christianity and Infidelity*, Eliot calls on the authority of Kant to convince Sara of her errors (*GEL* II, 268). Eliot’s reading, reviewing, and references to Kant have been charted by Anthony McCobb (1982) who suggests she imbibed much during the early *Westminster* years, and was not introduced to Kant’s works by Lewes. Thus, while Eliot never wrote extensively on Kant, the wealth of her knowledge is indisputable.

The concepts of sympathy and benevolence were basic to moral theory until Kant attacked them and attempted to reinstate reason. His main influences were the rationalists, but also Hume's empiricism, while Rousseau had inspired his respect for human nature. Central to Kant's theory of mind is a fusion of rationalism and empiricism. Kant insisted that the mind was not a *tabula rasa*, but a union of learned experiences acquired via the senses, and certain *a priori* intuitions and concepts.³ *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) explains his theory, where 'pure reason' is that which is known by means other than experience. Kant suggests that human sensibility and understanding are innate intuitions and concepts of the mind, and that they influence the way that we perceive and deal with experience. Thus what we perceive empirically may be influenced by our innate nature, rather than by constructed aspects of the mind as in Hume's work. Kant was not saying that our knowledge derived partly from our sense input and partly from *a priori* intuitions, but that knowledge derives from the *interaction* of these two. Lewes explains how oxygen and hydrogen are not two separate causes of water, but that the only cause of water is the union of the two (Lewes 1902, 546). Concepts of the mind were identified which, when applied to sensory input, made sense of it. Time and space are two such modes of perception which order the way we discern things.

Kant believed that this theory of knowledge demonstrated that morality cannot be based on anything we experience, such as pain or pleasure. He accepted the idea of a basic human moral consciousness, but asked what exactly defined morality. In the search for unchanging *a priori* aspects of human nature Kant concluded that anything morally good was done out of duty. Anything done from enjoyment, self-interest, altruism, or any inclination, is not duty and is not decisively good (MacIntyre 1998,

³ A returned confidence in the *a priori* stemmed from Newton's work, which discussed phenomena that cannot be accounted for empirically.

192-3). Kant was searching for the unchanging that is always universally moral and which will explain where duty lies. The answer was universalisability: ‘The maxim, or subjective principle, of virtuous action can only be that “I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law*”’ (Craig 1998, 190, quoting Kant). Such a view can be more colloquially expressed as, ‘Is it feasible for everyone to act in the way that I wish to act?’ This is Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’ which suggests that certain actions are right or wrong *per se*. A categorical imperative is not a source of moral principles but a test of the ones we already have; where it would not be feasible for *everyone* to act in a certain way, then an individual should not act. No exceptions are permitted for universalisability determines our duty to self and others completely.

Kant’s ethical theory means great freedom for those capable of a self-governing morality, for we impose our moral requirements on ourselves and do not need external authorities such as Church or State. We also choose all obligations, beyond the categorical imperatives, and these override all other demands (Schneewind 1992, 309). We are not committed to benevolence unless it is a chosen obligation, for selfless caring or philanthropy often result in servility, inequality or paternalism (Schneewind, 311). Such moral autonomy demands freedom and equality for all within the social and political system, which includes freedom of speech, religion and movement. However, we are not completely free, for conscience and the law of causality restrain, but we are reasoning beings and have a part in how the world exists. Otherwise, Kant gives little guidance concerning duty. Perfect duties tell us what not to do: not to kill, lie, break promises, or commit suicide. However, the personal morality of reason that he describes sanctions any way of life that is compatible with not contravening these perfect duties, and thus sympathy is not a duty. For imperfect duties to oneself, Kant

suggests improving our talents, while imperfect duty to others could include being benevolent. From a morality based on Divine Will, to a presumption of self-interest, to a climate where sympathy, even altruism, are desirable if not innate, Kant suddenly provides an ethics based on the autonomy of reason, acknowledging the importance of benevolence, but not that actions should be driven by it.

Theorists of moral behaviour such as Gilligan object to Kant's theories on the grounds that there is no real moral relativism, no allowance for individual cases; further, Kantian ethics is rejected for only expecting minimal duties (Koehn 1998, 6, n16); finally, *a priori* 'rationality and autonomy provide the necessary base for Kant's morality, thus anyone not capable of this, such as women and idiots are excluded from the moral sphere' (Hekman 1995, 2); for Kant believes that women are unreasoning and subject to indiscriminate benevolence. Eliot's campaign for tolerance, understanding and sympathy, and her accounts of the psychological determinants of her characters as a defence of their behaviour suggest a defence of moral relativism. It is also apparent that Kant's preoccupation with reason ignores the profound emotions involved in close family ties, which are central to Eliot's novels. The novels also suggest that she would agree with feminist theorists in preferring reason balanced with feeling - she considered his insistence on the *a priori* an error (Eliot 1992, 135). However, Kant's ideas on duty, and not being governed by external agencies are important. I consider that the greater autonomy Eliot wished for all would include the opportunity to choose obligations, although certain ties of caring and sympathy would be more important than Kant allows.

The Romantics had initially considered themselves Kant's heirs, but under the influence of Rousseau's work they came to emphasise sensibility and imagination

(Gaarder, 287). In his 'A Defence of Poetry' Shelley argues, like Eliot in her 'Progress of the Intellect' review, that our moral and social sciences have lagged behind the natural sciences; we have knowledge, but do not know how to use it to be happy. In his references to sympathy and the imagination Shelley is strongly influenced by the work of Smith and Hume. He argues that poetry is a moral force because sympathy and love are the basis of moral life, but they need to be awakened by the imagination, via, for example, art or poetry (Shelley 1954, 276; 282-3). This belief is essentially the same as Eliot's in her Riehl essay. The intuitive working of the imagination allows sympathetic identification with others, places and things (Bate 1945, 144-5); the imagination thus permits a way of looking that allows sympathy to achieve empathy by actually entering into an object. Such sympathetic intuition was important to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats. While the Romantic influence was important to Eliot, she is as likely to have acquired her input from philosophy itself, she always values reason, and her Riehl essay suggests a wariness of selfish instincts fostered by Romanticism.

Like Kant, most male philosophers considered women to lack reason and to be overly benevolent. Originally this view dated from women being associated with nature and animals, but was to develop along different lines with the Enlightenment. The growing interest in sexual difference in the eighteenth century arose out of the Enlightenment and Revolutionary fervour for equality (Benjamin 1991, 137). As equality looked to improve the standing of women, the opposite desire of some to deny equality to women led to the ongoing "equality within difference" philosophy (Badinter 1995, 7). Among other moves, as science developed and biology was born (Shuttleworth 1984, 3, n 4&5), anatomy was employed to ensure woman's destiny so that her reproductive role condemned her to inequality - before, male and female bodies had been considered equal but opposite (Poovey 1988, 6; Badinter, 8). The full

appreciation of biological and anatomical difference by the early 1800s led to theories of radical sexual dimorphism which were to evolve variously with Comte, Spencer and Darwin into ideas of a 'complementarity' (Badinter, 7) which further oppressed and repressed women. Complementarity argued for women's restriction to feminine roles just as they were beginning to move into masculine ones, and added extra restrictions to those already established by the 'separate spheres' argument. This distinction between the public and private spheres of men and women, and the complementarity increasingly dictated by science, both developed as if compensating women, who eventually became characterised by a maternal love which was soon extended to a universal caring that labelled her as the guardian of morality (Poovey 1988, 7-8). It was from the equal but different philosophy that Comtean images of maternal woman developed, as well as Patmore's and Ruskin's sentimentalised notions of woman's nature.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) may have influenced Eliot's notions of sympathy and duty, particularly later in life. If she had not read Schopenhauer's work before 1852, she was introduced to it then, along with many British journal readers (McCobb 1985, 343), via John Oxenford's article in the *Westminster* (1853). Eliot was impressed, recommending the essay to Sara Hennell and George Combe, for it proved the catalyst for Schopenhauer's growing reputation in Britain (*GEL* II, 95, n 5; VIII, 55, n1). Oxenford laments Schopenhauer's neglect, praises his forcefulness and lucidity, yet deplores his doctrine, describing it as 'the most disheartening, the most repulsive, the most opposed to the aspirations of the present world' that exists (1853, 394). Both Lewes and Eliot read much Schopenhauer, and Eliot read *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Idea*) (1818) in 1872-3 while she was writing

Daniel Deronda (McCobb 1983, 323) in which there is a Schopenhauerian air of world-weariness throughout.

Schopenhauer's main doctrine is that individual existence is illusory and human life is futile. We are organisms whose brains and physiology enable us to perform functions, but the innermost core of the human being is the will, and our mental processes are subservient to this blind will to life, which

drives us on through an ever-ramifying set of desires and goals, but we reach no ultimate point or final satisfaction. To have desires unsatisfied is to suffer, to have needs is to be vulnerable to deprivation, and – the final irony – to be without needs usually brings only a state of empty boredom waiting to be filled by a further cycle of desires (Craig, 550).

Schopenhauer's major work, *The World as Will and Idea*, is an application of his ideas to moral philosophy. He examines questions of free will and responsibility and makes a case for determinism, distinguishing between the freedom to act, which one has when there are no impediments to doing what one wills, and the freedom to will. Many of Eliot's characters are not even free to act, yet her exploration repeatedly shows that they are less free to will. Schopenhauer thinks that acts of will are the outcome of character (which he considers to be unchanging) and our motives represent states of affairs in the world. If character and motives remain the same, then the actions and outcomes would always be the same. Yet still we feel responsible. It is this effect of the will which must be transcended for us to be free (Craig, 552). Eliot explores situations where motives, and therefore outcomes change, but unlike Schopenhauer she believes character can

change, as with Adam Bede's growth from reason and knowledge alone, to sympathy and intuition. Schopenhauer considers reason to be overvalued, even impotent, and that Kant in elevating the reason undervalued the feelings, especially sympathy.

Compassion or sympathy is 'the only true moral impulse for Schopenhauer' (McCobb 1983), giving value to human existence and providing some release from the anguish caused by the will. However, it is a rare virtue as humans are mainly egoistic. Sympathetic humans see others as themselves: 'Everything and everywhere is "I once more"' (Craig 552). Compassion overcomes the effect of the will because its wide vision reduces the distinctness of individuality, and dismisses it. Sympathy is present in each human, with the best apprehending the world and their place in it; they and their actions are good. Everyone has a combination of sympathy, egoism and malice, but egoism is the greater part of the character for most natures because the will to live causes us to strive to survive and advance. The 'inability to transcend individuality and so treat others as equals debars such egoists from feeling sympathy or true compassion "which is the basis of justice and morality"' (McCobb, 324, quoting Schopenhauer).

The ethically sublime was a test for sympathy by Schopenhauer, for surrendering to the sublime signals a bliss in the loss of individuality and oneness with the world, "'a vanishing nothing in the face of stupendous forces"' (McCobb, 543, quoting Schopenhauer), a faculty exhibited by Eliot's most exalted characters, particularly Esther and Dorothea who both find solace in the 'largeness of the world' (*M* 776) while Gwendolen is frightened. Most people would fear this loss, but the sympathetic person is "'not oppressed but exalted" by the world's immensity, for his cognition and intellect lead him to identify his 'I' with the 'Thou' of the species' (543), a stance that suggests similarities to Feuerbach, Spencer and Spinoza. The will may be

transcended through virtue and reason, which help to shift the self from centre and relax the individual will to power. But this is limited as ‘virtue cannot be transmitted by practical reasoning, nor can it arise from abstract, conceptual knowledge, but rather from intuition’ (McCobb, 325). “‘Virtue must spring from the intuitive knowledge that recognises in another’s individuality the same inner nature as one’s own’” (McCobb, 325, quoting Schopenhauer). Again there is a strong echo of Spinoza, but unlike Schopenhauer he believed that man could change via a growth to perfect knowledge to achieve happiness and develop intuition. Schopenhauer suggests this possibility, but also claims that character cannot change: ‘Redemption...from such enslavement to individual self-assertion and to the illusory pleasures of life is...provided by the faculties of Reason, cognition and intellect generally; in relation to the will’ (McCobb, 325).

While the elevation of sympathy in Schopenhauer’s work is paralleled by Eliot and may have been admired by her, she never shares his pessimism or extreme disillusion. It would have been a negation of her own lifetime striving. Schopenhauer’s attitude to women would also have been disputed: “‘The weakness of their reasoning faculty also explains why women show more sympathy for the unfortunate than men’” (Brabeck 1993, 33). Women are commended for their love and motherliness, but are patronised as an ‘intermediate stage between the child and the man’ and considered quite ugly and ‘*unaesthetic*’ (Hollingdale 1970, 81, 85). Schopenhauer also agrees with most other male philosophers by considering that women’s lack of reason results in ‘*a lack of a sense of justice*’ (83). Schopenhauer’s views are so misogynist that the whole range of Eliot’s women characters in *Daniel Deronda* could be her riposte.

Finally, in following this quest for sympathy and duty, 'We have to remind ourselves of a fact that should never be forgotten in any consideration of the subsequent influences on her development: namely, that the basic inspiration which gave direction to all her works and led her to make of her novels a plea for human solidarity was Christianity' (Svaglic 1954, 146). Many critics assume that Eliot's ethics derive largely from her period of Evangelical Christianity (see Granlund 1994, 2-3), neglecting all other influences and the fact that Eliot did not herself receive much sympathy from Christianity. Christian theology does provide developing theories of sympathy and duty, but while I owe a debt to Granlund – for she observes that few who investigate Eliot's influences delve further back than the Romantic input (4) and thus sparked my philosophical journey – Eliot is *not* concerned with the individual rather than the species and does not regard selflessness as the route to self-fulfilment (5).

While Eliot's faith made her aware of the doctrine of universal love and benevolence, I believe that she experienced mainly self-sacrifice in her early life, and received little help or support in return. The evangelical Anglicanism she was involved with was a sectarian and militant branch, with a system to be imposed on society. Despite a philanthropic creed, the horror of the French Revolution had led to rigidity and an anti-intellectual stance within the doctrine. Many 'Evangelicals consistently taught that sympathy subverts morality by breaking down the distinction between good and evil' (Carlisle, 28), and the religion that Eliot embraced with Maria Lewis, and in an extreme form with the Franklin Sisters, opposed most of her pleasure and enjoyment. As Knoepfmacher observes, her early religion concentrated on what drove man to 'selfish action' and 'human depravity' and the cure was seen as 'self-denial' (1965, 31); only later was she to build upon her knowledge of philosophy and humanism to proselytise for sympathy. Meanwhile, her eschewing of fiction, dancing and anything

other than *sacred* music furthered the distance between herself and her more worldly brother Isaac (see *GEL* I, 5,8,10) *and* made it difficult to make friends. Her beliefs involved a rejection of intellectual stimulation and demanded emotional acceptance only - something she was later to criticise in her Mackay review – just when she was being tempted by everything from Scott's novels to her own ambition. These contradictions, added to her extensive reading of philosophical and religious debate, and her realisation that there was so much dissent, were to lead to crises of intellect, conscience and faith.

Eliot's habit of profound introspection, dating from her Bible reading and intense critical analysis of her belief (Hesse 1995, 25), adds to the psychological insights of the novels, although her study of philosophy added extra dimensions. Fortunately her wide study provided part of the necessary support to secede from traditional faith, for while she admitted that it was 'no small sacrifice to part with the assurance' of immortality, she did not believe 'the conviction that immortality is man's destiny indispensable to the production of elevated and heroic virtue and the sublimest resignation' (*GEL* I, 136). It must be remembered that at first she felt her loss of faith to be a release for her soul from 'the wretched giant's bed of dogmas', which though painful, allowed for the turn to the '*truth of feeling*' (*GEL* I, 162); while in 1874 she still insisted that

the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man: and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of goodness entirely human (*GEL* VI, 98).

Chapter Two – Eliot's Debate with her Intellectual Peers

In 1840 George Eliot was steeped in the works of Carlyle, Mill and Coleridge, who had themselves questioned all certainties and now sought a head/heart unity (*GEL* I, 1839-42; Dodd 1990, 75-78, 81): 'a new theory of perception in which reason and intuition, intellect and emotions are merged' (Dodd 15). Several modern critics have examined George Eliot's work in the light of the head/heart struggle (Schneewind, 1965), but none has considered it in relation to the nature and function of sympathy and duty in the novels, or to how all may be related to personality and gender construction. The theorists I consider here have all been considered in relation to their influence on Eliot's novels; however, my project is distinct. Firstly, these theorists have rarely been examined for their stance on sympathy and duty in relation to conceptions of gender; secondly, few works on Eliot consider such a range of influences together, without a partisan approach. I am less concerned with arguing for the specific influence of any one theorist, than with observing what all may have contributed to Eliot's evolving concept of sympathy and duty and how their work influenced gender relations. Finally, I am looking for theories for fiction. Eliot does not accept the work of others uncritically, she challenges, deconstructs and recreates, thus generating different ways of seeing, different voices and different possibilities for viewing human psychology and gender. As she said herself: 'the writers who have most profoundly influenced me ... are not in the least oracles to me ... [yet] inspiration has so quickened my faculties ... that I have been ready to make new combinations' (*GEL* I, 277).

Eliot met the Brays and Hennells, neighbours who were to accelerate her cultural and philosophical metamorphosis, in 1841. Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* (1841) outlines his optimistic necessitarianist philosophy that human minds are controlled by inviolable laws in the same way that the laws of science control events. Following Priestley, he believes that it is man's duty to find out the natural laws and to then work with them to improve life for all, thus demonstrating that man is not 'innately damned, but only miseducated' (Postlethwaite 1984, 121). Bray employs Benthamism, Priestley's Unitarian psychology and phrenology in support of his ideas. He hoped to 'revise the Benthamite psychology of action' (Dodd 1990, 85) which argues that freedom was not a matter of having free will, but involved the range of *action* open to an individual (85). From phrenology, Bray argued that our change and growth were governed by the characteristics which nature had bestowed, but which nevertheless could be further developed with education and stimulation 'Although man's behaviour is determined by his "mental constitution" and his "circumstances", he can reasonably educate himself to understand, and thus potentially to alter, his behaviour' (Postlethwaite 1984, 127, quoting Bray). Reason could influence instinct, which for Bray was more than just self-interest, since it encompassed fellow-feeling for family and friends (Bray 1841, 169). Since reason and emotion acting together could achieve the maximum self-determination, Bray believed that social reform along utilitarian lines would achieve the conditions to foster hope and the greatest possible development of reason and fellow feeling. From this, the maximum 'action' would be possible for each individual, and freedom could be exercised within the scope allowed by determinism. In encouraging these 'laws' and advocating fair and equal chances for all, Bray is raising morality to the rank of a science.

It was partly George Eliot's growing conviction of the need for social reform that attracted her to Bray's ideas. Postlethwaite also suggests that it is their consideration of intellect and emotion as mutually important that best unites Eliot and Bray (124). In addition, the idea of secular and scientific laws controlling our psychological, moral, and intellectual development was a continuation of the search for truth encountered in her reading from Coleridge to Carlyle. Whether rekindled by Spinoza, Comte or Darwin, her belief in inviolable laws is perhaps one of the most stable points in her work. Bray's belief in family and kin empathy, partly derived from Saint-Simonianism, was also important, but also involved his phrenological interest in benevolence, a quality which he was concerned to encourage. Thus an early influence presents a vision of the importance of duty and sympathy to Eliot.

Charles Hennell's *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1838) was another major influence. Bray had cast doubt on the divine origin of Christianity, distressing his wife Cara, Hennell's sister. The search for evidence to confound Bray led to the publication of the *Inquiry*, which aimed to investigate the Gospels and separate truth from fiction, history from miracle. Hennell had assumed that the 'principal miraculous facts supposed to lie at the foundation of Christianity would be found to be impregnable' (Hennell 1838, iii). However, he was forced to concede that the true accounts of the life of Jesus and the spread of Christianity could be accounted for by 'the operation of human motives and feelings, acted upon by the peculiar circumstances of the age and country whence the religion originated' (Hennell 1838, iv). Hennell stresses that the excellence of the moral system and the beneficial influence of the Scriptures were still important, and suggest a way between sectarianism and loss of faith. The effect on Eliot was crucial, being one of many steps that led to her humanism, and prompting her to search for a new morality. She had already been

moving in this direction, so that the Brays and Hennells are not responsible for her change of *mind*. Yet they do influence a change of *heart*, for their friendship and reasoned fellow-feeling eased her state as an intellectual and emotional outsider. They also gave her the courage to follow her head and heart with regard to her own beliefs: “‘I say it now, and I say it once for all, that I am influenced in my own conduct at the present time by far higher considerations, and by a nobler idea of duty, than I ever was while I held the Evangelical beliefs’” (Svaglic, 150, quoting Cross).

In early 1844, Eliot began work on a two-year translation of Friederich Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined)* (1835-6). Undoubtedly the project provided her with a sense of worth, which was otherwise lacking in her life. It was also a means of proving that she was capable of such a difficult and sustained task, and an outlet for ambition; she also sympathised with Strauss’s struggle to bear witness to new beliefs and duties in the face of ignorance, intolerance and convention. An historical analysis of the Gospels, Strauss’s work not only rejects their supernatural content but also disputes a great deal of their historical veracity; he even questioned the existence of the creative, personal, transcendental God. Strauss adopts a ‘mythological interpretation’ (Craig 1998, 164) believing that the Gospel writers added the miracles forecast in the Old Testament to the myth-history of Christ the man. The text was not as accessible as Hennell’s, or as comforting, and Eliot struggled: ‘I am never pained when I think Strauss right, but in many cases I think him wrong’ (*GEL* I, 203). Strauss was unsparing. He did not compensate by outlining the worthy human history of Christ’s life as teacher, or the benefits of Christian ethics. Her conviction emerged that Strauss forgot the essence of Christianity. In particular, he forgot people; he failed to analyse the human dimension of belief, the importance of stories, and the mere idea of wish-fulfilment. Eliot also disliked his Hegelian approach and particularly the notion of

the “transcendental spirit of collective mind” (Hesse, 36-7, quoting Strauss) with Christ as ‘God-man’ - filled with divine spirit but also a man of genius. Nevertheless, the work contributed to Eliot’s moral and intellectual evolution, and held particular relevance for her future writing career, introducing her to hermeneutics as a tool for fiction, particularly for the psychology of swaying the reader. Meanwhile, the spiritual pain she felt caused her conviction that sympathy was necessary - from the theorist - for the readers who were being deprived of their belief. Finally, Strauss’s Hegelian influences led to his notion of the *mythus*, which ‘indicated the way in which subjective perception transformed objective facts into literature’ (Dodd, 92). Both Hennell and Strauss found the Gospels beautiful, poetic and literary, suggesting that ‘it was *qua* literature that the gospels were able to inspire men to moral excellence’ (Dodd, 93). Possibly such a suggestion accelerated Eliot’s desire to write fiction, her aim being to emulate the Gospels in encouraging benevolence and duty.

Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza (1632-1677), the foremost exponent of seventeenth-century rationalism, may seem an unusual mentor for the young George Eliot, yet she first read his work in January 1843 (Haight I, xxiii). While Spinoza’s influence on Eliot was early, lacked an immediate form of expression, and occurred when we have few letters and no journal comments with which to assess its impact, it was nevertheless profound and should not be neglected. Spinoza was concerned with man’s knowledge and the understanding of those inviolable laws that were already so important to Eliot. Further, it was once more ‘a thinker who tried to reconcile opposing modes of enquiry who attracted Marian Evans’s attention’ (Dodd 1990, 95). By February 1843 Eliot had begun a translation, probably of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). She recommenced it in 1849 when her father was dying, while in January 1844 she translated portions of *Ethica* (1677) (Karl 1995, 74). Later, while

with Lewes in Weimar in 1854, and on their return to England, she produced a complete translation of the *Ethica*. The reasons why Spinoza's ideas would attract Eliot are legion. He defended freedom of thought, advocated a form of democracy and, above all, his was 'the moral system of the philosopher whose chief distinction was to embrace determinism while persuasively showing the possibility of - and indeed the necessity for - moral sympathy and social duty' (Ashton 1983, 15).

In May 1843, Lewes published an essay on Spinoza in the *Westminster Review*, eventually to become a chapter in his *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1902 [1845-6]). Thus Eliot and Lewes were simultaneously yet independently enthusiastic about Spinoza: 'mental sympathy existed before their lives converged' (Dodd, 1990, 142). George Eliot possibly experienced a sympathetic and imaginative identification with Spinoza, for Lewes's florid account of Spinoza as pilloried and ostracised by his own religion and community for expressing his beliefs mirrored her own experience when father and family rejected her. Tolerance and acceptance of outsiders were major aspects of Spinoza's doctrine, and of its appeal for Eliot. Overall she believed that this complex and easily misread work required a full analysis and estimate of the author's life and oeuvre. Having been greatly moved by his work, she wished to render him accurate and accessible, with his ethical message clear.

Spinoza lived, and was educated in the Jewish faith, in Amsterdam. He was excommunicated, possibly for the publication of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and refusing all bribes to recant he withdrew into austerity and scholarly labour. Denounced as an atheist, Spinoza was a forerunner of German higher criticism. His philosophical works lay neglected until Lessing, Goethe, Coleridge, and German Biblical critics such as Strauss began his rehabilitation. Spinoza wished to make

everything intelligent to human reason so all could achieve the joy and freedom that results from knowledge. In this alone he is an exponent of both benevolence and duty. He is often classed as a Cartesian, despite his opposition to most of Descartes' principles; Descartes was seeking to improve science and thereby increase human control over nature, while Spinoza wished to explain truth and knowledge and thereby improve human beings by explaining that they *are* Nature. His philosophy of knowledge and blessedness for all was intoxicating for Eliot, who craved knowledge, a new moral system, and a path to God and joy which lay outside conventional Christian worship.

There is a dearth of work concerning both Spinoza's ethical theory and its influence on Eliot's work. In *George Eliot and Spinoza*, Dorothy Atkins notes that George Eliot is lauded as a 'philosopher-novelist' (1978, 1) yet Spinoza's influence on her is virtually ignored by other critics. The philosopher Garrett also emphasises that recent research on Spinoza has not done justice to his actual ethics, concentrating instead on his metaphysics, epistemology, and social and political theory (1996, 269). Ethics and the search for the "right way of living" were Spinoza's major concerns (268, quoting Spinoza), and the *Ethics* is his most studied work. However, it is the *geometrical method* which is researched, and the work is rarely studied as a statement of ethics to live by. The logical truth of mathematics was there to guarantee the truth of his philosophy for Spinoza, proving its basic axioms. Yet, despite the Euclidian geometry, the underlying ethics are still powerful. His earlier and unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*) (1677) outlines the ethical argument overshadowed by the geometrical method in the *Ethics*.

Spinoza's ethical system is based on the central tenet that all reality is explained by a single philosophical system, and that if humans can reach full understanding of this system they can acquire complete happiness. His doctrine is for humans to understand every possible aspect of life, cease being afraid once fears and evils are explained, and then take control of their lives and achieve joy, looking beyond earthly life. Spinoza's two main aims were to *explain*, and to explain *rationally and truthfully*, and explanation involved demonstrating that everything is determined by the inviolable laws of nature. He wants humans to achieve a way of life that 'transcends merely transitory desires and which has as its natural consequences autonomous control over the passions and participation in an eternal blessedness' (Garrett, 268).⁴ The first step towards transcendence is understanding man's oneness with God, and that all creation, humans, nature, everything, are one entity, which is Substance, 'the fundamental essence of the universe' (Atkins 1978, 8). Spinoza's God is not omnipotent like the theistic God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, who renders humans passive, afraid, and unable to be active and strive for understanding, knowledge and freedom. Spinoza's God is himself creation and must follow the inviolable laws that govern creation / Substance. Therefore, the *Ethics* begins with an account of the most fundamental 'being' God or Substance (Spinoza 1981, 9-12). For humans, the outcome of this full explanation and awareness should be growth and change, an appreciation of our temporal and finite earthly existence, and a rejoicing in our eternal existence as part of Substance. Man's main false knowledge is the arrogant belief that we are the centre of the universe and can control nature. This misunderstanding causes all evil, greed, anger, and jealousy, because humans conduct relations on the premise that they are of primary importance.

⁴ Ermarth describes how Spinoza devalued 'purpose' (1985(b), 34) and that ideally activity should be without purpose. Here, purpose corresponds to transitory material desires and pursuits, and desire for recognition, which are to be transcended. Ermarth's 'purpose' should not be confused with self-preservation, which Spinoza thought to be our main duty,

Intellect and adequate knowledge are required before humans can attain the freedom and happiness that Spinoza advocates. He describes three different types of knowledge: the first is derived solely from sensory perceptions, experience, opinions, hearsay and 'imagination' (Atkins, 59) or 'fancy'. Because it is confused and disorganised, this is 'inadequate' knowledge, especially if relied upon without reason. Belief in the supernatural and other irrational ideas stem from inadequate knowledge. However, training the imagination and empowering the intellect (Garrett, 307) are part of Spinoza's project, so that 'adequate' knowledge may result. The second type of knowledge is pure reason, which is 'adequate' and based on ordered simple ideas, common notions, and deductions of cause from effect. The third type of knowledge, which is also adequate, is reasoned intuition. The last two types of knowledge can give us accurate information and understanding; they can be relied on and are to be encouraged. However, the third type of knowledge is not attached to the intellect but is intuited, or directly felt: it is the '*scientia intuitiva*, which simultaneously grasped isolated specifics and the totality of existence' (Dodd, 95). This knowledge corresponds to the combination of knowledge, reason, and emotions – particularly sympathetic imagination – as described by Hume and Smith, and is, I contend, illustrated by Eliot in her Riehl essay as that flash of sympathetic intuition which the artist may produce in people (Eliot 1992, 263). Such prominence and importance given to the feelings coupled with reason as part of knowledge is fundamental to George Eliot's increasing concern with a head/heart balance.

Although we derive all our initial knowledge from sensory perception, observation and imagination, this knowledge is inadequate, and the outcome may be what Spinoza calls bondage. Humans who stay tied to their observable life, not wishing to know of the wider universe and their own true selves, are in bondage. They think

they are free because they are aware of their own actions, but they know nothing of the real causes (Atkins, 52). A lack of intellect, or of access to knowledge results in, or maintains bondage, as does the inability to modify the effects of bondage. Humans have a limited amount of power and are often beset by outside elements which are stronger than they. Bondage may even be chosen, or the finite objects to which emotions are attached may exercise control: such bondage ranges from being controlled by another human, as Gwendolen is by Grandcourt, or being worked upon by valued possessions, such as Mrs Tulliver with her china. Such outside forces may induce passions that can impede the perception of what is good, or our ability to follow good (Garrett, 274). For Spinoza, a major part of obtaining knowledge includes how to control the passions.

When adequate forms of knowledge are available, chosen, and practised, then understanding and growth to freedom is possible. If a state of complete knowledge is obtained, Spinoza terms it “blessedness” - to him it is the ultimate freedom ‘existing solely from the necessity of one’s own nature, uncompelled by any external nature’ (Atkins, 10). Living happily and well, in knowledge and in freedom is the greatest reward. Although punishment exists, it is not conceived by Spinoza as a form of damnation but the inability to live in harmony with the rest of existence (Atkins, 46). Eliot believed that “learning is only so far valuable as it serves to enlarge and enlighten the bounds of conscience” (*GEL* I, 107, n3), while her novels ‘dramatize this human urge to achieve liberating understanding’ (Atkins, 10). However, she is as concerned with the characters that do not reason adequately or cannot live in harmony, and her novels follow their fates while exhorting us to sympathy, as with Hetty or Bulstrode.

It is often assumed that in a determined world moral responsibility is not possible. However, Spinoza believes that if we have gained freedom, from adequate

knowledge, then it is possible to achieve moral responsibility and self-determination. Even arriving at this stage presupposes some ability to change our lives within the limits available, choosing between different destinies by using adequate knowledge. Admittedly, Spinoza suggests that much of what controls our choices, and even the growth to understanding and adequate knowledge that allows choice, is determined. However, he is not a fatalist: 'His view is not that the same events would occur whether we acted or not, but rather that the causal determination of what we do contributes to the causal determination of what events will occur' (Garrett, 298), which I believe to largely explain the idea of the 'inviolable law of consequences'. Neither does Spinoza believe that free will is about choosing to be good or evil; he thinks that we can sometimes freely do good, but evil is never freely chosen since we are always played upon by external causes. Thus reason would counsel love for those who do good, but lack of hate or indignation for those who do bad.

Another foundation of Spinoza's ethics is that all humans – all modes or things – possess *conatus*, or a drive to preserve themselves. They constantly strive to persevere in their existence; and their striving is their essence. *Conatus* is the major virtue, with suicide something that Spinoza could not approve of or understand, for self-preservation is a duty, and therefore self-sacrifice can never be right - or be a duty. I believe this to be a tenet Eliot acquired from Spinoza. It may explain why she was less self-sacrificing after her obligation to her father ended, and why, as I will illustrate, self-sacrifice in the novels is never condoned. The primary emotions – pleasure, pain and desire - are central to self-preservation. The passions are the more primitive drives which promote passivity and pain, while emotions are active ideas derived from adequate thought; they promote perfection. When we blame our actions on external factors it rather is our inability to control both our passions and the effect of external stimuli on them that are

at fault. Some critics have misread Spinoza as rejecting emotions, but they are lauded as promoting activity and encouraging *conatus* - only the passions are opposed because they lead to bondage. Increased adequate knowledge allows us to understand and oppose the passions, and once understood a passion ceases to have any hold over us. One of the moral dilemmas that Eliot explores in the novels occurs when emotions, which originate with our basic drive for self-preservation and are necessary and good, are not controlled and contained by reason and become passions instead, as with Mr Tulliver or Caterina Sarti.

The experience of an emotion is very different from one person to another and may arouse different degrees of pleasure or pain in different humans. Such a consideration of the relative nature of our emotions is quite remarkable and offers another example of Spinoza being ahead of his time. George Eliot's understanding of this relativism is crucial in the representation of opposing emotions in her novels. At the end of Part III of the *Ethics* Spinoza lists emotions and passions whose infinite varieties exercise him in a study of human psychology (1989, 127-39). He distinguishes between them and isolates positive emotions such as joy, from negative passions such as sadness. Vice is defined as any depression of the vitality of life, while virtue is anything that promotes activity, pleasure and freedom. Power and virtue are the same for Spinoza, in that man can take control of his life (Atkins 1978, 78).

The awareness Spinoza demonstrates of the complexity of the emotions and feelings is stunning, and not matched by philosophers or psychologists until Freud. His cure for man's inadequate knowledge, for his excusing and rationalising his behaviour and for blaming external causes, is to make man more self-conscious of his *conatus*, and understand the self, accept the inner causes, understand the laws of nature, and own

responsibility. Spinoza suggests that as we gradually know more we will understand that many of the inexplicable causes of things are the laws of nature that we do not yet know. For example, there will be causal explanations for all illness, disease and disturbing behaviour (Hampshire, 121). There is also a general encouragement towards compassion and benevolence – as understanding - which is a part of duty, for duty is self-preservation and these aspects of duty assist life. Spinoza concludes that positive emotions form the source of true human activity towards self-preservation and can be summed up as '*fortitudo*' or 'strength of character'. *Fortitudo* is divided into two aspects: '*tenacity (animositas)*, which is the "desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being"; and *nobility* or (*generositas*), which is "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship"' (Garrett, 272, quoting the *Ethics*). Thus, there is an in-built benevolence to Spinoza's creed, even if it receives little attention, and he is constantly exhorting benevolence.

The emotions play a major part in affecting the degree of activity involved in self-preservation. Joy (*laetitia*) increases the capacity for activity, or perfection, while sadness (*tristitia*) decreases perfection (or the capacity for being active) (Garrett 271-2). Part of what achieves joy is striving for knowledge and freedom. George Eliot's heroines, such as Dorothea and Romola, achieve self-preservation, freedom, and are active in the lives they choose, so in Spinoza's sense they achieve happiness. Spinoza thought some emotions, such as sympathy, have active and passive aspects. If nothing active can come of the sympathy, then such a passive emotion is not useful, and may even cause harm. For example, if an atrocity is observed but no aid can be offered, the sympathetic response experienced by the observer is useless according to Spinoza. The sympathy is only useful if accompanied by action, such as averting suffering. I believe

Eliot's opinion differs, for Spinoza ignores the beneficial effect of sympathy on the observer. Even if they cannot assist, they have experienced, understood and developed, and may be able to help another time. Eliot's readers are in the same position, and she would have them learn from her fictions and take their sympathy out into the world, for sympathy is never useless.

Spinoza suggests that beings strive to overcome external threats and make internal modifications that assist in self-preservation. Maintaining external and internal equilibrium becomes a central tenet for survival with Spencer, Darwin and biologists. Living in communities is a survival tactic, for 'community virtue' is achieved through the good actions and intelligence of individuals (Atkins 83); also it hopefully promotes tolerance for we all have a self to preserve. The importance of community in Eliot's work has prompted Bernard Paris to judge that for her the "objective basis of morality is other men" and cites Feuerbach as the main influence. However, Spinoza had written long before that "the most important thing to man is other men" (Atkins, 12, quoting Paris and Spinoza).

Consideration of community life leads to the question of altruism versus self-interest. To explain altruism Spinoza has to explain how *conatus* or self-preservation can be directed to the well-being of others. He does not deny the phenomenon of altruism, but is committed to the view that 'the causal *origins* of these phenomena always lie in a single psychological force, which is the individual's own endeavour for his or her own self-preservation' (Garrett, 303). While still praising *generositas*, Spinoza sees the intellect and the imagination (fancy) as two separate faculties. If the well-being of another is the focus of our actions of self-preservation, then for Spinoza such altruism only acts through inadequate knowledge and results in passivity. It is

quite different when the intellect, via the reason, directs our *conatus* to help others: it does so through recognition that the true advantage of individuals largely coincides. The reason perceives that the same things will be beneficial to all, and Spinoza views such altruism with favour. Acting from virtue, acting under the guidance of reason, and acting in our own self-interest are equivalent in Spinoza's doctrine, and thus feelings can contribute and be as important as reason - it is how they are judged and valued, using adequate or inadequate knowledge, that is the important distinction for Spinoza. In situations where complete coincidence of interests does not occur, do we help ourselves or aid others at a sacrifice to ourselves? Spinoza argues that self-sacrifice cannot be good, nor is it the result of reason or virtue, and must result from being overcome by passion. He identifies certain types of 'self-sacrifice' at a pre-rational level, such as parenting and sexual sacrifice for the species, and helping another of the species when overcome by sympathy, even to the detriment of oneself. For the first, more recent philosophers suggest species preservation to be the explanation. For the second, Spinoza suggests that the observer is affected in the same way as the one suffering; a suggestion approximating to the ideas of sympathy put forward by Hume and Smith.

Finally, Spinoza rarely writes in terms of obligation. There are also few negatives, little talk of sin, or wrong. His ethical propositions do not exhort or entreat but evaluate using such positive terms as virtue, joy, happiness, and freedom (Garrett, 285-6). There is little 'duty' other than striving for self-preservation, which automatically involves freedom and joy, and even *generositas* or benevolence. He acknowledged the need for some system of law and order, but held that punishments by elected powers need be done out of duty, not hate or indignation. Unfortunately, as with many of the theorists whom Eliot studied, Spinoza is yet another who does not

consider women equal. He rarely discusses women, but in the *Tractatus Politicus* he argues that democracy cannot be extended to them, as they are not independent but subject to their menfolk, like children (Spinoza 1958, 443). He further insists that this inferior position is due to nature and not mere convention, for history has demonstrated that women are always inferior to men, weak in intellectual and moral power, and therefore not eligible to rule in any way (443-4). As an embodiment of how wrong he could be, Eliot repeatedly presents women characters who are vastly superior to their male counterparts, such as Mary Garth.

Aspects of Spinoza's influence reverberate through Eliot's life and work synchronously with her many other influences. In discussing Basil Willey's choice of Feuerbach as Eliot's major mentor, Dorothy Atkins argues strongly that Spinoza fits the model far better (12). While I am interested in Spinoza's general influence, and how he contributes to the make-up of Eliot's creed, I do agree that he has been neglected and plays a vital role in Eliot's conception of sympathy.

It is not known when Eliot first read Comte whose influence upon her may parallel that of Spinoza during the 1840s. A possible awareness dates from 1843 with her first reading of J.S. Mill's *System of Logic* (1843) (Postlethwaite 1984, 27& 43), which she reread and referred to throughout her life (*GEL* I, 310, 363; IV, 233; V, 163). She may also have read articles on Comte during this period; David Brewster's review for the *Edinburgh Review* appeared in July 1838, and Lewes wrote several pieces (Lewes 1843 (a); (b); 1844), crediting Comte with the most influential work of the century. In the wake of the secular and scientific attack on Christianity, many intellectuals required an alternative belief system, and the humanism of Positivism had a major impact, substituting a science of society for religious belief. By 1851 Eliot's

review of Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect* refers knowingly to Positive ideology (Eliot 1992, 18), and by 1852, she may have read the *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (*Course in Positive Philosophy*) (1830-42) and the *Catéchisme Positive*, although her journal mentions reading the *Catéchisme* in October 1859 (GEJ 1998, 81). As she was soon Lewes's companion, she would know of other works as they appeared. A letter to Charles Bray in 1853 is assumed to suggest a Comtean influence: 'I begin to feel for other people's wants and sorrows a little more than I used to do. Heaven help us! said the old religions - the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another' (GEL II, 82).

Positivism was a synthesis of many disparate ideas. In an age of fragmentation Comte appeared to reconcile opposites – a by now standard attraction for Eliot. His work is considered to fall into two distinct phases, the earlier *Course in Positive Philosophy*, and the *Système de Politique Positive* (*System of Positive Polity*) (1875-7 [1851-4]). However, recent commentators admit a considerable overlap (Hesse 1995, 64), which is quite apparent when the works are read closely. The aim of the *Cours* is to demonstrate the existence and continued discovery of the 'invariable natural Laws' (Comte 1853 [1830-42], 5) which control all branches of knowledge and life. The solution to man's problems lay not with politics and institutions, but with a disciplining of human opinions, behaviour and customs in line with these laws. Comte rejected a Rousseauan society based around autonomous individuals, freedom and equality, emphasising instead an organicism of society and family, with relations defined by an ethics informed by reason and feelings. A system by which these ethics could be reinforced was required.

John Stuart Mill, an early admirer of Comte, rewrote much of his *System of Logic* because of the influence of early Positivism. Although he and Comte were to disagree, Mill retained great sympathy for Positivism and influenced Lewes whose articles on Positivism and *The Biographical History of Philosophy* (1902), present Positive philosophy as a doctrine of unity. However, by 1852 Lewes was disenchanted, although he later claimed that the influence of one who was very dear to him - assumed to be George Eliot - had persuaded him to view Comte's work as a Utopia rather than a doctrine. By 1852, George Eliot had also persuaded Herbert Spencer to read Comte. Spencer reveals how much 'Positivism was discussed in the Chapman circle and how Marian Evans and Lewes were in the vanguard of the movement' (Dodd 1990, 177).

The primary tenet of the *Cours* is that all humans and all states of knowledge have evolved through theological, metaphysical and positivist stages of thought. This law of three phases was the basis of all intellectual, emotional and social development as a progressive dialectical history, and one repeated in any individual's and nation's development. The second major tenet is the hierarchical structure of knowledge. Although every branch of knowledge must pass through the three stages in its growth and evolution, the progression is not simultaneous; thus some disciplines are more 'Positive' than others - as are some individuals, nations or races. Lewes gives the example of meteorology as still at the supernatural or metaphysical stage, with prayers still offered for rain (1902, 649). Mathematics was the most fundamental discipline and all remaining sciences were arranged according to how they build on the preceding sciences; and how well their 'laws' are known and understood. Comte's classification of sociology as a science was revolutionary; thus extending scientific method to 'the fields of History, Politics and Morals' (Willey 1949, 188). Ultimately all social questions are scientific questions and can be explained and measured by these natural

laws. Psychology is absent from Comte's list; he considered it a branch of both biology and sociology and one that, concerned solely with reason and intellect, did not take sufficient account of the feelings. Mill considered this neglect of psychology a major error (1865, 62-3).

In 1842, Lewes lamented that of the *Cours* 'the chapters relating to science alone have been read; while those more important chapters on social science, to which the former are but preparatory, have been neglected' (1902, 643), which is still true of much critical discussion. A close examination of Book V of Volume I, which deals with biology, and the whole of Volume II which is devoted to sociology – or 'social physics' - reveals much relating to sympathy and duty. Evolution is central to both the biological and sociological histories, but, unlike Darwin Comte saw evolutionary development as progressive, citing Lamarck - with reservations - to support his ideas of gradual improvement through the inheritance of advantageous features. He did not accept Lamarck's theory of *constant* mutability, or the notion that species were still impermanent and had given rise to each other, but he did agree that slow gradual changes could occur (1853 [1830-42], I, 413-15). Comte therefore suggested that social perfection was possible for humanity, a condition that could be hastened once social laws were understood. Acquired characteristics could be passed on, particularly if they were reinforced in life. Eliot's hopes for a slow, gradual meliorism, rather than revolution, found support in this doctrine.

Comte was further influenced by Franz Joseph Gall (1759-1828) who claimed to explain man's nature and morality, suggesting laws that resided in the feelings. Comte 'believed the intellect alone could not discover truth, for " the heart is necessary to prompt the chief inspirations of the intellect, and it must also be put to service to

understand the results of intellectual enquiry” (Dodd, 115, quoting Comte). Gall identified the cortex as the organ of intelligence, noting that its larger size and surface area permitted greater intelligence. More important was his assumption of hereditary intellectual and moral characteristics, which complemented Lamarck’s work. Gall believed he had located various ‘organs’ for moral and intellectual ‘faculties’ at individual sites in the brain, and identified the ‘organs’ of benevolence, adhesiveness, amateness, and so on. From this work, phrenology originated, for Gall considered that the faculties of the brain influenced the shape of the bone, so that a reading of the contours of the skull disclosed how well developed the faculties were. Gall believed that men were innately mediocre, but that his science could be used to educate, improve, and even perfect them, by developing or repressing certain faculties as required. Influenced by Lamarck, he developed the possibility that improvements encouraged during life could be transmitted to the next generation. Reformers such as Comte adopted his theory, for it presents man as malleable and capable of improving. Comte therefore modified his stance and some of the ‘inviolable laws’ became malleable.

Gall’s work gave rise to various gender-specific statements that Positivism amplified, for example that men are more intellectual because their brains are larger, while women have better developed regions of benevolence, adhesiveness and philoprogenitiveness (love of children) than man and so are suited for nurturing and dealing with social relationships (Russett 1989, 19). From this Comte talks constantly of women’s altruism, maintaining that they are innately sympathetic. ‘Altruisme’ in French derives from the Italian ‘altrui’ meaning ‘of or to another’ or ‘what is another’s’, and Comte’s 1830 coining meant ‘devotion to the welfare of others, regard for the other as a principle of action; opposed to egoism or selfishness’ (*OED*, 1989). Interestingly, Comte’s altruism stresses a lack of egotism, but does not initially demand the welfare of

others to the detriment of the self. Yet it was the growing demand for selflessness that Mill feared in Comte's later work. Comte suggests that the affections had developed within the family to control all base instincts and that altruism was originally extended to all, as social interaction developed. The development of 'individuality' disrupted this process; thus for Comte, modern civilisation was atrophying altruism and encouraging egoism.

The Positivist stage would arrive once the underlying laws governing social physics were fully known (1853 [1830-42], II, 74), but in advance of this Comte formulated his first 'certainties' concerning the major attributes of human nature. Firstly, the essential ideas of our human nature are fixed by the preponderance of the affective over the intellectual faculties (II, 128). Secondly, as man is not strong he must use his intellect, but sociality has to be developed for all to help each other, as most are not sufficiently intellectual. Further, the personal affects are stronger than the social ones, so that it is the latter which need to be developed if the common welfare is to flourish. More intellectual and sympathetic development will assist the social instinct to grow (II, 131-3) with the groundwork for both being done in the family, where we are educated to be social. Comte considered any attempts to disrupt the family as signals of social decay (II, 132). These certainties Comte still considered immutable. With hindsight, Mill described this system as spiritual despotism, with Comte dictating not directing behaviour. Comte considered equality to be revolutionary and dangerous (Mill 1865, 78), and allowed no personal liberty whatsoever, seeing it as inconsistent with the laws of society; in fact, obeying the laws *was* liberty (Comte 1858 [1852], 228-9). This moral policing implied unanimity over moral issues, yet this was not possible until the Positive stage had been fully realised (Mill 1865, 96).

The *Système de Politique Positive* appeared during 1851-54. In his first phase of work, Comte had argued that study and understanding could lead to morality, but since then he had met and fallen in love with Clotilde de Vaux. When she died in 1845 Comte nearly lost the will to live. His experience fixed love, duty and altruism as paramount for humanity's progress, with woman now elevated to Madonna status. The *Système* was written to expound a newly developed doctrine - the Religion of Humanity – which further elevated feeling over reason and held love and service to others to be the major guiding principles: 'In the treatment of social questions Positive science will be found utterly to discard those proud illusions of the supremacy of reason, to which it had been liable during its preliminary stages' (Comte 1848, 10). In order to ensure the continued progress of altruism, Comte's *Système* dictated how all life was to be lived. A philosophic and scientific priesthood consisting of the greatest minds in all the subjects comprised the intellectual guides. Their powers were to be upheld by the moral influence of women. Now that intellect was once more subordinate to the heart, women could assume their place on the pedestal of emotion, and exercise their moral force over all. The capitalists were to be the material providence, while the majority of the people would do the work and be the general, or active, providence. Rank and function were only to be preserved until spiritual power was established and then merit would dictate rank - although little in the works suggests how such changes would ever take place. Every possible aspect of life was dictated to re-assert the reign of the emotions, as 'Positivism now turns to the task of devising "a system which regulates the whole course of our private and public existence, by bringing Feeling, Reason and Activity into permanent harmony"' (Willey 1949,196, quoting Comte).

The political climate in 1851 led Comte to think that the time had come to 'direct the thoughts of women and working man to the question of a thorough

renovation of the social order' (Comte, 1858 [1852], 13-4) - hence *The Catéchisme Positive* (1858 [1852]) was produced as a guide for women. It is in the form of a dialogue between a woman and a Positivist priest, for since knowing Clotilde, Comte has become 'a twofold organ' for Humanity (Comte, 1858 [1852], 19) - that is, he can now speak for women. Comte's inflexibility is most evident in his attitude to women and working men. If George Eliot's novels concentrate on the extension of sympathy, the groups she considers most are women and 'ordinary people'. While these are not Riehl's or Comte's peasants or working classes, many are nevertheless a developed English equivalent, such as Eppie, Adam, Hetty, Bob Jakin, and Felix. Comte's seeming concern for women and 'ordinary people' may well have acted as another catalyst for Eliot's initial interrogation of Positivism, yet his remarks in the *Cours* were ominous. Of working men he declares that Positivist Philosophy is best suited to 'ameliorate the condition of this majority, without destroying its classification, and disturbing the general economy...[thus] regulating the final classification of modern society'. Instead, reorganisation and peace are to be achieved by 'habitually interposing a common moral authority between the working classes and the leaders of society' (Comte 1853 [1830-42], II, 48). This proposal does not suggest a radical change in the 'progress' of the lower classes. In the *Catéchisme* Comte says that if the worker is in need of some new ideas, he 'must go again to the priesthood for them. He must not interrupt his industrial action by a vain attempt at scientific cultivation' (Comte 1858 [1852], 275). I do not think Adam Bede or Felix Holt would observe this. Yet, paradoxically, Comte believed that working men needed 'Emancipation from obsolete beliefs and a sufficient amount of mental culture' (1880 [1848], 136). Most disturbing, when discussing 'humanity', Comte declares that people must be 'whole' and capable of assimilation, hence we can ignore those "born upon the earth merely to manure it" for 'these mere digesting machines are no real part of Humanity' (1858 [1852], 74 -5,

quoting Aristotle). It is not clear to whom he was referring here, but it would be interesting to know Eliot's response as she read her *Catéchisme*.

Meanwhile, Comte considered that white, middle and upper-class woman had reached the pedestal of development. The task of Positivism was to prevent regression, while encouraging working-class women to aspire to the situation of their superior sisters: 'the law of social progression ... consists in disengaging women more and more from all employment which is foreign to their domestic functions' (1853 [1830-42], II, 292). Initially Comte describes woman as wholly subordinate. In the *Cours* he insists that the conditions of marriage will be 'the natural subordination of the woman, which has reappeared under all forms of marriage', and worse, that 'biological analysis presents the female sex ... as constitutionally in a state of perpetual infancy', while 'social science will show their equality is incompatible with their separate special and permanent functions' (II, 135). This is Comte again predicting the outcome of social laws as yet unknown.

In the *Catéchisme* Comte has become less dismissive of women, no doubt mellowed by the influence of Clotilde. Despite Eliot's admiration for Comte's eagerness to promote sympathy, it is unlikely that she accepted his attitudes to women. Many of her women characters rebel against imposed gender roles, despite the resulting pain and disruption. Alcharisi pursues her vocation, Romola, an intellectual, becomes head of her household, Mary Garth writes books, Dorothea remarries, and Hetty and Rosamund are sad lapses from innate womanhood, variously killing their babies. One wonders what Mrs Poyser would have to say to Comte, since while she may not work outside the home, she contributes much of its income. Women *are* educated under Comte's system – some critics seem to think they are excluded - and have the same

education as men, but schooling stops at twenty-one (Comte, 1858 [1852], 293) and they do not experience the vocational stage 'for their vocation is always known and happily is uniform' (132). Finally, women are denied individual 'incorporation'; that is, they are not praised after their death in the manner that ensures their eternal memory on Earth (137) except via their husband's incorporation. Consequently, perhaps Eliot was being arch - if not subversive - when she contributed 'O may I join the Choir Invisible / Of those immortal dead who live again' to the London Positivist group.

In the *General View* (1848), Comte does suggest a means of combining women's domestic role with a wider social influence by suggesting 'Positive salons', which are remarkably similar to the ones Eliot praises in her 'Woman in France' essay (1992, 37-68). Here is 'the mode in which women can with propriety participate in public life...women in their salons will promote active and friendly intercourse between all three classes...Gently and without effort a moral control will thus be established' (1880 [1848], 171). Comte's argument for restricting women was because their 'most important duty ... is to form and perfect man' (137), by which the family and society would grow to greater sympathy. Comte even recommends idealising and worshipping women as 'guardian angels' (Wright 1982, 36). This is an impossible role to sustain, and one that compares to Feuerbach's deconstruction of why man has created a perfect being, God, to compensate for his lack of perfection. Overall, Comte's readers were misled. Because he talks of improving man and society, and of change and growth through his equal education system; and because women are relatively raised and praised, with sympathy and the caring virtues lauded, and altruism encouraged, Comte's doctrines appear radical yet benevolent. Yet women are to be exploited as a sympathy resource, while he regards many working people as plebeians beyond improvement. All are themes strongly countered in Eliot's novels.

In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill disputed Comte's contention that woman's nature was immutable and innate, and that they lived entirely for others and in their affections (Wright, 47-8). He further insists that an adequate psychology is required before the differences between the sexes can be understood (Millet 1972, 127). Certainly George Eliot exceeded the limited education that Comte allowed women, he being concerned only to educate the mothers of sons. In 1840, Eliot had read 'Woman's Mission' (Lewis, 1839), an originally anonymous abridged translation of *De l'éducation des mères de famille, ou de la civilisation du genre humain par les femmes* (1837), by Louis Aimé-Martin, a Saint-Simonian. The work recommends improved education for women if they are to be good mothers and wives. Eliot initially approved and was soon quoting and recommending the original (*GEL* I, 66, 70, 107). The 'Woman's Mission' cult of the mid-Victorian period had a powerful influence, and for many such as Eliot it, and Saint-Simonianism, led to Comte's work. This level of sentiment is one that Eliot skilfully subverts in several of her essays. She wanted more for women, and her journalistic voice of a man to men is a strategic ploy to win converts, as in 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' where s/he advocates women's education for its own sake, stating that 'some of the best things [Fuller] says are on the folly of absolute definitions of woman's nature and absolute demarcations of woman's mission.' (Eliot 1992, 183) - hardly a Comtean sentiment.

Comte does not really engage with the idea of man becoming altruistic. He considers men unable to extend care and sympathy beyond their immediate domestic bounds, although its encouragement is part of woman's role. Morals are simpler to women than social rules, because she has 'felt' them naturally rather than having to reason out her actions like a man (Comte 1858 [1852], 184). Within the family we are

first weaned from self-love to altruism by being able to love our parents, and love for siblings teaches us to extend this process; marriage is the second step beyond the love of self as 'conjugal love [is] an education for universal sympathy' (1880 [1848], 172,n), and having children the third. Comte accepted that man's sociability was innate but had been submerged as individualism developed and civilisation distanced family and female influence - hence it needed to be encouraged. However, he seems unconvinced that in 'the tendency to place social above personal feeling... [woman] is undoubtedly superior to man' (1880 [1848], 155). Further, he assumes that women are better ~~of~~ mothers when a child's mother has died and in most cases 'do better than the father himself' (1880 [1848], 179), while in the *Système* he declares that 'the paternal is the least pure of all the domestic feelings' (1875[1852], II, 159-60).

Comte's view that man's obligations are to humanity and not to God has immediate appeal to any non-believer searching for an ethical creed to replace God, although Mill thinks it goes too far in its suggestion that whatever is not a duty is a sin. Mill also objects to Comte's idea that the good of others should be the only reason on which we allow ourselves to act (1865, 138). In *On Liberty*, Mill referred to Comte's '*liberticide*', suggesting that altruism would be crushed if men's 'active faculties' were depressed by over-control (Wright 1986, 45-6), a situation frequently explored in Eliot's novels. Comte banned the word 'rights' substituting 'duty' since all security is now to be found in 'reciprocal obligations' (1880 [1848], 266). Comte even suggested that artificial insemination should replace sex so that the 'Utopia of the Virgin Mother' could flourish (Wright, 30). For Comte, happiness, altruism and duty coincide. Seemingly, Mill correctly perceived the full extent of selflessness demanded by Positivism, for under its requirements no-one lives for himself. Yet if working men are to observe 'the gratuitousness of labour' (Wright, 30) and work for sympathy and duty

as their reward and motive, and women are to be the moral conscience of the system yet cannot have their intellects improved – despite the whole basis of the system being that the faculties are malleable – then where is the altruism from the capitalists and philosophers? Comte is establishing a giving and receiving of sympathy which is divided along the same class and gender lines that Eliot parodies in her novels.

There is continuing debate as to how committed to Positivism George Eliot was, and to what extent it influenced her fiction. Wright charts the critical history of opinion on this, while claiming that Paris (1965) and Knoepfelmacher (1965) overestimate the influence of Feuerbach to the detriment of Comte (1981, 257-8). More recently, Hesse has insisted that Eliot's affinity to Comte is greater than is generally accepted (Hesse, 16).⁵ I am intrigued by this partisan defence of favourite theorists, although far more interested in the synthesis of possibilities, and any sources of interpretative fictions. The major attraction of Positivism for Eliot lies in its vision of a community of sympathetic people whose priority is benevolence. While the constant striving within Eliot's fiction to encourage such sympathy suggests approval, how closely does Comte's conception of altruism correspond to Eliot's ideas on sympathy?

Whether Comte's altruism was to be encouraged in all, for all, is debatable. He suggests that women should use their positive knowledge of the brain to further their work with the affections (Comte, 1858 [1852], 265), yet he considers them too intellectually inferior to achieve man's work. He does suggest that 'each sex should strengthen the moral qualities in which it is naturally deficient' (1880 [1848], 196) but the concentration is always on women helping men to become more sympathetic. Although woman is supposedly less intellectual and short of energy and thus needs

⁵ Hesse also insists that many critics do not read Comte's works closely or widely enough, particularly before forging connections with Eliot's work (134).

something to 'strengthen courage' (196), little is said about how she will be encouraged. Above all, will everyone be equally selfless? Given Comte's attitudes to women, the working classes, and equality it seems unlikely. Eliot repeatedly explores the dangers of one-sided altruism, and the outcomes are not beneficial. Conversely, in her novels sympathy is often the force that drives a character to rebel against the blind insistence on the type of tradition, dogma and duty that form the heart of Comte's system.

Eliot was attracted to Comte's cerebral theory - his belief that human faculties are malleable and that the constant improvement of mankind is therefore possible - because she hoped all would eventually extend their sympathy. She was also intrigued by his attitude to children. Comte lists 'maternal instinct' as egoism not altruism, as children are often regarded as possessions on which to exercise power or avarice, so that this relationship does not qualify as an altruistic relationship (Comte 1858 [1852], 261). Not only does Eliot explore situations where all maternal love is lacking she also portrays myriad relationships where children are merely their parents' possessions - for example Tulliver's casual dicing with Tom's future and the Cheverels' callous neglect and objectification of Caterina.

However, there were many aspects of Positivism to discourage Eliot, not least Comte's dogmatism and rigid system-building. Further, while Eliot was often scathing concerning women's company and intellect it is unlikely she would condone a doctrine forbidding herself and all her closest women friends from carrying out their work. The law of eternal widowhood (Comte, 1858 [1852], 33-4), which Eliot ignored in marrying John Cross, was another area of contention (*GEL VII*, 271-2) and Richard Congreve gave thanks that 'her adhesion to Positivism had not been more open and complete' (Wright 1964, 177). Finally, Comte's many scientific errors would not have retained

her respect. In 1853, Lewes had objected to Harriet Martineau's failure to correct many scientific mistakes in the *Cours*.

Finally, two other major factors influence all judgement of the effect of Positivism on Eliot, one relational, the other vocational, a pattern of influence which is to be repeated. First, references to Comte and his work are scarce in the letters until 1859, when Eliot and Lewes moved near to the Congreves in Wandsworth (Simon 1963, 207). Richard Congreve (1818-99), leader of the Positivist movement in London, was married to Maria Bury (d.1915), the daughter of Eliot's father's surgeon. Since girlhood Maria had admired George Eliot and having become re-acquainted they soon became very close. This relationship makes it so difficult to be objective about Eliot's Positivism. The letters between them are warm and caring; Maria was the first of those worshipping young women who were to flock around, yet she appeared after George Eliot's long period in the social wilderness, and I believe Eliot would have done anything to maintain this sweet friendship. The letters oscillate between declarations that Eliot misses her, or thanks for loving gifts (*GEL* IV, 482) as well as Comtean related pleasantries: that Lewes is to read the *Système*; that Eliot has been 'swimming in Comte'; that reading the *Politique* every day is anticipated with enthusiasm and has improved her life (*GEL* III, 101; IV, 116, 333).

Yet overall there is relatively little enthusiasm. Congreve's lectures are described as 'chilling' (*GEL* IV, 363), and with a possible ironic jibe at Comte, Eliot says of Congreve that he 'internally resents everything like a freedom, looking very benignant all the while' (*GEL* III, 70). She is described as being very impressed with the *Catéchisme* (Simon 1963, 208), but when Lewes recommends Sara Hennell to read it, it is only because Sara will find her own ideas already written (*GEL* III, 320). There

is little distinct praise recorded and generally only in the letters to Maria; she did admire Comte's account of the Middle Ages, defending him against Leslie Stephen's criticism, but with faint praise: 'I quite agree with you ... in regarding Positivism as one-sided; but Comte was a great thinker...and ought to be treated with reverence' (*GEL* III, 439). A final irony is the realisation that George Eliot had known Frederick Harrison for six years – he was introduced by the Congreves – but she does not appear to have entered into any close acquaintance with him until she sought advice on the legal aspects of *Felix Holt*. Harrison tried to call in his favours by asking for various supportive 'writings' influenced by Positivism, but Eliot never commits herself (*GEL* IV 284-289, 300-302) and argues that her art cannot be dictated to.

A second consideration is Comte's stance on imagination, of which he was wary, seeing it as only secondary faculty and not empirical (Comte 1858 [1852], 263). However, he did think imagination was important in the hands of the artist for conveying an understanding and sympathy of the new system, and that it was an area where women could excel while maintaining their domestic and social role. If Eliot agreed with the main tenets of Positivism - the importance of sympathy and sociality, progress and order, and a system of ethics that could further all these - then she may have employed certain aspects of Comte's teachings in creating her own ethics of fiction. Comte suggests that we arrive at a knowledge of the universal laws by 'direct observation, observation by experiment and observation by comparison' (Hesse, 121), All of which Eliot employs in her psychological fiction. Comte also appreciated the power of imagination in art to influence for the good. However Eliot is far removed from Comte's notion of art as 'an ideal representation of Fact', nor does she consider the proper role of imagination to be 'the idealisation of truth' (1880[1848], 208, 237). Instead, Eliot transforms Comte's idea of the artist using imagination to produce

propaganda for Positivism – for he calls for the artist to present “‘a vivid picture of the ameliorations *that the new system should bring about* in the condition of mankind”” (Hesse, 122, quoting Comte), creating instead a psychological exploration of sympathy and duty that questions and contradicts, forcing the reader to analyse and reach their own conclusions. She attempted ‘the formula *voir pour prévoir*, and would then leave her readers to perform the second part, *prévoir pour pourvoir*’ (Hesse, 122).

Overall, Eliot’s novels do not prioritise the selflessness that Comte desired. The sympathetic actions of Eliot’s characters have more in common with the moral development described by Carol Gilligan, with the most successful stage being a care that includes the self: Silas Marner is benevolent but not selfless when he takes in Eppie, for he knows she will complete him and return him to the happiness of family. Eliot is also far more concerned with a balance between head and heart. Comte became too pro-feeling, while Eliot ‘succeeded, better than J.S. Mill, in uniting...the two main streams of the nineteenth century mind’ (Willey 1949, 205). The final voices on the controversy are the Positivists and Eliot herself. In 1891, the ‘Positivist Society of North London’ discussed the Positivism in Eliot’s novels, concluding that the lesson to be gleaned from her work was the need to fulfil the moral obligations she had neglected in her life (Quoted in Wright, 178). Meanwhile, Eliot declared: “‘I cannot submit my intellect or my soul to the guidance of Comte”” (*GEL* I, xlvi). This would appear to be her clear preference, particularly when it is remembered that elsewhere she freely declared: ‘With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree’ (*GEL* II, 153).

Again, we do not know when Eliot first read Feuerbach’s work, although much comment by Eliot which is claimed by critics to be Comtean is as likely to reflect Feuerbach’s influence. For example, Basil Willey considers Eliot’s letter to Charles

Bray (*GEL* II, 82) to reflect Feuerbach's influence, not Comte's (1949, 230). If Eliot *was* familiar with the work of Comte before that of Feuerbach, then she moves from a Positivist doctrine urging her to be a sympathetic, nurturing woman and wife, permanently closeted at home to the liberating doctrine of Feuerbach encouraging her to be a sympathetic woman living a life at one with nature, believing in herself as an individual but also as a member of a species and community, producing work and celebrating her humanity, especially with regard to relationships. She moves from the commandment to care only for others, using her skills in order to improve men and her children, and eschewing sex and happiness in favour of Comtean duty; to an encouragement to live a benevolent but full life, pursuing happiness and enjoying her sexuality. Overall, the developing pattern of Eliot's life mirrors Feuerbach's injunctions.

After her experience with Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*, Eliot had vowed never to translate again. However, by June 1853 she was committed to a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's (1804-72) *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841) (*The Essence of Christianity*) following John Chapman's advertisement of the project in the *Leader*, as part of his quarterly series (*GEL* II, 90, n1). Despite agreement, in December 1853 she was fighting fiercely with Chapman, arguing that the promised translation should go ahead: 'I am very anxious to fulfil my engagements both to you and to the public ... I don't think you are sufficiently alive to the ignominy of advertising things ... which never appear' (*GEL* II, 130). Money was not the issue, but her name and reputation were. This work would be the first to bear her own name and she wished it to go ahead, for she was moving to a position where building her reputation and earning her own living by such works was paramount.

It is possible that Eliot had read Feuerbach quite early in her intellectual career. A letter to Cara Bray in June 1844 has the following request: ‘My love to Sara, and tell her I do not wish to distress her conscience with the purchase of an atheistic book, but I feel sure there is “*Bauer’s Wesen des Christenthums*” (*sic*) published in Berlin’. Haight concludes that Eliot was mistaken and means Feuerbach (*GEL* I, 177, n9). The only other early mention of Feuerbach occurs retrospectively in a letter of March 1854, when Eliot, stung by some reported criticism of Robert Noel’s, declares that she is ‘rather surprized that Mr. Noel should “speak slightly” of Feuerbach. She brushes off his comments by adding: ‘Au reste, Mr. Noel is not a reading man and, I know, has no clear idea of the contents of Feuerbach’s works’ (*GEL* II, 144). She was not to be distracted from her work, or her convictions, and her sense of belief in both was growing stronger.

The translation had multiple ramifications for Eliot. It was a branching out into a new career; it was deciding to use her name and extend her repertoire and reputation; and it was daring to be more radical than even the *Westminster*. Feuerbach’s work was more disruptive than is generally realised. Engels wrote: ““One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general. We all became at once Feuerbachians’ (McSweeney 1991, 32, quoting Engels). Feuerbach, a Bavarian philosopher and humanist theologian, was initially influenced by Hegel, and he himself influenced Marx and Engels. His writings were critical of the current Christian theology, his most important work being *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, which saw him labelled ‘atheist’. He rejected Hegelianism, moving to a naturalist, empiricist, and materialist stance; and in dismissing metaphysics he may have weaned Eliot away from Pantheism. In particular, his celebration of Nature, often ignored, appears to elide with the more ‘organic’ aspects of the moral philosophers,

Spinoza's work, developmental science, and Natural History. For all of Comte's concentration on science and the laws of nature, his writing does not communicate with the natural world as Feuerbach's does.

Feuerbach's main thesis is that man created God in his own image, as the imagined perfect representation of all that man most loved, revered and aspired to. Feuerbach considered that the true essence of Christianity – or indeed religion in general – was a psychological and anthropological representation of what man wanted and needed - a Being or God of understanding, morality and love. However, his damning critique was that theology, or the institution of religion, had taken over from man's needs and wants, so that existing religion was a false essence where God had taken on an existence independent of man. Worship of the Christian God now inculcated a belief in miracle, revelation, supernatural sacraments and an altogether undesirable religious materialism. For Feuerbach, God was an illusion from which man was divorced, while also being alienated from reality, nature, and his sexuality. Karl Marx sums up Feuerbach's stance: “The criticism of religion ends in the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, it ends, that is, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, forsaken, contemptible being forced into servitude” (Kamenka 1970, 16, quoting Marx).

While this may seem a radical stance for Eliot to champion, Feuerbach was a complete democrat, believing that the government of the day would not survive once the people knew they were being duped in the name of preserving reactionary systems (Kamenka, 115) – an honest, naïve approach similar to Felix Holt's. With a belief in slow, gradual progress, he hoped that his work, in revealing the illusion of religion, would empower man and that the need for religion would disappear, with the result that

‘human feelings of helplessness and dependence could be overcome, comparatively simply, by a democratic political order and further scientific progress’ (Kamenka, 68). While utopian, Feuerbach honoured his convictions, building on the work of others and overshadowing the Higher Critics, extending where they had stopped short. Thus Feuerbach saw Strauss as timid in not acting on his revolutionary findings, and not sufficiently concerned with people to pursue the implications of his work. Feuerbach’s work was briefly courted but quickly superseded by revolutionary Marxism. This association may explain why reference to Feuerbach disappears from Eliot’s later writings, although she may have been impressed because he refused the revolutionary route of Marx, opting for an emancipatory and educative stance (Craig 1998, 637).

Of Sara’s response to Feuerbach, Eliot says: ‘Your impression of the book exactly corresponds to its effect in Germany. It is considered *the* book of the age there’ (*GEL* II, 137). This endorsement reflects Eliot’s enthusiasm. It was thirteen years since its appearance when the work had lost its cachet, but its importance to Eliot cannot be overestimated. She was following a trajectory of radical development mapped out by the works she chose to analyse and adopt. This is not a mere following of trends in Eliot’s case, works are explored according to an evolving personal creed. As Feuerbach’s man had created his own God, so Eliot recreated herself and her future vocation through a symbiotic relationship with the works studied. In fact, her personal development mirrors Feuerbach’s statement about his own philosophical experience: ‘God was my first thought; reason my second; Man my third and last thought’ (Kamenka 1970, 35).

While Marxism had diluted and deflected the impact of *The Essence of Christianity*, its reputation had been primary. The work is not atheistic, neither is Eliot,

and despite some residual Hegelian bias, the idea of Man as God was opposed to all 'metaphysical systems of thought' (Knoepfmacher 1965, 52). As a preface to debunking the supernatural, alienated aspects of religion, Feuerbach wished man to understand that the relation between philosophy and false religion is comparable to that between 'thought and fantasy', or between 'healthy and unhealthy states of mind' (Kamenka 1970, 37). Originally religion was merely man's imagination coming to his aid in times of need, fear or ignorance (39), and every God or spirit was a wish or an emotion of man's (43). In this sense, both religion and imagination are praised and considered healthy by Feuerbach, but theology has frozen man's lively imagination into rigid observance or enforced superstition. Man's original healthy religion was both cognitive, in that man would revere those images most relevant to further his interests, and emotional, in that religion helped man to combat his sense of dependence and helplessness (42). These deductions from his analysis of the history of man's religion led Feuerbach to develop idea of theology as anthropology, with metaphysics as psychology: 'God exists only as the object of man's thought, so that "to deny man is to deny religion."' But between them is a gap which only love can bridge' (*GEL* I, xlv, quoting Feuerbach). It was love as the bridge between all that interested Eliot. Haight argues that in this translation her radicalism reached its peak; I argue it is what she makes of it that is radical.

The impact of Feuerbach's work on Eliot was threefold, with all three aspects in direct contradiction to the implications of Positivism, despite the readiness with which many critics elide Comte and Feuerbach under the banner of 'Religion of Humanity'. Yet Feuerbach's influence is not more important, just different. As she notes in a letter of December 1880: 'with all systems ... "If you give them [the reading public] a whole they will straight away take it to pieces. Each seeks what is adapted to him"' (*GEL* VII,

344, quoting Goethe). Even by 1854, Eliot's own history of constant change and her knowledge of the history of philosophy had moved her beyond objective truth. Initially, the crucial aspect of Feuerbach's work is the insistence on the importance of the imagination, which not only pulls together so many threads from Eliot's philosophic inheritance, but also extrapolates into the two other strands of Eliot's personal and vocational future: the importance of sympathy for relationships, and for writing and creativity.

Feuerbach's main thesis, that man created God, is a celebration of man's imagination, and the influence of this revelation on Eliot is catalytic. She can re-develop the idea of the imagination coming to man's defence in times of helplessness, but this time in order to formulate a moral fabric in place of the rigid and limiting theology that religion had become. Feuerbach's account of the formulation of religions by man's imagination has been described as if 'religion is the first form of self-consciousness, being the child-like condition of humanity', an imagined religion as therapeutic, helping us 'recognise our natures and their personal limitations' (Coulson 1981, 93). This interpretation of religion compares remarkably well with Adam Smith's account of the role of the imagination in the formation of our conscience. It is religion as imagination, as the moral mirror which helps us to relate and compare, to make sense of our perception of self and other. Initially religion functioned as another means for us to measure ourselves by, in the way that the conscience and sympathy develops out of our relations with others, as a means of observing and judging ourselves: 'He [Feuerbach] compressed the "I" and "thou" relation of man to God into a synthetic One; he fused the first and second Persons of the Trinity into the "completed self-consciousness of the *alter-ego*"' (Knoepfmacher 1965, 530, quoting Feuerbach). Once theology takes over, man becomes divorced from conscience, sympathy and

imagination, and religion judges us where our own conscience once did. In imagining God as our early strength and defence, we put all our good into him and left the bad in man; now, in overthrowing theology while forming a new relation of God in man, the imagination can be used to re-imagine ourselves, and all others, as potentially the good that was previously only revered and acknowledged in God. Gillian Beer talks of Feuerbach ““negating limits”” so that imagination helps us to exceed/succeed ‘without any suggestion of transgression’ (Beer 1986, 76). Imagining a secular yet moral excess is Eliot’s achievement for both her personal doctrine, and for her fiction.

Feuerbach’s work provides ‘an ethic and a psychology applicable to men in their unheroic every day (or, as George Eliot often put it, “working day”) lives’ (Ashton 1994, 159). The centre point of this ethic and psychology is imagination, but also the goodness, sympathy and relationship that imagination thus makes possible; these constitute human nature, and have been lost in God for too long. They also constitute the second aspect of Feuerbach’s influence. As Ashton observes, Feuerbach’s work, and Spinoza’s, as mirrored in Eliot’s Riehl essay, is about being brought into sympathy with flawed, even stupid people, because – as their philosophies tell us – ‘we belong to the same species, we share our humanity with them’ (Ashton 1996, 157). This begins to define the specific meaning that sympathy had for Eliot, particularly as it is represented in her earlier works. The divine virtues of wisdom, justice, love, and the benevolence that is part of love, are represented by Feuerbach as being the best of man that man has attributed to God (1854 [1841], 18). Feuerbach, and Eliot in following his ethic, believes that these have to be reclaimed and practised by man. Feuerbach has been criticised as too naïve, ignoring all the evil that man has done (1854 [1841], xxviii). But these charges are unfair since Feuerbach is not suggesting that man is the perfection that he places in God, but that such perfection is the best that man can imagine for himself;

it is what he would aspire to. Elsewhere Feuerbach clearly acknowledges that there is evil; he suggests that a real atheist is one who does not value love, wisdom, reason, and justice, or law (1854 [1841], 21).

While revering reason and law, Feuerbach insists that love is the most important: 'the law holds man in bondage; love makes him free' (48). It becomes a major element of Eliot's novels that 'what faith, creed, opinion separates, love unites' (48). A mere moral judge who employs law, reason and justice cannot forgive and be sympathetic; to forgive, flesh and blood and love are required. Carol Gilligan argues that the justice ethic is only one voice because it lacks the wider judgement of relational, sympathetic love. As Eliot illustrates, Tom Tulliver cannot forgive Maggie's transgressions when he is being purely just, but when love returns to him in the light of Maggie's love, he becomes flesh and blood again and forgives her. 'Not abstract beings – no! only sensuous, living beings are merciful. Mercy is the *justice of sensuous life*' (49). Feuerbach argues that the Trinity demonstrates man's need for closeness to one another, because it reflects his dislike of a void and his need of community (Dodd 1990, 186). This belief has much in common with Hume's: man desires happiness and avoids suffering, yet is all the time coupled to sympathy, or the ability to imagine and understand and participate in others' sufferings. Man needs contact with others and is vulnerable to others' displeasure: 'love is moral and has a special position in morality because in it your happiness and that of another coincide' (Kamenka 1970, 134).

Feuerbach also sees the 'I' and 'Thou' relationship of man and God as man's imagination via Christianity 'teaching the perennial truth of human love and selflessness' (Knoepfmacher 1965, 53). The '*I-Thou*' becomes the epitome of relationality for Feuerbach and his followers, even extending to psychological therapy,

where it is 'repeated and elaborated' in the work of Rogers and Laing (Wartofsky 1977, 1). His thesis, like Comte's, is mainly concerned with sympathy and altruism, but aims to restore these values to man without the intermediary of God, whom religion has styled as the reason for sympathy. Comte would reinforce and enforce altruism through his social system, while Feuerbach argues that a duty of sympathy will return to man once the 'duty' of good deeds for God and self-interest in salvation has been replaced by the full realisation of man's universal humanity and suffering – which is what Tryan argues for when he criticises 'good deeds' in 'Janet's Repentance'. 'For though there is also a self-interested love among men, still the true human love, which is alone worthy of this name, is that which impels the sacrifice of self to another' (Feuerbach 1854 [1841], 53).

Yet, *pace* some critics, Feuerbach does not advocate an imposed self-sacrifice and always qualifies his statements on selflessness. 'Sympathy presupposes a like nature' (1854 [1841], 54), he asserts, which suggests that the bonds of kin, familiarity and love, as recognised by ethicists, are important in prompting altruism. Such sympathy for a loved or recognised one is never truly selfless, as love for the other always includes the self. Further, 'Love does not exist without sympathy, sympathy does not exist without suffering in common' (Feuerbach, 54). Feuerbach does not expect sympathy and sacrifice from everyone, or expect them to be extended to everyone. While 'the image of the suffering God expressed the idea that suffering for others was of ethical value' (Dodd 1990, 184), this image was an ideal, as God was man's ideal. So although Feuerbach believed there to be a natural *Gemeinschaft* or community where people find that the happiness of each is dependent on the happiness of others (Kamenka 1970, 135), he was aware that such an ideal does not always exist. Therefore, he stresses that sacrificing one's own happiness for another should only

occur when the doer feels the sacrifice to be more important than their own happiness (135), as when Maggie rescues Tom. While Feuerbach makes it clear that the example given by man's ideal of Christ's suffering suggests self-sacrifice for others to be the most noble of all actions - 'Love attests itself by suffering' (59) - there is no suggestion of demand or enforcement, unlike Comte's totalitarian system. When Feuerbach discusses sympathy he is talking of sympathy by all for all in the sense of equal responsibility; and when speaking of 'man' he includes women, who are not expected to be the moral conscience for humanity.

Recent psychoanalytic theories of the self bear comparison to Feuerbach's account of the 'I-Thou', such as Chodorow's 'self-in-relation' (1989, 99-113). Although concerned to recognise man as an individual - without over-emphasising this as he believed religion had done - it was important that man understand himself as part of a community and species. Man's vitality and humanity originate from the species. Feuerbach acknowledges the individual drive for happiness, but sees it as the source for universal morality by regarding the 'I-Thou' relationship as an essential part of human nature. Without 'thou' there would be reason only - the 'I-Thou' is needed for happiness, for benevolence, for the consciousness of a being that belongs to a species: "we can speak of morality only where the relationship of man to man...of I and thou are in question" (Kamenka 1970, 134, quoting Feuerbach). Such a view is compatible with Chodorowian theories of how a child moves from a state of totally merged yet self-centred absorption, to a state of individual 'self-in-relation', as a result of realising the equal self-centredness yet relatedness of others. Chodorow suggests that male children may achieve autonomy as a result of early separation, while females relate for longer with the mother and thus become more aware of the 'I-thou' and sympathise more.

The first stone against which the pride of egoism stumbles is the *thou* the *alter ego*. The *ego* first steels its eye in the glance of a *thou* before it endures the contemplation of a being which does not reflect its own image...I reconcile myself to the world only though my fellow-man (Feuerbach 1854 [1841], 82).

Overall, man's duty is to himself and not to a religion of alienation. Duty is to the happiness of the individual and the species, with love and sympathy for others, but not if this ignores the self. Feuerbach argues that ethics must be grounded in man's nature and desires (Kamenka 124): 'The relations of child, and parent, of husband and wife, of brother and friend – in general, of man to man – in short all the moral relations are *per se* religious' (Feuerbach 1854 [1841], 271).

A further aspect of Feuerbach's plea of sympathy and love for all which had a tremendous impact on George Eliot was his call for full acknowledgement of sexual love between men and women. In placing all that was good in God, man had alienated himself from love, and particularly from a belief and delight in sexual love. This process began as a sacrifice to God, but developed into a sense that sex was wrong, and that celibacy represented worship. If God was the God of reason and understanding, then freedom and the sexual impulse were the antitheses of this supposed ideal and must be repressed. Yet Feuerbach proclaims that God is not polluted by nature or sex and that 'personality, individuality, consciousness without Nature is nothing', but then Nature without corporeality is nothing, and 'flesh and blood is nothing without the oxygen of sexual distinction...it penetrates bones and marrow. The substance of man is manhood; that of woman womanhood...Repudiate then, before all, thy own horror for the distinction of sex' (Feuerbach, 91- 92). He even insists that 'the basis of morality is

the distinction of sex. Even the brute is capable of self-sacrificing love in virtue of the sexual distinction' (91), which suggests that tolerance, sympathy and an empathy with difference are born out of difference.

Moving beyond a distinction between man and woman and a celebration of difference and sex, Feuerbach also celebrates sexuality in its full expression: 'The 'thou' between man and woman has quite another sound than the monotonous *thou* between friends.' (92). He finds the idea of celibacy bizarre as it denies the creation of life. Sexuality is the cord that ties the individual to the species. Like Comte, he celebrates the mutually supportive symbiosis of the male and female relationship in marriage: 'But marriage – we mean, of course, marriage as the free bond of love – is sacred in itself' (271). He adds that a marriage of external restriction - such as the legal bond holding Lewes and his wife Agnes – 'is not a true marriage, and therefore not a truly moral marriage'. A moral marriage would be 'spontaneously willed, self-sufficing' (271) as was Eliot's relationship with Lewes. Most biographies note that the translation of Feuerbach took place just before Eliot's decision to live with Lewes, and it is generally accepted that his philosophy sustained and encouraged her in this difficult decision. However, this consideration is over-emphasised by critics to the neglect of Feuerbach's impact on Eliot's conception of sympathy and duty and its effect on her writing. It is the case that certain of the unions that Eliot describes in her novels are morally sound in Feuerbach's sense even if they contravene accepted ideas of 'duty': the relationship of Dorothea and Will is set against her marriage to Casaubon, and that of Janet and Tryan is contrasted with her relationship to Dempster. However, Feuerbach's work means far more to her than his pronouncements on marriage.

Feuerbach's views on the imagination helped to free Eliot's creativity and had multiple effects on her writing, increased her desire to write fiction. He stresses that we always succeed best in what we do willingly, but that our happiest activity is to produce (Feuerbach, 215). Feuerbach's influence may be reflected in her journalism, as when she rejects Cumming's notions that intellect alone decides morality (Eliot 1992, 144-5), that good deeds are only good if consciously done for the glory of God (166-7), and that all love, even of husband and wife, is to be for God and not for love of a fellow human being (167). Cumming's God sounds like Comte's duty. For Eliot, happiness and spontaneous love of another are more relevant.

Eliot critics often consider Feuerbach's work to feed directly and simply into the novels. In 1863, Richard Holt Hutton wrote to Eliot saying that he found the character of Romola too modern, as if she had read Feuerbach (Ashton 1983, 53). The importance of the sacraments as man's symbols of relationship, nature and life are remarked (Knoepfmacher 1964), as are her Feuerbachian stereotypes of earthly Madonna and working man 'saviour'. However, while Eliot has an ideological and moral agenda, even if much of it is unconscious, she is not an ideologue or a moralist intent on incorporating a specific derived doctrine. This would be to suggest that she was an inert receptacle for all these theories by men, whereas she is never passive, and all philosophies have passed through the mill of her mind. However, as a philosophical novelist, she uses fiction to think about moral and philosophical issues, and the theories she interrogated suggested methods of investigation for her fiction. Feuerbach had much to offer to the growing arsenal of models for interpretative fictions that Eliot was amassing. His importance lies mainly in his emphasis on man in relation to others - loved, despised, hated or revered others - and to himself, his inner, outer, moral, intellectual, emotional and constantly changing self. The emphasis on the senses and

imagination (Ashton 1980, 166), and the sympathy that results, provide all the information necessary for analysis of all relationships. In using Feuerbach's framework of belief in man, belief in love and understanding and justice, acceptance of nature and sex, and the need not to alienate ourselves from man, love, understanding, justice, nature and sex, Eliot begins to arrive at a malleable, self-conscious and constantly evolving interpretative ethic for fiction.

Knoepfmacher says that Eliot was constantly 'painfully reappraising and refining her humanist convictions throughout the entire corpus of her novels' (1965, 6). He writes here as if this evolution is disturbing, as if he expects certainty, yet in a notebook entry from the 1870s Eliot affirms: "Doctrines, no matter of what sort, are liable to putrefy when kept in close chambers to be dispensed according to the will of men authorised to hold the keys" (Ashton 1983, 52); she acknowledged and accepted constant change in response to constant feedback. Nietzsche criticises Eliot as weak and naïve for clinging to Christian morality having supposedly rejected Christianity (Newton 1981, 51). However, her moral and philosophical stance is far more complex. Her own precise version of sympathy and duty contributes to her overall moral creed the products of centuries of thought. Feuerbach's work adds another dimension in that he helped her to realise that 'the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i.e., an exaltation of the human)' (*GEL* VI, 98). Thus morality is not Christian *per se*, but is man's which he has 'projected outside himself' (Newton 1981, 52). The feelings, the values, and even the valued virtues remain in man even without a God. To develop a literary strategy that argues for, and defends these beliefs is not weak or naïve, and especially not if Eliot had foreseen the future as proposed by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and was exhorting us to sympathy

and duty before it was too late. If so, many of the aspects of the work of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) may have urged her to greater rigour.

So far, the theorists who influenced George Eliot have been discussed chronologically according to her acquaintance with their work. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) is different, for he spans much of her life and she knew him before, during, and after many of her other influences. Investigating Spencer's work for his ideas on sex, gender, sympathy and duty has been a revelation. I consider him to be underrated, both as a thinker and as George Eliot's friend, despite the extreme nature of some of his ideas. Spencer made a considerable, if indirect contribution to her work, whether she approves of his ideas or whether they fuel reaction via her writing. Further, his discussion concerning sympathy and duty is relevant, as are the parallels between his work and the feminist theory I employ.

Eliot first met Spencer in 1851. Initially their relationship prospered (*GEL* II, 29) so that people began to speculate about an engagement, but Spencer had made his position clear: he did not love her (*GEL* VIII, 42, n 5). The summer of 1852 was a difficult time for Eliot, and two extraordinary letters reveal how she tried to win Spencer's love (*GEL* VIII, 50-52; VIII, 56-7, & n7) to no avail. As painful as this period is, it is not the defining moment of her life - even in relation to Spencer - and apart from a brief period of cool relations in 1859, after Spencer inadvertently revealed to John Chapman the identity of 'George Eliot' (*GEL* III, 12, 49, 111, 154), the friendship endured. Spencer was the only friend told about Eliot's authorship; he regularly featured in the list of guests at dinners or outings; and their library was full of his books - presentation copies to his dear friends (Baker 1977, 191-2, nos 2057-69). At Lewes's death he wrote to Eliot to let her know that 'with more than conventional

truth I grieve with you' (*GEL* VII, 87). Eliot and Lewes were always fully aware of Spencer's shortcomings, yet both *still* valued and welcomed him. In 1861, he is 'very delightful' so long as they don't talk about art and classical literature (*GEL* III, 469).⁶ In 1880 she wrote to Sara Hennell to plead: 'I wish you did not find yourself so repelled by Herbert Spencer's words. He has so much teaching which the world needs' (*GEL* VII, 344).

By 1851, when he met Eliot, Spencer had published *Social Statics: The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of Them Developed* (1850). Spencer, like Spinoza, is concerned with what constitutes the good life for man, and is primarily concerned with correspondence, for if evil results from the non-adaptation of an organism's constitution to its internal and external conditions (Spencer 1954 [1850], 54), then man's lack of correspondence to his current social state will also result in evil (58). Spencer argues that it is man's duty to use his faculties for self-preservation via adaptation, but man must have liberty to do so, yet should not infringe each other's (Spencer 1954 [1850], 68-9). This statement is his 'first principle' for happiness and the right way of living, although the emphasis in *Social Statics* is more on the individual's rights than duties, the first being the right of self-preservation.

One of the catalysts for *Social Statics* was a repudiation of Benthamite interventionism, for Spencer believed that everything is governed by natural laws, that the action of certain laws ensured a general trend towards progress, and thus government should not interfere in society's actions, so as not to disrupt the action of

⁶ Paxton says that 'the letters that remain do ... reveal how her appreciation for his developing evolutionary analysis turned to an angry criticism which, by 1861, prompted her refusal to discuss with him its implications for art, literature, education, social reform and feminism' (1991, 6). However, generally there is no suggestion of 'angry criticism' in the letters of this period, and the only appropriate reference I can find for 1861 is the one quoted above, which merely goes on to say that Spencer can be rather a bore for their other guests, although they are quite happy talking with him.

the laws and derail progress. Both Eliot and Spencer were increasingly exposed by their intellectual pursuits to the belief in man having the capacity to improve and become virtuous, as illustrated by the growth of the doctrine of sympathy. There would be less need for a controlling state because public opinion influenced by natural law and moral sense would take control, allowing more liberty for the individual. This is why Spencer is viewed primarily as an individualist, but the overall trend of his work is toward sociality, with critics mistaking his acceptance of the harshness of survival for misanthropy.

Spencer is fully aware of man as a social creature, but his understanding of relations as part of a complex correspondence or feedback system – of man being part of an ecosystem – is generally misunderstood. He is also a biologist/naturalist with many of his evolutionary beliefs stemming from his perception of man as a complex individual within a complex community where both are mutually supportive. Shuttleworth interprets Spencer as seeing the environment as static (1984, 21) because originally he perceived evolutionary progress as continuing until a state of perfection was achieved; but even by 1851 he had discarded this idea (Wiltshire 1978, 193): ‘as fast as adaptation approaches completeness, it becomes slower and slower ... adaptation must ever remain incomplete’ (Spencer 1926[1904], I, 361). Spencer rejects utopianism (Wiltshire 193), acknowledges that nature and its laws are not static, and allows for constant gradual mental and moral change within humans.

In ‘A Theory of Population, Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility’ (1852), Spencer developed the work of Thomas Malthus to explain the drive behind evolution. Malthus advocated population control to counter human reproduction outstripping food production. However, Spencer suggested that as the population grew

and food production failed to keep up, the 'excess of fertility entails a constant pressure of population upon the means of subsistence' (Spencer 1852, 498). We strive to produce in order to feed all, and this constant environmental pressure stimulates our evolution: mechanical skills, intelligence and morality all progress as a result of the constant striving to supply. By 1850, Spencer's reading of Lamarck and his study of fossils led him to accept that progressive adaptation through the inheritance of acquired characteristics by new generations leads to the production of all new animals and plants - the popular conception of evolution before Darwin's work. In 'The Developmental Hypothesis' (1883b [1852], I) Spencer argues that 'any existing species...when placed under conditions different to its previous ones, immediately begins to undergo certain changes of structure fitting it for the new' (383). He then develops his 'use and non-use' principle (384), using it to account for the differences between the sexes and the development of intellect and morality, a principle based solely on Lamarckian evolution. However, in 1844 Darwin was already writing "Heaven forbid me from Lamarck nonsense" (Freeman 1974, 213).

To account for the underlying cause of evolution Spencer adopted an explanation based on the 'Persistence of Force', derived from Helmholtz's 1847 work on the conservation of energy (Hofstadter 1955, 36-37). Spencer considered that energy or 'Force' explained the drive behind all changes and phenomena, however the ultimate cause behind evolution remained unclear and was to evade all evolutionists until an understanding of genetics was achieved. Ultimately, Spencer suggests that further explanation is not yet possible. Eliot, genuinely impressed with this humble and honest stance, praised Spencer's agnostic account of the 'unknowable' in his essay 'Progress: its Law and Cause' (1883 [1857]): "the sincere man of science...learns at once the greatness and littleness of human intellect...its impotence in dealing with all that

transcends experience...He alone *knows* that under all things there lies an impenetrable mystery”” (*GEL* II, 341, n 1; III, 358, 364).

‘Progress: its Law and Cause’ (1883 [1857]) is the first occasion when Spencer applied Lamarckian evolutionary terminology to matters of social growth and change – as he was to apply evolution to all aspects of science and life. He was also excited by the embryology research of Karl Ernst von Baer (1792-1876), which detailed the multiplication and differentiation of germ cells into millions of different units that in turn form tissues and organs. Here is Lydgate’s ‘primitive tissue’. Spencer seized on this idea to describe the life-process as ‘essentially evolutionary, embodying a continuous change from incoherent homogeneity, illustrated by the lowly protozoa, to coherent heterogeneity, manifested in man and the higher animals’ (Hofstadter, 37). Evolution is an increasing differentiation or specialisation of function together with the integration or mutual interdependence of the structurally differentiated parts and the co-ordination of their functions, and it was from this starting-point that Spencer’s theories of the division of labour derived. Within a community or ecosystem different people or groups of organisms perform different tasks. As such systems are complex and unpredictable, our actions should be restrained and considered. The universal laws operate, and realisation of the unpredictability of man’s actions in this cause-and-effect process makes it our duty to strive continually to understand the laws.

In *First Principles* (1862) and *The Principles of Psychology* (1881 [1855]), Spencer employs his evolutionary theory to account for the functioning of the mind, and to begin a lifelong examination of the concepts of sympathy and duty. This move to an evolutionary psychology paralleled his continuing interest in associationist psychology and Mill’s work on ethology, the science of character formation. Spencer was opposed

to ideas of *a priori* essence or innateness, but, mildly influenced by Whewell, he accepted the idea of inherited faculties and rescued associationist psychology by suggesting how individual differences of the mind develop (Peel 1971, 115-9). His account of the brain organising and changing, with its echoes of Adam Smith's theory of the development of sympathy, imagination and conscience, is central to Spencer's discussion of the development of moral sense, and his ideas on the distinctions between the sexes. As inheritance, faculties, and organisation develop further, then higher animals can formulate general laws from specific truths; they can develop premeditation and begin to make, suspend and change judgements (Peel, 124). As conditions become more secure and settled, these modifications to the mind permit and promote the growth of sociality and sympathy (125). Spencer argues that such emotions represent more than kinship or 'herd instinct' and signal a 'likeness' in families and groups that depends, in a complicated feedback process, on mutual emotions for its continued development.

Spencer is generally represented by his 'survival of the fittest' coinage, but sympathy and altruism are central to his work: 'Spencer's formulation of his doctrine of sympathy as the root of justice and benevolence in a society of self-interested individuals was a contemporary restatement of the idea that was foremost in Spinoza's work' (Ashton 1994, 158). Man's priority is self-preservation - basic needs have to be met - but once satisfied, then sympathy can develop. *The Principles of Psychology* (1855) proposes that as a result of the mind's development there is an inherited memory, such that a baby recognises smiles and frowns as relating to pleasure and pain, even before they are learned (Spencer 1881 [1855], II, 596). Over generations, the development of these mental pathways foster sympathy between mother and child, and then within the family; sympathy may even be extended to the rest of the group. For

most of man's history, antagonistic relationships between groups have restricted the actions of sympathy and sociality (II, 577). According to Spencer, when general sociality plus 'the special socialities of a permanent sexual relation and of a double parental relation' are developed, then 'sympathy develops more rapidly' (576). While such conditions suggest a community progressing to altruism, they also reflect one of Spencer's main assumptions which has repercussions for the construction of gender relations, for he assumes that stable, heterosexual monogamy is the highest form of human relationship. However, he does stress the importance of the *double* parental bond.

Spencer regarded the evolving parental altruistic urge as responsible for our tendency to aid the weak, small and helpless; and also suggests that this response came to operate in men's choice of women (1881 [1855], II, 624-5). If Eliot's writing was sometimes in reaction to Spencer's sexist ideas as Paxton suggests (1991, *passim*), then this could explain her almost mocking account of Hetty's attractions, where weak, small and helpless is a disastrous sexual selection. Interestingly, Spencer suggests that man's lesser parenting is a factor which has restricted sociality: where there is 'a parental relation which, on the man's side at least, is vague or not persistent' fellow-feeling is feeble (1881 [1855], II, 576). There are two major aspects to his ethics, beneficence and justice. His term for sympathy is pity, which he considers the most appropriate form of benevolent response to any pain or suffering observed in another, and insists that its prevalence will increase as society evolves (II, 613). Eventually our evolved sympathy will prevent us from acting in ways that cause others pain, and we will also learn to recognise, by a feedback mechanism, the pain that generates our sympathy, and will respond with help (II, 615). Justice being central to Spencer's concept of the highest personal freedom (II, 616), one of his arguments against women ever being able

to evolve to the same level as men is that men are always more just (Haller 1974, 64). However, Eliot's novels often show justice as too harsh and logical, as ignoring the wider issues of sympathy and mercy - although Spencer does envisage an evolution to a higher state where justice debates with mercy (II, 622), which compares to current ideas of feminist moral theory.

Spencer's most outspoken work on the evolution of altruism occurs in *The Data of Ethics* (1879), which Eliot read and admired (*GEL* IX, 270). Although it was published too late to directly influence Eliot, it no doubt reflects numerous conversations over the years. The primary aim of all his work was to achieve an 'ethics' of man. When the species was under threat, Spencer argued that sympathy and sociality were less possible (1879, 133-4) and in such periods 'survival of the fittest' operates within human social groups. He acknowledges that at present sympathy can seem like self-sacrifice, when many are needing and few are giving, but sympathy will increase by example, education, and evolution. Eventually egoism and altruism will merge (256). However the ethics described, hoped for and possibly evolving, represent the ideal; whereas the ones we have to work with for now are relative (280). Ultimately he believed that 'sympathy is the root of both justice and beneficence' (148) but was only to be achieved via self-preservation. In particular he vehemently opposed self-sacrifice; we have to preserve our lives, 'egoistic claims must take precedence of altruistic claims' (189). He argued that a healthy egoism reflects well on those around, while someone who is 'undermined by self-sacrifice carried too far' is negative and depressing (193). Any self-sacrifice, especially that of mothers, had overall deleterious effects (194), which Eliot exposes in her novels.

In his discussion of duty Spencer is adamant that all aspects of moral consciousness should be employed willingly and not forced or done in fear. He identified three external controls, developed over time, that exert 'force' over our moral responses: the supernatural – including Christianity – the political, and the social (1879, 114-5). Often the actions of these agencies are not moral. They have evolved a status supposedly congruous with the well being of man, yet often exert control via external coercion coupled with the notion of obligation (119-20). Spencer's discussion of forced duty seems catalytic for Eliot's work, but published here at the end of their relationship it is not possible to say which way the influence had flowed over the years. However it supported the idea that Eliot questioned these external controls while the concept of 'duty' she discussed with F.H. Myers was far higher than his conventional views could comprehend. Nevertheless, evolving communities had required the stability granted by these three external controls before it was possible to evolve to full moral consciousness (1879, 122). As man developed, the senses and the faculties were able to move on from the satisfaction of basic drives, needs, and self-preservation. Gradually an evolving higher development suggests that distant, or more conceptual goals are more rewarding, such as honesty, truthfulness and keeping promises. These powerful feelings have a sense of authority, which becomes part of the idea of duty (126), but which may also be overcome by the second strand - a coerciveness derived from politics, religion and society. The fear and punishment inherent in these restraints gives rise to the feeling of moral obligation. Spencer considered that all societal relationships developed out of 'ought' relationships which were to do with family and the preservation of the group, but that with increased peace, security of self, intellect and wider sociality, forced obligation would fade and moral sentiments come to guide man as simply as the senses (129).

In *The Principles of Sociology* (I, 1876), Spencer insists that he has not retrenched on his opinions in *Social Statics*, but believed that the weak had to perish so that the reality of the harshness of survival would teach all to survive, and also that the weak should not be a drain on finite resources: “Society advances where its fittest members are allowed to assert their fitness with the least hindrance, and where the least fitted are not artificially prevented from dying out” (Wiltshire, 197, quoting Spencer). Such an attitude sits uneasily with us, for whom the fear of eugenics is strong. Yet I think Spencer genuinely believed himself to be scientifically describing what took place through time to ensure continued survival and progress, if man is a product of animal evolution. This opposition is the main area of contention concerning Spencer’s ‘eugenics’ arguments. Many see him as a utilitarian (Wilkinson 1993) with his attitude to welfare motivated by libertarianism and a refusal to have individual rights infringed; while others defend him as an evolutionist (Miller 1976).

The eugenics movement, which developed a social Darwinism that is largely an exploitation of Spencer’s work, had by the 1880s begun to express great interest in the women’s movement. By this time the dominant feeling was that too intellectual an education unfitted women for maternity, which idea derived largely from Spencer’s work. Chapter XVI of *Social Statics* offers Spencer’s discussion of the ‘Rights of Women’, and the 1850 version is remarkably radical: ‘Equity knows no difference of sex...the law of equal freedom manifestly applies to the whole race – female as well as male’ (1954[1850], 138). When Eliot first met Spencer in 1851 both had extremely feminist views. However, both Sayers (1982) and Paxton (1991) assert that Spencer reneged on his feminist principles ‘by erasing most of the chapter on “The Rights of Women” and rewriting many other passages about women in his *Social Statics*’ (Paxton, 7). ‘The Rights of Women’ is vastly reduced and less impassioned in the later

version; however, the sense is the same but the omissions *are* interesting. In the 1850 version, Spencer suggests that there are trifling bodily and mental differences between men and women, and then goes on to explain that these are not enough to decrease women's rights (1954 [1850], 138-9). Both parts are absent by 1892, as is Spencer's defence of woman's as yet untested intellect (140); *and* an argument that we do not yet know women's 'sphere', and therefore cannot condemn her to her 'mission' (151). This suggests a decisive revaluation. I consider that by the 1890s Spencer genuinely believed that evolution had demonstrated that woman's sphere *was* decided, and that for the sake of the species, woman's progress was – albeit temporarily – determined.

This period was very difficult for intelligent women such as Eliot. Their own drive, abilities and intellect told them that they were capable of almost anything within the academic, intellectual and professional worlds of the day. Yet just as Biblical certainties about woman's role were finally being challenged, it appeared that science was teaching them that their lives were as determined and circumscribed as ever. In her essay 'Cassandra', Florence Nightingale demands to know why women have been granted 'Passion, intellect, moral activity' (1978 [1928], 396) when they are never allowed to exercise them. She claims that women have no means by which they '*can* resist the "claims of social life"' (403). Pointedly, Nightingale outlines how in every dream of activity women are accompanied by 'the phantom of sympathy' (407). The implication is that they are expected to be endlessly self-sacrificing, always ready as part of their 'woman's mission' to minister to others. However, while Nightingale laments woman's endless self-sacrifice, most of the occupations she lists are nurturing. While opposing the demand for sympathy from woman, she also believes in woman's sympathetic capacities. The same can be seen in Eliot's life and novels. The work of Spencer and Darwin, and more particularly its exploitation by others, becomes central to

attempts to restrict women to their caring roles. The growth of science's seemingly objective backing for essentialist notions of a caring and sympathetic woman's nature served to undermine the feminist movement later in the century (Jann 1994, *passim*).

Dyhouse (1976, 43) finds Spencer's early essays supportive of women's education. In *Social Statics* he had made it clear that social convention prevented a development of true feminine intellect and that therefore we could make no decision on the 'alleged fact' of women's inferior mind (1954 [1850], 140) until women had received a fair education. This sentiment is echoed in Mill's *On Subjection of Women* (1869) and Eliot's 1855 essay 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' (1992, 180-186). In an essay on physical education Spencer comments that men care little for women's intellect (1932 [1859a], 203), but this is asserted within the context of the risks to the physical well-being of girls who are being educated in physically damaging conditions. This essay is often cited as an example of Spencer objecting to women being educated at all. However, he details a daily regimen reminiscent of Lowood school, and demands instead proper exercise, sleep, good food, and fun for the girls (193). His point is that damaged health is too great a penalty for over-education (204) for boys and girls.⁷

Paxton also finds Spencer's early stance on education enlightened (1991, 30), but senses a reaction by the time of his 1858⁸ essay on the moral discipline of children.

⁷ This essay first appeared in April 1859 in the *British Quarterly Review*, vol LVIII. Dyhouse quotes from Spencer's 1861 collection, *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical*, which contains four essays ranging between 1854 and 1859, but it is not always clear which essay is being referred to; I have used a 1932 text of the same essays, but have indicated throughout both this date and the date of first publication of each essay.

⁸ This essay first appeared in April 1858 in the *British and Quarterly Review*; Paxton uses this version; whereas I refer to the 1932 text containing the essay 'Moral Education'.

I find this opinion problematic. All of Spencer's comments are made within the context that it is reprehensible if parents, *men and women*, have no idea how to educate children as moral citizens. Supposedly, 'Spencer made it clear that he did not intend that girls should have an education equal to that of boys' (Paxton 1991, 30), but I cannot find evidence for this assertion in the essay. Further, Spencer advocates 'how to parent' education for males and females, stressing that both need it (1932 [1859a], 115, 158), and is as critical of fathers as mothers (1932 [1858], 118). A further essay on education for the *Westminster* attacks women's mothering skills but again acknowledges that they have rarely been advised how to bring up children (1932 [1859b], 32) and advises that both parents should study ethology (35). He did think that women needed a good intellectual education, if only to prepare them for "the grave responsibilities of maternity" (Dyhouse 1976, 43), and recommends educating 'as highly as possible' but flexibly, with 'the parrot faculty cultivated less, and the human faculty more', arguing that 'were the discipline extended over that now wasted period between leaving school and being married' then women would prosper (1932 [1859a], 204). His much lampooned comment about women's excess education putting them at risk of infertility is from this same essay, but my understanding is that he claims the women will be too physically run-down and unable to bear the rigours of married life. This is not *yet* the suggestion that a lack of energy can affect fertility, although this view is developing. Spencer did eventually believe that women, and men, should preferably be attractive, while for women a good physique for childbearing was more important than intellect and education. Later, when discussing Eliot, Spencer said of her phrenological appearance that 'she had "high philosophical capacity with extensive acquisition"' but that her "'abnormal" mental powers' involved "a physiological cost which the feminine organization will not bear without injury more or less profound"' (Brady 1992, 4, quoting Spencer).

Spencer considered the monogamous Western family with the man as breadwinner and woman relieved of work as the pinnacle of social evolution (Dyhouse 1976, 43). The constitution of the family had changed over time and was only now returning to the 'proper' family group of parents and offspring (Spencer 1876, I, 707) so that he feared radical feminist activity as threatening this near-perfect condition. Yet in 'The Comparative Psychology of Man' (1883 [1878])⁹ he considered women as non-radical and less modifiable than men due to 'the relative conservatism of women – their greater adhesion to established ideas and practices' (436). Often it is Eliot's women characters who are most eager for change and growth, while their menfolk adhere to obsolete traditions. Spencer's sexist beliefs become increasingly prominent in his later works, firstly in his inability to think of women as other than mothers, secondly, with his assumption that stable, heterosexual, monogamous relationships are the height of progress; and thirdly, because of his horror at women working. This latter objection is the greatest indicator of his increasing concern with women's fragility: 'where the men are no longer occupied in war and the chase, the division of labour between the sexes becomes humane in its character: the men do the heavy, outdoor work, and the women the light, indoor work' (Spencer 1969, 647).

Spencer's change of attitude is mainly conditioned by his extrapolation of Helmholtz's theory of the conservation of energy. He believed that each human being had only a limited capacity for energy, and that women had to reserve more of their energy for reproduction. Consequently, any physical or intellectual work will deplete the system of energy. He further held that most of the psychical differences stem from

⁹ The essay was published in 1878, but the version referred to here is in an 1883 collection of essays

the different parts played by the sexes in parenting, another example of his general belief that function dictates structure, which is at odds with Darwin and most anthropologists. In *The Study of Sociology*¹⁰ he hypothesises that women's individual development, both physical and mental, slows and stops earlier than men's because of the need to reserve vital energy (1878 [1874], 273). This foreshortened development results in reduced development in the nervous and muscular systems, so that the intellectual and emotional faculties are not as developed in women as in men. This assumption explains why women are not as physically strong, as quick and intelligent, and do not achieve 'justice'. If women squander their energy in physical and intellectual activities, in careers and education, their fecundity would deteriorate, and thus the species would suffer.

In 'The Comparative Psychology of Man' (1883 [1878]) the major argument is always that environment and activity affect the organism to produce change. 'Assuming the cumulative effects of habit on function and structure, as well as the limitation of heredity by sex, it is to be expected that if, in any society, the activities of one sex, generation after generation, differ from those of the other, there will arise differences of mind' (435). He thus blames difference on a division of labour, which has become exaggerated over time and produces both physical and mental effects. Again structure is derived from function, and he also argues that if men and women carried out certain roles in society, it was because they had evolved to perform these different tasks. Spencer ignores the circularity of his stance. In *The Study of Sociology* he further develops his ideas of physical and mental differences between the sexes. He argued against workers such as Mill that to claim the sexes were mentally alike 'is as

¹⁰ *The Study of Sociology* (1874) was a slight break from Spencer's production of the 'Synthetic Philosophy'. All the chapters had previously appeared as instalments in Youmans' periodical *Popular Science Monthly*.

untrue as that they are alike bodily' (Spencer 1878 [1874], 373). Spencer believed that all differences between male and female were related to their different functions, particularly the reproductive ones. This opinion appears in *The Principles of Biology* (1867), which was largely responsible for women's biology being used as a fixed explanation of their psychological and cultural differences. He also states: 'absolute or relative infertility is generally produced in women by mental labour carried to excess ... the deficiency of reproductive power among them may be reasonably attributed to the overtaxing of their brains' (1867, II, 485-6). He adds that there is a greater incidence of infertility and that 'earlier cessation of childbearing ... [and] frequent inability to suckle' occur, while 'most of the flat-chested girls who survive their high-pressure education are incompetent' to mother properly (1867, II, 486).

According to Spencer, certain behavioural traits had developed because women were weak and powerless relative to men. These include women's ability to please and thus influence a powerful mate (1878 [1874], 375), the facility for concealing emotions, particularly anger, antagonism and resentment, and also the capacities of influence, and the ability instantly and correctly to read someone's feelings – all nicely summed up by the term 'intuition' (Haller 1974, 62). All are basically defence or survival techniques, which can be seen as a specific form of sexual selection - women with these traits being more likely to mate and survive in a relationship with a male. Spencer's hypotheses here are particularly interesting when compared to Carol Gilligan's work on moral development. She suggests that women may have a greater ethic of care, but one argument levelled against her is that women's caring is merely a defence mechanism characteristic of subservient groups. Meanwhile, Sara Ruddick would argue that many of the behavioural traits described are likely to result from caring for children. They are examples of 'maternal thinking', where women have *learned* what is the best action

when looking after a child, a process involving the ongoing feedback described by Spencer. For Ruddick this attribute is learned, while Gilligan's 'caring' is psychosocially acquired. Neither is evolved, innate, or determining.

Overall, what Spencer describes is sexual selection. As part of his argument for survival, he suggests that men choose pretty women with a good childbearing physique; likewise he argues that women have evolved to choose stronger males - women who chose weaker men would have less chance of survival, and their choice-type would die out. Yet such differences would not normally result from natural selection as 'this would imply that "the two sexes follow different habits in their struggles for existence, which is a rare circumstance with the higher animals"' (Sayers, 31). It is Spencer's notion of women preferring powerful men that sponsors his belief that they support authority and power unquestioningly, and could not yet vote rationally. He refused to support Mill over the women's franchise in 1867, feeling it would jeopardise freedom in society, for "'women as a mass are habitually on the side of authority'" (Wiltshire, 115, quoting Spencer). He would agree to women having the vote ultimately, but not immediately, as this tendency to worship power is a trait that only evolution can cure. Yet Spencer also argues, without any sense of contradiction, that women are too sympathetic to make ethical judgements because 'women are naturally the nurturers of the young, so that their sympathy gravitates towards the weak. They would tend, therefore, to view social questions in a maternal light, resulting in "a more general fostering of the worse at the expense of the better"' (Wiltshire, 115, quoting Spencer). This compares to Freud's claim that 'for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men' (1974, 241-2). A similar argument is still levelled at women and initiated Gilligan's work, with her

questioning of Kohlberg's assumptions concerning girls' poor moral reasoning power. Spencer described Eliot as "so tolerant of human weaknesses as to be quickly forgiving; and indeed, was prone to deprecate harsh judgements. This last trait I doubt not in part caused by constant study of her own defects" (Haight 1968, 119, quoting Spencer).

Although acknowledging that some differences between the sexes will decrease as evolution proceeds (1878 [1874], 379) and as increased peace and security allow intellect, sympathy, and non-obligatory duty to flourish, Spencer himself sometimes appears to forget this possibility, as when he argues for the persistence of 'innate' feminine and maternal characteristics. It is certainly ignored by the anti-feminists and eugenicists who exploited his work. It is also forgotten now that his social sexual selection is not evolution in a Darwinian sense. The Lamarckian evolution that supports Spencer's work was soundly overthrown by the 1890s. T.H. Huxley remarked that "Spencer is bound to it *a priori* – his psychology goes to pieces without it" (quoted in Freeman 1974, 217). His observations on women were responses to environmental conditions which, he believed, could and would change as conditions changed. Further, many of the behavioural adaptations he describes in women are comparable to the psycho-social development discussed by feminist object-relations theorists, which are constructed rather than evolved. This is a type of psychological development which is *also* dismissed as essentialist, rather than being seen as something which can be changed. Damning verdicts on Spencer's evolutionary thesis cannot be avoided: he was indeed 'incapable of separating changes in a group's learned repertory from hereditary modifications' (Freeman 1974, 220).

While it is obvious that Spencer did move away from his convictions of the 1850 *Social Statics*, his comments are often taken out of context, and even some of his most contentious opinions are less barbed when seen as part of an explanation of a sexual selection which need not be fixed. However, he discusses sex roles, gender roles and mothering extensively, and his importance in establishing evolutionary science as a master discourse defining 'sexuality, knowledge, and power' (5) is not to be underestimated. Women needed to refute this seeming biological determinism (Eagle-Russett 1989, 13) and only by end of the century were cultural interpretations given credence in accounting for much of women's 'difference'. With hindsight, the dangers of Spencer's work are obvious, in that anti-feminists would exploit his ideas to ensure that woman remained in the domestic role and be denied education.

In addition to providing Eliot with much material to write against, Spencer's work supplies much support. Most important is his dual stress on the individual *and* society, which was relevant both to her personal life and her work. He details how Eliot complained of a 'double consciousness', with a 'current of self-criticism being an habitual accompaniment of anything she was saying or doing; and this naturally tended toward self-deprecation and self-distrust' (Spencer 1904, I, 396). Lewes confirms Spencer's account when explaining his habit of keeping bad reviews from Eliot: 'Unhappily the habitual tone of her mind is distrust of herself, and no sympathy, no praise can do more than lift her out of it for a day or two' (*GEL* V, 228). Spencer's induction of Eliot into the mysteries of species, individual organism, and community may have provided some positive resolution of this divide. Organicism helped her to find a place within the order or (eco)system, able to contribute to the life of the community, while still remaining an individual. Spencer also has a role as a fiction-catalyst, for her novels are partly examinations of societies as ecosystems.

From biology to anthropology and on to psychology: for as Spencer applied evolution to all, so Eliot evolved her fictional worlds by considering all these levels. Not only do the natural laws operate in life, they also operate in her fiction. Several critics have commented on Spencer's influence via anthropology. Postlethwaite considers Eliot's Riehl essay to demonstrate that she had 'thoroughly assimilated Spencer's movement from a biological to a social model in *Social Statics*' (1984, 195). Even feminist anthropologist Rosaldo commends Spencer's close attention to 'available anthropological data' - although she otherwise dismisses him for his offensive 'sexist assumptions' (1980, 402, n 21). Yet this influence is not a case of Spencer directly transmitting ideas to Eliot. It is rather the opening of new sources for fiction, and for formal approaches. Thus he becomes both a source of ideas and a clue to method.

If anthropology provided the means for studying whole communities, psychology allowed close investigation of individuals in all the infinite interactions that form community. *The Principles of Psychology* suggested a means of investigating natural feeling that did not rely on the innate or metaphysical (Newton 1981, 57). Psychology and evolution combined allow a developing, natural investigation of characters *and* the narrator's relationship with the reader. Further, the concept of correspondence is crucial: 'the degree of life in any organism...depends on its active correspondence with the complexities of its environment' (Myers 1984, 4). The psychological theories put forward by Spencer, Comte and Lewes all suggest that real problems are to do with a character's inadequate relations to community. They all suggest that 'species and even identity derive part of their essential nature from the environment, and that the external fatality to which man, in particular, must adjust in order literally to be a man, is the human community' (Myers, 39).

Overall, there is much in Spencer's account of the evolution of sympathy and duty that accords with Eliot's own views, and Spencer's suggestion of a gentle growth to change is amenable. She may also have shared Spencer's idea of an ultimate perfection of universal altruism and duty, without self-sacrifice, but while valuing mercy and pity equally with justice. Finally, with regard to Spencer's attitude to women, while there were areas of agreement, such as Eliot's belief that perhaps women were not yet ready to vote, and the need for slow change, there were also many disagreements. She was able to see his blind spots and expose them in her novels - which resist his more sexist ideas. Paxton has charted examples of Eliot's skilful parody, mockery and opposition to Spencer, however, Eliot is not the feminist that Paxton indicates. She may not agree with Spencer, but her beliefs about men and women are complex.

On 25 November 1859, Eliot wrote to Charles Bray: 'We are reading Darwin's Book on Species, just come out, after long expectation. It is an elaborate exposition of the evidence in favour of the Development Theory, and so, makes an epoch' (*GEL* III, 214). It was over seven years since Eliot's relationship with Spencer had first brought her into intimate contact with an evolutionist, and over four years since her 'elopement' with Lewes and a subsequent induction into natural history and classification - Lewes's *Seaside Studies* being very Darwinian (Ashton 1990, 31). However, she was already familiar with evolutionary ideas before meeting Spencer from her reading of Lyell (1830) and Chambers (1844). Even as early as September 1839 she was flaunting her geological knowledge by comparing the chaotic layers of her mind with 'a stratum of conglomerated fragments that shews here a jaw and rib' (*GEL* I, 29).

Evolution or “transmutation”, as it was usually called’ (Ellegard 1958, 11) had long been a topic for enlightened debate. Darwin’s grandfather Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) had published his *Zoomania, or the Laws of Organic Life* in 1794-6, which anticipated Lamarck’s more renowned *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809), with its theory of organic evolution caused by the passing on from generation to generation of advantageous acquired characteristics. Since Lamarck’s version of inheritance was the mechanism best known to most aware readers, the main debate in the first quarter of the century was between Lamarckian evolution and the Biblical story of Creation. The growing interest in fossil-hunting and the publication of Lyell’s massive *The Principles of Geology* in 1830 advanced the evolutionary debate into public controversy. Lyell’s work, Darwin’s ‘Bible’ as he journeyed around the world on the *Beagle* (Gilmour 1993, 117), nurtured his theory of natural selection.

Even those unaware of the complexity of the arguments about evolution soon became aware of a serious challenge to religious orthodoxy, as well as the questioning of fundamental principles such as the superiority of man, the fixity of the species, and the age of the Earth. Christians who accepted evolution followed the theory of ‘Catastrophism’, which hypothesised different phases of creation successively washed away by global cataclysmic events, such as Noah’s flood. An all-powerful God still orchestrates the sequential creation and destruction of serially progressive organisms, while the presence of fossils that do not correspond to existing organisms is explained, thus reaffirming current species fixity. Meanwhile Lyell’s work supported the alternative theory of uniformitarianism, which suggested a constant, gradual cycle of change. Landscapes are worn down over time while others are deposited. Species change in a similar, ongoing manner. Lyell discounted Lamarckian evolution but did not yet have an alternative explanation for development.

There was extensive discussion in the press on all topics surrounding evolution. Lewes, one of the most enthusiastic commentators from 1850 onwards, regularly reported advances in the 'Developmental Theory' in his *Leader* column, 'The Progress of Science' (Ashton 1991, 107). Until 1859 all theories of evolution had an element of progressive change - even Lyell's work has a teleological underpinning - and Chambers stated quite clearly that any law of development had originally been designed and instigated by a Creator. Although the mutability of species and questions of man's pre-eminence were dangerous areas, many found it possible to accept a theory of slow gradual improvement as guided by a benign God. Even aspects of Spencer's early work were interpreted in this way, and he did more than most to popularise the notion of a meliorist evolution. From this summary of the situation before the publication of *The Origin of Species*, it is apparent that while a more conclusive evolutionary theory was anticipated, Darwin's contemporaries were not at all prepared for his particular theory.

Darwin accumulated most of the material for his account of evolution by natural selection during his voyages on H.M.S. *Beagle* in the 1830s. His notebooks suggest that while still on the journey he already believed that the species evidence he was recording in the Galapagos Islands would "undermine the stability of Species" (quoted in Freeman 1974, 212). Once back in England, he then arrived at his "creative moment of imaginative insight" not later than March 1837' (212). Fearing what he had conceived, Darwin spent the next twenty years analysing his findings, and only published when Alfred Russel Wallace independently arrived at the same deduction. Darwin's extensive journeying, meticulous observation, appropriate specimen-collecting and creative lateral thinking enabled him to see that numerous similar, yet different, species existed in the regions he surveyed, and that their differences were

related to the different environmental conditions of their different habitats. Yet Darwin came to believe that the environmental conditions were not the cause of difference. As with Spencer, Malthus's theory of population outstripping food production helped Darwin to arrive at his mechanism for evolution, although his interpretation is quite different (Darwin 1996 [1859], 55). Darwin saw 'Nature' metaphorically as a surface with few available niches, while multitudes of clamouring species and individuals are sharp wedges trying to drive home in the surface; some will catch and others will not. This is a metaphor he removed after the first edition, possibly because of its violent or sexual connotations (Beer 1983, 71). The aim is to force the reader to understand the pressure and strife of survival. Darwin describes all organisms as 'striving to the utmost to increase', suggesting that a constant state of struggle is necessary for life, for far more are born than can ever survive (1996 [1859], 56). Nature is always represented by Darwin as 'she', while natural selection is neutral (Beer 1983, 70). Nature is the nurturing, fecund, productive side, while natural selection is the harsh culling side that yet makes life possible.

From this image of the drive to survive in the face of over-population, Darwin developed his idea of the mechanism that makes survival possible for the well-adapted few. He was fully aware of the process of artificial breeding of species - where specific characteristics can be deliberately selected in animals or plants, such as breeds of dog or pigeon, and strains of roses – and he spent many years familiarising himself with the intricacies of such breeding in order to test his ideas. This information forms the introductory part of *The Origin of Species*. He realised from his observations that there was a similar but *natural* process of selection taking place in all living things. His account of this process was to become his theory of natural selection, although he had no explanation for the mechanism of the change that was taking place. Darwin's one

certainty was that it was not Lamarckian inheritance, which he held in contempt (Freeman, 213). His revolutionary explanation was that within every species, natural variations – or mutations – occur constantly regardless of environmental conditions. Such variations appear continually as reproduction proceeds. If environmental conditions change, then within any species those types with natural variations which suit the new conditions will be better adapted to survive; and as they survive they pass on their advantageous characteristics, so that their type may prosper for so long as conditions remain the same, with new variations still being produced. Beer sums up his whole theory as ‘hyperproductivity, variability and selection’ (1996 [1859], xx). The immediate underside of Darwin’s theory is that this process of variation and selection for survival is totally arbitrary, impersonal, and harsh. Further, certain naturally occurring variations may unsuit a variety for survival, with the result that extinction may occur.

‘The reality of organic life, Darwin came to see, was adaptation and development under the pressure of the struggle for existence’ (Gilmour 1993, 127). The emphasis is on many slight variations, deviations or examples of difference - ‘Not the normative but difference proves to be the generative principle ... No virtue or effort is involved, simply a sorting process’ (Beer 1996, xxi). Such an elevation of difference has obvious implications for Eliot’s characters, the issues of difference and tolerance being paramount in her work, with most of her main characters alienated because they are ‘different’. Darwin defined three forms of selection: artificial selection, or breeding for certain characteristics; natural selection; and sexual selection, which is relegated to a few pages (Darwin 1996 [1859], 73-5) in Chapter IV of *The Origin of Species*. Sexual selection in humans remained a major preoccupation, both of Darwin and his readers, and was dealt with extensively in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Throughout *The Origin*

of Species, Darwin avoids all discussion of human evolution, although it lies beneath the entire text. Darwin's anticipation can be sensed, for once natural selection and his endorsement of an undirected or non-‘Created’ evolution has been understood, then questions of man's origin erupt.

In response to Darwin's theory, T. H. Huxley wondered “‘why, if continual physical conditions are of so little moment as you suppose, variations should occur at all’” (quoted in Freeman 213). This question Darwin could not answer, and until genetics was understood no solutions were forthcoming. His lack of explanation for the cause of variation led Darwin to be constantly tentative about ‘natural selection’. In the first edition of *Origin of Species* he had suggested that other means of modification might play a part. By the final edition he considered the ‘use and disuse of parts’ theory, and the effect of external conditions, as possible explanations of variation, largely because they appear plausible when no other explanation for the constant advent of new variations exists. Despite the obvious distinction between them (Freeman 1974, *passim*), Spencer's theory was linked with Darwin's. Spencer assumes a constant gradual progress or improvement for all species, while Darwin does not assume progress. Natural selection is totally arbitrary and Darwin himself clearly stated: “‘I believe...in no law of necessary development’” (Freeman, 218, quoting Darwin). Although it disturbed him deeply, Darwin also made it explicit that there was no supernatural dimension in his explanation of natural selection (Ellegard 1958, 12).

The work provoked a furious debate, much of which was initially hostile. T.H. Huxley became Darwin's ‘Bulldog’, particularly in the infamous debate with Samuel Wilberforce at the British Association meeting in 1860. Lewes was one of Darwin's keenest supporters. From January 1860 for six months, Lewes produced complimentary

articles in the *Cornhill*, explaining and analysing Darwin's 'Developmental Hypothesis' (Ashton 1991, 204). Apart from Huxley, Lewes was the only reviewer to deal with Darwin's work 'with such fairness and knowledge' (245). His articles in *The Fortnightly* (April to November 1868) pleased Darwin immensely and the two began a scientific correspondence (*GEL* VIII, 413, 418, 425), with Darwin proposing Lewes for membership of the Linnaean Society (*GEL* VIII, 436-9). The Darwins also met George Eliot, and the two couples visited each other on several occasions (*GEL* V, 449).

Darwin was particularly disturbed by the moral and social implications of the random nature of natural selection. He did believe in a caring, philanthropic society, based largely on Christian ethical values, even if he himself was not a religious believer. He was therefore 'hurt' to be told he had proved that 'might is right'; he had also not foreseen that the struggle for survival would be perceived as so negative (Hofstadter, 90-1). One *raison d'être* for the *Descent of Man* is Darwin's attempt to demonstrate that man can be moral. Darwin's weighty marshalling of fossil and developmental evidence demonstrated that evolution had to be taken seriously as a bleakly endless struggle for survival with no promise of perfection. Further, Darwin implicitly attacked the basis of western civilisation: firstly, by implying that this process of natural selection had happened to man; secondly by implying that man 'has not always been present' (Beer 1996, ix). Thus humans were explained by the same natural laws as all other organisms - we were not, after all, a special, separate creation. Thus it was no longer possible to accept a static, immutable picture of species, society, or life. Although Darwin did not attempt to explain the origin of life, the shortened version of his title intimated this. It was only a short time before critics and admirers questioned man's ancestry. Victorians were faced with the challenge to overthrow all certainties

and contemplate a dynamic world with no certainty of direction, goal or hope of ultimate perfection.

The credibility that attached to Darwin also extended to Spencer. Darwin's concern over the arbitrary non-progressive aspects of natural selection led to his acceptance of Spencer's term 'the survival of the fittest', with its connotations of the best, or strongest finally winning a fierce struggle; although the fittest are not the best, merely adapted. Darwin's work radically complicated the moral debate. If God did not exist, if there was no progress, no teleological framework, then how should man behave morally? Although these questions had long been debated by that portion of the public who followed religious and philosophical trends and were aware of 'Higher Criticism' the importance of the Darwinian debate forced such questions into the public domain. While there is little reference in Eliot's letters or journals to these questions, the significance of Darwin's bleak hypothesis would not escape her. The lack of purpose and progress, but also the implication that man could not be a moral being, because the pressure to survive ruled out altruism, would certainly concern her greatly. When Darwin published *The Descent of Man* (1871), he finally addressed the issue of human evolution, human morality, and the natures of man and woman.

In the decade following the publication of *The Origin of Species*, the demands for equality from the women's movement had increased, as had the arguments of the scientists who opposed women's emancipation. Spencer was not alone in arguing for women's 'special' difference. Henry Thomas Buckle proposed that woman had a 'special "genius" for deductive and intuitive modes of thought' which derived from her special nature. Even the American feminist Margaret Fuller – whose text *Woman in the Nineteenth-Century* (1845) Eliot had reviewed (Eliot 1992, 180-6) – had earlier

accepted the idea of woman as one side of a dualism, where the feminine side of love, beauty and holiness “was now to have its full chance” (Alaya 1977, 263). The developing belief - as encouraged by the ‘Woman’s Mission’ ideology – that woman was naturally more caring, sympathetic and maternal, was gaining ground. Initially this view derived from worship of the Virgin Mary, but Comte and others had secularised it, and now naturalist scientists proclaimed it biological fact. Increasingly, industrialists and bourgeoisie accepted the idea of nature and society as being under the sway of natural scientific law, since this permitted individualism and prevented state control. Even supporters of the women’s movement, were also supporters of naturalism, and they were therefore compromised when naturalism began to insist that women were different – if equal – in that they naturally and biologically possessed special womanly characteristics (Richards 1983, 61). This trend was also part of the developing secularisation and scientism of morals, for women were now biologically, and thus officially, the moral conscience of man.

Darwin did not ignore these developments, and along with many prominent anthropologists of the period, is now considered to have ‘solved’ the issue of woman’s nature – at least for himself and anti-feminists - by constructing a history of gender roles and ‘writing Victorian conceptions of female nature back into the past as biological and cultural norms’ (Jann 1994, 287-8). This was not Darwin’s conscious, specific, patriarchal agenda. For a long time, research assumed Darwin and his work to be an objective and scientific investigation. More recently, this assumption has been questioned, with his entire cultural and social context now being analysed (Richards 1983, 58). Darwin was fully aware of the work of Spencer, Galton and anthropologists such as Tylor, McLennan and Lubbock and their increasing consensus that the growing civilisation of man included the move to monogamy, marriage and domestic work for

women (Jann, 290-1). Further, Darwin's own experience of women - with the female members of the Darwin and Wedgewood houses, particularly his wife Emma, seemingly all conforming to the Victorian stereotype of caring, placid, maternal types – seemed to confirm domestic nurturing as the norm for women (Richards, 1983, 79-87). Richards argues that while Darwin believed he had much evidence to back up his conclusions on woman's nature, he was also strongly, if unconsciously, influenced by his own constructed patriarchal, Victorian beliefs, and these were read back into man's pre-history and animal ancestry, with Darwin accounting for them largely by his theory of sexual selection.

The definition of sexual selection in *The Origin of Species* describes a struggle not for existence – as is the case with natural selection – but a struggle for the best mates. Specifically, it is 'a struggle between the males for possession of the females; the result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring' (Darwin 1996 [1859], 73). Darwin had developed a theory, long debated with Wallace, that sexual selection was responsible for all racial and sexual differences, including mental, moral, emotional and physical differences, and the whole of *The Descent of Man* is a defence for his theory of sexual selection (Richards, 64). Part One deals plainly with man's evolution. Man is evolved from ancestors shared with the higher animals and our closest relatives are the apes. Darwin stressed that such animals share much of our moral, intellectual and social organisation, and thus such faculties are not God-given.

The moral sense, defined by Darwin as duty (1901 [1871], 148), is described as the highest development in man. He argues that once sociality along with parental and filial affections exist in a group of higher animals then a moral sense will follow where there is enough intelligence (150). Sociality and altruism are likewise deemed to have

evolved as innate faculties, and Darwin furnishes numerous examples of social and altruistic acts (153-161), arguing that such characteristics have been naturally selected with faculties such as selfishness, imagination and experience being added and refined in the case of evolving humans (163). Jann argues that this anthropomorphic crediting of animals with aesthetic and sympathetic faculties was developed by anthropologists and evolutionists to distance modern man from 'primitive' man, whose sexual and social habits did not conform to Victorian norms. Such 'native' groups were said to have regressed from their natural animal instincts to an egoistic human development, which involved such conscious practices as infanticide, rape and lack of natural 'kin' sociality. Meanwhile higher animal behaviour was awarded Darwin's saccharine anthropomorphism (Jann 1994, 292-3). J. S. Mill objected strongly to Darwin's claim for an inherited morality, arguing that such faculties are learned. Certainly Darwin had created a problem for himself: if natural selection had caused sympathy to evolve in man, then caring humans may object to the harshness of natural selection, with the danger of contravening natural laws. Darwin's stance is that weak or non-adapted humans should be aided, rather than the fight for survival being allowed to run its course.

The second section of *The Descent of Man* explains what sexual selection is, giving examples of its actions in many of the different animal phyla. Details are included on the various secondary sexual characteristics that have evolved as a result of female choice. In all of these instances it is the males who are the decorated ones and who actively need to attract the females if they are to be selected as a mate. While the secondary characteristics are assumed to be symbols of the males' good lineage, and not themselves necessarily valuable, it is as if the features of the females make no contribution. The whole of the discussion is directed at the male reader; Darwin

probably discounted the woman reader, as he had discouraged his wife-to-be from reading Lyell.

This central discussion sets the scene for the third and final section of *The Descent of Man*, where human sexual selection is examined. Here, unlike most other animal groups, the choosing of a mate has passed to the males by virtue of their greater strength and intelligence. Darwin makes it clear that everything now deemed beautiful in women, in all different cultures and races, has been selected by man over time. Choice had developed in order to improve survival rates. Implicit in this argument is the idea that sexual selection permits some control. Evolution is no longer the randomness of natural selection (Jann, 294). Man is portrayed as a breeder rather than a mate (Richards 1983, 78). However this image presumably added greatly to the attraction of the theory for the Victorian male reader. Darwin differentiates between characteristics innate to the sexes and others that have been selected. Man is naturally aggressive, and women naturally caring, intuitive and maternal, although the selection for these characteristics has led to the greater development of all the altruistic characteristics in women, while men are more distant although far more intelligent than women. Women have also been selected to be passive and coy, again corresponding to Victorian gender ideology (Jann, 292). In contradiction to Mill, Darwin insists that intelligence is innate or biologically determined. Women have smaller brains - comparable to a child's - and are incapable of developing beyond a certain level, thus women's education is a wasted resource (Richards 1983, 73).

No doubt Darwin believed his assertions and also felt that he had all the evidence for them, yet so much of what he claims rests on assumptions or observations, read through the distorting mirror of Victorian male ideology. *The Descent of Man* was

to have many subversive effects. Although many contemporary women, such as Frances Power Cobbe, were to discuss and debate Darwin's works, Eliot was one of the few women novelists who understood all the implications. However, as with Spencer's work, Darwin's texts could be positive catalysts for Eliot's writing, both in opening up new possibilities and by offering grounds for disagreement and challenge. One of the most immediate effects is the extra dimensions that Darwin's work seems to add to life and history. In *The Origin of Species* the world is teeming with life, both here, in distant places, and in the past. Even the earth overflows with the life of the past, as do all humans by virtue of their multiple inheritance. Beer has noted the 'intense air of connection' (1983, 47) that Darwin conveys, but when this is closely considered it becomes overwhelming. It is also quite obvious that Eliot becomes more concerned with chance, and unexpected and bizarre connections and coincidences, after the appearance of *Origin*. Another impact on Eliot is that much of Darwin's work is about disclosing how things came to be the way they are (Beer 1983, 24). This feeling for origins and causes is already present in her work, but becomes more implicit, although not always to the good. For example, trying to read the throw-away clues to why Hetty came to be the way she is proves an informative exercise; while having too much explained can be tedious, as with Bulstrode's past; however, the conscious menace of knowing absolutely nothing about what constructed Grandcourt is superb. All ideas of permanence, certainty and perfection are challenged (Levine 1988, 17) and closure is no longer possible – which is why I can read a much more fulfilling life for Dorothea than seventies feminists did. This negation of closure is, I think, what Beer describes as 'imaginative release into a continuing and undescribed future', or the "intention to continue" (1983, 64-5, quoting Edward Said). In particular, character is not certain and readings depend on what is and is not 'embedded in the plot' (17).

With regard to character, plot and aspects of form, Darwin's work adds much more to the organic 'species and community', 'I and Thou' dimension. Beer suggests that Darwin's use of the term evolution blurred the distinction between individual, organism, and species (1983, 15). Many of Eliot's contemporaries may have found this disturbing, but from her existing knowledge, Eliot was already comfortable with such a blending – if anything it helped her sense of belonging – and it fuels the sense of community, which reaches its apotheosis in the ecosystem of *Middlemarch*. Simultaneously it allows Eliot to examine both man's idea of his own overpowering centrality in the world *and* his total insignificance. There is 'imaginative attraction' for Eliot in the "inextricable web of affinities" which Darwin saw as the order of physical life' (Beer 1986, 15), but while Darwin adds extra dimensions to this complex of inter-relations, such an imaginative awareness was present in Eliot's work long before his influence. However, the denial of a grand design and underlying teleology, and the totally arbitrary nature of natural selection may explain the move to character that Levine detects (1988, 18), with plot emerging from characters' musings, moves and 'chance' encounters. Yet this is not to suggest disorder; even in the expansive *Middlemarch* the natural laws, so important to Eliot, still underlie everything. It is the narrator in Eliot's texts who takes on the role of experimenter and observer. Beer suggests this was a strategy of authors following upon Darwin's removal of the sense of omniscience or omnipotence (1983, 45), but Comte had suggested such strategies for Eliot's works much earlier. Of Eliot's possible reactions against Darwin's work, the obvious ones are an interrogation, and rejection of many of his statements concerning women (after all Man as sexual selector Lydgate foolishly selects Rosamund).

Overall, Darwin's work had two main outcomes. Many of his colleagues felt that he had over-extended the significance of sexual selection, with the result that the

ensuing pathway in evolutionary work was to re-explain many of his phenomena in terms of natural selection or 'use-inheritance' (Richards, 99). However, the trend was now set fair to ensure women were perceived as naturally and biologically caring and maternal. Darwin did not achieve this conclusion on his own, but his stature helped give credence to the general concept and underpins the many post-Darwinian works 'proving' woman's natural altruism and mental inferiority. This 'biological backlash', with evolution restricting women more than religion - for evolution was now accepted as objective fact - caused a radical discontinuity of feminist ideology. 'Nineteenth-century science, [...] gave such vigorous and persuasive reinforcement to the traditional dogmatic view of sexual character that it not only strengthened the opposition to feminism but disengaged the ideals of feminists themselves from their philosophic roots' (Alaya 1977, 262). The transition from a women's movement that was concerned to de-gender society, believing that differences are acquired or constructed, to one that believes in and encourages women's natural or innate abilities, has been charted in the twentieth-century, as well as this turnabout in the 1870s (Chodorow 1989, 99). All these coming developments, coupled with the sense of dislocation caused by Darwin's vision of natural selection, were most depressing. That Schopenhauer's bleak philosophy came along, with Nietzsche waiting in the wings, may account for the invocation of the 'Promised Land' in Eliot's final novel, now that perfection was no longer obtainable.

Chapter Three - Feminist Object-Relations Theory:

A Twentieth-Century articulation of ideas on Sympathy and Duty

In the preceding chapters I have provided a selected array of possibilities and probabilities that may have contributed towards George Eliot's evolving conceptions of sympathy and duty. This analysis of influence is not intended to be exhaustive, however, I do feel that it is sufficiently inclusive to suggest two conclusions. First, certain ideas which appear relevant to Eliot's developing concepts occur independently in works of varying age and origin. As these ideas are often reproduced in the fiction, I consider there to be enough evidence to offer more precise definitions of Eliot's sympathy and duty. Secondly, the repeated occurrence of similar ideas in the work of different theorists demonstrates that it is not possible to argue for one or two theorists being primarily responsible for influencing Eliot.

My reading of these works was originally intended to be background research towards definitions of Eliot's sympathy and duty. However, I feel that the preceding chapters are interesting in themselves, particularly as my concentration on ideas of sympathy and duty in relation to gender has revealed aspects which have not generally been engaged with by other workers. Examples are Spencer's concern with ethics, the profound nature of Spinoza's influence on Eliot, and the multiplicity of sources available to Eliot on many subjects, where perhaps only one influence has been emphasised in the past. While many of the ideas have influenced my reading of the novels, there is far more to be applied. I therefore regard these early chapters as my own 'theories towards criticism', which may suggest approaches to Eliot's work that have not been explored before.

As a result of considering all these known and possible influences on Eliot, I feel that a stronger account of her ideas on sympathy and duty is possible. Concerning the origins of the general and sympathetic caring faculties in individuals, it appears obvious that Eliot was strongly influenced by Spinoza's, Comte's and Feuerbach's ideas that family and community life help to psychologically or psycho-socially encourage sympathy in offspring. The parental relationship is primary for the acquisition of sympathy, but as Eliot demonstrates in the novels, while the mother's role may be central, it can be carried out by men. Secondly, Eliot considers sympathy to be naturally present, but not necessarily innate or spontaneously active. Like Comte and Spencer, Eliot knew that sympathy could be encouraged or lost according to an individual's experiences - hence the importance of encouraging readers to sympathy via her novels. Thirdly, the evolutionary work of Spencer and Darwin suggests changes take place in organisms over time and Eliot develops Spencer's work to explore via fiction the possibility of men becoming more nurturing and women becoming more autonomous. Finally, relationship was important for Eliot, as was individuality, and rather than arguing for one or the other being predominant, this thesis suggests that the 'self-in-relation' - as suggested by Feuerbach's concept of the 'I/Thou' and Spencer's idea of the individual as part of the species - is more relevant to an understanding of Eliot's ideas of mutuality.

A consideration of relationship helps to define Eliot's sympathy and duty, because these are values that are only relevant in relation - whether with a significant other, the family or the community. A definition of sympathy is strongly influenced by the work of Spinoza, the moral theorists, and Hume and Smith, while the action of

sympathy is encouraged by the development of many aspects of the character. Empirical knowledge is necessary, as well as experience, reason, understanding and the emotions. Imagination and the conscience also contribute to any sympathetic reaction. The action of sympathy is a complex but natural process, and Eliot considers that constant practice and development of all these faculties can enhance our powers of sympathy. Awe at the functioning of sympathy is registered in Spinoza's account of the third or intuitive level of knowledge, in Adam Smith's description of sympathy as empathy in action, and in Eliot's account of the self being surprised into 'attention to what is apart from themselves' (Eliot 1992, 263) and all these three suggest the nature of Eliot's sympathy. At its best it approaches empathy, but it is not self-sacrificing - although as Feuerbach and Spinoza acknowledge, sympathy for another may be so important to the happiness of the self, that selflessness *is* present. However, Eliot's sympathy is not Comte's altruism. Finally, Eliot's sympathy is not restricted to women, unlike Comte, Eliot illustrates that men can grow to sympathy.

A definition of duty is more complex, perhaps because more personal. Eliot's duty has little to do with the social contracts, artificial virtues, mores, forced duty and rights as discussed over time by Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Spencer and others. These conventions - originally formed out of necessity, but now often petrified by tradition, habit and law - are often represented as a duty to be questioned in Eliot's novels. Duty for Eliot is firstly to honour all obligations that have been freely undertaken. Secondly, a duty of sympathy or benevolence is desired, but this is not altruism or selflessness. No one, women included, is expected to be selfless - self-preservation comes first. Thus there is also a duty to the self. Duty is also governed by the natural and inviolable laws, and all laws and information should be taken into account when actions are chosen. This obviously reflects Spinoza's idea that happiness stems from ever-increasing

knowledge and understanding - the more we know the more accurately we can choose our actions and duties - and it also considers Spencer's advice to always consider the correspondence between internal and external environments. Thus choosing duties may depend on understanding ourselves - our psychology - and knowing of what we are capable. This leads to the final point, for Eliot appears to be influenced by Kant, in that duties can be chosen, but Eliot gives greater importance to the feelings, and does not engage with Kant's *a priori* ideas.

In Part II of this thesis I shall argue that George Eliot's fiction draws on this complex of ideas to provide both a critique of the existing notions of sympathy and duty, and to offer challenging proposals for change. Despite the immense amount of critical work on Eliot's novels, such an approach has not been followed before, perhaps because there is no convenient label to attach to this mixture of theories. To avoid confusion I will refer to Eliot's particular concepts as 'intuitive sympathy and duty' thus reflecting both the influence of Spinoza's 'intuition' and Schneewind's opinion that both Eliot and Spinoza were intuitionist thinkers (Atkins 1978, 68). However, the ideas that Eliot drew on have continued to evolve, and in the remainder of this chapter I argue that feminist object-relations theorists, in particular the work of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, provide an articulation of ideas very similar to those I find in Eliot's work. Usefully, they also provide an explicit terminology which helps to make visible for the modern reader patterns of analysis and advocacy which were the outcome of long thought and experience for Eliot. This chapter is therefore a detailed exposition of feminist object-relations theory. Because this work has been subject to much misrepresentation I have also addressed some of the major criticisms, as well as including a summary of the literary critical applications of the theory.

Object-relations theory evolved in Britain as a psycho-dynamic theory of personality structure and human interaction. Early theorists felt that neither traditional psychology, nor Freudian theory acknowledged sufficiently the centrality of social relationships to the human subject. Major object-relations theorists include Melanie Klein, Ronald Fairbairn, Donald Winnicott, and Harry Guntrip. Their main points of focus are: the relationship between the child and its primary carer from birth, and any psychopathology that may develop as a result of problems in this relationship. The importance of both the basic drives and the erotogenic zones outlined by Freud are acknowledged, but object-relations theorists do not accept that these structure psychoanalytic growth and personality formation (Guntrip 1961, 29). Rather than the child/subject being driven to seek erotic pleasure by the drives, these theorists consider the child as seeking objects/people for the purpose of relationship *itself*. The drives or erogenous zones are points of interconnection, or 'channels mediating the primary object-seeking aims of the ego' (Fairbairn 1952, 162), which are developed or not in relationship. Intimacy and mutuality are more important than erotic satisfaction.

The basic premise is that a child's personality - or its ego, or sense of self - develops first as a result of its *earliest* interactions. The 'objects' with which the subject has relations are people, parts of people, and symbols of people - for example, mother, mother's breast, and bottle/dummy. Initially, the child is in a stage of primary narcissism with no sense of itself as separate and having no separate ego. As objects begin to be perceived in interaction, the proto-ego is slowly formed. A gradual realisation of the self as separate from the carer occurs as interactions continue. It is because the carers are not always and exclusively available to the child that awareness of separation arises. As the child realises the external environment as separate from the

self, it also develops an internal environment. Object-relations includes 'relationships with objects which have been internalised during early life under the pressure of deprivation and frustration' (Farbairn 1952, 162); these are mental representations formed as the child develops its inner and outer object worlds. Simply, internalisations of the mother are formed, and may assist the child in coping with the mother's absence during periods of separation. The internal and external worlds continue to develop as relationships continue, with successful development resting with the carers, who try to ensure a constant, consistent relationship, *and* monitor separation so that the child becomes a happy self-in-representation.

Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan and others are collectively referred to as feminist object-relations theorists. Their ideas have permeated literary criticism, and their work is central to my analysis of Eliot's novels. In addition to a concern with relationships, and the internal and external object world or environment, feminist object-relations locates gender identity in the primary parenting period and sees subsequent gender-specific development as influenced by this period, particularly moral and social development. Theorists question whether mother-only parenting is determined and appropriate, if early-year gender prescription can be changed, and, if so, what would be the effect on moral and social development. Eliot was aware of the harmful effects, for both sexes, of extreme gender-role polarisation; yet simultaneously, she valued both the 'maternal' - the intuition, sympathy and relationship traditionally associated with women - *and* the independence and autonomy associated with men. As these values coalesced in Eliot herself, formed the basis of her mutuality with Lewes, and also reappear in many of her protagonists - as well as in the novels' form - then I contest that feminist object-relations theory is the most appropriate perspective for a re-reading of the novels.

In the *Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World* (1987)¹¹ Dorothy Dinnerstein argues that in the West, cultural attitudes towards birth, mortality, nature and sexuality, are destructively sex-biased, stemming from a woman-hatred that results from everyone being nurtured by one major carer - the mother. Like Comte and Spencer, Dinnerstein considered it important to change people rather than external legislation: in her view, those who believe that altering legislation will result in the liberation of women, underestimate the immutability of the psyche as formed by mother-only parenting (7). Yet women-only mothering is not immutable.

Dinnerstein claims that the mother is generally perceived as the source of all early pleasure and gratification (28), but also as the origin of all fear and frustration, in that she cannot be always available to the child. The work of Melanie Klein is a major influence; she revolutionised psychoanalysis by decentring the oedipus complex, stressed the importance of the pre-oedipal period and proposed a primary phase of femininity for both sexes. Klein also investigated the development of the child's psyche in relation to the carer's presence or absence. As the mother cannot totally satisfy the demands of the child, the child internalises both the good mother and the bad mother as a means of dealing with issues of maternal absence, ambivalence and aggression. Dinnerstein argues that the emotions and associations arising from these opposing psychological images perpetuate harmful gender relations. Woman is seen as loving and nurturing, and we always wish to recreate our symbiotic relationship with her; yet woman is also the omnipotent mother, unreliable and frustrating. As this experience

¹¹ Originally published as *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1977).

takes place before the child has fully perceived the mother as a separate subject, unconscious influences remain and woman becomes irrationally linked with an inability to control life. Contemporary nuclear family arrangements, or single-mother units, in Western families generally mean that since the father-figure is absent he does not become a significant figure for the child until he is perceived as a separate subjectivity, and so the father escapes from the preoedipally-inspired 'blame' that equates to 'mother'. He becomes the repository of culture and all that is rational.

Dinnerstein stresses the strong erotic links to the 'good' mother, particularly for girls, who remain with the mother longer. These erotic ties, muted in the girl (40) by society's fear of lesbian-incest, are severed by encouraging the turn to the father; nevertheless, a strong homoerotic pull from being mothered by a woman remains (48). Bart asks how Dinnerstein can defend her idea that mother-reared daughters hate their mother (1977, 835), yet ignores Adrienne Rich's acknowledgement of the tremendous anger daughters feel for mothers who by remaining victims have lost their daughter's chance for inclusion in history and culture (Rich 1977, 243). To children, all adults - father as well as mother - appear like Gods (Dinnerstein, 120), and Dinnerstein portrays humans as constantly attempting to maintain these mythical roles of 'all-powerful' mother (209) and male history-makers - as both sexes had perceived the idealised father-figure. The male 'I' sees the earth and nature in relation to the mother he wishes to dominate (108-111). For this reason man feels at liberty to plunder the earth in an attempt to control that which once controlled him - it is noticeable that Eliot's more maternal men are at one with nature. Adrienne Rich accuses Dinnerstein of ignoring male terrorism and of being obsessed with psychology to the exclusion of 'economic and other realities that help to create psychological reality' (1987, 30-31). Yet the

existence of social problems results from the situation outlined as Dinnerstein's central argument, which demonstrates how economic and material realities result from this psychological construction.

This concern with gender-issues originally stems from Dinnerstein's alarm at the human capacity to destroy ourselves (ix). Women collude with men in this destructive exclusion from power and history-making, not only because we fear the mother, but also because our role as childbearer seems a more impressive one (215) - thus women concede the earth and history to men. Since woman-only mothering is not a fixed condition (xxiv), Dinnerstein considers that the solution is for men to take an equal share in the task of child-rearing, so that the fear, anger and blame currently attached solely to women as mothers, can be spread to both sexes: 'They cannot be our brothers until we stop being their mothers' (90). Our constant attempts to re/create the symbiotic relationship of infancy via our sexual partnerships (xiii) needs to stop; for this reason, her suggestion of shared parenting cannot be accused of being homophobic (Bart 1977, 835) or perpetuating the monogamous, nuclear family; for although she does want men/fathers to be involved in parenting, this does not have to be in the context of a heterosexual structure.

Exploring similar territory to Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) asks why women still *generally* have sole responsibility for childcare, particularly when the physical and biological demands of child rearing have decreased. She suggests that 'the contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes' (7), a process I will refer to as psycho-social structuring. Chodorow is providing a descriptive account of why

women mother. She does not valorise the gender-roles produced, but wishes to engender change. Morally her theory is quite contentious (Housman 1982, 49), for she recommends change via a form of psycho-social engineering in order to produce 'ungendered' selves-in-relation.

Women's maternal role had generally been ignored by most sociological theorists because it was assumed to be 'natural'. Therefore Chodorow refers to extensive scientific and sociological research to oppose theories of 'maternal instinct' and woman's essentialist mothering. Anyone can be a mother - an adoptive mother is as receptive as a biological one - while biological mothers may refuse to care - as with Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*. It is caring itself that produces carers: 'Arguments from nature, then, are unconvincing as explanations for women's mothering as a feature of a social structure' (Chodorow 1978, 30). Chodorow also denies that social-role learning is sufficiently powerful to exercise this degree of control over women, and defends her idea of a psycho-social structuring. While acknowledging the centrality of socialisation in dictating the *exact form* that sex-stereotypes take within a particular society, she insists that

Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalised and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure. Women are prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grow up, and in which women have mothered them (39).

Her theory is based on psychoanalytic research and observations in white, Western, heterosexual nuclear families. She was also influenced by feminist research in the social sciences, particularly Gayle Rubin's feminist anthropology (1975). In western capitalist countries, woman's lower economic influence within the household, the separation of home and workplace, the distancing of the extended family, and increased male absence from caring, have all contributed to the biological mother still having most responsibility for childcare (Chodorow 1978, 4-5). Here the system of production has manipulated the sex and gender system in such a way as to ensure the continued reproduction of this system. Housman claims that 'Chodorow's work appears to suggest that the politics of personal life can be separated out from the politics of society' (1982, 49), yet she ignores the point that such social politics ensure that the mother is the sole carer and perpetuates the system.

The object-relations theory of Fairbairn and Winnicott is the source of Chodorow's hypotheses, a dangerous theory for feminism (Sayers 1986, 67) since their emphasis on 'good-enough' mothering has been cited in campaigns opposing working mothers. Yet Chodorow's reformulation of object-relations demonstrates the damaging repercussions of mother-only primary parenting and hence arrives at her argument for shared parenting, preferably by carers of both biological sexes. Chodorow accepts the premise of object-relations that early interactions are central in the formation of personality, mutuality, and satisfying relationships; and that object-relations 'provides the most useful psychoanalytic approach for a sociologist, because it integrates drives and social relations' (Lorber, et al 1981, 507). Fairbairn and Winnicott retain Klein's idea of the good and bad mother. 'The ego, says Fairbairn, only develops gradually. It is formed out of the baby's internal representation of its relation to the mother recognised bit by bit as separate from itself' (Sayers 1986, 65). The child, in the pre-

oedipal or 'primary parenting' period, interacts via feeding, holding, rhythm, gazing, cleaning and changing. A 'process of "differentiation" or "separation-individuation"' ensues, the child having been born feeling 'merged and continuous with the world in general, and with its mother or caretaker in particular' (Chodorow 1989, 102). The child's separation between its 'self' and the object world is gradually achieved, both by the development of a personal psychological division or ego boundary, and also as a 'body ego', or sense of the boundedness of one's own body. This sense of separation evolves from the mother's ministrations, and the distinction between self and other is gradually perceived. 'The mother is thus a supplementary ego for the infant: her perceptions are mirrored to the infant who utilises this mirroring to organise its own perceptions' (Wright, 286). The mother protects the child's "'going-on being"' (Sayers 1986, 66) so that this proto-ego is not damaged by too harsh or too early an infringement of reality. The mother's actions also mediate between internal and external realities so that the child gradually builds up its 'inner object world', which contains representations of the mother, the self, and interactions and connections. The child can eventually cope with the mother's absence via its mental 'object' that sustains it over ever longer periods. The child is psycho-socially structured by a mothering which gradually conveys to the child an understanding that it is separate from the mother (Adams 1983, 44-6). Thus separateness or individuality can only be defined in relation – which is why this work is so relevant for Eliot and her texts.

Problems occur when the mother cannot cater to every need, and internal object-relations are formed in repressing internalisations of the 'bad' mother. Thus as the child appreciates its own subjectivity, it also begins to realise that the carer is more than just 'other', but a subject with separate needs and activities. True differentiation then

involves understanding of the interaction between self and another self (Chodorow 1989, 104) – as when Eliot enables the reader to acknowledge Casaubon's own centre of self. One of the problems for mothers is that they may not be fully perceived as separate subjects by the child, but are seen as narcissistic extensions. This perception is often extended to women in general, who are deemed always available for sympathy and care, as Florence Nightingale describes. Ideally the newly emerged self/child needs to feel that it is an agent and can affect others and its surroundings, that it has been allowed to develop its own feelings and ideas, and also that there is a fit or mutuality with the needs and feelings of the mother (106). Validation and love from the carer achieve these aspects of the self, while rejection - through being ignored or allowed no freedom - will not. The crucial sense of the self-in-relation with the carer becomes internalised, and thus a part of self *becomes* the good mother, so that 'the central core of self is, internally, a relational ego, a sense of self-in-good-relationship' (106). If this ego-core is strong, then the wholeness of self patently does not inhere in separateness or individuation alone; genuine autonomy is about still being in connection: 'differentiation is ... a particular way of being connected to others' (107). Many of Chodorow's critics underestimate or ignore the psychoanalytic account of the formation of a core gender identity and a 'self-in-relation' to the mother, and its importance (Housman 1982, 51-2); Lorber insists that socialisation is enough to explain women's continued child care - despite Chodorow's refutation of the role-learning argument (1981, 484).

In theory, both male and female children, coming through the pre-oedipal period and having received a loving, relation-based caring that achieves this sense of self – even allowing for not having secured the ideal - should be sufficiently caring and relational in their sense of self-in-relation, to be able to mother. However, males

generally do not mother, and, even if willing, lack the 'intuitive' responses of females. Because physiological explanations for women's mothering are accepted, why men do not mother is not questioned. Chodorow wants to know why, and concludes that gender difference explains this anomaly. While children are not born with an awareness of gender difference, Chodorow believes that it is apparent early, and suggests that a 'core gender identity' is created in the pre-oedipal period, which for men ultimately conflicts with the masculinity that must be developed (1989, 109). Core gender identity is 'a cognitive sense of gendered self, the sense that one is male or female. It is established in the first two years concomitantly with the sense of self' (109). As the sense of self is formed in relation, so is the core gender identity; and if women mother, then the child - male or female - develops a sense of femaleness as its self-in-relation develops. Meanwhile, the mother perceives the female child as having the same core gender identity, while the boy is perceived as different or 'other', which becomes conflictual with a forming core of femaleness. Consequently, to be male is to be in reaction against this femaleness that defines male as different, and if there are no male figures of love and identification who are as personal and important to the male child as the mother, then 'learning what it is to be masculine comes to mean learning to be not-feminine, or not-womanly' (109). Other additions to this core identity will develop later, such as sense of class, colour, sexuality and so on, but they build on this core and do not erase, create or change it..

Elizabeth Spelman (1988) criticises Chodorow's insufficient consideration of class and race in the formation of the gendered self. However, Spelman does not engage with the concept of the early primary parenting period. At this time the conditions to be incorporated into the child's forming sense of self and gender will be ones which are significant to the mother-child relationship. Chodorow's argument is

that issues of 'difference' are paramount, and gender is the most common difference. It is obvious that if there are other major 'differences' between mother and child, then it is likely that these would affect the core gender identity. For example, if a child suffered great pain, this 'difference' may be part of its core gender identity.

Boys, then, do not develop the relational and caring attributes necessary for mothering because gender conflict results in their ejection from the pre-oedipal relationship earlier than girls (Chodorow 1978, 107). The mother perceives the boy child as more 'other' than a daughter and at the same time the son's core gender identity develops away from the mother. The male child's sense of self is consequently built on 'me – not me' rather than 'self-in-relation'. Girls do not experience these problems as mothers consider them continuous with themselves; girls may even feel too continuous. The forced separation and acquisition of early individuality further gender the boy, so that in male-dominated, father-absent societies masculinity and sexual difference are defined as separation and individuation issues. Therefore, children are aware of their gender well before the usual site of the Oedipus complex:

The boy's swift transition from preoedipal to oedipal stage can also lead to his associating primary love with rejection, and an inability to be relational, although boys are more able to form a separate self and impermeable ego boundaries. Chodorow cites research showing that fathers are always far more concerned with issues of gender role expectation, and in treating boys and girls differently (1989, 109). The boy eventually perceives that he still has the 'promise' of power that is part of being male, but is always rejecting his experience of the feminine. A girl's identification is personal, based on a real relationship with her mother and knowing what it is to be female, while the boy's is largely positional, formed in relation to roles, status and ideas of being

masculine. This early relationship with the mother is basic in three ways. Most important, the psycho-social condition for parenting is founded. Second, people come out of it with the memory of a unique intimacy, which they want to recreate. Finally, the relationship provides a foundation for expectations of women as mothers (Chodorow 1978, 57).

Chodorow argues that girls, by remaining longer in the pre-oedipal with the mother, develop more permeable ego-boundaries that allow for easier relationships. She does not say that women have *weak* ego-boundaries, but from a close relationship with the mother they are able to empathise and merge with others, and are thus prepared for mothering, although such close identification may create separation problems and a lack of autonomy. Girls' main problem with their gender identity arrives later in life once they perceive the female gender as negatively valued, and see mothering and femininity as available to them but with little power or cultural and social value (Chodorow 1989, 111; 1995, 145). While some critics misread Chodorow's work as valorising an essential motherhood, others have seen it as an attack on mothers. The literary critic Jennifer Strauss sees the work as belonging to an anti-maternalism prevalent in the Seventies (1992, 3). Yet when Chodorow talks of mothers, she makes it clear that men are just as gendered and psycho-socially structured, and that both are further manipulated by the dominant discourse. In outlining girls' turning away from their mothers, Chodorow acknowledges their sometimes desperate attempts to separate when the relationship has been too close.

According to Chodorow the oedipal complex in girls is characterised by the continuation of preoedipal attachments, by sexual oscillation in an oedipal triangle with the father, and by the lack of either absolute change of love object or absolute oedipal

resolution (1978, 133); they do not generally achieve the same heterosexuality as boys. The girl does not effect a change of object when she turns to the father in response to his heterosexual advances - which are societally dictated in order to overcome the greatest of taboos, the incestuous, unproductive, lesbian mother-daughter relationship - instead she maintains her internal link to the mother. The turn is not complete; the girl is always looking back to the mother with love, and her acceptance of heterosexuality is rarely complete: 'Her turn to her father is both an attack on her mother and an expression of love for her' (126). At adolescence other objects - such as close female friends, or an idealised pseudo-mother figure - may become the centre of the girl's attention; she may try to be as unlike the mother as possible, as with Eliot's early friendship with Maria Lewis. Again, complete separation and adherence to heterosexuality are not necessarily achieved, but pressure for this conformity is mediated by, and reproduced within the psycho-socially constructed, nuclear, heterosexual family.¹²

As the father is largely absent, the boy-child must imbibe his role 'positionally' by identifying with particular aspects of masculinity - both psychologically and sociologically - appropriating components of his masculinity, and identifying with cultural images of maleness. This means that 'boys are taught to be masculine more consciously than girls are taught to be feminine' (176). As they may lack an affective relationship with their father and reject their ties to the feminine, boys come to value isolation and separation. In a clamour for an elusive masculinity, boys begin to derogate all things female, as well as claiming for themselves exclusive 'masculine activities'; they learn what Freud called 'the normal male contempt for women' (182). Chodorow claims that this response stems not from any awareness of woman's 'lack' but from a

¹² Chodorow is accused of reinforcing heterosexuality (Rich 1987, 32; Housman 1982, 49) but is explaining heterosexuality's construction and the male fear of mother-daughter incest.

belief in female inferiority reinforced by fathers, although the original contempt is born of fear of rejection and maternal omnipotence as a result of the boy's early exodus from the preoedipal.

The main objections to Chodorow's work are from psychoanalysts over the downgrading of the Oedipus complex and the consequent displacement of the unconscious. Rose denies that a theory of the unconscious plays any significant role in Chodorow's account (Mitchell & Rose 1985, 37) and describes it as gender imprinting compatible with 'a sociological conception of role' (37). Yet the repression of certain 'bad' objects and object-relations into an unconscious internal suggests the presence of an unconscious. Adams joins this chorus, arguing that Chodorow is: 'disregarding Freud's concept of psychical reality and making the social determining of the psychical' (1983, 48). But what first originated the psychical if not the social? Freud frequently cites the importance of the incest taboo in the construction of the psyche.

Both males and females have a memory of a unique and intimate relationship which they wish to reproduce. For the male this is generally via woman as a return to the mother in a heterosexual relationship. For women, the impermeable ego of the male does not permit the closeness desired, and the triangular relationship of her childhood means that a man is only ever secondary and does not provide a way back to the mother. Having a child, however, does - hence the reproduction of mothering. Chodorow concludes that women's mothering includes the capacities for its own reproduction resulting in the production of women with, and men without, the particular psychological capacities and stance to achieve primary parenting (1978, 206). To break this so that women can achieve greater separation and individuality, and men can become more relational, Chodorow recommends shared primary parenting; all nurturing

and socialising should be carried out by both sexes/parents, *from birth onwards*. As she argues in favour of 'ungendering' she thinks that both sexes should care for both sexes.

Many critics misunderstand the crucial significance of the primary parenting period, and discuss socialising theories for later in the child's life. But 'primary parenting' is from birth onwards, when the formation of the child's 'self' and core gender identity slowly proceed as a result of the psychic interactions of carer and child. Critics assume that Chodorow expects 'ungendering' to proceed from men doing a little more baby care. But the task is arduous, and needs to be if it is to change psychoanalytic development. Ortner's comments that men's participation in childcare will not change the cultural view of women (Sayers 1982, 109) fails to understand that men's *primary parenting* would change gender, so that male children would emerge with an anti-women bias no longer factored into their psyche. The sexual division of labour cannot be separated from sexual inequality - it, and the woman's responsibility for child-care that produces it, generates male dominance. However this system is not biological or inevitable and 'it can be changed' (Chodorow 1978, 214). Having exposed how parenting qualities are created in women through psychoanalytical processes dictated by social structures, she suggests that by implication 'these qualities could be created in men, if men and women parented equally' (217).

Children can become satisfactorily attached to more than one carer, and Chodorow disputes research which claims that any dilution of primary care militates against basic ego development, observing that such studies only relate to cases where care was inadequate. She gives evidence that children with more than one carer are both more relational and assertive - as shown by children in Kibbutzim or other extended family situations (217) - and is generally in favour of 'othermothering' in

addition to shared primary parenting. However, she believes the 'mother as caretaker' model may be preferred by a patriarchal society as it appears to produce offspring who are 'good for society' in that they are 'achievement-oriented men and people with psychologically monogamic tendencies' (75). Further, 'because men have power and cultural hegemony in our society, a notable thing happens. Men use and have used this hegemony to appropriate and transform these [preoedipal] experiences' and define maleness as human, and femaleness as 'not man' (1989, 111).

Critics also claim that Chodorow ignores women's lack of power in the world and argue that economic considerations, not psychoanalysis, are primary in explaining women's oppression and their decision to mother (Lorber 1981, 484). Yet *The Reproduction of Mothering* contains a remarkable exposé of male and capitalist control of life. The sex/gender system is explored, showing how women are part of the exchange (Chodorow 1978, 8-9); the division of labour is discussed, where low-paid, unvalued work encourages women to stay at home (35), and manufactured changes in family structure mean that they have no support (37), while society's structure discourages non-mother or multiple caring (76). But the main question and remit always was, why do women want to mother? Chodorow defends herself against her critics, both in the Lorber essay and more recently (1995, 141-153). She states forcefully that few men will carry out primary care – even if there are exceptions - and is insistent about the near universality of women's mothering; she also makes it clear that many issues criticised were dealt with in the 'Afterword' (1978), particularly that her theories addresses white, Western nuclear families. Surprisingly, while there are many criticisms of these works, few comment on the enormity of the changes being suggested. Both Lasch and Housman see the suggestions as potentially dangerous, while Chris Weedon is more appreciative of the tension generated by Chodorow's ideas:

^{tension}
 '[the] produces a position where what has always been is not inevitable' (1987, 62-63).
 Adams (1983) is one of the few to appreciate the enormity of the idea of shared parenting, and sees it as liable to produce a dangerous androgyny of the emotions. Nevertheless, many feminist theorists are now coming to recognise that changing the psyche can be accomplished by social means.

For the purpose of my analysis of the operation of sympathy and duty in George Eliot's fiction it is notable that theorist Carol Gilligan recognises the importance of Chodorow's ideas in accounting for observed gender differences in ethical decision making. Gilligan first came to prominence with *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), where she announced that she had been hearing 'two ways of speaking about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self'(1). Since then she has argued at length that there is a different voice speaking about moral decisions, a voice that is not heard or valued, but which is vital to any full understanding of human development and morals (Gilligan 1986, 1987, 1988). Although she states that she is not making claims 'about the origin of the differences' (1982, 2), Gilligan gives a clear outline of Chodorow's theory (7-9), citing her contention that "'girls emerge from this [pre-oedipal] period with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not'" and that girls have "'a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own'" (8). Gilligan is concerned that object-relations theory ties the formation of the self to separation (1987, 28), yet Chodorow describes self-in-relation: 'a relational rather than a reactive autonomy', and claims that extreme separateness is a rigid defence (1989, 106-7). Gilligan's theories interact productively with Chodorow's work, and offer important insights into Eliot's novels.

Gilligan, a psychologist whose research concerned tests of ethical reasoning, became aware that girls could be marked down compared to boys of similar age, background and ability, because their answers did not conform to the moral response expected. Their response was not 'wrong', but just not fully catered for by the test and thus graded lower. These moral maturity tests, devised by Laurence Kohlberg, had been graded using male participants only; they present moral dilemmas and grade participants according to their solutions. Gilligan concluded that acceptable responses involved seeing the dilemmas as self-contained problems of moral logic which could be solved by the rigid application of a 'justice' ethic. She describes one boy as perceiving the dilemma as a 'math problem with people', while for a girl it becomes 'a narrative of relationships that extends over time' (Gilligan 1982, 28). The moral stance preferred by the tests is one of separation, autonomy, individuation, and natural rights as associated with male values. On Kohlberg's scale women generally reached the third level, where 'goodness' is defined as helping and pleasing others (18).

Gilligan is often misrepresented as claiming an ethic of care and relationship for women, and a justice ethic for men. This is too simple, for she is quite clear that the 'different voice' is characterised by theme and not gender; yet her immediate empirical and interpretive observations did associate the ignored caring ethic with women. However, Gilligan does not claim that men cannot have a care perspective and women a justice perspective; her observation was that philosophy had constructed a hierarchy of moral values which did not value the 'different voice' of an ethic of care and relationship, and that traditionally this caring principle has been associated with women. Already in this thesis, remarks on women's 'questionable' sense of justice have been noted by Spencer, Schopenhauer, Darwin and Freud. Gilligan suggests that such opinions result from women being judged according to normative developmental

theories that depend upon standards derived from male values. Freud, Piaget and Erikson (7, 10, 12) continued to value 'a trajectory toward increasing autonomy and individuation rather than toward intimacy and connectedness' (Benjamin 1983, 291).

Gilligan carried out her own 'moral dilemma' investigation, where groups of boys and girls are presented with certain ethical questions. A well-known example is whether a man should steal medicine for his sick wife or not (1982, 25-31). Overall, girls' answers tended to consider the wider implications - their thinking was lateral or 'web-like' - and was rooted in a desire to avoid hurting anyone, and a concern for relationships. They considered whether the man could get the drug elsewhere, or that if he went to prison his wife's situation would be worse. To them, the problems were of conflicting responsibilities rather than competing rights. By comparison, boys saw the problems as straightforward 'rights' issues, generally responding that the man had a right to steal the drug.

Another investigation analyses sex differences in relation to the perception of violence. College students, male and female, are asked to write stories in response to seemingly innocuous illustrations. Simply, men indicated that they perceived danger - and therefore wrote stories of aggressive response - in pictures suggesting relationship, trust and caring, particularly where women were represented; while women perceived danger in situations of ambition and success which they interpreted as suggesting alienation and isolation. These results suggest tendencies that Gilligan's work threw open to debate. If men are afraid of connection, relationship and intimacy, then this supports Chodorow's hypothesis that male gender may be constructed in reaction to anything female; it also accounts for any lack of relational concern in their moral thinking. Meanwhile, if women fear success - as studies suggest (Gilligan 1982, 14-16)

– imagining that it brings isolation and alienation, Chodorow's contention that girls are constructed in relation, and anything which threatens this and provokes aggression is to be opposed, appears to be validated. Interestingly, Eliot critics have commented on her fear of ambition and success (Bodenheimer 1990). Benjamin notes that Chodorow's account of separation versus self-in-relation highlights the paradox of a desire for independence versus a desire for recognition (in Lerner *et al* 1981, 160), which rather suggests that aspects of the 'other' are strangely present in each gender. On woman's moral sense Gilligan states: 'women's deference is located not only in their social subordination but also in the substance of their moral concern. Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgement other points of view' (1982, 16).

A further study investigates women's moral-decision making processes concerning abortion. Gilligan discusses at length women's lack of voice and frequent inability to speak and freely exercise moral opinions, or make decisions. Moral decision-making involves choice 'and the willingness to accept responsibility for that choice' (1982, 67). Abortion was chosen as a forum where women have to choose, and have to take responsibility for their choice. Follow-up interviews indicated that those women who had struggled to make their own decision and taken responsibility for it felt that they had grown and changed as a result. From these studies Gilligan proposes a model of moral development, one of increasingly complex and differentiated understanding of how care which also includes responsibility for oneself as well as others. At the first level, self-preservation is the primary concern and moral decisions revolve around one's own needs, such as having a baby in order not to feel lonely. The transition to the second level of morality involves balancing connection with others

alongside a definition of self – so there is the awareness of deciding between self and other. At the second level, goodness is perceived as self-sacrifice, where it is thought good, right, or one's duty to always defer to the other and avoid hurting their feelings, while ignoring one's own; thus a girl might abort the baby to please her parents. The transition to the third stage involves understanding that a morality of care involves care for the self. What matters is not what others will think of us, but what the consequences will be for both self and other. The transition is complete when a morality of non-violence is achieved where the most appropriate action involves not hurting either.

The 'different voice' of care which Gilligan identifies is a morality of responsibility based on non-violence and a recognition of the need for compassion and care for self and others. As with Chodorow's findings for women nurtured in the preoedipal, there is an emphasis on relationships and on the constant need to evaluate self-sacrifice versus selfishness. The main aspect of the 'ethic of care' is concern for the self in connection with others. All moral dilemmas are complex and contextual; they need solving via ongoing, web-like, feedback mechanisms and inductive thinking. There are no simple rules or rights because all situations are unique, each involving people in relation. Meanwhile, Gilligan does value the ethic of justice and is not valorising care. Although justice has been over-privileged and needs to work in harmony with the care ethic, in order to establish reciprocity, fairness and a respect for rights – our own and others'; there is also an emphasis on separateness, and the individual is to be respected. At the highest level of reasoning, moral problems are solved by the application of universal moral principles via formal and abstract thinking (Brabeck, 1993, 36). 'Development for both sexes would therefore seem to entail an integration of rights and responsibilities through the discovery of the complementarity of these disparate views' (Gilligan 1982, 100). If there are two sides to 'relationship',

then perhaps the optimum is mid-way, which means that caring should not be over-prioritised.

One of the strongest condemnations of both Chodorow and Gilligan is that they present an essentialist view. Chodorow's work appears 'an essentially biologically determinist and pessimistic account' (Leonard 1984, 54), with 'an essentialism about a female nature no less insidious for being culturally determined' (Wright 1992, 289). However, the definition of essentialism changes, at one time being synonymous with innateness and concerned with the unchanging inward quality of something as opposed to its attributes and existence. Now 'The term essentialism in feminist theory is taken on the one hand as biological or psychical determinism and on the other as denying the possibility of historical changes occurring in the structures of subjectivity' (Wright 1992, 77). Thus critics were taking Chodorow's account to be essentialist because of the psychic construction that she describes – disregarding her central project of changing subjectivity, which actually makes her work less 'essentialist' than that of Freud and Lacan, for whom our nature was fixed by the oedipal structure. Meanwhile Gilligan had always argued that she was not suggesting an essentially female ethic of care (Kerber *et al* 1986, 306, 308). In an extended discussion on the frequent use of the 'anti-essentialist critique' against second-wave feminist projects by third-wave feminists, Cressida Heyes (1997, 142) acknowledges that the meaning and the application of the term have become disconcertingly cavalier (143-4), now often meaning any feminist theory that is determinist, exclusionary, ahistorical, or that falsely reifies or generalises anything female. Overall, Heyes exonerates both Chodorow and Gilligan (147). I concur with Heyes' conclusion that it is easier to criticise than fully engage with 'political problems that often seem too overwhelming to address' (161).

Gilligan has never claimed statistical truth for her studies (126), insisting that it is enough if the 'different voice' is heard. Yet still critics assert that her work is not statistically viable (Luria; Kerber *et al*, 1986, 318-9). Critic Christopher Lasch assumes some *faux pas* on her part when she describes a 'caring' man (1992, 36), but Gilligan never said men could not care. Overall, the critics are correct, since empirical evidence in support of her claims is not available, interviews are not standardised, and no quantitative data is given (see Brabeck 1993). However, Gilligan never intended to prove that women were more empathic and relational; she just wanted the 'different voice' to be heard: 'To claim that there is a voice different from those which psychologists have represented, I need only one example – one voice whose coherence is not recognised' (Kerber *et al*, 327-8). It also does her an injustice to claim that she valorises the caring ethic at the expense of the justice ethic. Vandenberg castigates Noddings for her partial appropriation of this aspect of Gilligan's work, observing that 'these "different modes of moral understanding" are "complementary rather than sequential or opposed"' (1996, 256).

In 1982 Gilligan acknowledged that far more research was needed – unaware of the revolution that her work was to catalyse; for she has changed the 'voice' of social science, one example being that Laurence Kohlberg changed his own tests to include a care ethic (Kohlberg *et al* 1983). That people are increasingly able and happy to perceive themselves the product of different cultures across time and space, is one result of Gilligan's work (Bohart and Greenberg 1977). Whatever its faults, Gilligan's work has allowed for and encouraged the valuing of different realities and different ways of seeing - something that is investigated repeatedly in Eliot's novels. 'Gilligan's theory embraces relativism as the solution to moral choice' (Brabeck 1993, 46) and this position is her major advance over other moral development theorists.

All of these works have generated major, ongoing criticism, while also changing feminist theory beyond recognition, and many current practices and ideas are derived from feminist object-relations, even though they may no longer be credited.¹³ The successful ‘rhetoric’ (Davis 1992) of the original works provoked an ongoing debate, based around the controversies, the disagreements, the areas still to be explained, and the popular spin-offs. As a literary critic, I was attracted to feminist object-relations theory because it seemed to offer a new approach to much Victorian literature and George Eliot’s work in particular, with its involvement with the science and morality of the period, and complex approach to ethics, interconnection and changing environments.

In a disturbing book, *Death Without Weeping* (1992), Nancy Scheper-Hughes castigates theories such as Chodorow’s as Western, bourgeois, history-bound, and essentialist, because she feels that they have no place in her investigation of infanticide, deliberate neglect and selective care among the mothers she studies on the Alto do Cruzeiro, in Brazil. She asks, ‘What does mother love look like in this inhospitable context?’ (400), and suggests that ‘the invention of mother love corresponds not only with the rise of the modern bourgeois nuclear family (as Elizabeth Badinter [1980] pointed out) but also with the demographic transition: the precipitous decline in infant mortality and female fertility’ (401). Further, she is angry at the way some feminists have ‘celebrated, even idealised, the intuitive, empathic womanly ethos’, and adds: ‘Here I question the paradigm of an essentialist “female” psychology itself. The

¹³ For further discussion see: Fisher *et al* 1998; Hekman 1995.

“object-relations” that take shape in the womanly experience of pregnancy, birthing, and early mothering may just as “naturally” reproduce maternal sentiments of distance and estrangement as of attachment and empathy’ (403).

Hughes is right in claiming that the impossible ideal of the ‘good enough’ mother is largely a bourgeois invention, and many feminists have done Chodorow and Gilligan a disservice in presenting their work as over-valorising female nurturing. Chodorow’s aim is to show the dangers of such a practice and to suggest change, while Gilligan insists that if such a relational morality exists then it deserves to have an equal voice with the justice ethic. Neither is guilty of the ahistorical essentialism practised by Darwin and Spencer as they constructed ‘primitive’ woman and motherhood by reading the Victorian ideal back through time. Chodorow’s attention to the details of industrial capitalist society strongly implies that motherhood practices are always environmentally relative. It is nevertheless true that the kind of unconditional care described by Fairbairn is common to all our primate relatives, so long as conditions are good. It is the struggle for survival which produces the dark obverse of this picture suggested by Hughes, including infanticide and selective care of infants (Blaffer-Hrdy 1999, *passim*) - a picture corresponding to Eliot’s dark profile of ‘Dame Nature’. The parallels I draw between Chodorow and Eliot do not, therefore, depend on their belief that motherhood ‘is’ one thing or another. Rather, they each recognise that whatever mothering is, only women are ‘supposed’ to do it, so that only women are held responsible for the potential extremes of parenting, from self-denying devotion to callous disregard.

The literary application of feminist object-relations theories is comparable to the approach of psychoanalytic criticism, although the former is psycho-social, more fluid, and not restricted to the unconscious or the Oedipal crisis. Eagleton (1983) and Wright

(1982) concur in the belief that psychoanalytic literary criticism follows four main approaches: 'It can attend to the *author* of the work; to the work's *contents*; to its *formal construction*; or to the *reader*' (Eagleton 1983, 179). Both critics privilege attention to the formal construction and the language of the text - especially the literary analysis carried out by Lacan – and a concern with the relationship between the reader and the text.

References by literary critics to the works of Chodorow, Gilligan, Dinnerstein *et al* have become legion, yet few readings employ their theories extensively and specifically, or attempt to consider the form or the reader; most attention is given to analyses of the author and content. Patsy Stoneman provides a reassessment of Elizabeth Gaskell and her work with the aid of feminist object-relations theory, contending that critics have often dismissed Gaskell because they cannot read the feminine language of mothering and maternal thinking that is central to her work (1987(a), 14). By far the most common use of feminist object-relations theory involves a psychoanalysing of characters as if they were constructed on lines described by Chodorow and Gilligan. In a wide-ranging study of Caribbean women writers Niesen de Abruna employs Chodorow and Gilligan's theories to analyse the repeated incidence of women's bonding and the ethic of care among the characters in the novels discussed: 'The women characters best able to survive form a bond, a type of "mirroring" relationship with other women' (1988, 86).

The analysis of the latent structure of texts, including themes, form and language, continues to develop, and is the area where feminist object-relations theory has had its most profound impact. Gynocriticism elucidates woman's history through her texts and reveals, publicises and celebrates woman's previously hidden social,

personal and relational life; including woman's mothering, and increasingly the mother as subject (Gallop 1986; Suleiman 1988). Building on the continued emergence of such women-centred literature and criticism, Gardiner and others began to make the connection between the fluidity of women's writing, as cited by French feminist theorists, and the merging boundaries discussed in feminist object-relations theorists. Women's autobiographies are considered to be less 'goal'-orientated than men's, while: 'Critics find the merging identities and blurred boundaries which are attributed to women's relationships in all aspects of writing by women' (Gardiner 1985, 137). Meanwhile, Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) demonstrated that women writers were 'Breaking the Sentence: Breaking the Sequence' (31) in order to sever the narrative form from conventional structures and thus achieve a 'writing beyond the ending'. She refers to the theorists discussed here and asserts that "'Maternal Thinking" the ideology to which mothering gives rise' (180) is seen as extending through all the social institutions and pervades all habits of mind in much contemporary women's fiction.

Much of the critical work on the formal structure of women's texts is indebted to the theories of Dinnerstein, Chodorow and Gilligan. A classic text, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Abel *et al* 1983), builds on a base of feminist object-relations theory to analyse women's novels of development, comparing and contrasting the plots and narrative structures of typical *Bildungsromanen* by male authors, to the non-linear, more fluid, web-like and relational texts of female evolution by women authors - texts that resist closure and rigid classification, so that a new sub-genre of gender emerges. Furthering this work, *Mothering the Mind* (Perry & Brownley 1984) proposed new frameworks for assessing the structure of female texts and advocated a reading for sub-plots which celebrate women's relatedness - as outlined in Chodorow and Gilligan - sub-plots which 'communicate multiple and contradictory messages,

displace heterosexual love plots from the centre of women's fictions, disrupting their seemingly smooth surfaces to reveal the repressed content beneath' (Wright 1992, 281). Other formative texts are *The (M)Other Tongue* (Garner *et al* 1985), Abel's *Writing and Sexual Difference* (1982) and Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989). To some extent, the catalytic effect of feminist object-relations theory has been overshadowed by the presence of these groundbreaking texts, which are often referred to without their own influences being considered. While such works lay heavy stress on connectedness and caring as 'female', they do present an alternative reading schema for a perception of a non-male psyche, relatedness and progression in literary texts, particularly texts by women where gender issues are under debate and latent readings possible.

Margaret Homans attempts an analysis of language and literary form by fusing Lacan's and Chodorow's work in *Bearing the Word* (1986). Homans considers that Chodorow's reformulation of the oedipal complex has profound implications for Lacan's theory of language acquisition. In the absence of a reasonable Lacanian account of the girl's experience of the oedipal period, Homans appropriates Chodorow's theory and suggests that because the girl is the same as her mother, the father's interruption does not have as significant an effect as for the boy; there is no difference that needs linking by language, no gap or desire opens up to require repeated attempts at closure because the girl is not separated from the mother. The girl has less incentive to enter the symbolic order, and the preoedipal period lasts into the period of representational language, during which time she is in a triangular relationship, as described by Chodorow.

For Freud and Lacan, the girl's longer preoedipal period is a disadvantage as she is denied the early experience of separation, individuation and symbolic language acquisition. However, Homans suggests that the 'daughter has the positive experience of never having given up entirely the presymbolic communication that carries over, with the bond to the mother beyond the preoedipal period. The daughter therefore speaks two languages at once' (1986, 13). She speaks both the literal of the mother, and, as she makes the gradual shift to the symbolic order, the figurative of the father. Employing Chodorow's theory to tell the story of the daughter is interesting, and Homan's defence of Chodorow's theories as truth, as well as myth for literary criticism is persuasive. However, her leap from Chodorow's re-privileging of the preoedipal, to a referential language of women is problematic. Although Chodorow's theory is not essentialist, Homan's notion of a literal language for women seems just that, and is frequently interpreted as such. Stoneman agrees that Homans may be seen to be embracing 'a position outside culture' and feels that 'the pursuit of "literal language" is not a positive reaction for women' (Stoneman 1987(b), 11).

In describing her concept of the literal language, Homans distances herself from Julia Kristeva's explication of the semiotic (Homans 1986, 19). Yet I think that far greater use can be made of a Kristevan analysis of language, as part of a feminist object-relations literary criticism. This linkage of Chodorow and Kristeva was first suggested by an essay which questions the psychoanalytical base where women's oppression is seen as psychologically internalised, and somehow 'given' or irreversible (Leland 1989, 82). Blau DuPlessis quotes Michèle Barrett in order to make the point, like Chodorow, that things don't have to be like this (1990, 36). Further, Jacqueline Rose at a 1982 conference admitted that 'as women gain power in society, the oedipus complex may itself change' (Stoneman 1987(b), 5). The theories I have outlined correspond to what

Leland describes as 'a growing body of feminist research [that] is providing support for a politically important counter-thesis: gender and sexuality are social constructs that are in principle susceptible to intervention and change' (Leland 1989, 90).

The Lacanian claim that 'language only reacts to loss' (Chodorow 1989, 190) is subverted by Kristeva's theory of a pre-oedipal or semiotic language. While the semiotic is not an alternative to the signifying system of the Symbolic Order, the semiotic is an essential precursor; a scaffolding of relational syntax and communication practice that organises the child prior to the acquisition of language. The semiotic is derived from the basic pulsions that traverse the pre-oedipal child's body, and which are influenced by the carer's rhythms. It is not essentialist in the same way that Homan's literal language appears to be, for all children experience the semiotic, and if strengthened the semiotic must disrupt traditional gender divisions. However, some children, in staying longer in the pre-oedipal period, or by virtue of their relationships, may have greater access to the semiotic. Further, although the semiotic is repressed on entering the symbolic, it can erupt, disrupting symbolic language as 'contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences' (Moi 1985, 162). If Homans can conceive of yoking Lacan with Chodorow, then I find Kristeva's non-gendered pre-oedipal 'language' far more amenable for the purposes of an object-relations literary criticism.

Kristeva's work has moved through many stages, and more recent developments are influenced by object-relations theory (Doane and Hodges 1992, 54; Benjamin 1998, 88-9). Employing the work of André Green, Kristeva is concerned with 'the maternal, and in affect (particularly its potential as language)' (56). Green makes use of Lacanian theory but criticises Lacan because his emphasis on symbolic language ignores the

situation of analysands whose problems are tied to the 'space before language where the vicissitudes of the passions are inscribed' (57). Green follows the work of Klein and Winnicott to investigate the effect on language of a child's experiences of mother loss, and it is this work that Kristeva has developed in *Black Sun* (1989). Green is concerned with the effects of 'bad mothering' which is often psychically represented as the child's loss of the mother. This may be actual death, but generally it is an absence, withdrawal or passivity of the mother that Kristeva charts as having an effect on language acquisition. The good enough mother gradually effaces herself in a way that frames and supports 'the ego and its object representations' (59). Where the "dead mother complex" develops, offspring prove 'gifted at representation and interpretation, but these representations are finally disconnected from emotions' (60). Kristeva is particularly concerned with 'affective language', which exists at 'the border of the maternal unnameable and the paternal Symbolic' (Oliver 1993, 62). Generally, the loss of the 'good enough' mother is acknowledged, and then she is refound via the acquisition of language; this process is necessary before girls can go on to develop affective relationships with other objects. Kristeva is more interested in the problems with lost or bad mothers, where language is disrupted by the semiotic or affective language. While still a tentative theory - and although my interest in Kristeva's work is tangential - I feel it provides another avenue for exploring Eliot's form and language as part of a feminist object-relations re-reading of her novels.

The account of gender-differentiation provided by feminist object-relations theory, and the resulting gender-role dichotomies - where women appear to be more caring and relational, with men more autonomous and separate - not only corresponds to the gender roles which were assumed to operate during Eliot's lifetime, but also accounts for the traditional gender division of sympathy and duty that Eliot eschews.

Simply, women had responsibility for all caring and nurturing, including the provision of sympathy for all, where self-sacrifice was often expected; while men defined and dictated duty which was generally determined according to God, law, or societal mores. Eliot's apparent adoption of forms of sympathy and duty which ideally had no built-in gender divisions relates remarkably well to the ideas suggested by Chodorow and Gilligan, where all may ultimately be both caring and relational, and just and autonomous. Obviously there is no simple one-to-one relationship between Eliot's sympathy and duty, Gilligan's care and justice ethics, and Chodorow's ideas of relationality versus separation. However, there is considerable correspondence, and given that all the concepts have been discussed in detail, overlap is possible.

My own literary critical approach is to employ the psycho-social outline described earlier as a feminist object-relations reading of Eliot's fiction, in order to analyse the nature and function of sympathy and duty in the texts. I investigate the content, form and reader response, with some reference to Eliot herself. With regard to the form of the novels, I am particularly concerned to chart narrative strategies which encourage the reader to sympathy and which give multiple reports on events and characters so that sympathy and duty are variously assessed. I also map all aspects of form which are primarily related to relationship, such as: movements within the text through time and space; incidences of absence and connection; occurrences of rhythms and repetitions; patterns of speech and silence; and the use of metonymy. Where appropriate I also make links with Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the lost mother. The major part of my analysis, however, rests on characters and their relationships. Although this is not the emphasis preferred by Eagleton and Wright, my focus on sympathy and duty, care and justice makes the representation of people and their relationships a central aspect of my investigation.

Until Eliot met George Henry Lewes, her life had largely consisted of the duty of caring for her father and hard work; she appears to have received very little sympathy, care or support throughout her early life. The details of Eliot's life are well known and there are numerous excellent biographies (Ashton 1996; Karl 1995), however, I feel that there is still insufficient consideration of Eliot's own experiences of sympathy and duty. Although such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work, I do feel that Eliot's letters deserve a reading which considers her isolation, the demands constantly made upon her, and the thwarting of her own ambitions. Between 1841 and his death in 1849, Eliot was her father's housekeeper and latterly his sole companion and nurse during his final illness. She was tied to duty, particularly a duty of care and sympathy in a situation where no sympathy and care was returned.

After her father's death, despite some friends, possible lovers, and the ability to lose herself in her work for the *Westminster Review*, Eliot was essentially alone - with no one to turn to for support, encouragement or love - until she met Lewes in 1851. I am not acceding to the argument that Eliot needed someone to lean upon, however, I do feel that she required the love, happiness and mutuality that she bestows on the heroines of her later novels. These she found with Lewes. They had been together for nearly two years when they visited Ilfracombe in May 1856. 'Recollections of Ilfracombe' (GEJ 1998, 262-273) notes that Eliot's review of Riehl's *The Natural History of German Life* - to be published in the *Westminster* in July - coincided with this ecstatic first-hand experience of natural history. Her review of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* had appeared in April, and 'Silly Novels' was to appear in October. Together these four pieces form the core of her initial fiction-writing manifesto. This period also signals

Eliot's rebirth. The woman scrambling around on Ilfracombe's rocky seashore is not the lonely, self-questioning creature of a few years earlier.

Part II – Sympathy and Duty in Eliot's Fiction

Chapter Four - Challenging the *Status Quo*:

Scenes of Clerical Life and *Adam Bede*

On Tuesday 22 September 1856, George Eliot noted in her journal: 'Began to write "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton"' ¹⁴(*GEJ*, 63). This is the first of Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1988 [1858]) and these short tales embody the essence of her ideas on sympathy and duty. They also represent her first attempts to win the reader to sympathy. These early tales are told looking back in time, so that the distance afforded allows the reader to be sympathetic to difference. It also allows the narrator more control, for the reader is on unknown territory. The stories take place in small relatively enclosed communities which are all experiencing disruption so that traditional values cannot hold - an increasingly central theme in George Eliot's novels. The settings of the works examined here correspond to what Suzanne Graver describes as a *Gemeinschaft* culture (1984, 14): that is, one predominantly based on family and tradition, where the culture is not sophisticated but organic relationships still hold sway. Typically, the community is rural as in *Adam Bede*, or almost feudal as in 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story'.¹⁵ Yet the pains of transition to a *Gesellschaft* - or urban, industrial, capitalist community - are beginning to be apparent. The *Scenes* provide snapshots of communities where intolerance and injustice result from change. But change is also needed, for there is a general lack of care, justice, and intuitive sympathy and duty; as a result damage is done; in particular men and women suffer because their roles fracture

¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as 'Amos Barton'.

¹⁵ Hereafter referred to as 'Mr Gilfil'.

along the lines of these virtues, and women become scapegoats as a result of their self-sacrifice or objectification.

Repeatedly, these tales are concerned with outsiders who do not conform to the traditions or conventional duty of the community, with women outsiders frequently contravening gender norms. Newcomers are regarded with distrust, particularly if alone, intelligent, or 'different'. When the outsider belongs to the community and yet behaves in an alien manner, the response is worse. Hetty Sorrel is a striking example of such an 'outsider-within', and Janet Dempster anticipates all of Eliot's statuesque heroines such as Maggie, Esther, and Dorothea. The narrator introduces the outsiders via their impact on the community, and in every case they are viewed through several filters: comments from neighbours and family; what they reveal about themselves; the narrator's response to the community reaction; and the narrator's own opinion of the outsiders. The reader is thus presented with a seemingly multivalent picture where nothing is certain, and it is necessary to suspend judgement towards the characters. Divining the rights and wrongs of such judgements and the subsequent allocation of sympathy will not be an easy task for the questioning, tolerant reader whom the author is struggling to create - particularly when the communities and characters themselves are not questioning and tolerant.

Scenes of Clerical Life and *Adam Bede* are explorations in form, particularly in finding the appropriate narrative voice for a realistic yet potentially evangelically empathic narrator. Eliot laboured to create narrators who can make effective appeals to the reader. The effect can be disconcertingly familiar, yet what emerges is not quite the voice of an omniscient narrator:

There can be no illusion of life where there is no bewilderment, and the omniscient narrator is obviously not bewildered. The process most like the process of life is that of observing events through a convincing, human mind, not a godlike mind unattached to the human condition (Booth, 1961, 45).

That the narrator is self-confessedly a man is ironic, for our knowledge now (Beer 1986, 38) that the voice originated in a woman condemned to social ostracism because she was 'different' adds piquancy – and levels of interpretation – to our readings of 'difference'. The narrator is also self-consciously a man's man, with suggestions of a classical education and an understanding of science and philosophy that would usually be beyond the 'sphere' of women authors. Yet much of this is a smoke-screen, partly to counter the evidence of 'female knowledge' in the novels, partly because it is fun to play and poke fun from behind this assumed male mask (38), and partly because the voice of male reason and knowledge, added to female relational concern, underlines yet subverts the whole notion of gender differentiation. The complexities of the outsiders' relationships with the community structure the narrative; the narrator fosters the interweaving of voices and opinions in order to present a multi-relational account that mimics the process of becoming acquainted and reaching conclusions.

Amos Barton, the first outsider-within, is introduced via the nostalgic narrator's disapproving disquisition on the changes wrought on Shepperton Church, all of which convey a tacit disapproval of the literally 'innutrient' Barton (*SCL*, 5), whose baldness becomes a metonymic clue to his lack of nurturance. Barton, a relative newcomer, is intent on 'progress' even as the villagers resist. Eliot's studies with Lewes, her knowledge of evolution and her familiarity with Spencer's ideas of social and

psychological progress alerted her to constant ongoing change. However, the natural laws that govern a community, and the individuals who comprise it, must be valued and understood. Amos's first mistake is to force change without knowing or understanding himself or his environment. His second mistake is in not forging relationships.

The narrator reneges on his initial negative presentation with a sympathetic outline of the hardships of Barton's life, which may leave the reader confused. Are we for Amos or against him? Possibly against if the narrator's forceful present-tense report of a conversation between Barton's parishioners at Cross Farm is to be our guide. The reader is on the margins of the scene, dragged there by the narrator, and learns that Barton is bad tempered, not 'overburthened i' th' upper storey' (*SCL* 11) and generally deficient. This is an example of Comte's observation by comparison, so that the reader may form premises by induction. But then, should the attentive reader trust these characters? Are their morals and judgements sound? Mrs Patten, a malevolent, unchristian, miserly woman, plans to leave her devoted niece penniless. Mr Pilgrim is a worldly, intemperate man who values only money-generating ailments. All are variously in bondage due to inadequate knowledge. Meanwhile, even the narrator has distanced the audience, ordering us from scene to scene and accusing us of being 'miserable town-bred reader[s]' (8). And Mrs Hackit? She only supports the Bartons once she perceives that her 'good nature...was a little in contradiction with the dominant tone' (11). This comment reveals much about the character's opinion of herself, but the reader should be wary for Mrs Hackit deludes herself. She will later bow to public opinion and betray Milly Barton - when it seems best *not* to contradict the dominant tone.

The reader is constantly warned to be careful of swift judgements. As Eliot was aware from her study of hermeneutics, from Spencer's incessant warnings about careless dabbling with natural laws, and from her own experience of gossip, it is necessary to know all the facts before forming conclusions, even if 'nice distinctions are troublesome' (33). The text encourages provisionality, questioning and hypothesis. The critic Norton considers the narrator disturbing, as he listens to 'superficial and externalized, as well as simply inaccurate, information about their curate' (1989, 219); while Eliot's publisher John Blackwood commented: 'Perhaps the author falls into the error of trying too much to explain the characters of his actors by descriptions instead of allowing them to evolve in the actions of the story' (*GEL* II, 272). Blackwood and Norton seem to expect stable and coherent figures to evolve, but the very point of the many 'descriptions' from varied sources is the *lack* of stability and coherence. The different accounts are to foster contradictory and inconclusive impressions.

Amos sees himself as influential, rational and learned, for there is: 'nothing like a man who combines shrewdness with energy. The wisdom of the serpent ... was one of his strong points' (*SCL*, 15). Seeing himself as a typical male history-maker (Dinnerstein 1976, 176-9), Amos refuses to be governed by female power – such as Milly's aunt, or the propriety of the ladies of Shepperton – yet is happy to return to the mother's tender care (*SCL* 188). The cumulative picture of Barton is so negative - from the narrator's account of his physical appearance, to his brusque treatment of his wife - that even the temptation to see ourselves as the 'largest souls' (21) does not make it easy to sympathise. Yet Amos is in the 'wrong place', and the narrator's brief 'picture' of the other life that could have been his, by its very simplicity and clarity, induces sympathy for this 'honest faithful man' (21).

Milly's love for her husband is one argument encouraging sympathy, but as Amos consumes her love, constantly 'showed no recognition of Milly's attentions' (25), and fails in all caring and clerical obligations, then the reader's sympathy is inhibited. He lacks mere pity, and seems incapable of any relational care; he has confused Mrs Patten with doctrine, offended his congregation, and forced too much change too quickly. This lack of relationality is mirrored in the arrangement and linkage of the 'snapshots' of life within the tale. There is sympathy and care among the parishioners, and love surrounds Milly. However, linking all these 'tableaux' is Barton's spare lonely 'I', threading his linear route between all the web-like sites of potential connection that he fails to make. There is a tremendous sense of loss that calls up the absent mother and foreshadows the loss to come. This tension between connection and separation runs throughout the tale.

The narrator's pleading apostrophes to the reader demand sympathy - the technique that Pace (1986) assumed unnecessary. Despite critical comment that Eliot's narrative voice is as yet immature - 'she miscalculates her tone, reaches too eagerly towards us, is too arch, too intense, too solicitous' (Hardy 1993, 191) - she does show a remarkable understanding of the reader's psychology. These appeals, follow passages where Barton has been disparaged. Firstly, the narrator wishes the reader to understand the circumstances which led to Amos becoming placed beyond his abilities (*SCL* 20-1), for the changing nature of work and class increasingly permitted mobility. Spencer expressed fears of society evolving faster than man, so that Amos may be a victim of this evolution. Secondly, the narrator appeals to the readers' sense of themselves as ordinary mortals, whose 'very faults [are] middling' (40). In short, if we condemn Amos we must condemn ourselves. The opening of Chapter 5 is one of George Eliot's most direct appeals for sympathy on behalf of 'commonplace people'; it is a

defamiliarising intrusion which stirs the readers out of the fiction and provokes their analysis - possibly even their leap to an intuitive sympathy that will transcend difference. Yet it is an exceptional demand from an author – imagination, sympathy and understanding for the character most responsible for the crisis.

Milly's miscarriage¹⁶ precedes a decline into tragedy. The details surrounding the loss of this child are absent; it is literally a loss represented metaphorically. The silence is also scathing irony, in that such subjects were not discussed yet women constantly died. Thus sympathy for Amos becomes even more difficult. Milly's acceptance of the Countess's extended stay is the catalyst for the removal of all help and sympathy from herself. As another relative outsider, Milly is supported only so long as she conforms to conventional duty. Just as Gilligan's ethic of care is phenomenological (Brabeck 1993, 37), so is Eliot's analysis of all the 'selves-in-relation' that constitute her ideal communities of individuals. Contextual relativism is called for in judging Milly, yet it is not forthcoming.

Amos follows his Christian and human duty in assisting the Countess and defending his innocence, but the continued maintenance of his rigid 'justice' in the face of hardship for his family seems stubborn selfishness. Opprobrium for Amos doubles once Milly is pregnant again; Victorian readers would blame Amos for Milly's condition, and Amos's neighbours 'regretted that Mr Barton did not more uninterruptedly exhibit a superiority to the things of the flesh' (*SCL* 40). Blackwood did not like the particularisation of the children in the deathbed scene (*GEL* II, 272), but their touching and kissing is a significant relational image. In particular, little Walter

¹⁶ It is now generally agreed (Norbelie 1992, 64; Marcus 1975, 40) that George Eliot does not make a mistake in her timetabling, and that the 'illness that made [Milly's] lips look pale' (*SCL* 38) was the loss in March of the child referred to at the beginning of the tale. This also means that the 'seven months' baby (56) dead by December, was conceived soon after the miscarriage.

reaches out and 'speaks' at the moment of separation. This portrait of connectedness, and remembrance of pre-oedipal love, reaches out to the reader, surprising even those selfish and trivial men at the Garrick who 'mingled their tears with their tumblers' (*GEL* II, 293).

A muted message is that Milly is partly responsible for the tragedy. As Mrs Hackit says of Mrs Barton: 'It goes to my heart to turn my back on her. But she's i' the wrong to let herself be put upon i' that manner' (*SCL*, 44). Selflessness - which characterises Milly and the stereotypical image of Victorian women - is as much the cause of tragedy as selfishness and inflexible uncaring duty. A common perception of Milly among contemporary critics is as a representation of the 'Angel in the House' (Lodge 1973, 19; Knoepfmacher 1968, 55), with Eliot assumed to valorise selflessness. Yet it must be remembered that Eliot had done much to kill her own 'Angel in the House' - for once she felt the power of her own writing she was not prepared to be selfless. On being asked to write for a friend, she commented: 'It is a question whether I shall give up building my own house to go and help in building of my neighbour's garden wall' (*GEL* II, 431-2). Given such an attitude, it is unlikely that Eliot would demand selflessness from women; and her writing always 'participates in the undermining of polarities' (Beer 1986, 28).

If the rising tide of evolutionary, sociological and psychological doctrine was set to condemn women to domesticity, then Eliot's irony reveals a reticent yet radical social comment. She may also be parodying Spencer's theories of sexual selection when she describes the lovely Milly as a fitting prize for the ordinary Barton. This critique is also mirrored in Milly's fate, for it is her constant 'giving' that kills her. Milly is at a level of moral development where her caring extends only to others and

does not include herself (Gilligan 1982, 69). She is the ideal mother of Comtean and 'Woman's Mission' ideology - female images that Eliot had recently subverted in her essays 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' and 'Silly Novels'.

Finally, the narrator's 'set-piece' description of Milly is deeply ironic. The idea of the 'soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood!' (*SCL* 16) is undercut even as the narrator eulogises. The narrator suggests the reader would be scandalised if Milly 'had descended from the serene dignity of being to the assiduous unrest of doing' (16), yet this seeming 'Positivist' mother - nursing her restless child like the statue on Comte's tomb - never stops *doing*. The enthusiasm of the account conveys that Milly is good and lovely, but the narrator's insistent use of 'You' when addressing the reader is distracting. However, it does cause a questioning of the narrator's account. For Milly's goodness is not in doubt, but the worth and honesty of her allotted role is. She dies from a neglect sanctioned by the self-sacrifice demanded of women. She dies from her husband's neglect - because his construction as a man does not include the capacity to care; she also dies from the community's neglect, where all caring is delegated to women who are, however, bound by social mores. Henry James argued that in any conflict between irony and sympathy, irony was always sacrificed (Booth 1961, 48). In this early work the irony is reticent but it is pervasive.

The community try to compensate at Milly's death, but care and sympathy cannot be retrospective; they should be ongoing, with constant monitoring and feedback – as in the mothering that Ruddick describes. The women may be unsisterly, but the portraits of the men are damning. Leslie Stephen objected to the account of the Clerical Meeting, feeling that Eliot was merely in search of characteristic touches (Stephen 1924 [1902], 58); but this portrait of the barren nature of the clergy is essential

to the relational structure of the story, for care does not emanate from those most charged to nurture. Only Mr Cleves is 'the true parish priest, the pastor beloved' (*SCL* 46), he is the first of Eliot's maternal men - a character-type that develops throughout her oeuvre. The period of death and bereavement is characterised as relational by the movement of characters, with many acting on the margins and carrying out interweaving patterns of care, while at the centre, helped by this support yet still alone is Barton.

The surface reading of the tale is that the experience of death and suffering allows Barton and his parishioners to become more caring and sympathetic; its apparent intention is that the readers will be so moved both by the content and the strategies of narrative structure that they may themselves experience sympathy for Barton. Realisation by Amos that Milly 'was gone from him' and that he really never could 'make up for omissions in the past' (60) is more painful for its sparseness - mirroring Amos's very lack. Elizabeth Ermarth suggests that as 'Death is the great economist' (1985(b), 61) then the trauma of Milly's death may shake the characters and assure "“respectful pity”" (62). This inadvertently points to one latent reading of the text, for pity is really all that the parishioners feel. Ermarth's suggestion is too unrelational; it is sympathy, if not empathy, in the readers that is desired, not mere pity in the characters.

However, a more negative latent reading is possible - involving the question of whether Amos really acquires sympathy. Although the 'terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives' (*SCL* 60-1) makes him realise how selfish and unloving he has been, there are ominous overtones. When Amos visits Milly's grave the narrator explains that 'love is frightened at the intervals of insensibility and callousness that encroach by little and little on the dominion of grief, and it makes

efforts to recall the keenness of the first anguish' (63). While true, this is also a warning to be wary of forgetfulness and lack of imagination. For Patty, the Bartons' eldest daughter, takes on her mother's role and is sacrificed as Milly was before her (Norbelie 1992, 66-7; Brady 1992, 67). Early in the story Patty is perceived as already reproduced as a mother (Chodorow 1978, *passim*) and is observant where Amos fails (*SCL*, 19), although her 'preservative care' was not enough to save Milly.

At this point it is impossible to ignore Marian Evans's own history - this fate could have been hers. The last sentence of the story is consoling from a conventional point of view, but from the perspective defined by feminist object-relations theory it is chilling: 'Patty alone remains by her father's side, and makes the evening sunshine of his life' (64). The 'consolation' of the sentence is to be gleaned by the father, with Patty as its source but not its recipient. Eliot had issued the imperative 'never to beat and bruise one's wings against the inevitable, but to throw the whole force of one's soul towards the achievement of some possible better' (*GEL* IV, 499). A surface reading of 'Amos Barton' may achieve the meliorist increase of sympathy that is a 'possible better'. However, always present is the reticent, subversive reading: the unconscious beating and bruising that demand radical change.

In 'Mr Gilfil's Lovestory', Eliot also exhorts sympathy from the reader for her second cleric, although again the sympathy may be misplaced, and there is much for the reader to analyse. At the opening of the tale Mr Gilfil has recently died and several 'post-mortem' vignettes reveal that the Parson had cared for, and loved his parishioners in a personal, relational way, and was loved by all who knew him. The reader may be uncertain whether to approve of this pipe-smoking, gin-drinking old man of lax

doctrine, yet the narrator's opinion, and multiple reports of his intuitive sympathy and duty belie any disreputable image. Further, Mr Gilfil has a hidden past, about which the narrator drops sufficient hints to intrigue the reader, eventually granting himself a hypothetical reader's question, 'Mr Gilfil was a bachelor, then?' (*SCL*, 75).

Such a direct dialogue with the reader, while in danger of destroying the sense of fiction, preserves the illusion of story-telling; especially as it implies that Gilfil – and the narrator – actually exist. It even links relational concern to the reader. However, with regard to the love story, the narrator warns 'refined lady-readers' (*SCL* 74) that they should not object, as 'gin-and-water, like obesity, or baldness, or gout does not exclude a vast amount of antecedent romance' (74). Such topics were not the usual fodder of *Blackwood's* readers, and such approaches to 'implied readers' can be distancing, for they are sufficiently specific for the actual reader to wish not to be associated with them (Warhol 1986, 811). However, readers are encouraged towards sympathy, for when young and handsome, Gilfil had a beautiful, talented bride who died in childbirth. Since then his relationship to his parishioners had saved and sustained him as a caring vocation, for 'It had like to ha' killed him when she died, though he never gev way, but went on ridin' about and preachin' ' (131). In a telescoping of time that encompasses *decades* of 'ridin' about and preachin' ', George Eliot gives readers an instant explanation for this confusing cleric, and it is such relational touches – as much as 'unfinished baby-caps' (129) – that encourage sympathy.

The narrator's revelations excuse this strange beginning to a love-story, generating desire to know more. To tell a story's outcome in the first episode of a serial work was unusual, yet Eliot was always taking arms against the conventions of popular

fiction (Rowland Tush 1993, 9; Carlisle 1982, 166). Confusion over what to think about the characters was far more pronounced when the *Scenes* were published. Readers were used to a more Manichaeian approach, even from the less populist authors: Jane Eyre - good; Blanche Ingram - bad. George Eliot was writing very much against the grain compared both to the more predictable 'serial' plots that were then appearing in *Blackwood's* (Martin 1994, 54), and when compared to the hordes of 'Silly Novels' that were her main competition and set the 'horizon of the expectable' for a particular genre (Rowland Tush, 10-11). In her 'Silly Novels' essay, Eliot had insisted that the 'real drama of Evangelicalism...lies among the middle and lower classes' (1992, 315) and illustrated this in her first fiction. Yet John Blackwood enquired: 'when are you going to give us a really good active working clergyman?' (*GEL* II, 345). Eliot's reply was that: 'I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are' (*GEL* II, 362). Yet throughout all her works, irony constantly underlines what *should be*, or rather, what 'should *not* be' (Cervetti 1992, 354). Exhibiting things *as they are* means multiple perspectives, which leads to uncertainty about how to judge characters and events.

An introduction to young Gilfil is achieved by moving the story back to 1788, and a meeting with his guardian Sir Christopher Cheverel and Captain Wybrow, Cheverel's nephew and heir - and Gilfil's opponent for the love of Caterina Sarti. All are orphans and relative outsiders; Caterina is an Italian foundling, and the men are pseudo-sons. Despite Wybrow being preferred by both Caterina and Sir Cheverel, the narrator presents Gilfil with his 'open face and robust limbs' (*SCL* 80) as a general favourite. Yet Gilfil is not as handsome, is not the heir, and, while sympathetic, is judgmental, so that 'Caterina, like the rest of us, turned away from sympathy which she suspected to be mingled with criticism' (85).

Caterina, the true outsider, is another piece of Italy brought back by the Cheverels from their architectural foraging trip. As such, she is almost completely objectified. Uglow criticises Caterina's stereotypical presentation, seeing her as 'conceived almost entirely in cultural terms' (1987, 86), but this mimesis is exactly the point. Consciously or not, the author's construction of Caterina reflects the objectification that has been her experience. Her only moments of individuality are the semiotic release of her singing, and the superb irritation that makes her turn from the critical, duty-laden Gilfil. Generally, only Caterina's malleable social self is apparent (Flax 1987, 92) - the one usually encouraged in women – and the passion of her sexual self is sublimated via her singing. She lacks any form of 'adequate knowledge', never having been encouraged to exercise any freedom or understanding, and is thus subject to 'fancy' and in bondage to her passions. In this tale Eliot deconstructs the stereotypes associated with 'gothic' stories, yet John Blackwood was still expecting the typical romance outcome: 'I look with great anxiety for the picture of her half-broken heart turning to Gilfil' (*GEL* II, 297). Since Eliot has already displaced expectations by revealing the outcome for Caterina and Gilfil, the Gothic tale becomes Comte's observation by experiment as the text engages the reader in 'working out' what happens, so that reading becomes active and creative (Iser 1974, 275), giving exercise for the imagination in anticipation of sympathy being demanded.

With no clear sense of self, Caterina's multiple roles and relationships result in her objectification. Images of Caterina as pet or animal abound, and 'all perhaps involve a lack of respect for Caterina as a person. The images make her into an object, something less than human' (Lodge 1973, 26). For the Cheverels are lacking in care; Sir Christopher calls to mind many of Jane Austen's lamentable patriarchs, who have

forgotten their chosen obligations as landlords and guardians in their concern with property. Wybrow releases Caterina's desire and suppressed selves, but he realises that in her passion she may be capable of contravening the family duty demanded by Sir Christopher. Yet Caterina is unable to assert herself, inhibited by fear of further loss. Her lack of fictional life, particularly in the central part of the tale, reflects this lack of subjectivity and power as she becomes more passive and selfless on the surface. The awareness that she is totally dependent is chilling. For she believes she has glimpsed love and purpose, yet a conventional duty to 'parents' and a culture that have never valued her demands repression and denial.

While Gilfil adores Caterina his increasing adherence to the masculine justice ethic of Sir Christopher distances her. Feuerbach would argue for blood and love, not laws. David Lodge is surprised that Gilfil 'is also implicated in the insistent pet-imagery and illusion' that surrounds and objectifies Caterina. For him this blurs the 'moral-imagistic pattern' dehumanising Caterina, because Gilfil's love for Caterina 'is supposed to be selfless and perceptive'. (Lodge 1973, 26). Lodge misses the point that sympathetic care, which is crucial to Eliot, is in conflict with the dominant justice ethic which has seduced Gilfil. This consideration permits a reading where Caterina is indirectly betrayed by Gilfil, because of his greater respect for Cheverel's 'duty' than for her. It is an example of coercive duty subverting the primal ethic of care born of the 'I/Thou' relationship, as variously described by Rousseau, Feuerbach and Spencer. That we find it so difficult to perceive Gilfil as selfish, and are propelled into the dominant reading of the tale – whereby the Cleric should be the main recipient of our care and sympathy and the main source for others - is partly because of the precedents set by the romantic genre. The narrator has won the reader over to sympathy for Gilfil after an inauspicious beginning, and having been convinced he is the 'romantic hero' it

is difficult to view him as flawed. But Gilfil is the only character who does not have to fight for self-preservation against Sir Christopher, who sees the full extent of his despotism, and who knows the damage done to Caterina.

The moment when the reader fears that Caterina will kill Wybrow is a false climax (Knoepfmacher 1967, 13) yet perfectly possible given the state of mind conveyed. John Blackwood remonstrated, but Eliot wrote explaining why she could not modify Tina's behaviour: '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' (*GEL* II, 299). When Caterina races from gallery to woods intending to stab Wybrow, the narrator becomes a stranger with gothic horror diction – Caterina's actions so estrange us that even language becomes distanced. At the moment when she talks of killing, Caterina's speech is that of another and in a future tense; she is a 'she'; Caterina finally voices herself as 'other' and is outside herself with grief.

Caterina returns to infancy, dislocating space and time - thus altering all her perceptions - by returning to childhood; literally to Dorcas, and metaphorically in her catatonia by a brief rebirth into a pre-oedipal time without pain (Norton 1989, 221). The phases of her illness are a second growth into adulthood. Meanwhile the narrator insists that Gilfil 'had lost the being who was bound up with his power of loving' (*SCL* 153), as if Caterina had mothered him, yet she is still 'his little bird', an object to be owned (154). Gilfil counsels Caterina and absolves her of all guilt: 'Our thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are' (159). There is a strong element of role-reversal here. If Caterina has reverted to a child-like state, then

Gilfil is the mother, and Caterina's mirror-response to him helps restore her. The narrator suggests that a 'brave and faithful' man's love has in it the 'maternal tenderness' that he experienced with his own mother (154-5). This, plus his early love for Caterina, may explain Gilfil's caring abilities which have been overshadowed by his severe justice ethic and duty to Sir Christopher. In her re-awakening to recovery via music, Caterina admits defeat, reconciles herself to dependance, and acknowledges the need for Gilfil as 'something to cling to' (163).

Caterina again confronts the situation common to women, where marriage and motherhood are her only options. 'Amos Barton' had reminded the reader of the truth of Victorian childbirth, and although muted, the text is unequivocal that Tina is not well enough to face pregnancy: 'her health continued too delicate to encourage the slightest risk of painful excitement' (165). Gilfil's passion exceeds his maternal thinking, so that in claiming his love too early he condemns her to death. This is not the 'looking, holding (as opposed to acquiring), self-restraint, humility, and empathy that comprises the maternal discipline' (Perry & Brownley 1991, 215). Knoepfelmacher, with reference to Caterina's singing from Gluck's *Orfeo*, concludes: 'If Tina is identified with the fragile Eurydice of Orfeo, Maynard Gilfil cannot aspire to become an Orpheus able to follow his beloved into the realm of shadows' (1967, 14). However, Gilfil's devoted love has already won Caterina back once. He followed her into illness, depression and near-madness. His mistake is to renege on his pact with 'Care', by wanting Caterina too much, too soon. In marrying her, Gilfil has looked back and lost Caterina forever. He becomes 'the poor lopped oak' (SCL 166) because he failed Caterina, but the 'noble tree' persists. The 'Epilogue' returns Gilfil to the reader as the sympathetic cleric of the opening, with his imagination expanded by his experience of loss and guilt; this latent reading of passion over-ruling sympathy and care is distanced, and to most readers there

predominates the manifest tale of a blighted life spent working to regain a balance of sympathy and duty.

In the third story, 'Janet's Repentance', the outsider is the Evangelical preacher Edgar Tryan, while Janet Dempster - wife of Tryan's main opponent - is the outsider-within. Both characters challenge community mores and accepted gender roles, while they battle egoism and altruism in attempts to find peace and human connection. Again, change causes intolerance within the community. Ostensibly suspicion and fear are aroused by the advent of evangelicalism, but the muted fear is that the working classes, women, and the ethic of care may have acquired a champion in Tryan. The oppositions explored within the first three chapters form the base for the development of the remainder of the tale. John Blackwood felt that this long introduction did not assist 'materially in the movement of the story' (*GEL* II, 344), but in fact it bears significantly on the central ethical debates.

Although the reader does not meet Mr Tryan until the third chapter, the cleric is constantly discussed. He is fiercely opposed in the community by Anglican traditionalists and the narrator portrays his 'Red Lion' opponents, particularly Lawyer Dempster, as loathsome. Through his brutal yet pretentious talk, unsavoury appearance, and egotistical misappropriation of language, Dempster condemns himself and raises Tryan. His seizure and control of speech suggests post-Freudian theories of male access to language - and it is significant that Dempster's wife, Janet, is silenced and absent from the text for some time. Dempster and his crew are Hobbesian men bent on self-interest. In this portrait of Milby all those branches of social convention that Locke and Hume expected to assist man's moral sense - God, justice, and public opinion - are corrupt or manipulated. They have more in common with Spencer's notion of false and

coercive duty. The good folk of Milby seem in need of a sound clergyman, but Mr Tryan 'held peculiar opinions' (181), and Evangelicalism was viewed as a 'disease' (182).

As before, the narrator challenges the reader with different versions of the cleric. He is finally encountered at Mrs Linnet's cottage. The text declares that 'it was much pleasanter in Mrs Linnet's parlour than in the bar of the Red Lion' (*SCL* 183), and there seems little doubt that 'these ladies have retained standards other than those prevailing in Milby and so provide a footing for Tryan's ideals' (Carroll 1980, 338). John Blackwood concentrated, like critics since (Noble 1965, 99), on the comic function of such groups, lamenting so much 'humour in the delineation of characters who ... are not in themselves interesting' (*GEL* II, 344). But his own author would warn him not to make swift judgements. Few critics examine the ethical and narrative function of the Linnet ladies, particularly in relation to the introduction of Tryan, the practice of sympathy, and the importance of the gender debate.

The significance of placing this chapter in opposition to the first, with the narrator's depressing disquisition in between, is to draw attention to the parlous state of gender, class, and caring relationships in the town. The narrator jokes about the Linnet ladies' 'susceptibility towards the clerical sex' (*SCL* 191), but Tryan represents a type of man not widely available. The jests at the ladies' expense are a technique to allow a male narrator to air his credentials and thus foster complicity with the readers, so that - as with George Eliot's 'male-journalist' voice - the extreme message that these men lack the virtues of care, sympathy, justice and any duty that Eliot would value, may be more easily imbibed. Far from condemning the narrator's attitude, it is apparent that Eliot devises a speaker who understands women's 'yearning for a third gender that does not

fall into the rigid categories of masculine and feminine' (Brady 1992, 80). Tryan, as one of Eliot's 'maternal men' combines an ethic of justice with an ethic of care (Gilligan 1982, 167).

It is significant that the ladies are physically marginalised at the edge of Paddiford Common, the working-class region of miners and handloom weavers. Eliot is often criticised as being too melioristic, fearing change and revolution, and not being sufficiently committed to social criticism, to the denunciation of class and gender oppression (Marcus 1975, 25, 37; Bedient 1972, 33-34). However, such objections rise from a 'vein of phallic criticism' (Cervetti 1992, 352) which feels that social criticism should be 'militant ... propagandist' (Bedient, 33). Eliot's method of attack is a subtle narrative subversion. Milby society labels the Linnet ladies 'vulgar women' (*SCL* 192), possibly because they are not wealthy enough to demand respect. Yet they are also 'different'; they are independent, resourceful and comfortable enough not to require any old marriage as a 'preservative from want'. The reader might believe such feminine homilies once they read on and realise that at the same time that Tryan is talking to the ladies, Dempster is becoming dangerously drunk in order to go home and beat his wife. It is at Mrs Linnet's that we first hear of Janet Dempster. Oblique comments alert the reader to a mystery (*SCL* 190), for Janet has turned to drink.

It is an anti-climax when Tryan finally appears. Damnation by Dempster and adoration by the ladies lead the reader to expect a pre-fall Satan, and his petulant outburst at the loss of the Sunday Lectures does betray marked egoism. However, Tryan demonstrates that he can control his passions, and ponders where his judgement had failed. This humility and willingness to reconsider the correspondences between his own ideals and the different layers of the community show an understanding of the

workings of both nature and psychology. He is at once the best of Spinozan, Comtean and Spencerian men, but the reader is still undecided, and consciously or not, Eliot works well to create this uncertainty, so that sympathy, tolerance and understanding – when it eventually surfaces - will surprise ‘even the trivial and the selfish’ into ‘attention to what is apart from themselves’ (Eliot 1992, 263). This long introduction to *Tryan* is essential for an understanding of all oppositions. The method of constantly presenting individuals via the direct opinions of other characters in the works is what Marcus describes as ‘a mode of dramatized discourse’ (1975, 28) which ‘enables us to regard the characters that are being created from a number of different points of view’ and conveys the ‘relativism of human reality’ (Marcus 1975, 29).

Janet Dempster, the outsider-within, does not appear until the fourth chapter, at which point the account of her husband's drinking is a frame for the beating that is her nightly experience. Janet is silent. Women's silence is a powerful and recurring image in Eliot's work. Generally they are denied access to language, and so lack the power to represent themselves; however, silence here is more significant, for Janet was a relational woman, and to remain silent denies connection. Her silence serves to re-open the ‘gap’ between Robert Dempster and woman/mother that his relationship with her had closed; he experiences rejection again. These few paragraphs, and the pause before the beating finally begins (198-9) are among the few in the work that contain little ambiguity. Elsewhere the reader puzzles about what is happening, and where sympathy is due; but here, the multiple perspectives are lacking. Surely Janet's call upon the reader's sympathies and those of her community is so evident as not to require such clarity? Yet Miss Pratt's attitude (274) prepares the reader for the central contradiction, explaining why George Eliot could not permit a more veiled reading of Janet's predicament.

Blackwood was worried about Janet being driven to 'so unsentimental a resource as beer' (*GEL* II, 344-5), and a similar response to Janet - ostracised and receiving no support - is presumably what George Eliot feared from her readers; hence the unambiguous violence in order to win sympathy. Thus the narrator acts throughout as if the moral pathway is unambiguous: the reader just needs more tolerance, imagination and sympathy to work it out. Contemporary criticism *was* more offended by Janet's drinking than Dempster's violence (Carroll 1971, 49-70), and few shared Eliot's 'satisfaction in Janet' (*GEL* III, 35). But she insisted that Tryan would 'carry the reader's sympathy' and that she 'had made it apparent in [her] sketch of Milby feelings on the advent of Mr Tryan that the conflict lay between immorality and morality - irreligion and religion' (*GEL* II, 347). More specifically the opposition is between self-interest and intuitive sympathy, and intuitive duty versus convention.

Blackwood commented: 'Hitherto Janet and Tryan, who ought to bear the the chief burden of the interest, do not stand out from your canvas so distinct in form and substance as your other figures' (*GEL* II, 359). Yet the relatively submerged presence of the two outsiders, both suffering and isolated while living within a complex web of relationships, is a significant absence. Both characters are 'I' in isolation, with no sense of 'Thou'; they are hemmed in by conformity, by lack of close relationships to confirm their sense of self, and distracted by an oscillation between selfishness and selflessness. Dialogue is always symbolic of connection and sympathy, yet both have few honest, open, personal talks, and the need to relate powers the caring work of both. Janet had a close loving relationship with her mother that reproduced caring, sympathy and relationality, while her education and separation may account for her independence, autonomy and 'difference'. She satisfied her need for connection and care via kindness,

with the result that she clings to this 'vocation' even when Robert's acts or her own drinking leave her beside herself.

Meanwhile, Tryan has begun to energise the community into a new regard for itself and has precipitated 'that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, "which is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life"' (Carroll 1980, 339, quoting *SCL*). This new nerve pathway in Milby is furthered as Tryan's movements and interactions of care and support increase and affirm connection. Sympathy and intuitive duty became more clearly defined and practised by more of the townsfolk, as 'a rule of goodness higher than the opinion of their neighbours' (*SCL* 228). Meanwhile, Dempster makes angry, lonely dashes for money or revenge. The tragic irony is that both sets of passionate movement will result in their deaths.

Until her personal crisis, Janet's life has been a Comtean one of resignation and activity. However, Dempster pushes her too far, and 'for the first time in her life her resentment overcame the long-cherished pride' (244). As Dempster's own life fails, his only power is beating Janet, who yet is too proud to submit. Readers expect a fearful beating, but Dempster merely puts her outside. This may appear an anti-climax, but Eliot's psychology, both for the character and reader, is profound. As a relational *and* autonomous woman, Janet's 'self' depends on her pride in herself and her connection to others. In the community she represses all sides of herself other than the social, caring side expected of women, while with Dempster she maintains her autonomy. But if Janet no longer preserves this strong, proud role, then Dempster's power is over. Thus when Janet chooses possible death (245), Dempster humiliates her instead, thus

attacking her relational self. Such degradation expresses far more than the beatings that Janet is dependent.

Tryan confesses his own sins in order to convey to Janet his understanding that: 'sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form...[and]...confession often prompts a response of confession' (358). In a letter to Blackwood when first introducing Eliot's work, Lewes said that the tales were of the clergy, 'solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect' (*GEL* II, 274). In this sense Tryan is a Feuerbachian man: he re-connects Janet to a fully human 'I/Thou' relationship rather than persuading her to God. His 'cure' for Janet is a talking cure, which involves reason as well as sympathy. As Tryan's ministry develops, greater experience adds to his abilities, for caring begets caring. This process corresponds to Gilligan's accounts of increasing ethical awareness as a result of taking responsibility for moral decisions. George Eliot's sympathy was concerned with all, with individuals and communities, but did not rest on generalisations based on statistics - hence her attack on utilitarianism at the beginning of Chapter 22. She feared actions based on rational considerations alone, and so the narrator argues that 'emotion, I fear is obstinately irrational; it insists on caring for individuals' (270).

There is a possibility that Janet will adopt selflessness, and hence her desire to return to Dempster when he is ill and the hope that love could be recaptured if he survives. This is a very powerful Spinozan doctrine, urging the forgiveness of those who do not have control of their lives. The account of Dempster's death disturbed Blackwood who wished that he 'had pressed George Eliot more to curtail or to indicate more delicately the Delirium Tremens scene' (*GEL* II, 394). Janet's pity is intensified by observing Dempster's suffering. However, it is pity and not sympathy that Janet

now feels (282). The accounts of Dempster's earlier violence, and the extremity of his delirium offers a fierce textual warning against selflessness; now Janet merely desires that Dempster would 'read the full forgiveness that was written in her eyes' (388), but also that he would ask her pardon; both are essential. The moment of Dempster's death is left deliberately ambiguous: although Eliot would wish sympathy for him, it would not be at the expense of Janet's new-found sense of self-in-relationship.

While Dempster's death is a convenient plot move which releases Janet from an abusive past - and the unlikely ideal future of her fantasy - it also allows for a closer exploration of selflessness. In daring to leave Dempster, she has begun to include herself in her decision-making in a way neither selfish nor selfless - the two poles she has been torn between in her marriage. She also questions the conventional duty that binds her to him. Although Janet quickly fills her days with good works, 'the chief strength of her nature lay in her affection' (285), and caring for others is a vocation. Such caring is not altruism because she is including herself when she chooses to care; it is a Kantian 'imperfect duty' to others. Caring also saves Janet from her addiction: 'Whenever the too well-known depression and craving threatened her, she would seek a refuge in what had always been her purest enjoyment - in visiting one of her poor neighbours' (286). Janet's inclusion of herself in care is reflected in her persuading Tryan to take more care of himself so that he can live among them longer. Having experienced both Dempster's selfishness and supposed rationality, and Tryan's selflessness and excess of fellow-feeling, Janet comes to embody a balanced form of both. She guides Tryan out of his selfish selflessness which can now be perceived as guilt over Lucy and a reaction against his own strong egoism. Their relationship has began as a Comtean priest advising a woman; but now the roles are reversed as Janet begins to show Tryan the dangers of his selflessness. In finally acknowledging his need

for affection, even love and desire, 'he was conscious of a new yearning for those pure human joys which he had voluntarily and determinedly banished from his life' (298), and there is a great deal of suppressed eroticism in the final relationship between Janet and Tryan.

The harmony of sympathy that Adam Smith describes is attained when both have learned from each other; Tryan accepts earthly love and abandons his self-sacrifice, while Janet embraces the life of sympathy and caring that satisfies her most. Janet may be supported by a belief in the love and forgiveness of God, but she is also supported by her feelings for Tryan (263). She returns to where she always wanted to be, a member of the community who is valued for her reason, intelligence and sympathy. That she adopts a caring that yet includes herself, as does Tryan, is symbolised by the mutuality of their kiss. Janet survives - spared the usual 'death or marriage' alternatives available to heroines. There is an openness about her ending, and while it is not an exceptional fate for a woman, it is her choice. Although Janet is saved and the community temporarily improved, the submerged message is less about the improvement of sympathy and duty in the characters in the text than about how much the text can promote sympathy and duty in the reader. The caring that George Eliot's fiction promotes is not self-sacrifice, since caring has to include the self. Further, duty is not blind duty to husband, or role, or position in the community, nor is it a duty that endlessly attempts to atone for past sins.

Scenes of Clerical Life was well received, yet Eliot declined to write more stories, wishing instead to work on the larger canvas of a novel (*GEL* II, 381). From the very first paragraph, *Adam Bede* (1998 [1859]) is a multiple narrative in that differences

or oppositions are constantly offered, analysed and dramatised, while no-one and nothing is as it seems. The narrator is attempting a realistic account from the mirror of his memory, but warns us that 'The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused' (*AB* 175). Within the complex community of the novel, intuitive sympathy and duty are lacking, as are imagination and caring, also reason and justice. The causes of this erosion of care and justice originate largely in the change from a *Gemeinschaft* to a *Gesellschaft* culture (Graver 1984, 94-105) as external or urban influences contribute to the depletion of caring.

Adam Bede himself is influenced by the rise of the individual and plans to advance himself; he pursues study, work and common sense, to the exclusion of family relations and imagination. Comte blamed individualism for the erosion of family-based societal values and the subsequent halt to the spread of altruism. While Adam has made a personal decision to stay with his family and meet his 'obligations', he is generally more influenced by conventional duty and Christian self-interest ('It 'ud make a poor balance when my doings are cast up at the last, if my poor old mother stood o' the wrong side' [*AB*, 48]) than by love or understanding. Another 'transition' factor is the decline in the authority of the aristocracy, church and family. The obliteration of the Donnithorne coat-of-arms from the weathered inn sign is symbolic of the Squire's general abdication of care and duty. Later, the narrator takes up the rhetorical debate with the reader as to whether Mr Irwine is a sound minister for the community or not. Meanwhile, family values may seem superficially strong, but there is already evidence of breakdown. Dinah lives away from her Aunt, while more significantly, Hetty's mother moved away and Hetty only returned as an orphan outsider. Further, conventional or societal mores have increasingly taken over from morals; thus both Mrs Poyser and Lizbeth Bede are more concerned about the cleanliness of their house than

loving their offspring. False education and instruction of the type that Rousseau describes have aided the establishment of these 'artificial virtues'. Further, the God of man's religion is now the false God of theology so that while the villagers follow Christian rituals with feeling, there is little understanding. Overall Mr Irwine's flock are still in the fetishistic-theological stage, with only Adam or Arthur aware of any 'positivistic' aspects to come. Rituals within the community still provide some sense of care and belonging, but they also mask fragmentation.

The structure and form of *Adam Bede* contribute to the assumption that all is calm. The novel is massive and slow-moving, and the early books follow the format of the *Scenes* with the narrator leisurely threading a way between 'pictures' of Hayslope life. The surface-tale predominates and lulls the reader (Carlisle 1982, 9), and it is common to view *Adam Bede* as a stable and coherent pastoral (Bedient 1972, 35-6; Shuttleworth 1984, 28), yet there are many clues to the contrary. Eliot's Strauss translation served as her introduction to hermeneutics, and it is possible to imagine Eliot's text imitating the Biblical pattern: looking back at the past, yet re-writing it for the reader to produce these tales as myths in order to bring about change.

Again Eliot follows the fortunes of certain outsider characters in order to map the action of sympathy and duty - particularly to see who administers them, and who does not, and also to investigate how these virtues are endangered. The theories of sympathy which I believe Eliot to have incorporated into her definition - from Spinoza to Spencer - all suggest that the development of sympathy begins in close kinship relations. As sociality and experience develop, and as the faculty develops in certain individuals, sympathy may be extended to the community, and even beyond - but only when conditions are stable and secure. In times of change and transition, sympathy may

be limited and is generally not extended to relationships of 'difference'. Therefore, in communities such as Hayslope, where tolerance may not normally extend far beyond the parish boundaries, and where change is beginning to be felt, sympathy is more difficult, and coercive conventions become more rigid.

Gender difference is a dominant theme and central to any interrogation of Eliot's sympathy and duty. The double opening of the novel involves 'an indoor and an outdoor, a workscene and a landscape, a "realistic" and a "mythic", a masculine and a feminine' (Gates 1998, 21). Yet while the landscape is feminized - even interpreted as a description of a female body (Beer, 1986, 61) - and nature is typically associated with women as opposed to culture and language, it is Dinah with a masculine power who dominates the landscape, controls the onlookers, and has usurped the role of male preacher. Several critics also argue that there is a narrative split between "the analytic narrator" and the "sympathetic narrator", an uneasy alliance resulting in "a disjunction of power and sympathy" (Logan 1996, 19, quoting Bonaparte). I read this as a sympathetic aspect combined with a rational aspect, which together question power. A disjunction is present, but is not divided between gendered voices.

Dinah is introduced before the reader meets her via characters such as Wiry Ben and the anonymous traveller. All the discussion of Dinah is from the male point of view (Lawless 1990, 253), which adds to the sense of gender opposition. The main comment is always that Dinah is pretty. This insistence on her beauty is a normalising technique; Dinah is less powerful, frightening and different when classified as pretty woman. However, Dinah is also 'unselfconscious like a boy', which subverts gender assumptions and marks her as the antithesis of the conventional romantic heroine (Rowland Tush, 28). This in turn attracts the reader's attention to what she says. Dinah

is unconscious of her appearance and sexuality because she has not been constructed to value them; perhaps there has been no third term, no male to seduce her to heterosexuality as Freud and Lacan would expect. She does not blush, simper or avert her eyes, but meets all intrusive looks with a clear, calm, sympathetic gaze that invites relation, but does not possess or allow possession. Her gaze transcends the gender barrier (Levine 1996, 122) so that she can communicate with all, while she seizes language and uses her voice to urge sympathy and salvation.

Yet as an authoritative woman, it is Dinah's sense of self that commands respect. The reverence Dinah receives contrasts starkly with the lack of civility and concern generally afforded Hetty. Dinah's refusal of Seth Bede's proposal suggests that the duties of her vocation are stronger than any maternal or sexual desire. Yet Dinah's role is still a nurturing and traditionally female one, and overtly her character is sympathetic, caring and understanding. Orphaned at an early age, Dinah was mothered by her Aunt Judith, also a caring, relational woman, but one who worked, had a vocation, and held a position within the Methodist community. In Chodorow's terms, Dinah experienced both a personal and a positional relationship to her primary carer, which I contend explains both Dinah's caring, relational abilities *and* her sense of autonomy. Further, with the character of Dinah Morris, Eliot subverts the notions of true womanly behaviour as expounded by both Comte and Spencer. Not only does Dinah work outside the home, she adopts the 'male' role of priest; worse, when she finally gives up her preaching, it is for a sexual relationship, while she simultaneously – as I will argue later – eschews much of her former selflessness.

Hetty Sorrel is absent from the text until Chapter Seven, although she has been variously discussed. This absence along with the fact that she is remarked 'on' without

any suggestion of relationship, indicates both her isolation and her secondary status. Adam loves Hetty, but all other comments are negative. Even Seth regrets Adam's passion (34), while Dinah's reference to Hetty as 'that poor wandering lamb' (*AB* 1998 [1859], 34) is disturbingly condescending, although the reader's response may depend on how Dinah is perceived. Hetty's critics can themselves be questioned, thus the discerning reader will avoid hasty decisions.

Dinah's sermon and its effect are of primary importance in questioning her valuing and use of sympathy and duty. Imagining Jesus in Hayslope, she highlights the qualities of sympathy and tolerance needed in a Christian community - qualities lacking during Hetty's plight. Yet there is a sudden switch to an account of a vengeful God unwilling to save latecomers – that is, those who will not heed *Dinah's* warnings, *now*: 'Jesus, who stands ready to help you *now*, won't help you *then*...*Now* he looks at you with love and mercy...*then* he will turn away from you, and say, "Depart from me into everlasting fire"' (31, my italics). The narrative disjunction here is not remarked by critics - perhaps the theatricality of the sermon masks it - but Dinah changes from sympathetic, caring voice to judgemental, doctrinal voice. Dinah's tactic is to tempt and then terrify those she would save, yet without ever enlightening them. The narrator gently undermines Dinah's strongest pronouncements; she looks with 'appalled pity' (*AB*, 28) on these sinners, rather than sympathy, so that the effect on the listeners is to evoke fear rather than understanding. This Janus-faced preacher-woman, one moment gentle and caring, seemingly feminine - yet non-sexual (Levine 1996, 114-17) - the next accusing and talking of 'bottomless pit[s]' (*AB*, 31), is often attacked by modern critics. Herbert sees her sermon as violently Calvinistic and accusatory, representing the type of Evangelicalism attacked by George Eliot in her 'Dr. Cumming' essay (1974-5, 415). Thus it is not clear if Dinah is sympathetic according to the terms I have established, or

where exactly she regards her duties to lie. Perhaps it is this personal and positional confusion that Eliot is exploring: 'My irony, so far as I understand myself, is not directed against opinions – against any class of religious views – but against the vices and weaknesses that belong to human nature in every sort of clothing' (*GEL* II, 348).

When Hetty appears, it is in comparison to Dinah. Her beauty is the attraction for Arthur Donnithorne, is possibly the only aspect of herself that has ever been praised, and it is heavily emphasised in the narrator's descriptions. Her beauty 'with which you can never be angry,' (*AB* 83-4), does much to exonerate Hetty for those who, like Mrs Poyser, are 'fascinated in spite of themselves' (84). Eliot's ire is not so much directed against pretty women via her portrayal of Hetty as the society which creates silly, naive, uneducated women. The comparison of Hetty with 'spring-time' and 'young frisking things' (84) darkly suggests that such innocence does not last. However, Spencer argues that such beauty in women is a result of sexual selection; and men find it attractive because it resembles that of young vulnerable babies. Significantly, Hetty lacks all such sympathies and hates babies, lambs and fluffy chicks, thus seriously undermining one of Spencer's main tenets. There may also be a 'false air of innocence' (84), but this is female ignorance, born of the male belief that women need to be kept ignorant - particularly of sexual matters - for their own protection (Paxton 1991, 53), a theory the Poyseres adopt with disastrous consequences. Adam's eventual anger and remonstrance arrives partly because he recognises this false virtue and the harm it does.

Arthur Donnithorne has come literally to *see* Hetty, while Mr Irwine has come to *talk* to Dinah. Hetty is in 'The Dairy', Dinah discusses 'Vocation'. Irwine is friendly, formal and egalitarian with Dinah, while Arthur's manner changes from studied gallantry to seductive intimacy once alone with Hetty (86-7). Unlike Dinah,

Hetty is totally self-conscious and 'quite used to the thought that people liked to look at her' (96). Yet Hetty's inability to understand her current emotions is not false innocence, but a lack of experience, particularly of happiness and love. The marked attentions of a handsome man whose approving gaze and intimate voice suggest warm relationship, conjure a return to idyllic happiness. One emphasis of the narrator's is to suggest that 'Hetty's dreams were all of luxuries' (99), but such is to ignore and minimise the sensuality that suffuses the alternate descriptions of Hetty's fantasies. However, as a warning to readers not to be seduced by this description of romantic love, the episode of Arthur's filling up little Totty's empty pink purse is an almost obscene gesture.

In person, Dinah and Hetty provide an immediate opposition in intuitive sympathy and duty. 'Languid' and 'pettish' Hetty is shocked by the news of Thias Bede's drowning, but is not 'deeply affected' (95); while Dinah's response is one of empathy. However, Mrs Poyser's own reaction shows less care than Hetty. Like Dinah, Hetty is an orphan, with Mrs Poyser as her primary carer. Mrs Poyser talks constantly of teaching Hetty her 'duty', but this is domestic duty - *and* to be subservient to her betters. Otherwise, duty is a matter of petty conventions. In praising the 'wonderful' Mrs Poyser, John Blackwood provided ironic insight; he regarded Hetty's indifference to Totty as evidence of her perverse, unfeminine nature (*GEL* II, 510). Yet Hetty is described as a motherless child of seven or eight when her nursemaiding began with baby Marty, and she has nursed each child since. Prophetically she declares that she 'would have been glad to hear that she should never see another child again' (155). Blackwood failed to notice that Mrs Poyser constantly delegates her children's care (Logan 1996, 20); she conforms well to Dinnerstein's image of both the all-powerful mother that all wish to escape, and the Evil Stepmother. Since Mrs Poyser's care does

not foster self-sufficiency and maturity and Hetty's life is still completely managed (Creegor 1956, 228), she has a 'child-like trust that she will be taken care of' (Logan 1996, 21), a trust later betrayed by all. Dinah has the freedom to increase her experience, while Hetty resorts to lies and deception. No tenderness, love or emotional care is ever offered to Hetty, and although not educated she is a perfect example of a Rousseauan child who has not been nurtured but corrupted by social conventions.

The narrator's warnings about making snap decisions continue, although the emphasis now is to be wary of appearances, and not to think that 'nature has theatrical properties, and, with the considerate view of facilitating art and psychology, "makes up" her characters, so that there may be no mistake about them' (*AB*, 23). In particular the characters are warned not to assume that women's beauty is a sign of moral virtue. Both Adam and Arthur, blinded by Hetty's beauty, misunderstand her inner nature - for with Hetty, Eliot parodies Spencer's theory that beautiful women make good mothers (Paxton 1991, 48). Adam, believing in his own sense of good and right, creates Hetty out of his own image and believes Hetty, as yet an innocent child, will outgrow her fancifulness. But as the text warns: 'Nature has her language, and she is not unveracious; but we don't know all the intricacies of her syntax just yet, and in a hasty reading we may happen to extract the very opposite of her real meaning' (*AB* 153-4). After his father's death, Adam strives to be sympathetic and understanding, but is too controlled by reason - he thinks that the answer to all problems lies in his mensuration tables. Adam has much adequate knowledge but lacks the imagination and experience for intuitive sympathy; he cannot put himself in anyone else's position and he cannot understand Hetty's fears and desires until her crisis.

Hetty's life before Arthur has been hard and frighteningly limited, while Arthur's advances are outside her frame of reference. However, as Hetty relates neither to his reality nor hers, and barely recognises the subject-status of anyone, then impropriety has scant foothold on her psyche. But Arthur should know better: perhaps if he had read 'The Thorn' in his copy of *Lyrical Ballads* he would have heeded the warning presented there instead of declaring the rural poems to be 'twaddling stuff' (*AB*, 65). In the many passages where Arthur debates with his conscience and appears to win the battle against his desire for Hetty, the narrator's own analysis often features as a parallel account. The 'narrator' alternates between being so extreme in Arthur's defence that it becomes a parody and points up the dangers of Arthur's behaviour, suggesting that despite Arthur's good intentions, trouble never falls on him alone (124-6); while also reporting all that Arthur whistles, sings, reads, admires or admits, all of which labels him the perfect 'rake'. Yet Blackwood described Hetty as 'the little villain' and pitied Arthur (*GEL*, II, 484). If such opinions were typical, then Eliot had undertaken a serious struggle in encouraging sympathy for characters such as Hetty.

Throughout, the narrator skilfully undermines and subverts certitudes, not only by presenting multiple points of view or 'dramatised discourse' but also via his own disjointed voice. These effects are seen particularly in Chapter Nine, 'Hetty's World', where the rational narrative account of Hetty's own, yet third-person, inner monologue reveals her petty, shallow soul; while at the same time the narrator provides an alternative sympathetic commentary. Her soul, with its 'very limited range of music', will not vibrate to the emotions that touch others (96); her 'sphere of comparison' (97) of men was not large, and she had led a very sheltered life. We are also told that her aunt and uncle did not esteem her as a daughter, so that she would have been placed as a servant elsewhere if her uncle had not 'brought her up as a domestic help' (98). Further,

for Hetty to marry Adam would be a move to hardship, while 'she felt nothing when his eyes rested on her' (99). Hetty may be a selfish little egoist, but to choose hardship without love would be lacking in self-preservation. Further, her state of bondage, of triviality and inadequate knowledge is not her fault.¹⁷ Hetty does have free will, but her limited experience makes moves beyond her determined role difficult. Critics generally assume that Hetty is an object of dislike to the narrator and even to George Eliot on the grounds of: 'Eliot's insistence throughout the novel on [Hetty's] vanity and materialism' (Carroll 1971, 50-1). However, these qualities are objectively probable given Hetty's experience, and are always balanced against her lonely existence, and her lack of education, hope, or love.

In the 'Bed-chamber' scene, Hetty is perceived in all her narcissism, and the mirror is her main companion - whether literally or in the form of watching eyes. She seems promiscuous, responding to any gaze, while Dinah responds only to a look of love (Levine 1996, 117, 120). However, Hetty's relation both to the mirror and men's gaze corresponds to Winnicott's account of the mother's gaze 'as the mirror which validates the child's existence and importance' (1971, 130-8). Hetty, seeking the love and validation of the mother - which was never forthcoming - may thus not be capable of sympathy, love and relationship, for she cannot see 'the other' at all. If Hetty is incapable of sympathy, then Dinah strives to be totally selfless. The narrator's abrupt redirection of the readers' attention to Dinah's bed-chamber accentuates the contrast. Dinah is correct in her surmise that it was not that 'Hetty did not love Adam well enough to marry him', but that there was 'a blank in her nature' (*AB*, 158). Dinah's imagination here - in contrast with Irwine's lack when Arthur approaches him - demonstrates her sympathy in action: 'Dinah's imagination and sympathy acted and

¹⁷ Atkins provides an extended Spinozan reading of Hetty's character, with many observations of a similar nature (1978, 139-57).

reacted habitually, each heightening the other' (158). This formulation recalls Hume's description of our mental and moral powers functioning in combination. But despite her vision of Hetty trapped in a thicket of sin and sorrow, Dinah lacks the understanding to relate to Hetty, and her idea of 'trouble' merely causes distress. While Dinah is overflowing with sympathy, her doctrinal harshness interferes and hinders intuition. The narrator observes that 'the higher nature has to learn this comprehension [with the lower nature]...by a good deal of hard experience' (150). This description may draw upon evolutionary concepts, suggesting that Dinah is more highly evolved than Hetty, but I think it refers to the levels of sympathy that Eliot describes in the Riehl essay. Dinah has intuition and often achieves the higher sympathy, but lacks experience, so that her imagination and sympathy have nothing to react with. Moreover, as women of their time and class, both lack the language to discuss love and sexual feelings and communication is unforthcoming.

Perhaps Adam was on the threshold of Dinah's thoughts. At her encounter with him in the cottage, his 'dark penetrating glance' had caused a 'faint blush' (117). Dorothea Barrett considers Dinah's vocation to be a form of sexual sublimation, arguing that her 'bedchamber' reverie is about Adam rather than God (1989, 40-1). Imagining no spectator except perhaps God, Dinah has the window, the landscape and the moon as her companions. Because this is Dinah, and the narrator refers to 'the Divine Presence' (157), the reader may be distracted from the sensuality of the passage, as Dinah 'melted away like ice crystals in a warm ocean' (157). But the window suggests a liminality to be explored as she sinks into her reverie (Levine, 119-122) - the landscape was earlier sexualised, yet the moon goddess is chaste. Dinah's absence in the text from now on symbolises the lack of sympathy within the community - there is no one for Hetty to

turn to. Dinah's independence is rare for a woman, and is later taken to belie her caring, altruistic persona, when she cannot be found by her family (415).

Chapter Seventeen announces a change in the novel's pace and focus. The engaging narrator who has guided the reader through a calmly linear introduction now becomes a distancing presence, addressing the implied reader brusquely. Under the guise of readers complaining that Irwine is not an ideal Pastor, the narrator highlights the uncertainty surrounding people and opinions. The narrator is not just claiming that people are variable and complex, but by raising the question of the Rector he forces a reconsideration of all the clues within the first volume. There is also a disingenuous appeal to accept people as they are, to 'tolerate, pity and love' (176). While tolerance is desired, the unspoken requirement is also that we have to change if we are to become more sympathetic. Using the well-known comparison to Dutch paintings, the narrator pleads for the beauty of truthfulness - thus excusing his portraits of ordinary, fallible, 'mixed' human beings - as well as for the beauty of form and human sympathy; which constitutes a statement of Eliot's artistic aims and ideals. For truth is difficult while falsity is easy, and so truth - like the mirror - may not be flawless, but varied, contradictory and subjective. This interlude also suggests more change to come. By multiply signalling a disruption in time - breaking the linearity of the story, and reporting a conversation with an elderly Adam Bede sometime in the past of the writing yet in the future of the setting of the tale - the narrator forces a reassessment of everything to this point, particularly the nature and function of sympathy and duty.

When Adam encounters Hetty and Arthur in the wood, the reader is already expecting a *dénouement*. Adam's slowly-rising hopes have been buoyed by his success and preferment, and since in all his scenes with Hetty and Arthur the reader is

constantly and painfully aware of that other reality, a continuing dramatic irony mounts. This secret knowledge of hypocrisy, faithlessness and dishonesty, shared by reader and narrator, subverts all the communal gatherings that should strengthen the idea of community. To see relationship perverted in this way, when previously in the novel it has been the key to all good – the connective principle knitting together all that was positive despite all the failures of sympathy and duty within the community - provides a powerful learning resource for the reader.

That Arthur is kissing Hetty shatters Adam's reality and a 'terrible scorching light showed him the hidden letters that changed the meaning of the past' (*AB* 296). Such an epiphany provides only Spinoza's 'laming sympathy', unless something is learned from the experience. For Adam, all his reason and logic, all he has built his concept of self and future on, are suddenly called into question. Thus, it is easier for him to restore his image of Hetty and blame Arthur completely than to effect a complete change in his own judgement. The fatal flaw is that when robbed of reason - without his own carefully constructed ethic of justice to support and protect him – Adam falls prey to his passions (Atkins 1978, 105). The world is turned upside down as Adam denies his station and ultimately accelerates his class movement. Subsequently, guilt, remorse and even fear for Arthur's life mask his returning reason. If Adam had remained in control of his passions then the possibility of Arthur's continued hypocrisy and faithlessness would have occurred to him (Atkins, 105). But Adam has to return to his own values and believe Arthur's 'truths', and he is soon 'attributing imaginary virtues' to Hetty (*SCL* 353). The narrator still respects Adam, while pointing out that he could not 'imagine narrowness, selfishness, hardness in [Hetty]' for he 'created the mind he believed in out of his own' (354). His insistence on an immediate letter of separation from Arthur ultimately worsens the situation, for this 'hard' letter causes

Hetty's inability to act, for she comes to hate the writer (334). Selfishly, the letter is for Adam, not Hetty, so that he may stand a chance of winning her back. In a few weeks the 'hopes he felt about Hetty softened a little his feeling towards Arthur' (354). Like Dinah, Adam knows nothing of Hetty, of her desires and fears, and both fail Hetty by believing that they know best, and by succumbing to their own needs.

The reader has already been alerted by the warning that Hetty is a woman 'with a woman's destiny before her ...[with] vain hopes' that may become a 'rancorous poisonous garment' (249). The chapter 'The Hidden Dread' alerts readers to Hetty's pregnancy, via the very pregnancy of the prose: Hetty is 'oppressed', and illness had 'confined' Mrs Poyser (362). The revelation is sudden – it is November, Arthur left in August, and Hetty's fears were not voiced when Adam proposed. This construction of a suddenness of fear following an absence that created hope begins an escalation in tension and the generation of sympathy for Hetty. Arthur was aware of the risk, but the withholding from the reader of Hetty's growing realisation mirrors Arthur's escape from his responsibility. In the description of the 'coming on of her great dread', the narrator subverts the pathetic fallacy, for, with the beauties of nature might 'be mingled for your ear...a despairing human sob' (364), as simultaneously, pink and white Hetty becomes metonymically represented by her 'red cloak', thus conveying her state and thoughts of suicide by a pool in the Scantlands. If Eliot's novels 'effect changes in her readers' (Graver 1984, 11) and encourage tolerance and sympathy, then a constant balancing is necessary between challenging the audience's beliefs and yet not offending them. The balance becomes more difficult in *Adam Bede*, for Hetty's offence is extreme, and sympathy has to be worked for by Eliot.

Tremendous fear of “‘The Parish’” propels Hetty on her journey, so keeping her respectable in all but her most despairing moments.¹⁸ Hetty reveals her knowledge of hardness, for her family are 'hard in their feelings even toward poverty...and had little pity for want...but held them as a mark of idleness and vice' (378). Finally, resourceless Hetty does not have herself to turn to, and nothing in her construction has prepared her: 'Hetty's was not a nature to face difficulties ... There was not much room for her thoughts to travel in the narrow circle of her imagination' (335). The choice to flee to Arthur has been regarded as a 'gesture of abandonment, a refusal of responsibility' (Uglow 1987, 108) on Hetty's part, but I see her decision finally to act as a moral step forward, given her utter passivity. Hetty grows morally as she begins to take responsibility for herself, as Gilligan describes from her research.

The first glimmerings of insight into others and their feelings occur once Hetty has made her decision. This unlooked-for broadening of Hetty's response begins to place her within a reality peopled by others: 'The new susceptibility that suffering had awakened in her' (373) creates fellowship as she comes to accept her own subjectivity. From selfishness, passivity and passion, even her striving for life is a major movement. Reticence still dilutes the harshest truths and '[Eliot's] sympathy for her characters is usually too deep' for her irony to be too strident (Forster 1983, 487). Yet, for almost the first time, Hetty thinks of someone - another female - in positive terms and remembers Dinah's 'affectionate kindness'. Her hope is buoyed by the realisation that Dinah, an outsider like herself, 'did not think about things as other people did' (380-1). The account of Hetty's return journey is written with such empathic understanding that the reader has first-hand experience of despair, near-suicide and the final love of life

¹⁸ Logan (1996, 25-6) provides a full analysis of the limited options available to pregnant single women. The reviews of *Adam Bede* were critical of the account of Hetty's pregnancy, labelling it an unsuitable topic for a novel: *British Quarterly Review*, no 45, Jan 1867, 164; *Saturday Review*, no 7, 26 Feb 1859, 250-1.

(386-7) that pulls her back from death. In a masculine aspect, the narrator prays: 'God preserve you and me from being the beginners of such misery' (389).

The birth and Hetty's infanticide are only accounted for later via Dinah's mediation and by the reader's prior knowledge that Hetty has been condemned to death. This precise crafting maximises the sympathy already generated by the free indirect account of her journey. An immediate account of the child's death might risk the reader's fellow-feeling for Hetty. Dorothea Barrett claims that 'If we feel too much for Hetty at the end of the "journey in despair", the infanticide is calculated to dispel that sympathy' (1989, 48), but this is not the case. Rather, Hetty's confession is given distance and the shadow of death to render her act forgivable to the reader. Distance is achieved physically, temporally and emotionally via the account of Adam's quest for Hetty. The reader is jerked back with the realisation that life has been going on. This jolt is compounded by Adam's journey paralleling Hetty's, as Dinah's absence parallels Arthur's. Further, neither the reader nor Adam anticipates the charge of infanticide. While the reader is aware of Hetty's pregnancy, the revelation of the child's death both mirrors Adam's shock and intensifies the reader's experience. Irwine's pain at Arthur's involvement heightens the tension, and all are forced to acknowledge that beliefs about themselves and others are false. Such a climax brings the realisation that moral choice does lie within, as Irwine had stressed to Arthur, even though the latter persisted in viewing it as external and saw himself as a victim of fate, rather than able to act in a way implied by Bray's 'philosophy of necessity', or Spinoza's determinism. Adam's present refusal to believe ill of Hetty is part of the same self-delusion that kept her innocent in his eyes.

Despite the fact that Martin Poyser had earlier said 'I'll not turn my back on her' (402), once Hetty's crime is revealed the sympathy is as unforthcoming as Hetty had feared. The dreadful irony that their hardness led Hetty to a greater crime never occurs to the Poyser. As the narrator remarks on Mr Irwine's surprise at Mrs Poyser being less severe than her husband: 'We are often startled by the severity of mild people on exceptional occasions; the reason is, that mild people are most liable to be under the yolk of traditional impressions' (413). Such lack of sympathy stresses the adherence to mores as opposed to morals that Rousseau and Feuerbach warned against. That Mrs Poyser is more sympathetic lies in her greater intelligence, reason and imagination, yet she still acts as the voice of established values and is ultimately as inflexible and incapable of sympathy as her menfolk.

1856 was rocked by a debate about infanticide, prompted by an article by the Rev William Smith, who insisted that mothers accused of infanticide were regularly being acquitted (Morris 1990, 76-7). Smith argued that this laxity was an erosion of moral standards. Eliot, on the other hand, demonstrates via Hetty that myriad circumstances demand leniency. Relativism, not blind justice was called for. Most of the women charged were, like Hetty, young, single, working class, and abandoned by men. Eliot foreshadows later appeals, such as Gilligan's desire for a caring ethic combined with a justice ethic. In the cultural climate created by Comte and Spencer, who regarded women as the personification of morality and the embodiment of an innate and universal nurturing role, then Hetty is punished for what would be deemed an unnatural act (Morris 1990, 79). Eliot shows that it counts against Hetty greatly that her counsel 'tried, without result, to elicit evidence that the prisoner had shown some movements of maternal affection towards the child' (433). Eliot's condemnation relates to the period when *Adam Bede* is set - for Mary Voce, on whom Hetty's tale is based

and who was comforted by Eliot's Aunt Samuel, was executed for infanticide in 1802 (Uglow 1987, 100) – yet she also counters the many calls for greater severity during her own time.¹⁹ Yet at the time, infanticide was possibly seen as the lesser of two evils compared to keeping illegitimate children on the parish (Logan 1996, 24, n13).

The witness-accounts in the trial further demonstrate that any tale has multiple strands, for none includes Hetty's own story. As a literary and a moral exercise, Eliot's novel departs from 'the literary convention in which unwed mothers find redemption through maternal ideology' (Logan, 18) and demonstrates that biology is not enough to make a caring maternal woman. Further, if Hetty displays the self-preservation described by Spinoza, then her actions can be seen as a return to nature, demonstrating clearly the paradox of Spencer's two disparate views: he cannot expect to have both nurturing women and the 'survival of the fittest ethic', unless conditions are equalised. Trauma has returned Hetty to a child-like stage - she cannot mother a child because she is still one herself. Hetty refuses to acknowledge any part in the baby's life or death, like a child blind to all reason and sensibility. Here the narrator acts as a mirror, like the conscience described by Adam Smith.

Even during her prison visit, Dinah continues to misunderstand Hetty, who clings to her merely as 'this something' for it is only 'the human contact she clung to' (AB 448). Again Dinah's attempts to talk of God produce fear and incomprehension. An understanding of either death or God is beyond Hetty, whose drive is still for self-

¹⁹ Between 1623 and 1803 women accused of infanticide were presumed guilty until proved innocent, with any concealment of the pregnancy considered to be evidence of an intent to murder (Clayton 1991). This becomes a point of law concerning Effie Deans' baby in Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*. Eliot is perhaps allowing for her readers being aware of the way the laws had changed since the late eighteenth-century, while presenting a warning against the 1856 argument.

preservation; even at the end she declares: 'I wouldn't mind if they'd let me live' (449). Dinah's doctrinally-fuelled exhortations closely parallel her sermon on the common, the difference being that Hetty only has 'now' in which to repent. While the opportunity to tell her truth is undeniably welcome, and her words confirm that the intention to kill was not absolute, Hetty is moved to speak more by hopes of human forgiveness, the need to unburden her guilt, and the love and physical affection Dinah provides, than by thoughts of everlasting life.

Holding the condemned Hetty in her arms, Dinah has no time for mistakes, and while she talks of not hurrying God's work, and of feeling the 'Divine presence more and more' (448), it is ultimately Dinah who speaks and prompts Hetty's relief of confession. Her description of herself as part of the Divine presence is Feuerbachian in that Dinah as human is God-like. While Dinah talks of God's forgiveness she is also encouraging her to relate, love, trust and unburden. Hetty's confession is so terrifying, for briefly she *was* intending to kill the child - believing in her near-madness that she had no other way out - that tremendous sympathy *and* startled condemnation are brought into play. Hetty asks: 'Dinah, do you think God will take away that crying and the place in the wood, now I've told everything?' (455). There is no answer, for a spiritual God was not involved. Dinah is not being arrogant and usurping God's place as Logan suggests (1996, 20) when she says that Hetty 'has confessed all to me...she leans on me for help' (457). With no conception of God, Hetty is confessing to Dinah, but it is the quality in Dinah as a caring human who helps and listens which is God-like. Dinah is in the early stages of recognising the greater importance of human agency in sympathy. She develops a personal duty to care for humans in this life, not the next.

Adam perceives that Hetty's only strength lies in her contact with Dinah, whom she obeys 'like a little child' (460). For Dinah has become the mother and, by reflecting back a better Hetty, has promoted some genuine penitence and the memory in Hetty of 'the love that she had once lived in' (461). Yet the extent of Hetty's growth is limited; selfishness may be fading, but selflessness is not yet born. Hetty begins to think of others, tentatively, as when she says of Arthur: 'I hated him...but Dinah says, I should forgive him...and I try...for else God won't forgive me' (461). Despite his hardness, Adam never really doubts Hetty, especially once he realises his own fault; as Bartle Massey says, 'you'd a notion she'd got another sort of nature inside her' (458). He does not accept that she wittingly murdered the child and constantly excuses her on the grounds of her innocence and of Arthur's greater culpability. He has learned sympathy and understanding from his own experience of pain and suffering.

Adam's suffering has produced such moral growth that forgiving Hetty is not a test, since he had already done so; it is in forgiving Arthur that he demonstrates true sympathy. By the time they meet in the woods, Adam has learned that 'Anger 'ull mend nothing' (466), and, once certain that Arthur has repented, he forgives him and acknowledges his own hardness in the past. That 'the folks at the farm were too hard' with Hetty (469) had prompted his care for her and made him extra harsh on Arthur, but now as with Hetty, Adam's suffering permits recognition of the other's suffering and allows him to forgive. At this point, Adam represents George Eliot's ideal of a growth to sympathy through suffering and experience; he has made the transition from the rational and unimaginative to a sympathy and caring for others that also includes the self. Ultimately, Adam achieves Spinoza's intuitive sympathy, as all his faculties combine in helping his empathic understanding of Hetty.

Arthur's growth is perhaps the greatest, for he had further to go and had a greater responsibility to accept. On his return to Hayslope on his grandfather's death, the dramatic irony is intense. Arthur is like Hetty in not accepting responsibility for his acts – both are in bondage, yet Arthur has less excuse. When Arthur and Adam meet, the signs of suffering that Hetty recognised as herself in Adam are visible in Arthur, and 'Adam knew what suffering was - he could not lay a cruel finger on a bruised man' (465). The same signs subdue Arthur who still smarts that Adam makes him feel 'the irrevocableness of his own wrong-doing' (467). The death of Hetty conveniently relieves Arthur of his greatest test. It is this, rather than Adam and Dinah's marriage, that is the main fault in the novel. Meanwhile, Dinah moves from the margins of society into its centre as a result of her experiences of Hetty's suffering. Her growth to sympathy is greater than generally acknowledged, for she has acquired the 'hard experience' and the bruises and gashes (161) necessary to embrace the 'lower nature'. Dinah fully realises the power of relation and acknowledges the importance of the listener, rather than the preacher it is the power of the self-in-relation, or the 'I/Thou'.

There is general objection to the final book of *Adam Bede*. Feminist critics object to Dinah's loss of vocation and her acceptance of the traditional roles of wife and mother, taking particular objection to the fact that Hetty's death is necessary to allow this end (Brady 1992, 85; Uglow 1987, 111). In choosing Adam rather than devotion to her faith, however, Dinah chooses sexuality. That she should choose to be sexual is also Feuerbachian, for her experience with Hetty has taught her to love herself and not be so selfless. Further, it can be objected that in choosing to be a wife and mother she chooses a secondary vocation, for she keeps the major part of her work by talking to people in their homes – the result of her own learning process with Hetty whereby she can now relate to the 'lower natures'. She also practises the duty of sympathy, rather

than duty to a theological God. The doctrine of her sermon is gone, and the harsh judgemental rhetoric that deformed her caring sympathy is eschewed for a Spinozan and Feuerbachian ethic, without the dogma of Comte.

Dinah's reluctance to change to the Church where women's preaching was allowed indicates far more than submission. Adam suggests that Dinah thought it best to set an example to other women, who mostly 'do more harm nor good with their preaching' and do not have her gift (539). But Dinah has learned just how inadequate her own gift was, with the villagers untouched by her sermons, her family not grown towards sympathy, and Hetty confused by her attempts at spiritual ministry. Caring and sympathy are still part of her vocation, but the judgemental doctrines are overthrown. Dinah is now a woman finally constructed as both personal and positional. Her role as a Methodist preacher previously provided an outlet for both aspects of her personality and gender. However too close an adherence to the harsh doctrine of the Church rendered her inflexible, unforgiving, and unintelligible to her listeners. Previously Dinah had no choice, but now her choice with Adam is not an issue of marriage versus vocation as Barrett describes, but a matter of sexual satisfaction, love, and sympathy for herself, and the ability to practise a casteless vocation of caring, with independence and autonomy.

Adam and Dinah were George Eliot's pet characters (*GEL* VIII, 201) and the amount that they grow and change is central. It is also important to remember that love, the look of love and all other signs of caring between Adam and Dinah are mutual: 'For Eliot, a reciprocal gaze is apparently fundamental to a mature sexuality in men and women alike' (Levine 1996, 118). Both Adam and Dinah need to become self-conscious in order to realise the full impact of the love of the other, and both must experience this mutuality. Finally, both have to learn from their experiences of the

suffering of others in order to have personal relationships that involve the self and the other. The wedding of Dinah and Adam therefore celebrates their happy ending as a mutually supportive 'I/Thou' relationship, even while it accentuates Hetty's absence. The narrator's remarks about those who are absent highlights the lack of sympathy and duty that led to the downfall of both Hetty and Arthur.

Hetty's crime was too great to go unpunished; but if readers can be persuaded to sympathy and understanding for Hetty, and possibly to extend this into their own lives, then *Adam Bede* will have achieved much – her hanging would have detracted from this achievement. Further, sympathy for Arthur and acceptance of Adam's forgiveness of him would also have been impossible to win if Hetty were to be executed. The details of Hetty's fate and her subsequent death after seven years are problematic, for the horror of transportation is also too great and has to be glossed over. Yet Hetty is a spectral presence: she disrupts the 'happy ending' and returns to subvert the text in a deeply ironic way. Alarming, many readers wanted a sequel to account for Hetty's transportation and exile (*GEL* III, 3), something else Eliot could not allow if her wider message of sympathy and duty was to spread. At the end, the social and class changes involved in the marriage of Adam and Dinah are less important than the move to a doctrine of sympathy and duty, by all for all, that would itself ultimately overthrow the crime that destroys Hetty. Eliot was no longer content to make moral observations via her journalism. Her desire to change herself *and* other people's sympathies sanctioned her literary ambitions, and she had to publish successful texts in order to achieve anything. Despite its faults, Eliot was fully justified in loving *Adam Bede* and being 'deeply thankful to have written it' (*GEL* II, 505).

Chapter Five – Extraordinary Individuals in Ordinary Environments:

The Mill on the Floss and Romola

The Mill on the Floss is an angry exploration of how intuitive sympathy and duty may be opposed and deposed by narrow or gendered definitions of virtue and convention; these false values may even inhibit and destroy individuals who do not conform, and Maggie Tulliver is the ugly-duckling heroine who rejects the ill-fitting moulds prepared by family, community *and* the reading public. The faint trailing echoes of a sympathy and duty that Eliot would value inhabit the text, but the reader has to work hard to isolate these virtues. Maggie and Tom here represent all ‘young natures’ who, ‘in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts’ (MF 272-3). Forced into gendered personalities which suit neither their reproduction nor inheritance, and bound by rigid maxims that have no lasting value, they strive to find an ethic to live by.

Despite early signs that the novel is to be a *Bildungsroman* (Brady 1992, 94), readers’ expectations are subverted, for there can be no growth to vocation and autonomy for Maggie as a woman of the period, and as a woman excessively constrained by webs of connection. The *Bildungsroman* scaffolding is typical of all systems that do not accommodate women, from Spinoza’s *Ethics* to Lacan’s account of women’s exclusion from the Symbolic Order. Even Tom’s progress is repeatedly set at a tangent by relational demands. Chodorow’s relation-based account allows for a rereading of development which shows the linear progress of traditional autobiographical approaches to be deeply flawed, and in the *Mill* they are mimicked,

ironised and questioned. The word 'development' originally derives from the French, '*velopper*' suggesting something wrapped in several layers (Esty 1996, 144); which is far more appropriate for the gradual unwrapping of Maggie's life that Eliot presents here. The lives of Tom and Maggie ripple out as layers of absence, opposition, rupture, renunciation, isolation and loss, as Eliot develops further the idea of intuitive sympathy and duty being opposed to false virtue and convention.

It is a commonplace that *The Mill on the Floss* is Eliot's most autobiographical work. Despite the phenomenal success of *Adam Bede*, the period 1858 to 1859 was a disturbing and melancholy time. Controversy surrounded one Joseph Liggins, who claimed to be 'George Eliot', while in September 1859 Blackwood - underestimating Eliot's insecurity - suggested that the *Mill* be serialised anonymously. As Eliot's identity had recently leaked, Blackwood anticipated an adverse effect on sales, but his remark that 'it would be great fun to watch the speculations as to the author's life' represents an amazing 'lapse of tact' (*GEL* III, 161, n3). A temporary rift ensued. Yet Blackwood's concerns were justified. In July 1859 *The Athenaeum* had published a ferocious attack by William Hepworth Dixon accusing the 'strong-minded lady' of manufacturing the Liggins fiasco as a publicity prank (Haight 1968, 290-1). Eliot's desire to cling to her incognito further complicated matters. Friendship with Chapman was severed and that with Spencer strained after Chapman's attempts to 'sound' Spencer over the identity of George Eliot (*GEL* II, 494, n7). That friends could not be trusted intensified Eliot's depression and isolation, for as Lewes's 'wife' she was already ostracised. Lewes was all she had, and he was constantly in ill-health. All of these anxieties were further compounded by grief, for in March 1859 Eliot's sister Chrissey died. Her deathbed letters, in which she bitterly regretted the cessation of contact with Eliot following the news of her 'marriage' to Lewes, was a tremendous

shock; Eliot declared it had 'ploughed up my heart' (*GEL* III, 23). *The Mill on the Floss* therefore has its genesis in a period of loss, betrayal and outsidership.

The autobiographical elements suggest a need to exorcise the pain of family relationships. The novel begins in 1829, with Maggie ten and Tom thirteen - as Mary Anne and Isaac would have been (Ashton 1996, 234). However, *The Mill on the Floss* is fiction, and Maggie is *not* George Eliot. Extrapolating from Barbara Hardy's theory of unrealized or 'possible' lives (1959, 135-54), another reading is that 'Maggie is the other possible Marian Evans who never left her home, never broke the ties most sacred to her, never discovered the George Eliot in herself' (Barrett 1989, 53). There is also more overt emphasis on gender roles than in the previous works, generated by Eliot's anger at the gender standards that were being used to judge her in 1859, and by anger at the values which could have condemned her, like Maggie. As Eliot claims her role as a woman writer, her narrator becomes more feminine, and although the sex is ambiguous, a relational voice, which I will call feminine, dominates.

The first sentence of *The Mill on the Floss* is a broad, rushing, passionate plunge into the story, only for the reader to be stopped short. This alone mimics Maggie and Tom's story. Further, the narrator's description of a solitary girl watching the circling mill wheel and patternings of the water suggests Maggie's centrality, but also a fluid submergence - 'I am in love with moistness' (*MF* 8) - that is both pre-oedipal and sensual. Childhood is the river and the mill, and the story returns there rhythmically and repeatedly. The novel is titled *The Mill on the Floss*, precisely because this is the metonymic site of love, warmth, care and connection. The recognition and relation signified by 'home' structure the novel during the absence of other constant and consistent loving interconnection. This is the beginning and the end, and the primal

point of connection for Maggie and Tom: 'we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and ... we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self' (Gilligan 1982, 63).

Maggie is individual yet always in relation; she is first seen in vibrant connection with the landscape, and the whole basis of the text is interaction. Maggie may ask, 'If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment' (*MF* 475), but only after a lifetime spent making mistakes in following the inclination of the moment, while acquiring sympathy and duty and understanding how to employ them. Critics comment on the falseness of the narrator's references to the lost but happy infancy of Tom and Maggie. That 'the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them' (191) is disputed on the grounds that the reader hardly sees any golden childhood. Yet this is a realist novel: life existed before page one and at thirteen Tom is nearly a man, so childhood was virtually over. All the tokens of care - Tom's painting of the Devil (19) and the present of the fishing line (34) - also indicate that there was much for Maggie to love at one time. Otherwise, early childhood love is an absent referent that keeps sounding throughout the novel, suggesting that there was a time of love, caring and closeness. It is this remembered absence that keeps Maggie tied to Tom even when they fail each others' ethics and expectations. The supreme importance of this fundamental link of unseen but ever-present happy childhood needs to be understood by the reader in their analysis of duty and sympathy.

The narrator is sometimes perceived by critics as a representation of the adult Maggie looking back on her past, but Maggie is dead (Barrett 1989, 52-3), and despite the 'I', this is not to be a first-person narrative, although 'the empathic maneuver (*sic*)

stands' (Landa 1991, 43), capturing the reader and suggesting the narrator's caring connection to Maggie and establishing her as the main consciousness. That the narrator appears to be looking back on *her* past, and becomes submerged in the presentness of that past, suggests tremendous identification. While this narrative feature strengthens ideas of an authorial and an autobiographical voice, it also presents a different voice. This is an ever-more engaging, empathic narrator. Even the fond, familiar account of the mill and river evoke sympathy, for we also learn an early attachment for places and things. This narrator is more personal, relating both to a community and the individuals in it, reporting on the correspondence between internal and external environments as Tom and Maggie evolve. While there is still much 'dramatic discourse' between characters that presents alternative readings of both themselves and others, and a weaving beneath all accounts continues to present different interpretations, far more is conveyed by the nuances between the different gradations of the narrative voice. Ironic comment is even more difficult to discern, often achieved by opposing contradictory aspects of a single voice; leaving the reader to read any incongruities. The multiplicity of the opening narrative voice is an example: author, narrator, character; present and past, waking yet dreaming. The reader should realise that this is no stable, coherent tale.

The sudden plunge into the intimacy of the Tulliver and Dodson family is startling for the reader. Even E.S. Dallas saw the novel as a portrait of 'bestial...vulgar...repulsive...insect life' (Haight 1965, 12); Eliot was shocked:

So far as my own feeling and intention are concerned, no one class of persons or form of character is held up to reprobation or to exclusive admiration. Tom is painted with as much love and

pity as Maggie, and I am so far from hating the Dodsons myself, that I am rather aghast to find them ticketed with such very ugly adjectives (*GEL* III, 299).

Revelations about the family vary from direct narrative comment to shades of narration within a character, to direct speech from characters who present multiple accounts of the Dodsons *and* their moral values. While their code of behaviour is no longer suitable for the evolving world of Maggie and Tom, it has presumably developed from a kinship code of sympathy and duty such as those described by Hume, Smith and Spencer, and it still has some standards to offer. For example, family connection is recognised and Mrs Glegg will stand by Maggie in her crisis (*MF* 499). Yet behaviour for the Dodsons is largely determined by a mythical public opinion, so that leaving unimpeachable wills amounts to duty – despite the fact that the opinions of others are barely valued by the Dodsons. (58). Eliot's sympathy - as a caring, compassionate fellow-feeling which requires practice and encouragement - barely exists in the family, much less empathy, and the dominant virtue is pity, whereby 'Bessy, I'm sorry for you' (73), signals nothing but contempt.

The Dodsons have evolved and differentiated from their common origins and creed; they are now outsiders to each other, so that there is no clear code to pass on. The narrator is at her most obviously ironic concerning family foibles, for although we are told that there were 'particular ways of doing everything in that family' (43), the narrator gradually reveals, through various levels of comment, that all of them disagree with each others' methods. Further, there is only Mrs Glegg with the moral strength to utter the 'disagreeable truths that correct family feeling dictated' (43). For example, while Tulliver's culpability in his own ruin cannot be ignored, his family share the

responsibility, for Mr Deane admits later that he knew Tom's education would be all wrong: 'It wasn't my business, and I didn't interfere: but it is as I thought it would be' (230). A small observation, yet the narrator's tunnelling suddenly revalues Dodson codes. Minding one's own business while a family member ruins himself is not a 'duty' George Eliot would recognise. To observe this point is not to be writing different stories, but it is about the multiple 'might have beens' that are such a large part of this novel, consciously or not, and which all provide practice in realising the nature and function of sympathy and duty.

Maggie and Tom are both presented as outsiders within their own family. Darwin insisted that "individual differences are highly important to us, as they afford materials for natural selection to accumulate"... This emphasis on slight differences, deviations, rather than approximation to the parent-type, is among the most profound of Darwin's challenges to conventional thinking. *Not the normative but difference proves to be the generative principle* (Beer 1996, xx-xxi, my italics). Therefore, that Maggie is described as 'this small mistake of nature' (MF 13) should be celebrated, for it should have allowed her - like Tom in his different way - to act as the generative principles for family and society. Eliot was familiar with the developmental debate, and actually read *Origin of Species* in November 1859 while writing *The Mill on the Floss* (GEL III, 214), although she was still most influenced by Lamarckian theory and Spencer's work, rather than Darwin's natural selection.

Darwin distinguished between sexual selection and natural selection, 'thereby seeming to recognise the degree to which sexual selection is *social* selection' (Beer 1996, xxvi), and Mr Tulliver has been experimenting. He chose his wife because 'she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn't agoin' to be told the rights o' things by my own

fireside' (*MF* 19). Eliot observes in 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' that 'Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women' (1992, 185). She argues that women's development should be changed, and demonstrates in her novels the damage caused not only by feeble-minded women such as Mrs Tulliver, but by men who are complicit in the constant reproduction of such women. Spencer's argument that man's sexual choice was for attractive, altruistic women who would be submissive wives and nurturing mothers is also parodied by Eliot in the depiction of Bessy. Tulliver is reminiscent of the breeders in *The Origin of Species*, but complains: 'That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' the breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't' (*MF* 12). The progress that Spencer describes is expected, but as Darwin was to explain, inheritance was an arbitrary process and did not necessarily include progress. Both Maggie and Tom are rejected because they do not conform to gender norms, not being pretty enough or clever enough. Spencer was radical for the time in blaming both parents for children's developmental problems and recommending that fathers take more of a role. However, Tulliver attempts further social selection by sending Tom to school with no consideration for Tom's preferences or abilities; as Comte warned, Tom becomes a possession to be exploited.

The psychology of Eliot's characters is carefully constructed, yet the varying empathy and observation of the reader will produce individual assessments. Fludernik suggests that Mrs Tulliver and Lucy are 'exposed as contemptible and weak' (1992, 176), but I disagree. Close reading reveals that both are oppressed, Bessy by her elder sisters (*MF* 44) and Lucy by her mother (62). As Eliot invites speculation about her characters' moral construction, Chodorow's accounts of gender differentials in personality formation are useful. For example, Tom is shown as cherished by his

mother, his Dodson characteristics transcending difference even as his maleness pushes him into a strongly gendered position. Further, Tom has a positional role as a Tulliver male; he is scathingly disdainful of women, acquiring a rejection of the female after his early expulsion from the pre-oedipal, and from years of listening to, and valuing, his father. From his father's legal wranglings Tom also acquires some sense of honesty and rights, but not yet the knowledge or understanding to determine whether these are based on reason and sound emotion, or ignorance and 'Spinozan' passions such as fear and pride.

As later events reinforce Tom's need for rigid maxims to live by, his own concepts of duty and justice will override any caring, family feeling from childhood. The narrator, who personifies 'Nature' as a hard character like Eliot's 'Dame Nature', comments on her 'cunning' in hiding 'rigid and inflexible purposes' and 'unmodifiable characters' within such bits of 'pink-and-white' (*MF* 33) as Tom. Such damning prophecy is sandwiched between Maggie's delight at Tom's return, and his present of a fishing line for his little sister. Tom's introduction is thus an oscillation between brotherly love and assertion of self-righteous masculine superiority. While Maggie is portrayed as thoughtless and careless and Tom is justified in being angry, the violent language of his condemnation ensures a readerly sympathy for Maggie. Tom's justice ethic already lacks contextual relativism for others, while allowing it for himself: he says that he does not forget things (36), but he forgets to love and care for his sister. However, Tom's character deserves sympathy and tolerance, for like Maggie he is the victim of gender expectations, and Eliot intended him to be understood. When Dinah Mulock diagnosed authorial disdain for Tom, Eliot observed that she alone had created any respect that is perceived: 'the exhibition of the *right* on both sides being the very soul of my intention in the story' (*GEL* III, 397). Although there is little overt

sympathy for Tom, Eliot constantly presents Maggie and Tom as both being right: Tom is always more dutiful and just, while Maggie is more sympathetic and caring.

Maggie's imagination, love of music and beauty all condemn her as being 'like a Bedlam creatur' for her mother, while her dark hair and 'brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter' (MF13) may explain maternal rejection. Extrapolating from Chodorow's theory of gender difference, Maggie's 'difference' has circumscribed her mother's love. Although she was passively mothered she experiences mother loss as Kristeva describes it (Doane and Hodges 1992, 56-61). Maggie has effectively left the pre-oedipal early and turned to her father and Tom for the agency and authenticity that Chodorow describes as essential for the formation of a self-in-relation (1989, 106). Maggie lacks initiation into her female role, yet as a woman can expect nothing from her positional role with her father. The absence of Maggie's domestic training is symbolic of her rejection of feminine passivity, yet she *is* sympathetic; she feels for the 'Prodigal Son' (MF 32) and will not allow Tom to be judged capable of turning his father out (17). In 'Being and Doing' Chodorow reports that girls are generally constructed for nurturance, and thus know their role from early on (Chodorow 1989, 28). However, Maggie's turning to her father and Tom is a metonymic linkage²⁰ as their relationship stands in for the lost maternal bond. Although Maggie is happiest with masculine language and ambition, in opposition to Lucy's feminine role, her use of language is characteristically metonymic rather than metaphoric. Metonymy is a major trope within this text, signifying connection. The narrator's own play with metaphor (MF 139-40) highlights Mr Stelling's incompetence, for in attempting to totalise with metaphor he consequently never explains anything to Tom and only provides endless replacements. Meanwhile Maggie always offers contiguous stories that show connection and care: she worries if Philoctetes had a sister to care for him (182), and

renames, connects and sympathises, for metonymy is about renaming (Matus 1988/9, 310).

Maggie's quest for sympathy is double; she desires to receive it, for she is critically aware that no one judges her with justice, but she also wishes to improve and extend her sympathy and care. She is sensitive, but lacks reason and full understanding and is governed by passionate self-interest. The reader's sympathy is elicited by the constant criticism Maggie receives, and by her desire to improve and be loved, and by her always 'wishing she had done something different' (*MF* 53). The reader is secure because we identify with the characters' mistakes. The greatest injustice and violation of Maggie's identity is when Tom tells her 'You'll never go far into anything' following Stelling's judgement on women's 'quick and shallow' intelligence. Maggie is speechless and 'so oppressed by this dreadful destiny' (150-1) that she is briefly ousted from her hard-won claim on language. Yet Maggie's continued rebellion in the face of criticism, undermining, and violation should be praised, her rebellions constitute 'a key site of protest in Eliot's text' (Fraiman 138).

In one of the major patternings of connection in the text, Maggie and Tom are frequently presented in opposition. Their attempts to transcend this opposition usually precipitate scenes of rupture, as they strive confusedly after each others' sympathy and duty, as Maggie shoulders the duty of feeding Tom's rabbits, only to fail (*MF* 31). But Tom's realisation of the importance of love is measured by his withdrawal of it as punishment (36). Because Tom measures himself against his own construction of duty, in the absence of other clear guidance, he lacks a sense of other as conscience as Adam Smith describes, and thus lacks the imagination to sympathise. Yet there is recognition. In the scene of the jam puff bisection (45-6), Tom insists on justice in the division and

²⁰ See Matus 1988/9 on metonymy and relationship.

the sharing, yet expects and anticipates Maggie's sympathy to provide him with jam. Maggie meanwhile follows Tom's rules, never imagining that he anticipates her bending them. Once again the narrator demonstrates Tom's undermining of his own maxims. From his position of gendered power Tom expects to be loved and cared for despite his harshness and rules, the irony being that he cannot reciprocate. This is a hidden moral; the narrator lays out all the arguments, but leaves it to the reader to draw conclusions. In microcosm, Tom's behaviour here is an example of the wider functioning of gender ethics, with women expected to care while being harshly judged, while men expect care and temper judgement of themselves.

Scenes of Maggie and Tom's various ruptures highlight the need and isolation of Maggie, as Freud's *'fort, da'* game or Klein's absent mother, is repeatedly replayed. Generally Maggie incarcerates herself, while independent Tom wanders free. Maggie, desperate for love, relationship and sympathy, is alone with no role or purpose. She revels in her senses as part of her emotional release; it is a return to the semiotic, which like the flow of the river and the pulsing of the mill wheel suggest a return to the time of oneness which she wishes to recreate with Tom. The text suggests a comfort in her own abjection: sobs, tears, gasps; even a 'wretched pleasure in the hollow resonance' (37) of the womb-like loft. Meanwhile Tom exerts his mastery and role by discussing business with Luke and administering justice to Bob in purposeful language (49). Both children always display excess. Tom's justice ethic *is* excessive, while Maggie's selfish passions are extreme and overwhelm duty.

Tom senses his father's rejection, and the narrator confirms that it has been difficult for him to accept that 'he was not to be brought up to his father's business' (133). His greatest shortcomings are his shyness and lack of facility with language, but

then as he has not been granted full access to his male role, access to symbolic language is also reserved. Tom believes his schooling will not matter when he is a man. It will of course, but not the subjects on the timetable, for Tom experiences the false schooling that Rousseau fulminates against. In particular, school produces a 'painful sense that he was all wrong somehow' (136); even Tom's definition of masculinity is challenged. Stelling imposes a different standard, 'something higher in the eyes of the world than that of the people he had been living amongst ... he, Tom Tulliver, appeared uncouth and stupid' (141). If the Symbolic Order registers cultural phenomena, then Tom experiences a different symbolic, and different languages, which he will use on leaving school. Meanwhile, he is expected to live according to a rigid system which is alien to his needs and abilities. Despite the 'fibre that turns to true manliness' (143), that he displays in caring for little Laura Stelling, he is so defeated and emasculated at school that he turns to an even harsher masculinity. Tom enters his uncle Deane's world as the newly evolved man and can adapt, although he develops his own justice further as a certainty to cling to. Ironically, the brief experience of caring for Laura suggests the solution to life, for as Tom leads her by her ribbon in the garden it is his care and sympathy that point to salvation. For 'Laura', means 'path' from the same route as 'labyrinth' (Hillis Miller 1976, 59); but such a path, with an innocent woman leading the way, will not open again for Tom until the end. Meanwhile, Maggie's schooling is also taking place, but merely constitutes an absence within the text. This omission is a moral comment that both mimics society's attitude to women's education, while further subverting the notions of a double *Bildungsroman*.

Small, discrete examples of sympathy occur repeatedly, as if reminding the reader of this lack. Even Tulliver recognises the sympathy of kin that is the basis of all loving care, and connection with his sister prevents him from ruining her. He also

experiences imaginative intuition: concern for Maggie in case Tom should ever desert her; 'his love and anxiety for "the little wench" had given him a new sensibility towards his sister' (84) and Gritty 'stands in' for Maggie. Aunt Gritty herself is an oasis of sympathy – one of the few sites of unconditional love that Maggie experiences. Further, despite his self-pitying outbursts, Philip Wakem furnishes another example of a maternal man. His sufferings have left him exquisitely sensitive to the emotions of others - although he is not yet intuitive - and he recognises Maggie's potential for empathy. While Maggie cannot as yet discern the difference between sympathy, pity and 'feeling sorry' she begins to learn from Philip's responses. Philip alone divines Tom's fears of being lamed after his accident, sympathises, and is able to act. He also enters into intelligent, empathic communication with Maggie, perhaps the first she has ever experienced, and establishes himself for the future as a caring friend. However, the question for the reader is whether Philip's sympathy, even here, is a form of self-interest rather than mutuality.

The detailed length of the early books slows the narrative, while stressing the importance of connection. There are numerous supportive passages where the narrator demonstrates that Maggie 'was a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge' (*MF* 235). Further, while Tom's 'difference' is not urged so strongly and is masked by accounts of ill-humour and harsh judgement, the text nevertheless demonstrates Tom's growth beyond his father's powers, while his willingness to change and develop exceeds the careful Dodson spirit. That he dreams of being 'a Tamer of horses ... dispensing treats and benefits to others' (310) suggests an imagination generally hidden, and a largesse alien to the Dodson spirit. Although Eliot herself lamented that she concentrated too much on the early books (*GEL* III, 317), the detail and the familiarity with Tom and Maggie is not an error

as critics often suggest. The indecent haste of the ending compared to the lengthy intimacy of the early part intensifies the waste and horror. Critics argue that Eliot's text is flawed, but the ending creates an alienating effect for the reader: the pointless loss after the finely drawn picture of earlier life catalyses intuitive sympathy and the reader is forced to acknowledge the fictionality of the text and step back to evaluate life itself. The discursive passage at the beginning of Book Four, which compares the 'grovelling existence' of the Rhone inhabitants to the 'sordid life...of the Tullivers and Dodsons' (*MF* 272), is a return to the narrator's distancing approach of the earlier works. This consideration of 'oppressive narrowness' is necessary so we may fully understand the impact of this reactionary community on Maggie and Tom. Further, the shock of Tulliver's irreligious and vindictive revenge pledge at the end of Book Three needs countering, yet the narrator's method is this vitriolic attack. The debate thus created - between character, narrator and reader - promotes an analysis of where right, sympathy and duty do lie; while the hyperbole of the passage mirrors the excess that is to come.

Following the account of Tulliver's downfall, Maggie and Tom are variously associated with Comte's oppositions of activity and resignation (*GEL* II, 134). Superficially, Tom is active: working and exhibiting moral strength and a sense of obligation to clear the family name. As a woman, Maggie must adopt resignation for she cannot act. That 'there was no music for her any more' (*MF* 286) is mimetic of this closed life; there is nothing sensuous, no semiotic rhythms and returns to early excess, only sordid tasks and oppressive empty leisure. Only if she had 'been taught "real learning and wisdom"' would there be any hope of progress (286). Her father is bitter, seeing Maggie only as a beautiful possession, one devoid of value by virtue of his fall (280). Tom's troubles are sounded throughout this section, but Maggie's is generally the dominant point of view. The extent of the damage to Tom's character needs to be

understood by the reader; the narrator provides the evidence of his pent-up anger and postponed hopes, but in fleeting comments. His pain is not dwelt upon like Maggie's. Strangely, Maggie's sympathy for Tom is absent from the text, which instead emphasises her laments that he is not there for her (279-80). Tom may crave love and care, but to give in is feminine, and clinging to his masculine role is Tom's only support. Otherwise his renunciation becomes as extreme as Maggie's passions, while his chosen duty is Tom's 'God' in the way that Feuerbach describes man's false theological God as replacing his sense of other or 'Thou'. Self-in-relation is lost and material strivings rather than a search for knowledge or happiness are seen to fill Tom's life. Such loss and absence indicate afresh that this is not at all the typical male quest novel, and without the 'other' or *alter ego*, Tom lacks a conscience to guide his duty, especially towards Maggie.

Amid this misery, Bob Jakin is a symbol of hope, sympathy and kindness as he develops a metonymic stance of duty and sympathy, caring for his mother and family and continuing to aid Tom and Maggie. Bob is one of the few well-mothered characters in the text. He is also pivotal in an evaluation of the different ethics of Tom's justice and Maggie's care. When Bob and Tom fight as youngsters, the narrator provides the contextual understanding lacking from Tom's rigid justice by observing that any 'fine moral aroma' would be incomprehensible to the 'public opinion of Kennel Yard, which was the very focus or heart of Bob's world' (52). Tom cannot yet understand lives different from his own and is ignorant that his justice is alien to Bob. Yet years later, Bob allows himself to be won over by Maggie's sympathy and duty when he promises to abjure the use of his 'big thumb' (284-5). Bob is also a major plot device, he both moves the story and lightens the mood; literally 'bobbing' up when things are grim. He is Rousseau's child, unpolluted by education and convention, as Bob said to his mother,

if she had sent him to school more he 'could ha' read i' the books like fun, an' kep' [his] head cool an' empty' (314). Bob is free and adaptable; far more than Tom he is the newly evolving man, particularly as he moves through the class barriers. His imagination runs riot yet his reason and calculation are unsurpassed, and he constantly displays admirable intuition, and reads people exactly. The scene of his seduction of Mrs Glegg is superb. By inadvertently supplying Maggie with a copy of Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, Bob serves to further advance her resignation into an active renunciation. Meanwhile, he provides Tom with the means of becoming financially active.

Maggie's period of renunciation as a result of reading Thomas à Kempis is presented as part of a necessary learning process and is neither condemned nor lauded by the text. The narrator is simple and genuine in the account of the book's worth, but irony is Maggie's desert as she welcomes humiliation and self-sacrifice. The narrator is gentle - for renunciation is clearly a survival tactic - while also noting that the hand that wrote the text had awaited the 'heart's promptings' (291), but Maggie 'threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation' (292). Yet self-denial and quiet calmness permit the only relations possible, and the good, quiet Maggie becomes as close to her father as circumstances will allow. Maggie has moved from Gilligan's first to second stage of moral development, from selfishness to selflessness. However, interaction is required - moral authority housed in a text cannot hope to produce moral strength without practice. Eliot's own text encourages analysis while hoping that readers will take their growing moral values into the world.

The meeting with Philip Wakem precipitates an oscillation between selflessness and selfishness. Harmful self-sacrifice should be rejected, or, as Philip prophesies, it will erupt with a devastating force; but this same renunciation has kept Maggie sane. Also, she cannot act against those she loves most. It is wrong that the sacrifice of Philip's friendship is demanded, but cleaving to her family was a duty chosen freely within her determined limits. Although the choice to continue seeing Philip has a selfish component, in that Maggie desires love and friendship, the aspect generally ignored by critics is that womanly sympathy and a recently flourishing selflessness also encourage her to put Philip before herself and her chosen duty. That Maggie's meetings with Philip require serious consideration by the reader is highlighted by their juxtaposition with the account of Tom's trading success, although this actually took place much earlier. Tom's anticipation of clearing his father's name should promote a questioning of Maggie's behaviour and place Tom in a more sympathetic light.

Maggie concedes when Tom forces her renunciation of Philip, yet it is her decision. This is the first example of her successfully controlling her passions. She concedes out of sympathy for her father; her ethic of care would not hurt him further whereas Tom's justice would reveal the harsh truth at the risk of destroying his fragile health and reason. Now Tom has gained a mastery of language and is no longer shy or awkward. However, during the scene with Philip the language of both is that of the romance novel. Rather than being allowed to consume the content of the novel, readers are faced with the artificiality of the situation and forced to analyse. What is actually taking place is a competition between dominant males where both claim to know what is best for Maggie. At the time of publication, Bulwer Lytton wrote praising the novel, but suggesting that Maggie's silence was uncharacteristic, and that surely she would have defended Philip. Eliot agreed that Maggie was too passive (*GEL* III, 317).

However, I would argue that this is not the old Maggie: she now practices self-control, and only speaks out when Tom goes too far, but after Philip's declaration of love, there was also, 'a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation' (*MF* 348). When Maggie appeals to him that his duty could involve the care, understanding and sympathy that she has to offer, he dismisses her values insisting: 'if you can do nothing, submit to those that can' (*MF* 347) and seemingly accedes to her opinion that he has no pity, no sense of his own imperfections, or awareness of his own sins.

Thinking back on the work, Eliot remarked that 'I can see nothing in it just now but the absence of things that might have been there' (*GEL* III, 285), yet all the absences are significant. Maggie's isolation of herself when she goes away to work after her father's death is a personal choice and an exercise in moral control. When she returns home and Tom releases her from her promise, so that she may see Philip Wakem, he accuses her of lacking judgement and self-command. However, she is always striving to develop morally. There is no corresponding self-awareness from Tom. Even Lucy fails to breach Tom's rigid maxims regarding Maggie and Philip (*MF* 455-7). He has lost that imaginative ability which occasionally has broken out to rescue him to sympathy. Tom's reticence could suggest a non-relational character, but subtly, the narrator reveals that he is lonely and constrained.

That Maggie develops a passion for Stephen Guest represents the excess following on renunciation that Philip had warned of long ago. Many readers objected to Stephen as the representation of Maggie's lover. When responding to Bulwer-Lytton's dismay at Maggie's choice, Eliot argued that the psychology she had created for Maggie allowed such a decision (*GEL* III, 318). Further, as Brady notes, to claim that Stephen is unworthy of Maggie presumes a requirement for a happy union of equals, and Eliot's

tale refuses this romantic ploy as it has refused most other conventional plots - 'both Philip and Stephen are exposed as imperfect suitors, and the novel's focus is thus shifted away from idealistic notions about courtship' (Brady 1992, 101).

With Stephen there is a sexual attraction in the text that was absent with Philip. Eliot conveys Maggie's fluid attraction as vivid sense perceptions. All Stephen's features - attar of roses, diamond ring, manly grace - stand in for the sensual, semiotic over-abundance that Maggie has been denied. He has a supportive strength, yet with an intellectual appeal; he is roses – and Maggie is 'quite wicked with roses' (*MF* 441) – and he is the music Maggie has long been deprived of. Above all, Stephen is eye-contact, the mirroring look that tells the child it is loved, that gives validation. This is a heady brew, suggestive of the oneness of the pre-oedipal growth to self-in-relation (Chodorow 1989, 105-8). Further, everything about Stephen is unlike Philip, yet mimics a cultured Tom; Stephen hunts, rides, knows business and industry, and has the same conceited dismissal of women. He is symbolic of the unavailable connection; even his egoism is akin to Tom's and plays an equal but opposite role in catalysing the dénouement. Given Eliot's own position and particularly the dropping of her incognito just prior to the release of *The Mill*, her decision to describe an illicit relationship, and one with such erotic overtones, was both honest and brave. It was also risky, and when Blackwood eventually published *The Mill*, Mudie contemplated boycotting the works because of moral qualms over Eliot's relationship with Lewes (Martin 1994, 114). In Book Seven the narrator addresses Maggie's quandary directly: 'The great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it' for we have 'no master key that will fit all cases' (*MF* 497). This is a 'brave authorial remark' given Eliot's own sexual choice (Ashton 1996, 236), it is also echoed by the contextual ethics that Gilligan advocates.

In a self-conscious aside the narrator remarks that Maggie's story would not be interesting if she was a society lady who knew how to cope with Stephen's flirtation (*MF* 384-5). Such a metalingual comment 'addresses the codes and conventions of the narrative act and thus foregrounds its artificiality' (Malmgren 1986, 481). Malmgren suggests that as a realist Eliot would not wish to do this. Such repeated stepping back however, is a reminder to the reader, not only that this is fiction, but that it is not to be consumed, and needs to be analysed, learned from and maybe acted upon. Further, the regularity of the effect suggests Eliot's intention. Narrative comment decreases once Stephen is present (Doyle, 78), but then it is largely unnecessary for Stephen's actions are obvious, he is set on conquest. Even if in love he essentially conducts a Darwinian campaign of sexual selection and dominance. Stephen's language on his visit to Aunt Gritty's reveals a character in contravention of all of the moral values established both by Eliot's text and in the developing character of Maggie. The dominant word is 'I', and the declaration is driven by self-interest. The attention Stephen gives to his chosen obligation to Lucy is negligible, the lack of sympathy for all others is striking, and his lack of empathy for Maggie's struggles disturbing. Her promise to Philip in particular is dismissed as 'unnatural' (*MF* 448). Stephen's is not an ethic of care balanced with an ethic of justice, his care is for himself alone, and his idea of justice involves his 'rights' as an alpha male. Stephen's words and actions should condemn him according to the values already established. Yet the reader is continually diverted by the prevailing discourse of romance and convention. Stephen is always at the centre of Stephen's campaign, whereas Philip's arguments to her always placed Maggie's concerns along with his own. However, the narrator needed to reveal Philip's more subtle ulterior motives and manipulative tendencies, while the absence of comment on Stephen's persuasive techniques is significant. The readers and Maggie are deemed capable of

reading Stephen's self-interest. Those readers who want a happy romantic ending are possibly the ones who find the ending flawed.

Drifting on the river is mimetic of Maggie's emotions while she ponders her options. In first going with Stephen the choice is purely for herself, to be with a loved object-substitute and be loved. As her chosen duty to Tom, Philip and Lucy begins to impinge, then Maggie is torn between two types of altruism. Does she give up Stephen for the others, or give up the others for Stephen? Maggie is won over by a selfless sympathy for Stephen. When he offers to stop the boat and take all the blame, she cannot allow it. In these stages, knowledge, reason, passion and imagination are gradually brought into play. It is only in the final stage, when Maggie dreams of Lucy, Philip and then Tom, that she realises where her own choice lies, while including others with the least hurt. Her semiotic choice is between a rejecting Tom and a Tom at home in the mill who 'was not really angry' (470). Maggie's final choice must hurt Stephen, but she includes her own desire in choosing the Tom who signifies all relational love, and the very point where duty lies.

That Tom is not equal to Maggie's love should be no surprise to the reader, unless implausibly happy endings are expected. The narrator recommends tolerance for Tom and not being too 'severe on his severity' for his 'family feeling had lost the character of clanship' as a result of personal pride (500) and Tom's turn to 'I' overrules all care and love of 'Thou'. Bob remains as a maternal man, and Dr Kenn proves to be another, as he laments the loss of all concern for 'Thou' in his parishioners. That the community opposes him over Maggie demonstrates the general lack of sympathy, and signals the triumph of artificial virtue. Gilligan (1982, 148) has already claimed Eliot's 'man of maxims' passage (*MF* 498) as support for her work, and Eliot clearly outlines

the distinction between the minds that want general rules and ready-made patent justice, and those that accept 'growing insight and sympathy' and even the 'trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality' not to mention, experience, knowledge, insight and the creation of 'wide fellow feeling'. Gilligan's account of the complex means of acquiring the full ethic of care, balanced with reasoned, knowledgeable justice, yet allowing for contextual relativism, clearly appears to reflect much that the narrator, or even the author, is advocating in this passage. Yet a choice for slow-growing sympathy is not easy.

In the period immediately before the flood, the predominant emotion presented in the text has been forgiveness. All forgive Maggie except Tom, but nevertheless she is finally aware that love lies within. Prior to the flood she despairs, yet also accepts forgiveness and contemplates the contrast between the two letters from Philip and Stephen. Philip's letter is an exercise in fellow-feeling. He addresses Maggie's trials, the troubles of others, praises her strength and honesty, speaks of all that she has taught him, but barely mentions his own desires. Meanwhile, Stephen's letter is an exercise in 'I': 'a passionate cry of reproach: an appeal against her useless sacrifice of him; of herself: against that perverted notion of right' (513). While Maggie is nearly swayed by selfless sympathy for 'Stephen's tone of misery', the letter is burned. Eliot's heroine has made her ultimate choice as signalled by the dream on the river - and her first appearance in the novel. Maggie's rescue of Tom is not selfless; it is a choice for herself, as well as a rejection of all who demand selflessness. In choosing Tom, Maggie has finally worked out her own moral pathway, which includes an acceptance of the best of his justice ethic. Eliot was never solely concerned with women and feminism; neither are Chodorow and Gilligan. All are concerned with the harmful results for both men and women of gender-role damage. Chodorow believes that both genders need to

change, while Gilligan accepts that both care and justice have their place, and Eliot insisted on the importance of both the 'ethics' that Tom and Maggie exhibit.

The mill and river have essentially vanished, for Tom has tied himself to wrong objects that occupy the space of sympathy and care. The flood, representing the anger of all damaged lives, sweeps all away. Hence Tom's silence, for his limiting 'chain' of signifiers has been washed away. The narrator assumes his thoughts and responses, but the silence is more significant; it is pre-oedipal, and gives power to Maggie, so that briefly they become autonomous woman and maternal man. Tom always thinks he knows Maggie, but full knowledge only arrives at the end when intuition coincides with emotion, reason and knowledge, and Tom realises what she has done and perceives the extent of her love. He is thus able to access his own buried emotions that link them back to their connected infancy.

Everything in the life portrayed for Maggie and Tom has led to this joyous reconciliation and tragic waste. The ending is absurd and extreme but it is also the only way of achieving the impossible reconciliation of the two opposing doctrines that Maggie and Tom represent, while also providing a melodramatic ending largely acceptable to most of the Victorian reading public. Yet there is also an excess that promotes an examination of the fiction. Hyperbole alerts the reader to an understanding. *This* loss, waste and tragedy is the result when lives are forced into false and opposing roles and when sympathy and duty are forsaken. From the realist point of view, Tom and Maggie could not be reconciled and live, and no happy ending was possible. From Eliot's point of view, progress and continued development are not possible for individuals and communities - for 'I' and 'Thou' - unless these two opposing strands are reconciled. In fact, the text may question the whole notion of progress via the arbitrary

nature of the deaths - which perhaps suggests that Darwin's influence had disturbed Eliot. However, the ultimate conclusion is that sympathy can catalyse progress, for Tom has been won by sympathy. Thus although a balanced reconciliation of opposites is achieved, Maggie's sympathy and care prove dominant.

Although *Silas Marner* (1861) was George Eliot's next published work after *The Mill on the Floss*, *Romola* was conceived first. Lewes had suggested a historical romance concerning the life of Savonarola during their visit to Florence in May 1860 (*GEL* III, 295) and Eliot began work researching on their return. In August she proposed the anonymous serialisation of the work in *Maga* to Blackwood (*GEL* III, 339). That Eliot proffered such a move, after her extreme reaction to Blackwood's intention of publishing *The Mill* anonymously, is an indication of her insecurity concerning *Romola*: 'I am quite without confidence in my future doings'.

For the purposes of my analysis I wish to discuss *Romola* alongside *The Mill on the Floss*, albeit briefly, partly because the ideas in *Romola* follow so closely on those established in the earlier work, but primarily because I consider there to be a continuum between *Silas Marner*, *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*, with a distinct change in form and development of themes. I also consider *Romola* to lack any new narrative or formal developments, when compared to *The Mill on the Floss*. Further, while *Romola* does extend the themes developed in *The Mill on the Floss* to extremes, there is no profound evolution of issues.

Research for *Romola* was extensive and continued from 1860. After a second visit to Florence in April 1861, Eliot's journal details her phenomenal reading and research programme between July 1861 and June 1863 when the novel was finally

finished (*GEJ* 1998, 96-118). Eliot read everything, from the texts of the period - including Savonarola's own works - to books on history, language and costume. She only began thinking about the plot in September 1861 (102) and declared '*I began my novel of Romola*' on 1 Jan 1862 (107). Critical opinion on *Romola* is more varied than on any other work. F.R. Leavis describes it as the novel of 'a mind misusing itself' (1983, 65), while Beer sees *Romola* as pivotal 'in her growth as a woman writing' while admitting that it is 'heavy going' (1986, 113). Beer suggests that the historical distance granted by the setting allows Eliot to extend certain themes (114), thus she presents an extremely radical example of a society in flux and a more intense critique of gender relations than in *The Mill*.

Romola was conceived as a historical novel and there has always been intense debate concerning its success in this genre. Leslie Stephen felt that Eliot's desire for historical accuracy paralysed her imagination (1924, 130) - thus *Romola* fails *because* of the history; meanwhile, Ashton sees the depiction of Fifteenth Century Florentine society as a 'comparative failure' (1983, 53). Even Lewes implored Blackwood to 'discountenance the idea of a Romance being the product of an Encyclopaedia' when talking to Eliot (*GEL* III, 473-4). My own opinion is that the history, while absorbing and fascinating for itself, replaces or diverts the thematic and formal development that was otherwise proceeding in Eliot's work. The effort of the historical detail, and in particular the attempt to incorporate it seamlessly into the plot, uses up energy that in other novels is devoted to creative progress. The structural and thematic links to the earlier works are strong, but if *Romola* is one pivotal novel, I consider *Silas Marner* to be a far more important one.

Another major area of analysis of *Romola* is that 'If any of her works may be called "Positivist", it is *Romola*' (Ashton 1983, 51). This frequently explored argument centres largely on Romola Bardi's development from a pagan to a theological or Christian stage, and then from a metaphysical to a Positivist stage, where altruism supposedly dominates. Dorothea Barrett provides a detailed summary of Comtean interpretations of *Romola*, but also provides an investigation of Eliot's moves beyond Comtean theories to articulate new ideas (1989, 75-98) which deserves a close reading.

From my perspective, *Romola* continues the investigation of sympathy and duty in family and community relations, particularly during a time of immense social upheaval. Further, as in *The Mill on the Floss*, the clash of individual desire with that of family or community is explored, with major oppositions established between competing moral stances. For all its grandeur, Florence is still a community like St. Ogg's with similar concerns and *Romola* is essentially a study of character and environment (Sanders 1978, 172-4). Like Maggie Tulliver, Romola has little experience of morals and relationships beyond her immediate family. As a motherless child, Romola has turned to her father and brother for love and self-definition, although her brother Dino leaves, when she is only six, to become a priest. Dino is disowned by his father for this choice of Christian benevolence, service and selflessness, over an academic, humanist vocation. Romola possesses sympathy and relationality, born no doubt of her kin relationships and any mothering she may have received, but she is also constructed as a proud, intellectual woman, whose limited life inhibits wider moral development. Her only concept of duty is that owed to her father and his work, therefore she cannot comprehend Dino's beliefs and vocation. Even when he is dying Romola cannot empathise with him.

Tito Melema is the outsider who breaches the Bardis' isolation, winning Romola as his bride. The detailed portrayal of his gradual slide from lazy, selfish, self-preservation to utter moral corruption, where he trusts no one – not even himself – is the most interesting facet of the novel. Tito has no concept of obligation. He begins life in Florence knowing that he has abandoned his step-father to a life of slavery, and in hugging this secret to himself the fears of discovery and exposure grow, making him a haven for secrets and evil generally. Any seeming sympathy displayed by Tito to Romola, Bardo or others is merely calculated self-interest. Once he is safely married and Bardo's heir, his attentions to them wane.

Romola is won over by techniques similar to those of Stephen Guest: friendship, intellectual acknowledgement and discussion, strong sexual appeal, and above all, a visual recognition that conveys the love and validation usually offered by the mother; 'Tito's glance ... had that gentle, beseeching admiration' (*R* 58) which Romola desires. Despite her intellect and learning Romola is denigrated by her father for being female. Regardless of her selfless love and devoted work, Romola, like Maggie, cannot transcend gender to become as valued as a son. When Tito fills that vacancy, Romola becomes doubly repressed and oppressed by patriarchy. *Romola* is the last occasion when Eliot explores father/daughter ties, from now on she concentrates on love beyond the family. There is an unspoken realisation in the text that a masculine linear descent of family property and reputation is far more important in the society and family than the relational and metonymic links which have tied and supported Romola; it is this lateral kinship with its potential for a 'web of connection' which interests Eliot (Beer 1986, 117). Brady also emphasises exactly how masculine and misogynist the Florentine culture of this period was and traces Eliot's detailed representation of women as items of abuse, use or exchange (1992, 120-7).

As Tito degenerates in a life of political intrigue, he betrays first Bardo and then Romola. Her brief development of imagination and sympathy atrophy as she adopts a proud, selfish, self-preserving autonomy. Romola resolves to flee Florence in order to become a woman of self-supporting learning, yet even in this act she is guided by damaged feelings, for 'there could be no law for her but the law of her affections' (*R* 305). A meeting with Savonarola checks Romola's flight, for he wishes to conquer her pagan pride and win her to feminine and Christian altruism for the service of Florence and its people. As Savonarola is offering both an alternative duty and vocation via this philanthropy, Romola accedes, for without Tito and her father she is no longer wife or daughter and has no role. In Gilligan's terms, Romola has moved from a position of alternating egoism and selflessness with her father and Tito, to altruistic selflessness. Yet Savonarola's rigid maxims already clash with Romola's moral sense. He argues that her God given duties are those of a wife and woman and that no one can choose their duty (341) - a doctrine clearly opposed by Eliot. Ultimately Romola chooses submission to Savonarola, yet it is the beginning of choice for herself, for 'she had found an immediate satisfaction for moral needs' (367). Like Tom and Mr Tulliver, all Patriarchs fail their dependants by adhering to a rigid, linear ethic of justice that does not allow for consideration of others. Romola is initially seduced by the duty and vocation Savonarola offers and her experience of enforced caring in the city slowly allows lateral connections to form and the emergence of sympathy; but also the consideration of herself.

Romola's small store of sympathy grows as she works, although she never enjoys selflessness; Eliot emphasises that altruism is not woman's natural inheritance and Romola 'had no innate taste for tending the sick' (*R* 366). Personal relationships

promote sympathy and sociality more readily, and Romola's greatest moral growth at this time comes from caring for Tessa and her two children by Tito. Caring promotes caring and Romola grows in relational and moral awareness. However, as her experiences teach her tolerance and understanding she rejects Savanarola's rigid maxims (Uglow 1987, 169). Faced with Tito's adultery Romola finally questions where 'the sacredness of obedience ended and where the sacredness of rebellion began (*R* 442); the struggle is an intensification of Maggie's choice between family ties and her own needs. However, here there is no transcendent love or deep sense of self-in-relation, to keep Romola.

Savanarola remains inflexible and uncaring even when Bernardo, Romola's Godfather, faces death. It is this choice of rigid duty to a God, over care and sympathy for an old man that causes Romola to flee again. Tito and Savanarola are the moral antitheses against whom she struggles. Tito does not make decisions as such, he has no maxims, morals or duties as guides, he merely follows the inclination of the moment – he personifies Kant's image of immoral action, he is also an extreme development of Stephen Guest. Meanwhile, Savanarola allows for no contextual relativism, he lacks any intuitive sympathy for the moment and the circumstances of the case. Romola has neither Tito's complete lack of moral belief nor Savanarola's absolute certainty; consequently she constantly questions herself: 'It belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its own horizon' (*R* 328). Brady suggests that two struggles continue throughout the book, power versus sympathy (1992, 120), however, although both Tito and Savanarola are swayed by power and lack sympathy, Savanarola is guided by duty. As with Tom and

Maggie, Romola's opposition places the duty of sympathy in the ascendent over any external duty to God, State or family.

Although it is an idealised and utopian representation, Romola's drifting on the sea and eventual landing at the plague village suggests a brief return to the mother and the semiotic, a re-realisation of the self-in-relation. She is tempted by death, but no more of Eliot's heroines die after Maggie, and Romola is able to gain strength from her brief isolation and rebirth. The experience of community relationship which follows in the village promotes caring, and yet also leads to Romola's choice for a life of love, connection and learning with her female community in Florence, rather than the altruism of the village. Romola has learned to recognise and transcend difference to develop both imagination and sympathy,

Romola returns to Florence. Personally, Romola has achieved the knowledge that leads to freedom and happiness, she has transcended her bondage to linear, inherited, family connection and chooses a web of relationship. That all the male protagonists in *Romola* die is not a symbolic punishment, but I do consider it suggests that Romola's relational yet autonomous caring is seen as evolutionarily superior, while patriarchy, clergy and corruption become extinct. Further, that Romola is seen concentrating on the education of Tessa's son Lillo may suggest that male children are most in need of maternal thinking, teaching and relationship if the rejection described by Chodorow is to be overcome. This is not primary parenting but it is some form of reparation so that the evolution of maternal men and autonomous women can proceed. Now, with the added input and inspiration provided by the interruption of *Silas Marner*, Eliot moves on to the major phase of her work.

Chapter Six – Maternal Men and Autonomous Women:

Silas Marner and Felix Holt

For much of its history *Silas Marner* was generally regarded as a minor work, falsely perceived as ‘too obvious and lightweight to merit serious critical discussion’ (Dawson 1993, 26). However, considerable re-evaluation has taken place,²¹ for as Carroll observes: ‘the very simplicity and economy ... led to the persistent undervaluation of the novel’ (1967, 167). The initial response to the work on publication was favourable. The *Saturday Review* thought *Silas Marner* as good as *Adam Bede*, with its greatest strength being the realistic picture of the poor people of Raveloe, and the lower gentry (13 April 1861, xi, 369-70). E.S. Dallas in *The Times* agreed, suggesting that Eliot presented boors and peasants in all their innocence, ignorance and callousness, while still maintaining their humanity and compassion. The general opinion was that this work lacked the faults of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill*, but that its brevity, simplicity and subsequent lack of moral and intellectual scope rendered it lightweight. However, R. H. Hutton in the *Economist* felt that there was a strong intellectual impress in the manner by which Eliot draws the reader’s attention to the psychological effects of the story (27 April 1861, 455-7). Hutton hones in on the points that render *Silas Marner* central to Eliot’s *oeuvre*, for it presents in microcosm her main thematic concerns and is a simple prototype for future formal techniques.

1860-61 was a disturbing period for Eliot. With Lewes’s eldest son Charles now living with them, they took a house in the city for the sake of his work. While obviously loving Charlie, Eliot must have found her new role of adoptive mother unsettling. Her letters to Blackwood tactfully ignore his requests for progress reports on the new novel

(*GEL* III, 355-7) while complaining of illness and depression. There was also the brief temptation of a divorce abroad being a possibility for Lewes, although when this proved a false hope Eliot insisted that she preferred her 'excommunication' (*GEL* III, 366). When *Silas Marner* was finally under way, Eliot described it as having 'thrust itself' between her and *Romola* (*GEL* III, 360), a 'sudden inspiration' unfolding itself 'from the merest millet-seed of thought' (*GEL* III, 371). The many problems with the complexity of *Romola*, following on the awareness that aspects of *The Mill* had escaped her control, may have led Eliot to desire a simple work through which to present profound issues, while also experimenting with formal approaches.

Silas Marner is frequently compared to a fairy tale and many critics do not look beyond this vehicle to the substance of the story (Carroll 1967, 167). But Eliot employs such a frame to mythologise her experiences and ideas. She knew that Spinoza 'showed an understanding of the social function of religious myth' (Ashton 1994, 156), while Strauss in his examination of the hermeneutics of Scripture demonstrated the value of telling moral tales that did not preach. Thus the disguise of a simple moral fable conceals the profound questioning of fundamental values at work in the novel. It has been specifically compared to 'Rumpelstiltskin' (Beer 1986, 126), where in order to regain his child, the King has to discover the name of the gnome who spins flax into gold.

Eliot's novel mimics this tale yet achieves role-reversal and moral analysis in a fabular mould that is unparalleled until the works of Angela Carter. The novel subverts gender stereotypes, demonstrating that Eliot is not merely proto-feminist but is questioning all gender roles. The work also questions and parodies all parental,

²¹ See: Thale 1958; Thomson 1965; Milner 1966; Carroll 1967; Dessner 1979; and Dawson 1993.

proprietal and Christian duties. Every assumed moral norm of her period is interrogated and compared to the importance of the natural laws and the power of sympathy and true duty. As with *The Mill*, Eliot is concerned with the reconciliation of opposites and the antagonism between equally valid claims.

Silas Marner signals Eliot's first full use of a double plot, while still investigating the subject of alienation within a complex web of connection – a theme which is to reach its apotheosis in *Middlemarch*. The double plot relates well both to alienation and to Feuerbach's idea of the double consciousness of 'I/Thou' – which itself extends ideas of exchange between author and text, text and reader and reader and author. One of the main functions of the double plot is to examine the opposing values of supposedly 'feminine' caring and connection, and 'masculine' separation and justice as represented by the characters of Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass. Their interwoven histories lead the reader through the web of Silas's increasing connectedness, set against Godfrey's life of linear individuality. This shuttling between the two characters in the carefully arranged chapters mirrors their approaches to relationship, and their personal ethics of care versus justice.

The ever-present metaphor for evil in the novel is absence, which is repeatedly set against relationship. Both Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass are outsiders, with relationship initially absent. Silas is introduced in a fantasy setting of fear and fable, with the narrator reporting the mistrust and superstition with which he continues to be regarded, despite his having lived in Raveloe for fifteen years. Although the narrator intimates that Silas is a harmless recluse, the reader receives a welter of fears and prejudice and so may reserve judgement. As each 'supernatural' element is undercut by the narrator, the reader gradually gains understanding: 'wanderers' become mere

weavers. George Eliot's illumination of the fear that results from 'ignorance and insularity' (Thomson, 1965, 71-72) allows the reader to see why Silas is regarded with suspicion, but also to feel sympathy both for Silas *and* the villagers who are unable to recognise and transcend difference.

This fostering of false fears in the reader is a dramatic equivalent of the problems described by Feuerbach; many people find 'difference' an insurmountable barrier and do not regard different others as fellow beings, therefore sympathy cannot be extended. Since Silas has lived in this village for fifteen years with no fellow-feeling extended to him, *Silas Marner* is decidedly no pastoral idyll. The air of superstition also obscures the moral problems under investigation – as the romance plot does in *The Mill* - with the result that the image of a simple moral fable persists. Having established Silas's alienation, and fostered the reader's uncertainties about his nature, only then does the narrator recall Silas's Lantern Yard experiences. His past shows him to be deserving of sympathy and understanding, since he is 'both sane and honest' (*SM* 8).

The dialogue that immediately characterises Godfrey's story – a dialogue absent from Silas's tale until his visit to The Rainbow (Thomson 1965, 77) - gives a false air of relationship, for Godfrey is neither close to father, brothers nor community, and lacks any sympathetic connection. Thus for both characters, relationship is lacking. However, the main absence is the maternal and all the caring values traditionally associated with the mother. The description of a 'domestic life destitute of any hallowing charm' (*SM*, 23) explains Godfrey's need for feminine order and gentleness as well as his misguided search to replace the lost maternal. It is often via the love of a woman that men reclaim the lost unity with the mother; yet the memory of rejection is always with them so that love is conditional and wary (Chodorow 1978, 199).

Ironically, Godfrey's marriage to Molly Farren has intensified his lack. Yet Godfrey's love is always expressed in terms of neediness and possession, like the men Dinnerstein dismisses. Nancy 'would be his wife, and would make home lovely to him', so drawing him in with her umbilical 'strong silken rope' (*SM* 30). But in his single-minded, self-interested pursuit of love *and* autonomy, Godfrey lacks all care (Gilligan 1982, 74) and thinks in terms of his rights when as yet he has not earned them.

Unlike Silas, Godfrey has no sense of connection, and few memories of love and caring. For despite overtones of alien origins Eliot's narrator reveals Silas as a caring, relational man. From 'the close fellowship' (*SM* 7) of Lantern Yard, the early portrait is of the man that only Silas remembers: 'the same Silas Marner who had once loved his fellow with tender love' (84). That Silas had a long and close relationship with his mother is made manifest by the memories that knit him to the maternal throughout the novel. On finding the golden child Eppie on his hearth, Silas immediately wishes to name her after his mother and sister (122). The reader is also told that he had 'inherited from his mother some acquaintance with medicinal herbs and their preparation' (8). As a child he was old enough - and therefore loved by a mother for long enough - to imbibe this herb-lore. Silas has also developed the relational love common to women - possibly acquired while looking after his sister - for Chodorow argues that caring promotes caring. I perceive the Calvinist community of Lantern Yard, with its seeming-brotherly love, to be Silas's mistaken mother-substitute. The text describes the community as 'the fostering home of his religious emotions' (*SM* 14), but from the narrator's scattered clues, I see Silas's values and emotions as already existant and formed in a previous loving relation, while Lantern Yard - as chosen foster-home - perverts those emotions. Dolly Winthrop's theory later is that love was interrupted by the Lantern Yard religion, and hers is the best theology in the novel (Carroll 1967, 185).

The women in the story also lack mothers: Nancy, Priscilla, and of course, Eppie, who, we are told, even before her mother's death was used to cry 'Mammy ... without expecting tender sound or touch to follow' (*SM* 119). Both Nancy and Priscilla exhibit a closeness and veneration for their father that are common in Eliot's tales of mother-absence. They can afford to be proud and have 'no opinion o' the men', because they do have 'a good father and a good home' (91). Priscilla would not wish to leave her father, given her security, love and autonomy at home; while Nancy would not settle for a man who cannot compare to her father. Yet Mr Lammeter is rigid and pernicky, and may be the source of Nancy's arbitrary inflexibility. It is ironic that all the main characters are portrayed as making false choices in their search for substitutes for mother love.

Fathers are also a major relational absence. Some critics see Silas's turn to the Chapel as a search for the father (Emery, 1976, 57-59), however, insufficient analysis is made of Silas's perception of the faith as caring. Yet the Lantern Yard community proves to be both a false father *and* mother in its stripping away of connection and ultimate betrayal of Silas. First Silas abandons his mother's herb-lore in the fear that it is contrary to the church's principles; he thus seals off fundamental 'channels for his sense of mystery' (*SM* 8). Religious feeling then becomes 'shaped by an interpretation of the Unknown that excludes the maternal principle' (Paxton 1991, 99) as memories of his mother and sister are repressed. Silas thus embraces the institution of religion which Feuerbach portrays as sealing man off from the full love and understanding of self-in-relation, as well as rejecting the growth to knowledge and understanding of all natural laws which Spinoza saw as the route to happiness and eternity.

While Eliot had become more tolerant and understanding of the help and support to be gained from religion since her 'Holy War' period, she was still opposed to all systems that claimed ultimate formulas:

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 (*GEL* III, 365-7).

This opinion proves to be startlingly appropriate to an analysis of *Silas Marner*. Silas's Chapel proves to be a Patriarch who judges and rejects without love, understanding, or justice. Ironically, Silas and the friend William who betrays him were known as 'David and Jonathan' (8), Jonathan being also condemned by a drawing of lots. After the theft, betrayal and the illogical, uncaring judgement passed on him, Silas rejects the Church as it rejects him.

Silas turns to his weaving because he finds in its rhythms, repetitions, sounds and touch the only certain comfort and security available to him. Weaving symbolises a return to the pre-oedipal – Silas literally does have to climb into his loom-womb – and recalls Kristeva's account of the semiotic, the phase when the child is at one with the mother, and pulsions traverse the body (Moi 1986, 90-98). It is a return to the pure sensuality and total unity of an infant, and, with hand and eye and the 'immediate promptings' (15) of bodily needs satisfied, Silas is able 'from pure impulse without

reflection...to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life' (15). When he flees to Raveloe, he goes to where 'mother earth shows another lap' (*SM* 13), and in his virtual solitude for the next fifteen years, Silas can be considered as trying to recreate an idyllic phase of love and unity.

Silas's role as a weaver is doubly an access to comfort, as it provides his positional being - his relationship to the masculine world. As Chodorow describes, male children gain a positional relationship to their father and masculinity, often via a role which has to be learned. In addition to his feminine caring, Silas also has his role, or vocation, possibly acquired from his own father. Thus Silas's work has not lost its purpose, as some claim (Johnstone 1992, 36) - instead it gains extra importance in allowing him to maintain some sense of self. Work is his salvation, and although the weaving becomes a drug equivalent to Molly's opium, it is more respected and validated for men who are in denial of love (Brady 1992, 117), and is an option not then available to women – such as Maggie - when isolated and alone. Silas's coming and going in his loom and his movements about the village recreates the coming and going of the good and bad mothers as he attempts to reconstruct a self-in-relation.

Godfrey's experience is quite different. Even as a first-born male he lacks a clear role and almost certainly experienced an early separation from his mother, being pushed into a gendered role of supposed autonomy and masculinity in a fiercely misogynist household. Godfrey is very much his father's son in that he was intended to adopt the patriarchal role, a role which he cannot forsake and so hides the truth of his marriage. However, Godfrey's positional relationship with his father has not been successful partly because his father is not a positive role model, also Godfrey is not certain of his future place, and would have preferred more discipline from his lax and

contradictory father. Squire Cass, typifying much that Spencer had lamented in male parenting, threatens to re-assign his fortune (25) and so controls and undermines his heir, regarding Godfrey as a possession. The presentation of Godfrey is contradictory. He is seen as cowardly, procrastinating, and prone to trust to chance rather than his own ability to change his fate, yet is also strangely endearing. The presentation is sympathetic, with Godfrey's morally doubtful arguments relayed by the narrator without adverse comments. Compared to the treatment of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*, sympathy for Godfrey is sought by the narrator all along. This appeal is essential to underpin Godfrey's status as a central character, for he does not conveniently disappear like Hetty. Thus the reader's sympathy must be won for the character by presenting a convincing psychology, seemingly formed by experiences and an inheritance that never promised strength, honesty and care.

Silas Marner appeared in 1861, two years after Darwin's *On the Origin of Species Through Natural Selection*. With the topics of inheritance and 'nature versus nurture' buzzing among the educated reading public, the Squire's reference to Godfrey taking after his mother (70), while his own character exhibits numerous faults is a deeply ironic manoeuvre, which yet summons great sympathy for Godfrey. The Squire is weak, ill-managing and manipulative, his only concerns being his own ease, money, and his supposed prestige in the neighbourhood. There is a complete absence of care and sympathy, with total unconcern over Dunstan's absence. The Squire is the source of Godfrey's shortcomings, either via poor nurture or the poor nature available to be passed on. In addition, Eliot's understanding of science, philosophy, and the means by which knowledge, reason and feelings are all acquired by experience and relationship and are then physiologically and psychologically incorporated to form personality. Not only is the Squire presented as a poor parent, but throughout the text the narrator has

emphasised that the Squire neglects his proprietorial role as a landowner and member of the gentry. Such a thorough account of gender and personality formation as Godfrey's is striking, and largely succeeds in winning sympathy for a character by displaying a contextual relativism which Godfrey himself will not prove able to display. Such psychological workings are profound for a work often dismissed as minor.

In her presentation of Godfrey's history and influences, Eliot also employs Kant's theory of time and space as concepts of the mind, or modes of perception, which, when applied to sensory input, effect or order the way we perceive things. Godfrey, a character within a text, is yet presented through time and space so that the formation of his personality is understood. Eliot also utilises this technique in relation to the complete absence represented by Silas's cataleptic trances. If time and space are the means of understanding by which we modify all empirical data, then their suspension for the duration of Silas's absence not only explains his lack of understanding of events, specifically the Lantern Yard theft and Eppie's arrival, but allows Eliot as author to change the present and thus the future. While some readers may have regarded Silas's trances as uncanny and supernatural - as do the inhabitants of Raveloe - and thus well within the remit of the tale as fairy story, Eliot is most likely to have perceived catalepsy as a medical condition. Even though no explanation existed then (Shuttleworth 1984, 80), Eliot's own experience augmented by her knowledge of Spinoza would re-assure her that the as yet unknown laws of nature account for all inexplicable occurrences, such as illness, disease and disturbing behaviour (Hampshire, 121).

However, as Sally Shuttleworth observes, the use of the trances presents Silas as powerless and unconscious at the two major points when 'the discontinuity of his social

history' (1984, 81) occurs. E.S. Dallas whose 'theory of narrative progression and psychological development is based upon uniformitarian principles' objected to the introduction of such chance, on the grounds that it upsets the pleasure of fiction if the reader cannot rely on the presentation of character and thus calculate results (Shuttleworth, 81). However, writing in the wake of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Eliot was now able to understand the full implications of the operation of chance in his theory of natural selection. Therefore chance has a scientific precedent and presents life as lacking continuity and control; as unstable, incoherent and lacking in full explanation and understanding - just as I believe Eliot had always presented life via her novels. Thus the chance, unconsciousness and powerlessness of Silas's loss of community and return to relationship via Eppie is clearly paralleled to the chance, powerlessness and lack of good 'conscious' behaviour of Godfrey's marriage to Molly and his rejection of Eppie. Such coincidences are therefore no more unlikely than the arbitrary series of events that have led to the evolution of mankind via natural selection. Given such coincidence, Silas's constant refrain that his stolen gold has become the golden child Eppie is not an unreasonable account of evolution. However, just as Priscilla's 'pork-pies don't turn out well by chance' (97) Eppie does not turn out to be good, intelligent, spirited, autonomous and caring 'by chance', but as the result of Silas's love. Spencer repeatedly argued that the white, Western, middle-class male was the peak of evolution, and that his main characteristics were autonomy, action and egoism, while altruism and caring relatedness were female characteristics. Within a framework that is primarily concerned with nature versus nurture, Eliot parodies these notions. The Cass males fail to meet Spencer's strictures, Molly lacks the maternal care supposedly innate in attractive women, while the humble weaver demonstrates all the gender values that Eliot most revered.

Before Silas can become a good parent, he needs to work through and consolidate his own experiences. The gold that Silas earns comes to 'mark off his weaving into periods' (*SM* 18), just as the mother's coming and going interrupt the child's sense of unity, laying the foundations for a self who has to separate, but who can maintain a relational love that is the essence of maternal care. Silas's weaving and the relational movement, the equivalent of a child's 'fort/da' game, are part of the healing process. Kristeva describes the pulsions of the semiotic as prerequisites for the acquisition of symbolic language (Moi 1987, 161-2), thus Silas's weaving is a precursor to social reintegration. His reaction to Sally Oates' illness had prompted 'a sense of unity between his past and present life, which might have been the beginning of his rescue' (*SM* 16) had he continued to practise his herb-lore (Thomson, 78). However, his role as a weaver does create the network of weblike connections that later become his support. However trivial, the incidents with Sally Oates and Silas's affection for his old brown earthenware jug (Carroll 1972, 179) demonstrate that his caring and relational abilities are still vital, for our sympathy is also encouraged and maintained in relation to objects. I disagree with Milner that Silas's isolation causes an attachment to things bordering on fetishism (1966, 719): Silas merely values all those substitute love-objects by which he maintained sympathy and connection during his absent years.

Silas's weaving is also an important act of creativity. As Eliot writes Silas's tale, so she has her character Silas weave his 'tale' of cloth. Feuerbach had advocated that while we always succeed best in what we do willingly, our happiest activity is to actively produce, and so Silas is doing the one activity left to him that is productive, *and* produces happiness. Further, his weaving is creative not only because of the cloth produced, but because the flaxen lengths generate gold, and the gold becomes his children - his only outlet for love and relationship. Surprisingly, in object-relations

theory any creative act repeats the separation from the mother (Wright 1991, 84). It mimics the child's differentiation via the process of gradually becoming a separate self by individual acts. Thus the product created from Silas's weaving may recreate the growth and separation process by which any child gradually comes to be a self-in-relation. Above all Silas's work brings gold, a metonymic substitute until Eppie's arrival.

Eliot's own creativity also produced the gold which allowed her and Lewes to be free and happy, while also permitting their continuing care of Lewes's children. Thus, such a story is singularly appropriate at the point where Charles Lewes enters her life and becomes her adoptive son; for as Eliot was to display in *Silas Marner*, adopting, caring for and nurturing a child may be as creative as fathering or giving birth. Adoption can be seen as a model for humanly created ties, one extending the concept of sympathy by transcending difference and not relying on pre-formed sympathetic attachments based on relation and familiarity. What Silas achieves is the highest form of moral and emotional development advocated by Spencer, Comte and Feuerbach, while his example also serves to educate his community.

Molly and Godfrey created Eppie, yet little is said of Molly, who constitutes yet another absence whose tale is pieced together from scattered references. Perhaps Eliot was aware of the impossibility of winning readers' sympathy for a barmaid opium-addict who risked her child's life in the New Year snows. Yet, Silas recognises a fellow-outsider and rushes to the Red House in search of the doctor. Although the use of free indirect speech provides a sense of drowsy delirious absence, yet Molly is presented as clinging to her daughter even as the opium deprives her of consciousness - unlike Godfrey, who in his opium of desire for Nancy ignores his child. Like Hetty,

Molly dies while her seducer is relatively unscathed and her death conveniently saves Silas from emotional isolation (Uglow 1987, 148). Attempting to accommodate all the conflicting demands for sympathy is perhaps less plausible than all the chance and coincidence of the novel. Godfrey is excused by his wife's addiction, an excess capable of permitting her death, while Molly is not damned – which would blight Eppie's presentation - by being presented as a caring mother to the last. However, Molly's death is an important social comment, and the moral pivot of the novel is that Eppie later refuses to be bought by the same man who exploited her mother. Perhaps the only means of making a strong attack on the exploitation of women was via the death of a character who could not otherwise be defended, but who is later celebrated in a strong daughter.

Molly's situation also presents unnarratable subjects for Eliot, who as a consequence needs to rely on the reader's experience to complete the voids. The reader is told that Godfrey, encouraged by Dunstan, was propelled into his marriage by 'a movement of compunction' (29) suggesting perhaps that he thought Molly was pregnant. But a 'delusion' was revealed to him, and the narrator's comment that 'if Godfrey could have felt himself a victim' (30) indicates that Godfrey was duped. To consider Godfrey a victim is a possible stance if the reader is to exonerate and thus sympathise. Yet simultaneously, the narrator reveals that Godfrey accepts responsibility, cursing his own 'vicious folly' (30) - an acceptance of culpability that may further encourage sympathy.

Godfrey's beloved Nancy is everything that Molly Farren is not. She is prim, pure, pretty and always aware of propriety, yet 'slightly proud and exacting, and as constant in her affection towards a baseless opinion as towards an erring lover' (91). While such a nature augurs well for Godfrey being forgiven, it suggests any life with

Nancy would be exacting. It also suggests inadequate knowledge and a lack of reasoning powers. Nancy is barely educated, but according to most theorists of the period, such as Spencer, Comte and all supporters of 'Woman's Mission', Nancy's natural altruism and general womanly qualities should be all that Godfrey requires or needs in a wife. Eliot refers to this topic in every novel, variously and subtly railing against women's lack of good education by showing the disadvantageous outcomes for men as well as women. Here the presentation of Nancy's feminine ignorance is far more subtle than in Mrs Tulliver or Hetty. However, Nancy can be recognised as a gentle precursor of Rosamund Vincy, for her ignorant will is to prove as indomitable.

Silas accepts chance, and capitalises on it, yet knows that progress partly depends on his own actions; Godfrey's reliance on chance, however, is so absolute that it takes the place of God. Godfrey's freedom from an ethical God again suggests the ideas of Darwin, whose account of the mutations that fit or unfit an organism for its medium allow Eliot to play with the idea of chance as a way to compare and contrast Silas and Godfrey, by rooting the events in their individual histories (Beer 1986, 128). But Darwin proposes arbitrary evolution as opposed to Herbert Spencer's belief that change with time is always progressive, an improvement (Paxton, 105), and thus we see the characters obeying the chance laws which have constructed them. On the other hand, their attitudes and responses to chance introduce the idea of voluntary agency while still reflecting their different psychological and social development.

Dunstan's theft of the gold is the first step in the inevitable convergence of the two plots. Until now the stories of Silas and Godfrey have been rigidly separate. But Silas now has the knowledge of a community - a network that his weaving has created - and he is able to seek aid in *The Rainbow*. George Eliot stressed that *Silas Marner* was

intended to set 'in a strong light the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations' (*GEL* III, 379-82). However, that Blackwood also lamented the lack of a character 'of whom one can think with pleasure as a fellow creature' (III, 380) suggests that the whole message about extending sympathy to all others has passed him by.

Yet life *is* grim in Raveloe. While it may be rural, it is not Wordsworthian. The conversation in *The Rainbow* is the reader's first experience of Silas's peers, and, as many other critics have variously claimed, its function is far more than comic. Firstly, the conversation establishes Silas and Dolly as morally and intellectually in advance of their fellow villagers, even while it demonstrates the male working community as 'glued' together by fellowship. When discussion is heated, the landlord keeps the peace, insisting that everyone is right, even when they are patently not, even when there is no real argument. Relationship and fellow-feeling are far more important than the rights of the debate, as Gilligan submits is the norm for those who exercise an ethic of care. This scene sets an example over 'rights' that should later guide Nancy and Godfrey: 'We're all good frinds here, I hope ... You're both right and you're both wrong ... there's two opinions and ... I should say they're both right' (46). Most important in this interlude however is the time given to spiritual and moral matters, and most relevant to the theme of gender reversals is the account of the incorrect 'sexing' of Nancy's parents' vows at their wedding, with such a reversal shown to be irrelevant to the success of a relationship. Various suggestions are made as to what rightly holds a relationship together: words, meaning, or register. However, as we are eventually to appreciate, it is loving, mutual relationship composed of sympathy *and* duty, care *and* justice; and in this Eliot is stressing her own Feuerbachian stance on marriage.

The Rainbow interlude is crucial. In this ravel of conversation and inter-relationship Silas finds support and his first public voice. In confiding, he quickly feels the stirrings of a connection which the narrator intimates has been long - and slow-growing: 'Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us...there have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud' (54-5). Fellow-feeling returns as Silas apologises to Jem Rodney for falsely accusing him of the theft, for 'memory was not so utterly torpid' (55) that Silas should forget his pain over a theft he did not commit. *Silas Marner* 'is a fable about speech, about the way men should talk to men, and about the way they fail to do so', for many types of speech are 'inimical to the need for sympathy and fellowship' (Preston 1980, 113). When falsely accused in Lantern Yard, Silas 'feels a revulsion against speech' (14) which is largely maintained until his visit to The Rainbow. This visit is one turning-point of the novel, for with the absence of the gold relationship ironically begins to flow back into Silas's life. Silas welcomes intrusion, realising that help has to come from outside. While much of the sympathy is flavoured with egoism, as his neighbours seek to point out where Silas has erred, he recognises 'the desire to give comfort' (SM 80) in Dolly Winthrop, who personifies care. Thus the healing process has begun even before Eppie's arrival; his ability to be a related, caring person has only lain dormant.

When Eppie appears on Silas's hearth, his first thought is that her gleaming hair is the gold 'brought back to him', but his second thought is to hope and imagine that it is 'his little sister come back to him in a dream' (SM 109). The immediate promptings to care for the child have their origin in Silas's care for his dying sister (109). Eppie facilitates his 'growing into memory' awakening 'old quiverings of tenderness - old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life' (109). Silas's change to a caring, relational male cannot be considered dramatic or

discontinuous when the clues about his earlier life are considered. Silas just needed the 'chance' to rediscover relationship, that form of chance described by Darwin as 'the name we give to "as yet unknown laws"' (quoted in Beer 1979, 82).

Silas's insistence on keeping Eppie is a release for Godfrey that permits the realisation of desire. With Molly dead, Dunstan absent, and the child fostered by Silas, Godfrey can claim Nancy and secure his role *and* his inheritance via the children he anticipates. Yet Godfrey does not even begin to understand the true nature of a father's duty. With his narrow conception of justice, Godfrey does not consider the wider repercussions of his actions (Gilligan 1982, 24-32). In this respect he resembles his father, who in his single-mindedness, rarely thought of the consequences for his tenants of his lax paternal role as landowner, until that is, his own needs were pressing. Godfrey 'was not critical on the faulty indulgence' (SM 65) but of the demand for reparation; we are to see that he is his father's son when he is to act in this way with Silas. A prophetic note was struck when The Rainbow's landlord was alarmed at the idea of paying Mr Tookey to stay out of the choir on the grounds that 'paying people for their absence was a principle dangerous to society' (46). Yet ironically, this is effectively what has happened with Dunstan, and Godfrey does the same to Silas when he eventually tries to 'buy' Eppie back.

For Godfrey, on seeing 'his own child carried in Silas Marner's arms...there was one terror in his mind...that the woman might *not* be dead. That was an evil terror' (112). This is the danger point with regard to the reader's sympathy for Godfrey. His inner debate reveals that he lacks the moral courage to own his wife and child; he still waits on chance, but the reader has been well prepared to expect such moral cowardice from Godfrey. This is as much as Eliot can do to maintain sympathy for

him, given the rejection of Eppie that is to come - although the reader is partly won round by the happy accident that means Silas can keep the child (Martin(a) 1972, 486). The sight of his dead wife stays with Godfrey, but this and the 'conflict of regret and joy' he feels when the child shows 'no sign of recognition' (116) are not enough to overcome the 'sense of relief and gladness' (117). Inwardly he vows he will do everything for the child 'but own it'. Ironically, Godfrey is hoping that the child will be happy without him, because he, 'the father would be much happier without owning the child' (117), yet he is merely moving into a new phase of isolation, and one that will eventually corrupt Nancy's happiness.

There has been much critical debate on the differences and similarities between Godfrey and Silas (see Martin 1972, 479), but their response to chance and crisis clearly demonstrates their difference. For this is the centre of the story, the point of moral choice for both. After his denial of Eppie, Godfrey's creativity is at an end and he is described as working only to keep vacancy at bay, while Silas regains purpose, happiness, love and community as he simultaneously gives these things to Eppie. Silas's caring grows into the love that Sara Ruddick calls 'maternal thinking' (Ruddick 1990, *passim*), which he attains as he struggles to protect Eppie in the stone hut that becomes a 'soft nest for her, lined with downy patience' (128). He takes her on his travels, ensures she is educated, and learns to share her with others (cf Ruddick 1990, 17-23). Most significantly, Silas realises that Eppie 'must have everything that was good in Raveloe' (129). Eppie is Christened, goes to church, and becomes an accepted member of the community, and Silas is accepted for 'the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world' (129). This successful parenting via love alone may seem too idealised, but as a counterbalance, George Eliot has already demonstrated 'the impotence of parental love without nurturing love' (Beer 1986, 132).

That Silas should develop into one of George Eliot's most successful mothers contradicts Spencer's insistence on women's innate mothering skills - and men's lack of them. Paxton's account of George Eliot's 'ongoing feminist efforts to demystify "maternal instinct" by noting, as in *Adam Bede*, the differences between the capacity for reproduction and the psychological disposition for maternity' (1991, 110) bears comparison to Chodorow's account of mothering as psychosocially reproduced in most, *but not all*, women - so that many are not inclined or suited for mothering. Paxton also notes that Eliot only ever refers to 'maternal tenderness' or 'mother's love' and never 'instinct' (110). Silas's decision to care for Eppie is not altruistic, and is never presented as such in the text. He gains companionship and relationship from Eppie and achieves Gilligan's highest level of caring by choosing to include himself in the relationship.

Godfrey remains childless, even though the main outcome of his actions sixteen years earlier was that Nancy did marry him, and now fills his life with the orderly feminine calm and love he once so desired. He sees his childlessness as retribution for his disowning of Eppie, but fails to understand that his overall pain is not imposed by God or Fate, but because of his lack of sympathy, care and the relational duty. He is prey to Eliot's 'inexorable law of consequences' because he played with the natural laws and set in train the events he suffers. Even the pain caused by Nancy's stubbornness is the result of his own choice of a woman who behaves so, as Lydgate will choose Rosamond. Both Godfrey and Nancy suffer, but Nancy accepts it as God's will, even to the extent of refusing to adopt a child - she will not go against what is ordained. The narrator presents the irony of her self-comforting thought that if Godfrey had married 'a woman who'd have had children, she'd have vexed him in other ways' (SM 153). There is evidence in the text of Nancy's suffering, yet grief has been

repressed in deference to God and Godfrey. Her main aim is to continue to brighten Godfrey's hearth and have him love her. That Godfrey has allowed Nancy to treat herself like this, to be so selfless, confirms that he has still not learned to care. The narrator muses about why Nancy and Godfrey are as they are in free indirect speech which reads as if each were wondering about the other; why is she so rigid in her beliefs and routines, and why was he so uneasy about the lack of children? Such techniques serve to remind the reader that we and the narrator know such things, but Nancy and Godfrey do not.

All men of propriety in the novel having failed in their duty; only Silas, Dolly, Aaron and Eppie represent the moral core and extend care and sympathy. The catalyst for Godfrey's decision to tell Nancy about Eppie is the return of Marner's gold. Godfrey thinks that reclaiming Eppie can be achieved as a 'Levi-Strauss' exchange, part of the sexual economy. Previously Eppie was an 'it' to be provided for: 'That was a father's duty' (*SM* 131). Now Godfrey does not attempt to reason beyond this 'predetermined course of action which he had fixed on as the right', and dismisses 'other people's feelings counteracting his virtuous resolves' (*SM* 164). Eppie is his property, to be disposed of and acquired as he thinks fit, as Comte lamented was often the case. Godfrey may also fear Eppie's possible marriage, when she would cease to be his property, but fails to realise that from the day when Silas acknowledged her as 'Thou' Eppie has been her own 'I'. Godfrey has no notion that Silas would 'rather part with his life than Eppie' (152).

Bonaparte considers Eppie as a Proserpina figure (1991, 58) who has filled Marner's years with love and laughter. She fills the cottage with life and now her abundance overflows in her garden scheme. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory suggests

that women do not have full access to language, as their closer relation to the mother means they 'lack the lack' that powers a man's desire once he has been separated from the mother's love by the law of the father (Homans 1986, 6-15). But Eppie, in being mothered by a man, can achieve not only relationality born of close caring love, but via this complex mother/father figure can also claim language as her own. Her talk and plans dominate. Feminist critics worry that Eppie's role is restricted, yet she has rejected other negative female role models. She will not be Nancy with her adherence to a patriarchy that gives false support; nor will she be Dolly, the best of 'notable mothers' (*SM* 118) yet sacrificing herself to constant caring, motherhood and a husband who drinks (Brady 1992, 110-111). Eppie has chosen caring, nurturing Aaron - he is very much Dolly's son. Further, Eppie will not be a victim like Molly, for while loving and acknowledging her mother - and Eppie does believe that 'a mother should be very precious' (142) - she has her own aims and will include herself in her care, which includes caring for Silas. It is her choice. The narrator reports her ironic opinion that Silas 'loved her better than any real fathers in the village seemed to love their daughters' (142), a sad indictment of both men and their attitude towards daughters.

Eppie is the moral centre of the novel (Gilbert 1991, 106) and Nancy is not because like Godfrey she values propriety, or Spencer's false duty, or 'rights' over feelings. For Godfrey, Eppie is to be a lifeline - one he can exert control over, reeling her in to save himself as he once reasoned Nancy would save him. But to Silas, Eppie is a complex web or text, woven with care over the years by many hands, and there is no easy control over her voice of the shuttle, nurtured by her relational yet independent upbringing. Eppie has recreated herself, as Silas did, and rejects Godfrey's offer, aware that Godfrey would have allowed her to go to the workhouse all those years ago. Meanwhile Silas demonstrates his curious altruism that yet includes the self, as he again

keeps Eppie's love by not trying to hold her, and lets her answer for herself. He facilitates the different voice and Eppie chooses freely, as Silas always allowed her to be free. Eppie opts for love, empathy, care and a preferred duty to Silas, not the blood link of the patriarchal father. She bases her choice on knowledge, reason and feeling. Eppie is aware that Godfrey would own her as a possession, but by not 'owning' her earlier, he has forfeited the rights of a father (Sadoff 1982, 72), and Eppie is not to be won over by the material and social status he offers. Like Stephen Guest, Nancy and Godfrey speak of their need and of what Eppie will mean to them; they do not engage with her needs, or the fact that she includes Silas and all her friends and neighbours in her care.

As Gilligan describes in her account of the rigid justice ethic, Nancy and Godfrey do not question themselves, acknowledge their mistakes, recognise the truths of others, or any contextual determinants. For Eliot, however, as for Gilligan, right and wrong are not easy to decide, because right is always dependent on circumstances. Silas had at first said that he would only keep Eppie until someone else appeared who had a right to her, but by this time his care supercedes biological rights. As Dolly says, right has to be earned and always involves a corresponding duty. Godfrey claims to have duty and right on his side, but ignores all Silas's duty and care woven over the years, and this attitude generates 'repulsion' (*SM* 166) in Eppie. Silas knows that the 'feelings inside us' (164) are not to be wiped away by self-righteous justice, and finally, gaining voice and releasing his anger as a result of the love manifested in Eppie's defiance and refusal, joins her in defeating Godfrey. Eppie has not ~~acquiesced~~ to the 'law of the father' (Gilbert 1991, 122) for she rejects the false father and chooses love. Unlike the King in Rumpelstiltskin, Godfrey cannot reclaim Eppie because he does not know true names.

The ending of *Silas Marner* is the strongest but simplest statement yet of George Eliot's doctrine of sympathy, and particularly of the argument that there is a duty of sympathy, but one that always has to include care for the self. Godfrey's selfishness is his downfall, Nancy's selflessness hers, while Silas and Eppie in their mutual love achieve a caring that yet includes the self. Meanwhile the tentative gender role changes give a subversive suggestion about the way toward sympathy and duty. Again, this is no pastoral stasis, for major changes have been made, and the novel anticipates others. For Eppie has a life beyond the text, one she has chosen for herself.

Felix Holt was first conceived on 29 March 1865, when Eliot declared to her journal: 'I have begun a Novel', and by June 1865 she was reading the beginning to Lewes (*GEJ* 1998, 124). Apart from lists of her background reading and the extraordinary series of letters between her and Frederick Harrison - as he assisted her with the complicated legal aspects of the plot (*GEL* IV, 221-260) - there is little comment on the book until terms and details are discussed with Blackwood. The novel is more complex than earlier works, even without the legal windings, and Eliot admits to Harrison that 'the threads are so woven together that I do not know how to separate them without leaving you in a state of mystification as to my intentions' (*GEL* IV, 237-8).

The introduction, with its sweeping account of history, geography and sociology, prepares the reader for a tale of a larger, wider society than had so far been typical of Eliot's fiction. The narrator's references to the whole country - and even the world via Harold Transome's travels - suggest an opening up that is reflected in the

novel's move to the town from the country. Yet the headlong narrative, yoked to the image of Sampson the coachman driving his team into the metaphorical abyss of the future (*FH* 9), suggests a disturbing period of change and fragmentation ahead – both in life and in the novel. But I for one have no problems with what I interpret as Eliot's suggestions for a way forward.

For the purpose of my analysis, *Felix Holt* suffers from being between *Silas Marner* and *Middlemarch*. As a novel it is still a major achievement, despite the greater renown of Eliot's other works. However, its success pales somewhat if perceived as a development of one work and practice for the other. *Felix Holt* develops and extends both the themes and form already employed in *Silas Marner*. Eliot's artistic ambitions and thematic concerns have widened, such that in *Felix Holt* she analyses a situation where urbanisation, industrialisation and a rapidly changing population profile have produced a society not a community, and one where there is a decrease in general care and concern for others, and for relationship. As Comte had observed: where society becomes larger and more impersonal, then familial and communal sympathy, benevolence and duty may decay. *Felix Holt* illustrates this breakdown at various levels of society and considers some of the suggested solutions, the 1832 Reform Elections being one of the most obvious, although Felix Holt - Eliot's anti-hero - has other ideas. In all this provincial turmoil, an examination of the role of sympathy and duty is still the prime concern of the author, which includes generating the readers' concern.

Eliot presents the town of Treby Magna in 1832 as a complex environment - almost an ecosystem - with inter-relationships and connections clearly mapped, although the full extent to which the many different 'organisms' depend on each other and are disturbed by events within the society is not initially apparent. The play of

chance and coincidence is central, with the more impersonal revelations of the legal-inheritance plot highlighting the other freely chosen risks of the characters, as Rufus Lyon, Mrs Transome, Jermyn and others trust to chance in the hope of avoiding moral revelations. The characters and their relationships being primary, the novel investigates all internal and external environments rigorously, in keeping with a Spencerian and Darwinian concern for inheritance, psychology, and a natural-history inspired check on correspondence. Thus the character analysis increasingly reflects ideas of Spencer's individual as part of the species, and Feuerbach's 'I/Thou', while I perceive a concern comparable with Chodorow's self-in-relation. History, family background and personal moral and emotional debates are present in the text in order to provide three-dimensional characters. As befitting an increasingly complex society, the themes under investigation are extended. Clerical, proprietorial and parental issues remain central, but the novel develops an investigation of class and gender, while also demonstrating that in any society there are no rigid demarcations between spheres, personal or political.

Formally Eliot has developed the double plot employed in *Silas Marner*, with the story of the Transome family investigated alongside the lives of the Lyons and Holts; the two strands meet, entwine and then sunder. In fact, the plot is multiple; there is a public and a personal dimension, a doubly political and romantic narrative, and even a legal and 'gothic' plot, all portrayed for the reader via a greater return to the dramatic discourse whereby the narrator gives multiple accounts of characters and events from numerous perspectives. There is much less telling and more showing than in *Silas Marner*, but any information is rarely simple; as always, the reader has to work, even create, to arrive at their moral version of Eliot's tale. The various strands of narrative, opinion and dialogue, and even the presence or absence of characters and the ever-fragmented flow of the various themes within the novel, are like the strands within

a web - disappearing and emerging as different aspects of the tale are relegated or pulled to the surface. Thus all aspects, background or foreground, internal or external, public or private are variously important, whether present or absent, connected or contiguous.

As in the earlier works, absence is still a major metaphor throughout the novel; for example, Mrs Transome is absent from the entire centre of the novel, while fathers are generally absent - literally or metaphorically. However, connection and contiguity have become far more important. Hence, absence and connection alternate, again like threads weaving in and out, with the points of connection mirroring the need for relation; thus as Silas's temporary mental absence brought him Eppie, so the absence of intolerance and anger in Rufus Lyon brings him Esther. For rather than absence, the polar opposite of connection is to be isolated or non-relational, and self-in-relation is the most important factor for Eliot, suggesting an ability to transcend difference and be sympathetic. Rufus Lyon begins the novel as the only character capable of this virtue, but by the end the importance of relation has spread.

The main burden of the novel is to stress this importance of human relation, but also to demonstrate that the emergence of men and women with more interconnected natures is possible. Maternal men and autonomous women can evolve, and such mutuality of characteristics, rather than the extreme gender-role polarisations - the dangers of which were explored in the earlier works - permit the possibility of a genuinely radical change of society. *Silas Marner* demonstrated Eliot's first development of such characters, with the example of Silas's ability to nurture and care, and Eppie's intelligence, facility with language and exercise of choice. *Felix Holt* develops these possibilities further. However, the experiment evolves beyond the characters, for the proposition contained in *Felix Holt* - one either ignored or

unperceived by most critics - is that such a radical reorganisation of ideas can be extended out into society. What Felix advocates in his address and in his planned lifestyle, is a development of Comte and Spencer's idea that a change of ethics in people rather a change of politics in society is required. In *Felix Holt*, Eliot has begun to plot a malleable utopia, based on intuitive sympathy and duty. It is for this reason that feminist object-relations is so appropriate for a modern analysis of Eliot's novels, as the work of Chodorow and Gilligan is profoundly radical, yet is also dismissed as essentialist and conservative. This link is not to suggest that Eliot would welcome the concept of degendering, but her stance on woman's role and nature in her letters is generally ambiguous, while in her novels it is more radical than many critics allow.

In a letter to John Morley in May 1867, she explains that she considers the "intention of nature" argument a 'pitiable fallacy' (*GEL* IV, 364), suggesting that she does not accept that women are innately tied to domestic, nurturing and non-intellectual roles. This opinion reflects sentiments first voiced in her 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' essay of 1855. In particular, Eliot stresses that she would support a system which could give 'an equivalence of advantages for the two sexes, as to education and the possibilities of free development' (*GEL* IV, 364). She frequently repeats a desire for an equal and good education for women (*GEL* IV, 425; 468), although she does believe there is a precious 'special moral influence' (IV, 467) that women possess by reason of their maternal capacity and which must be preserved. Graver suggests that Eliot like Comte, believes that women are morally superior to men, but Graver's references are to the above letters, which I find quite ambiguous on the whole, or to works on Eliot which do not offer any fresh primary evidence (Graver 1984, 176). However, Eliot suggests that we were proceeding towards 'a more clearly discerned distinctness of function ... with as near an approach to equivalence of good

for women and for men' (IV, 365). While ambiguous – and Eliot frequently qualifies herself in comments on the 'Woman Question' - this idea of some degree of interchange between the sexes has radical potential, no matter how limited Eliot's intention. It may reflect Spencer's idea that as development proceeds and conditions become easier, there will be less need for many of the sexually selected differentiations, although it seems more likely that Eliot means an equality, possibly where the roles of men and women are both valued, which would support her hopes of mutual relationships. Elsewhere she adds that 'complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds of judgement may be as far as possible the same' (IV 468), implying that all notions of women lacking justice and judgement are conventionally constructed, based on factors of education and experience. Further, Eliot believed that the lives of both men and women 'ought to be passed together under the hallowing influence of a common faith as to their duty and its basis' (V, 58), which may suggest that duties, if not actually common, could be worked out by both sexes, instead of decided by men and imposed on women. Certainly she adds that this can only be produced by both men and women having the 'same store of fundamental knowledge' (V, 58).

Catherine Gallagher observes that 'Eliot saw her own literary practice as a primary mechanism for social reform' (1988, 224), and the point ignored by most critics is that, as with Comte, Spencer and Spinoza, Eliot believed all areas of life to be open to ethical reform. In Chapter 42 of *The Mill on the Floss*, she provides a fiercely ironic analysis of how the 'good society' in order to exist requires 'nothing less than a wide and arduous national life condensed in unfragrant deafening factories' (MF, 291-2). This sentiment is generally regarded as an aberration on Eliot's part, some brief flirting with radicalism, yet her concern, contempt and anger are self-evident. I believe that

much radicalism in her work is missed because it is less strident or explicit than mainstream radicalism. One of the major critical stances in relation to *Felix Holt*, particularly before the advent of feminist criticism, was to consider the novel as a social-problem, political or industrial novel belonging to the same genre as Dickens' *Hard Times*, Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South* or Kingsley's *Alton Locke*. Two main objections are raised against most of these works.²² The most common is that while these works may exhibit a genuine concern and sympathy for the plight of the working classes, there is generally a conflict between sympathy and fear, with the authors reneging on a realist representation and following through of the issues they have raised: 'They deny the centrality of class and process threatening working-class elements into less disturbing, middle-class or classless forms' (Hobson 1998, 20). Thus the novels' radical and militant protagonists often die, emigrate, or form questionable pacts with the bosses - the result in most novels being a containment of working-class unrest in preference to a genuine questioning and challenging of the *status quo*. This stance characterises Raymond Williams' approach in *Culture and Society*. Providing more specific criticism of *Felix Holt* on this issue, Arnold Kettle admired the initial depiction of radicalism as a social force, but felt that ultimately the novel failed, because Eliot refused "to face, morally or artistically, the problems she has set in motion" (quoted in McSweeney 1991, 123.). McSweeney's assessment is that Eliot displays 'the middle-class intellectual's fear of the mob' (123).

Williams also voices the second major criticism, that there is a tendency for these novels to move towards a sentimental stance - which is his summary of any emotional or relationship subplot. 'Implicit in this diagnosis is a strict delineation of "industrial" novels as separate from and superior to ... merely sentimental fiction'

²² I rely on the work of Hobson 1998, Gallagher 1998, Lesjak 1996, and Ingham 1996 for my background to the 'social-problem novel' debate that surrounds *Felix Holt*.

(Lesjak 1996, 79). Effectively these critics enforce 'separate spheres' (80) - there is no place for emotion in politics or political novels. But Eliot, working to counter such arbitrary oppositions throughout her entire intellectual life, maintained that all factors - knowledge, reason and emotions - have to be taken into consideration whenever any decisions or duties are considered. In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Felix Holt*, Peter Coveney observes: 'It would of course have been against the whole grain of George Eliot's mature talent to deal with private and public themes in disconnection' (1972, 18). In effect he echoes Eliot's narrator who stresses that her work is primarily concerned with the 'private lot of a few men and women; but there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life' (FH 43). The narrator's implication is that within the course of the novel the inextricable interconnections between private and public life for these characters are to be fully observed and analysed. Other critics, less censorious of the presence of both a political and a personal dimension to the novel, nevertheless complain that the two parts do not work together, and that there is an uneasy relationship (Doyle 1981, 96; Johnstone 1994, 113, quoting Thale and Thomson). However, I believe that the connections are all meaningful in the text and can be observed by the sympathetic reader. Certainly all of the relationships within the novel have their political aspects. In a brief aside, Rufus Lyon mentions how his own concern for radical politics is opposed by his brethren who 'contend that a share in public movements is a hindrance to the closer walk' (FH 56).

Eliot's heroines, slowly evolving as the novels multiply, are not all the neglected, objectified or abused creatures first encountered in her works. After Maggie, her women do not die: thus Romola survives her male oppressors - patriarchs, cleric and husband - while Eppie chooses her own father - and lover - based on their sympathy and care. In *Felix Holt* women and men are seen to be beginning to evolve to a point where

they recognise and value each others' strengths. But this is not complementarity. In *Felix Holt*, opposing values have crossed into the 'separate spheres' and transcend all boundaries: Felix binds the finger of little Job Tudge while Esther seizes language to defend Felix.

Mrs Transome is Eliot's first representation of a woman who has dared to seize power. For years she has run the estate. While cramped by 'small immediate cares and occupations' and lacking in 'any large sympathy' (*FH* 23) as worries and fears have eroded any caring and relational faculties – as Comte and Spencer warn happens with disuse - she has nevertheless turned her world upside down. She is a female agent, a subconscious subversive, and she topples both the gender and patriarchal powers that initially govern her, and that later - in the shapes of her son and her former lover - are to humiliate and disown her. In taking a lover from a lower class she defies the mores which led her to marry an inferior man to earn a contiguous relationship with the wealth and power otherwise denied her as a woman. Sadly, she lives in bondage to guilt, fear and shame, all useless emotions according to Spinoza, and dwells increasingly in isolation, dreading the discovery of her dark secrets - her Dantesque underworld of 'quivering nerves of sleepless memory' (11) - yet briefly she had chosen, seized and enjoyed her passion.

With reference to Mrs Transome, Uglow insists that 'although Eliot presents a world "governed by forces", pitiless general laws of natural and social evolution, her interpretation of determinism does not free people from the burden of choice' (1987, 180). Yet while Mrs Transome is not as determined by fate as she fears, but is instead haunted by her own past choices, she was at least able to choose – which is an advance on earlier Eliot heroines. While she is not presented as a figure to be admired or

celebrated, her actions challenge all gender and class norms and false duties that would contain women. Further, Eliot is once more parodying Spencer and Darwin's notions of female nature; Mrs Transome may have been sexually selected for her beauty and other womanly qualities but she preserves herself, her lineage, and the estate via faculties not generally associated with women; in particular, she chose her mate and clearly displays that full fatherhood, biological and social, is a privilege that has to be negotiated with free women.

Yet this particular reading would not be blazoned when the novel was published. For Mrs Transome has transgressed, and Eliot has to work to gain sympathy. This is achieved both structurally and thematically, yet all threads relate to the central arguments of the interconnection between sympathy and duty, the personal and the private, and the possibilities of gender-role change. The return of Harold Transome after fifteen years is the grand set-piece of the novel's opening. As yet, the reader is ignorant of his parentage, although sympathy and understanding are generated by the text for a nervous mother anticipating her son's return. Sympathy is swiftly magnified when Harold Transome does not value his mother at the same worth as the narrator; within minutes he is ignoring her words in preference for those of the local paper (*FH* 18). From this point on, everything that Harold says to his mother is condescending, dismissive and insulting. He does acknowledge a son's duty of care, but this is material only and he possesses no sympathy. His mother is reduced in a few pages from a powerful matriarch with a role and position in life to a dependent creature to be patronised: 'you've had to worry yourself about things that don't properly belong to a woman' (20). Mrs Transome gains the reader's sympathy before the narrator's frequent comments about Harold become indiscreet. While she is as great an egoist as

her son – nearly all of these major characters are – she does crave relationship and mutuality. Yet after all her loneliness, connection to her son is denied.

Memories of motherhood secure sympathy for Mrs Transome, although the tenor is mixed as if testing the reader's tolerance. This mother wishes her eldest imbecile child dead, so that the child who provided her with 'absorbing delight' and enlarged 'the imagined range for self to move in' (22) might benefit instead. Yet the metaphor of the passive pretty egg, grown into a 'brown, darting determined lizard' (22) conveys this mother's loss. The narrator also makes it plain that motherhood is not enough for many women, since 'mothers have a self larger than maternity' (94). This harsh and honest attitude to motherhood is relatively unusual, but Eliot was by now deep in the throes of step-motherhood, and often acknowledged that her own life was no longer her own. Yet Mrs Transome is to be doubly sympathised with, because not only has this son removed from her the sense of self and vocation that for years has filled her life beyond motherhood, but he does not give himself in relation. The image of Mrs Transome lashed with exquisite threads cutting her flesh is multiply suggestive (94). She is in bondage to her guilt and fear, she is in bondage to Harold's maleness and lack of sympathy and understanding, and she suffers by virtue of unwanted connection. The threads are both a metaphor for the bond to her child which she could not bear to break, yet also suggest metonymously the shadow life that links her to Jermyn and shame.

Sympathy is finally won via the interview with Jermyn. That his 'moral vulgarity' (97) falls like cuts upon Mrs Transome recalls the pain her of connection to their son. Jermyn's selfish, unsympathetic cupidity is clear, and enough is said for most readers to finally understand that he is Harold's father. Many critics lament the fact that Mrs Transome - possibly the most strongly drawn and attractive character in the novel -

is absent from the text for the whole central section. It is regarded as a flaw. However, no one notes that the absence follows immediately on the revelation about Jermyn. This distancing is necessary to maintain the reader's sympathy, while it also signifies the position of Harold's women by their absence. He is in the world of politics, while she is confined to the domestic and personal, and exists in isolation surrounded by images of autumn and decay, a fate that could be Esther's.

Gallagher suggests that Eliot's works are metonymic in that they assume that 'observable appearances bespeak deeper moral essences' (1988, 375). In other words, we read characters' natures and values according to the external signs that Eliot presents, just as Mrs Glegg's mood could generally be judged according to the laxness or crispness of her 'curled fronts'. Thus the 'skill of the portrait' should give 'their whole moral nature' (376). Yet Mrs Glegg's hairpiece told us nothing of her family loyalty and sharp discernment. In *Adam Bede* the conversation between Mr Irwine and his mother makes it quite clear that appearances are not to be relied upon as an accurate guide to character, while Rufus Lyon affirms that he abstains 'from judging by the outward appearance only' (*FH* 52). The metonymic signals contiguity, a linkage or touching that lies along boundaries, something that stands in for, but does not stand for, something else. A metonym is therefore not so easy to read, requiring greater reason, understanding and intuition. Rufus Lyon, Jermyn and Mr Transome all stand in as fathers, but that tells us little about them as individual men.

Mrs Transome exists in strong counterpoint to her husband, who, despite being one of the most senior of the local gentry, is the weakest and most powerless of characters. Again the stereotypical norms of gender, patriarchy and gentry are overturned. While Mr Transome is a figure worthy of sympathy - a character who,

Spinoza would argue, cannot be blamed for his shortcomings - he and his dead son Durfey are a metaphor for the decay of the landed classes. This decay is mirrored in Sir Maximus Debarry's lack of care for all, although his son, rich, powerful and aristocratic, is one of the most caring and just characters in the novel. That he moves to Rome and Catholicism (*FH*, 132-3) is one of Eliot's classic touches, inserted to jolt the reader out of any complacency, prejudice and intolerance. Maybe some readers were able to respond to Eliot's ethical guidance and reach the sympathetic conclusion, that Debarry would still be a caring, just and relational man even if Catholic. The reader has to work out the moral problems Eliot sets. The character and event detail of the novels constitutes the experience and experimental evidence, and it is up to the reader to form premises and induce conclusions. This Comtean process of observation by experiment, is central to the linking together of the novel's two strands - personal and political - into a complete caring ethic. Further, to connect is to be capable of transcending, capable of being sympathetic or even empathic.

As Eliot depicts the slow evolution of autonomous women, she also shows the development of maternal men, men who are capable of exhibiting the caring and sympathetic virtues that Eliot herself valued in women, while also retaining the traditionally masculine attributes of reason, knowledge and autonomy. Rufus Lyon is a maternal man in the mould of Silas Marner, yet with great knowledge and understanding; he even questions pre-destination – what Felix calls his 'awful creed' (*FH* 63). He is another stepfather who would be dangerously selfless in his love, were it not for Feuerbach's belief that such sympathy for a loved one is never truly selfless, as love for the other always includes the self. As Gilligan observes, the highest moral stance is where we include ourselves in our love of the other (1982, 74). Feuerbach stresses that sacrificing one's own happiness for another should only occur when the

sacrifice is more important than one's own happiness. Yet Mr Lyon's sacrifice of his earlier status as preacher and theologian was first compensated by his love of Annette Ledru, and then by his love and sense of relation to Esther. Feuerbach states that: 'Love does not exist without sympathy, sympathy does not exist without suffering in common' (1854 [1841], 54), and both have lost Annette.

The critic Brady fails to recognise Lyon's relational care, commenting only on his irritation, impatience and insensitivity concerning his servant Lyddy and Mrs Holt (1992, 145), and suggesting that Annette gave far more to him than he to her. Yet the portrait painted by the narrator, and via most characters, suggests Lyon is an utterly honest and moral man, who acknowledges his faults – except perhaps his tendency to discuss and digress to excess – and who would be the first to acknowledge his debt to his wife, just as he prays for patience for dealing with the needs of his 'weak sisters' (46). Even Philip Debarry admires him. He is the least egotistical of the main characters, concentrating on Esther, his creed and the souls of his parishioners, almost to the exclusion of self; yet in this his chosen duty he is happy in a Spinozan sense. Nevertheless he too seeks greater connection and is completed by Felix's friendship and finally by Esther's love.

As examples of non-maternal men, Jermyn and his son Harold Transome exhibit the dangers of the gender. Jermyn first appears to the reader amid a welter of hints that Harold is his son. Harold's uncle Lingon has warned him to let Jermyn 'drop gently and raise no scandal' after the election (*FH* 30), adding later 'dash it! You're a Lingon whatever else you may be' (31). In addition, the narrator's comparison on their first meeting, of the plump white hands of father and son, ends with a knowing aside that Harold's 'suspicions were not yet deepened' (32). When the truth is revealed it is a

shock for the reader to realise the complete lack of filial regard in Jermyn, who would prefer it if Harold did not exist (33). While Mrs Transome palpates with thoughts of Harold as her child, Jermyn never reveals any relational stance. Such an absence shows Jermyn's lack of imagination, conscience and sympathy, even more than his callous clashes with Mrs Transome in Chapters Nine and Forty Two. In the former, both wish Harold had not been born (98), Jermyn because this unwanted son makes life difficult, Mrs Transome because she cannot bear the possible loss of her son's love and the shame when he realises her fall. This dominant mood persists in the later chapter, but now Jermyn would have Harold know the truth, merely in the hope of saving himself (335). This absence of all recognition, acknowledgement and relational feeling in Jermyn is submerged in the text, yet is fundamental to the reader's understanding of the wider importance of sympathy, care and, in this case paternal duty. Eliot expects this observation of absence from her readers if they are themselves to achieve connection with the text and interpret the moral. Thus the greatest contrast and foil to Jermyn's lack of paternal care is Rufus Lyon's excess of love for Esther. There is little sympathy for Jermyn, who is a complete egoist devoid of any saving emotion. Most of his business activities are immoral: in his dealings with Mrs Transome and Harold he shows no remorse or concern for relationship, and his wife and daughters are thought of chiefly in terms of expense (99). Perhaps Jermyn influences Felix's awful vision of what happens when men raise themselves out of their class. In fact, the only point of possible readerly sympathy for Jermyn is that he is constantly derided for being a self-made man, 'one of your middle-class upstarts who want to rank with gentlemen' (30) as Lingon describes him.

Felix Holt, generally not well liked by critics, is often seen as Eliot's meliorist mouthpiece for arguing against riot and violence. Meanwhile, for feminist critics he is as paternalist and oppressive as Transome or Jermyn. However, the main objection appears to be that Felix does not conform to socialist or feminist norms. Admittedly, the character lacks depth, while Eliot - or at least the narrator - idealises him too much. Yet I believe that Felix is far more radical than the radicals, and capable of growth to a less gendered position. Also, as with Stephen Guest, the lack of narrative criticism on Felix (Doyle 1981, 101) may suggest that his moral stance, faults and all, is clear enough for the reader's interpretation of his character. The lack of narrative comment does not signal approval, merely suggests that more careful analysis is required.

As a radical, Felix describes himself as wanting to go 'to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise' (*FH* 224) and has a long-term, meliorist policy to which he plans to devote his life (Hobson 1998, 21). The critic Deborah Guth compares Felix to Schiller's William Tell, both of whom oppose organised politics and appear to be individualists (Guth 920). However, although Felix is a loner, he is still more Spencer's individual in a species, so that when he meets the congenial Minister of Malthouse Yard he immediately wishes to stay and talk (*FH*, 57). His concerns are about mutuality, give-and-take and debate, not rules and forced coercion. He appears to possess the beginnings of Gilligan's union of care and justice, although in his case less egoism is required on questions of rights, more sympathy for others, and care for himself - Feuerbach would see his rejection of love and sexuality as irrational.

The Augustinian stance was that the State was the force of protection 'to restrain and coerce sinful men' (Peel 1971, 72). However, as Enlightenment philosophy saw man improving gradually - becoming virtuous and growing to benevolence - the idea

developed that 'public opinion based on "moral principle"' (72) would take control, with the result that the laws and state would not be needed. This political ideal, historically central to the dissent tradition, also describes the background philosophy of Spencer and Eliot. It also suggests an appropriate context for Felix's stance. As he says in his speech, votes won't raise the working classes; only public opinion can do that, for which it is necessary to change people if we are to value each other more. While not exactly opposing universal suffrage, Felix does want 'something else before all that' (*FH* 246). His account of how the extension of the franchise could militate against working men if manipulated by the ruling class is described as 'Eliot's prophecy', which is itself often considered an accurate account of how the working class were derailed, fragmented and disempowered (Lesjak 1984).

The main point of Felix's speech is to oppose the working class being kept ignorant so that all they could offer with their vote is 'ignorant power' (*FH*, 247). His speech is essentially Spinozan in that he wants to move against 'vain expectations' (248) and thus raise people out of bondage. He wishes to encourage reason and knowledge among the working classes for its own sake, and their sake, but not solely for escaping from their class. It is not a fall for Felix to choose to stay in his class (*FH*, 55, 363), as some suggest (Ingham 1996, 128). Most critics ignore this class loyalty, but Hobson defends Eliot's picture of Felix Holt as being closer historically to accounts of radical working men, and far more politically daring than is usually credited (1998, 21). He refers to the writings of a working man called Samuel Bamford, whose memoirs Eliot read as part of her preparation for the novel (*GEJ* 1998, 124). Bamford suggests that a change in working men, 'in the heart and home', was necessary before political reform would be of use (Hobson, 22). Hobson does not think that Eliot followed this aspect in her characterisation of Felix, but I consider that there is plenty of

evidence to show that Felix wished to live a moral, honest home *and* work life, and wished the same for others. Felix can be considered a labour pioneer soldier like Bamford, of whom there were many, quietly working among their class to improve conditions, knowledge, reason and self-respect (Hobson, 24).

Felix does have a strong ethic of care and justice. His objections to his mother's potions, the teaching and work with the miners, his desire to protect them from the evils of 'treating', and his misguided efforts to redirect the mob on polling day all affirm his care of others, although like Dinah Morris, more knowledge, experience and sympathy are needed if he is going to interpret and thus help others. For example, he frequently misjudges the minds of the miners, being too idealistic. Guth suggests that Felix is too out of touch and does not understand that morality will often be counterproductive where anger and poverty are so extreme (1999, 921). Spencer had made it clear that sympathy and the higher virtues could only flourish and be extended once life is safe and comfortable, and Eliot suggests that for the workers it is still too hard. Self-preservation will come before benevolence. Eliot's representation of the miners in their utter ignorance and innocence *is* embarrassing and condescending (*FH*, 110-119), but that itself does not, I think, invalidate the idealistic ethic with which she imbues Felix. When he naïvely declares that to convince and thus aid the miners he will 'lay hold of them by their fatherhood' and set one of their little sons in their midst (110), he is unwittingly ironic given the model of fatherhood portrayed elsewhere in the text. However, he does show by this and many other statements that for him the political is inextricably personal. Gillian Beer suggests that Mrs Transome challenges sexual mores more than Felix challenges political values (Beer 1986, 134). However, Mrs Transome has challenged more than sexual mores - she is attacking the very bedrock of the political system that Felix is questioning. Yet this comparison does not negate his

actions, for by bringing a maternal thinking to bear on political thought, Felix is making as great a challenge against the ruling hegemony as is Mrs Transome.

Thus, not only is Felix's stance far more radical than is usually credited, but he is always concerned with the personal life of his class. This connection is also present in his relation with Esther, for from the moment they meet he is concerned with how this attractive 'person' would clash with his 'political'. What most critics miss or ignore in their relationship is that they are besotted with each other from first sight and that their interchanges are funny. The importance of the romance plot is also to afford more sympathy for the unendearing Felix, basically he is shown as human, and capable of falling in love. The narrator claims that on first their meeting, Felix 'would not observe' Esther, but then proceeds to give a detailed description of her charms (*FH* 58) that originates from Felix. Esther likewise notices every fine feature of Felix's in a 'glance'. From then on, both are attracted and both against their will. Unconsciously, Felix strives to woo Esther, winning her to his work and moral stance. Yet he is not patriarchal or misogynist, but merely challengingly egalitarian; while his manner is bullying and arrogant, he at least engages her on serious topics and expects an intelligent woman's answer; all their conversations make a marked contrast to Esther's vacuous, flirtatious exchanges with Harold Transome, where she acknowledges 'how angry they would have made Felix' (150).

In Chapter Ten, Eliot sets out a programme of improvement for women, and while it is galling that it stems from this male demagogue, it is also presented in so ironic a manner, that Eliot, I feel, wished to win the emancipated women to mutual love by the sense of Felix's reason, and win the sentimental women to emancipation by the force of his emotions. For this is purple prose; Felix behaves like a proto-Mills and

Boon hero who has read J.S. Mill. Wishing to have Esther realise her fullest worth, he makes plain his belief that woman does not have to accept subjection - 'let her show her power of choosing something better' (104) - which echoes Eliot's repeated belief in free will within a lot determined by the the natural laws. Esther's bondage to niceties such as wax candles - which here *are* metonymic representations of a leisured life - and also that she is ruled by fancy (104) are mercilessly laid bare. Yet this entire passage, where Felix says he wants her to change, is a declaration of love. But Esther is to also win Felix to greater sympathy, caring and an acceptance of self-in-relation, away from his austere philanthropic role. Doyle suggests that he accepts a Feuerbachian role and even sees his sexuality as a result of this powerful attraction (1981, 98), while Alicia Carroll observes that for both, the argument over Byron and his poetry reveals their sexuality to each other (1992, 248). However, more than this rather Freudian reading, the exchange reveals their desire for relationship, connection and mutuality.

Harold Transome stands in cold opposition to Felix, regardless of any similarities between them, for they represent extreme poles of moral, political and gender beliefs. As such an extreme egoist, Harold has very little care or sympathy for anyone, and acknowledges few duties or obligations. Overall, he has knowledge, reason and experience but lacks imagination, sympathy and conscience. In particular, Harold would restrict women; treating them with contempt as 'slight things' (149) and repeatedly underestimating them. Echoing Herbert Spencer, he tells his mother that 'Women, very properly, don't change their views' (35), never realising that she is far more radical than he. This personal stance also forms the core of his political creed, for unlike Felix his politics are to do with money, power and status with no concern or care for the working class or anyone else. As he would exploit the election, so he would exploit Esther once her lineage is known. Uglow observes that his plot to win and wed

Esther parallels the power lobby that took place to regain power via the working classes in the 1867 enfranchisement (1987, 188).

Alicia Carroll suggests that Harold's oriental background is Eliot's means of criticising British Imperialism, while demonstrating his self-seeking, manipulative tendencies in relation to Esther, *and* further parodying many of the so-called 'radical' candidates of her time, whose politics were *purely* personal (1992, 251). Harold's background certainly adds a 'Gothic' element to the already bizarre translation of Esther from Malthouse Yard to Transome Court. However, her education is equally swift. At one time she would have expected to be happy, but since Felix asked her to change she needs more than mere wealth, flattery and leisure. All along she senses Mrs Transome's pain and is early unwilling to be considered as posing for a family portrait (*FH* 321). Meanwhile Mrs Transome fears Esther being her son's captive (313) as much as she would love her as a daughter.

Two final revelations convince Esther where her future lies, the first being Harold's comment that his first wife was a slave (352). Esther is suddenly confronted with the reality of Byron's Gothic excess and sees the danger of her situation. Further, when Harold has discovered his parentage and spurns his mother, Esther perceives the years of pain Mrs Transome has endured because of men. Initially Harold cannot transcend the difference he now perceives in his mother. As Dinnerstein describes, Harold had never really appreciated her as a separate subjectivity with needs and desires. Discovering her history is like a retaliatory rebirthing where Harold now rejects her. If Harold is a total egoist, he was possibly, unconsciously, created so by his mother, who no doubt adored and spoiled him, while also rejecting him both for his gender and his relation to Jermyn. Thus Harold has possibly been constructed in

extreme rejection because of difference. He may also have been rejected yet again on his return home. Mrs Transome does not recognise her own child when they first meet - 'she heard herself called "Mother!"...but...this son who had come back was a stranger...the sense of strangeness came upon her like a terror' (16) - and immediately sees his terrible resemblance to Jermyn. There is no recognition, no eye-contact with Harold, and he is pushed away again. Is Mrs Transome projecting her own fears onto Harold? Is she now as she was when he was a child, both the bad mother and the good? For we never hear of Harold's memories of his childhood and only know he was keen to leave and did not return until power was his. Alicia Carroll observes that 'some readers have noted that the issue of reform in *Felix Holt* connects an individual's moral to his or her political awareness to such an extent that "family politics reflect national politics", (1997, 238, quoting Gallagher). Thus from the opening chapters, the political in the Transome family is inextricably bound to the personal. Harold's choosing to become a radical is merely a reflection of the difference that already exists at the heart of the family. Perhaps for all his unprepossessing callousness and egoism, Harold deserves the readers sympathy too. Beer proposes that Harold does not grow in any way (1986, 145), but he is able to go to his mother, although more is unknown. However, this very absence could promote sympathy, while also making it clear that, evolutionarily, the Transomes constitute an exhausted line.

Although Esther persuades Harold to go to his mother in order to comfort her and be reconciled (even saying 'O, I think I would bear a great deal of unhappiness to save her from having any more' [393]), Esther chooses freedom. She goes back to her father and her narrow life without knowing if Felix loves her. She chooses self-respect and the promise of happiness that Felix and her father have demonstrated to exist through work. Lesjak observes that Felix has put himself outside the economy of

exchange (1996, 98), a position that Esther now also shares. She is not her father's to give and this independence is shown by her rejecting both Transome and a fortune. She takes charge of her life and makes decisions. She does not give herself up to Felix, but is ready to meet him half-way if he too can change and accept women as other than a blight on men's work. Alison Booth notes that when Esther is alone in her room on her final night at Transome Court, she opens her blinds because 'She wanted the largeness of the world to help her thoughts' (*FIH* 388). Esther's emotion anticipates Dorothea's in *Middlemarch* (1992, 151) after her night's despair. Esther's action reflects Schopenhauer's belief that surrendering to the ethically sublime or a oneness with the world reflects happiness and exaltation in the loss of individuality: "'a vanishing nothing in the face of stupendous forces'" (McCobb, 543, quoting Schopenhauer). Most would fear such loss, but Esther's moral growth is signalled by this merging with the world and loss of individuality, for the sympathetic person is "'not oppressed but exalted"' by the world's immensity, and can identify her "I" with the "Thou" of the species' (543).

Esther is initially an extreme egoist, although well-mothered, fathered and loved. While in bondage to life's trivia she recognises virtue, and, with practice, knowledge and experience, is capable of intuitive sympathy and duty, as is early reflected in her turn to her father. Unlike Harold Transome, with whom she can be set in parallel, she immediately realises her father's pain and love over all the lost years. From this flash of empathy, Esther is able to grow into the duties that she chooses. Brady considers that Esther is pushed into selflessness when she chooses to marry Felix (1992, 140), but to stay with Transome would have been a selflessness equivalent to Gilligan's second stage where she places others before herself. I also do not think that Esther is choosing only Felix's cause and work (Brady 138). Bored with the inactivity at Transome Court,

she tells Felix plainly that she intends to work (*FH* 396). She has already chosen transgression by speaking at the trial. While the gentry normalise and romanticise her action and sentiment, she speaks out of a forgetfulness of self - which again is to recognise the 'other' and forget the self through sympathy. Such a move has already been seen with Eppie, and it anticipates Dorothea. While these may not be feminist actions according to many twentieth-century definitions, these women are happy, choosing freedom, sexuality, mutuality, and happiness through advancing knowledge, reason and sympathy.

Yet Felix also has to choose to change. In accepting a wife he cares for himself and acknowledges his need to be a self-in-relation, but he also accepts modification. He agrees to the money Esther has secured for them and accedes to the idea that she will work, and even teach him things (*FH* 396). Gillian Beer, while acknowledging Felix's ability to change and also to awaken change, feels that the novel is one of powerlessness and impotence, as Mrs Transome's rage and transgression achieve nothing, the political parties do not understand change, and Rufus Lyon's Christianity appears a doubtful option (1996, 145). However, Felix and Esther suggest an alternative; mutual relationships where both are valued. Felix, like Mrs Transome, has experienced a futile beating and bruising (*GEL* IV, 499) and knows there has to be another way. While there is a latent desire for swift change in the text, what I consider to be Eliot's mildly utopian intentional offering is almost as hidden. Extrapolating from Comte's system, but eschewing his doctrinaire gender roles and enforced altruism, while also including Spencer's ideas on a slow growth to sympathy and justice as conditions improve, Eliot is, I believe, suggesting the beginnings of a new type of social selection, even sexual selection. Here what is chosen is a growth to 'as near an approach to equivalence of good for women and for men' (*GEL* IV, 365) as is possible.

Chapter Seven - Novels Without Heroes or Heroines:

Middlemarch and *Daniel Deronda*

Middlemarch represents a disturbing perfection in relation to my remit of examining the development and deployment of George Eliot's concepts of sympathy and duty. I consider it to be the pinnacle of her art in terms of theme and form, particularly in relation to her empathic narrator and the complex, interwoven examination of characters, events and all the relationships and inter-relationships. However, *Middlemarch* is perhaps disappointing in that its overall message is that we all - all of us - may have to be content with less, in exchange for happiness and freedom in mutual relationships. The hints of possible utopias still present in *Felix Holt* are gone. It is as if Eliot's old adage never to 'beat and bruise one's wings against the inevitable but to throw the whole force of one's soul towards the achievement of some possible better' (*GEL* IV, 499) has finally been accepted. While this augurs well for the steady, meliorist advancement of an intuitionist sympathy and duty, there is a price to be paid.

Eliot began 1869 by confiding to her journal that one goal was to write 'A Novel called Middlemarch' (*GEJ*, 134). As early as March 1867 Eliot had indicated to John Blackwood that she contemplated another 'English novel' (*GEL* IV, 355), while the notebooks that she kept between 1867 and 1871 reveal the extent to which she constantly searched and researched in order to gather the material towards this, her most complete web of interdependent lives (Pratt and Neufeldt 1979). For nearly two years her efforts were concentrated on what was to become the Lydgate and Vincy portion of *Middlemarch*; Eliot only began 'experimenting in a story' that was eventually to become 'Miss Brooke' towards the end of 1870 (*GEJ*, 141-2). These two tales are then seamlessly woven together, following the pattern of the previous two works of dual

plot, again incorporating a search for sympathy and duty in an ever larger and more complex society. While family, clergy and proprietorial care are again lacking, the main relationships under observation are those between the sexes. Although the work clearly demonstrates the extent to which women are oppressed, repressed, damaged and limited as a result of harmful gender role constructions and expectations, *Middlemarch* also harks back to *The Mill on the Floss* and *Tom Tulliver*, in order to examine fully the damage done to men. *Middlemarch* is Eliot's most comprehensive and holistic treatment of human relationships, extending her analysis of the effects on personality, gender and relationships of sympathy and duty, care and justice. The novel was finally published in eight instalments between December 1871 and December 1872. Despite Eliot's usual agonising during composition that she could never produce anything comparable to her past work – at one point she described *Middlemarch* to Lewes as the 'rinsings of the cask' (GHL V, 246) - it was received with more acclaim and popularity than any of her previous novels.

In a letter of 1868 to Clifford Allbutt, Eliot wrote of her 'conviction as to the relative goodness and nobleness of human dispositions and motives' (GEL IV, 472). Such a declaration confirms the impression that Eliot expected a natural benevolent moral sense in people, while also accepting from her experience and revealing repeatedly in her writings the equal conviction that goodness had to be worked for and practised. While this belief ultimately forms part of the overall impression of *Middlemarch*, it is a hard-won impression that rests on textual affirmation that most of the characters are good, unless damaged by their upbringing and experience. Further, Eliot illustrates - as she hoped to demonstrate via influence on her readers - that sympathy and an intuitive duty could win all but the most hardened wretches back to a state of goodness and nobleness. However, none of the characters in *Middlemarch* is

truly exceptional. Even those who have potential do not achieve greatness, although some with the most questionable beginnings develop exceptionally well.

Middlemarch is essentially a novel of anti-heroes and anti-heroines. With regard to both Dorothea, and Lydgate in particular, Eliot almost idealises her protagonists only to drag them back to ordinary life (Guth 1999, 916). This reversal of expectations quickly involves the reader more intensely, but also contributes to the overall anti-climactic effect. However, the technique also adds enormously to the sympathetic appeal for the reader. This presentation of characters both ordinary and yet potentially exceptional is Eliot's most subtle handling of psychologies yet; we were never in any doubt that Felix and Esther were not ideal, but the narrator of *Middlemarch* repeatedly succeeds in suggesting worthy protagonists while simultaneously revealing their feet of clay. Even Casaubon glows when first presented alongside Brooke. However, from the first pages of the Prelude the reader has no excuse for not realising that these are 'blundering lives' (*Mm* 4). The main representations in *Middlemarch* are still the commonplace lives and relationships seen in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, but now the pain of thwarted ambition and success causes a closer analysis of what constitutes freedom and happiness.

Having met Dorothea and Lydgate, the reader may nevertheless still hope for epic lives rather than tragic failures, even as these characters are simultaneously undercut by the narrator's irony. Dorothea is beautiful, fine of form and stature, remarkably clever, and linked metonymically to the Blessed Virgin. She is a character to seduce any woman reader of learning, beauty, desire – or pretension – and any man who dreams of a worthy woman. Whatever the later revelations about her faults and shortcomings, once Dorothea is linked to the image of Saint Theresa - despite the

narrator's clear disclaimer that this is not a tale of successful Sainthood - the image of Dorothea's special nature remains. That she is trapped by her gender and by social conventions and by the fact that there was 'no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul' (*Mm* 3) all serves to provoke sympathy. The Prelude is scathing in its condemnation of assumptions about women's nature and in its suggestion of the conventional moulds of 'sameness' into which they are forced (4). From this condemnation of society's attitude to women and from many other such examples in the novel it is hard to imagine how anyone can doubt that Eliot is a profoundly feminist writer. While I argue that Eliot is not primarily or solely concerned with women - for her concern is for humanity and the novels also demonstrate the damage done to men, both by the gendered demands made on them and by the effects on them of the foolish and dependent women they help to create - her anger and reforming zeal constantly demand the reader's, and society's, sympathy for women, and she demands change. I consider Eliot a feminist, but she is also always a humanist.

That Dorothea is an orphan, has been parcelled out to a various and inadequate education, and is forced to defer to Mr Brooke heightens the reader's sympathy. However, Celia has more common sense; Dorothea's learning pales into insignificance if compared to that of Mary Ann Evans; and the idea that she yearned after 'some lofty conception of the world' which might yet 'include the parish of Tipton' immediately sketches in her limitations, pretensions and egoism (8). As F.R. Leavis observed, 'Dorothea ... is not exempted from the irony that informs our vision of the other characters' (1983, 90).

Lydgate has a more equivocal introduction via the tongues of Middlemarch (*Mm* 89-91), but the reader eventually discovers that he is intelligent, poor, ambitious, committed to his vocation and determined to achieve great good in medicine. The text's reference to Henry Fielding (*Mm* 139) prepares the reader for the narrator's direct address: we are to be included in the analysis and invited to step back and consider Lydgate. This intertextuality also serves to place Lydgate in our minds as firmly among famous men and the 'tempting range of relevancies called the universe' (139). The narrator's first-person account draws us in, we quickly have a personal interest, and Lydgate's life of orphaned intellect, self-tutored evolution and chosen education, together with his passionate, reforming and empathic and dutiful vocation, wins great sympathy (140-7). He is obviously a Spinozan man, seeking full knowledge and thus finding happiness, activity and even hints of blessedness.

The narrator's finely nuanced account of a man obviously capable of doing 'good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world' (147) overshadows Lydgate's obvious isolation and outsider status, and his brief but disturbing history of unfortunate attachment. It also draws a veil over any earlier disappointments for the reader, as on Lydgate's first appearance the narrator reveals that Lydgate's character was, after all, of a masculine ordinariness; for outside his professional intuition, Lydgate lacks sympathy. Despite his many advantages, he repeatedly fails to empathise with the hopes, fears and politics of Middlemarch in general and so quickly fails in his wider social relationships in a manner similar to Amos Barton. More tellingly, Lydgate cannot understand women. He initially dismisses Dorothea's earnestness by asserting his 'reasons' over feminine 'moral sense' (91) - by now an obvious warning sign in Eliot's texts. This lack of consideration of a major facet of the internal environment, particularly in relation to women, is to be his downfall.

All this early and subtle questioning of the main protagonists seems to grow organically from the text, with a far more reticent irony employed than usual. Many warning signs are not obvious upon first reading or are revealed before the reader understands their significance to a particular character. Thus reader sympathy depends on an ability to read all the signs, to analyse, but also, as always, to not jump to any early conclusions. Yet ultimately, much criticism of the novel, past and present, centres on readers' disappointment with Dorothea, Ladislav, Lydgate and others, because they are not what the reading public want them to be. They are not ideal, they do not achieve exceptional things, even that they are stereotypical male and female heroes and heroines. While Eliot's texts have always subverted readerly expectation, in relation to her other works the characters of *Middlemarch* almost suggest a reverse evolution, or a lack of progress, in that the characters become less and less ideal-seeming within the work, yet are ultimately more real and ordinary. Perhaps this temptation of potential not achieved may generate the reader's active concern and cause it to be extended into a duty of sympathy for this life, since it is obviously unobtainable in the life of the novel.

Middlemarch is a successful and well-researched historical novel, set nearly forty years before its publication and just before the failure of the First Reform Bill attempt. However, *Middlemarch* is also a natural history, a study of the ecosystem that is Middlemarch.²³ An ecosystem is a community of organisms all variously relating with one another, while also interacting with the environment in which they all live, as well as variously modifying their own - and sometimes each other's - internal environments. An ecosystem is a fertile metaphor by which to examine the relationships within *Middlemarch*: not as food chains and webs and the flow of energy

²³ I hope that this ecosystem metaphor is original, but I suspect it may not be. However, I have been unable to find any source where it has already been applied, despite a considerable search.

through the community – although this is an image to preserve given Spencer's ideas on energy - but as an economy of sympathy and duty. Chains and webs can be mapped showing the giving and receiving of intuitionist sympathy and duty in contrast to the patternings of false virtues and conventions. As the multiple points of similarity and divergence between all the characters in *Middlemarch* are so complex, this analogy with an ecosystem permits an organic exploration of the text.

It is quite common to use the metaphor of the web in relation to Eliot's works, *Middlemarch* in particular. Hillis Miller observes that the web is one of the most frequently applied 'totalising metaphors' together with woven cloth, flowing water, and the labyrinth (1975, 12-3) - all of which suggest connection, relationship and even metonymic linkage. George Eliot herself refers to the complexity that is her novel as 'this particular web', suggesting both the whole and also the individual 'human lots', and how they are 'woven and interwoven' (*Mm* 139). The metaphor of an ecosystem is even more suitable as it relates so well to aspects of Eliot's life and history and to all the science, natural history and evolution which was her daily fare and intercourse with Spencer and Lewes. It is particularly apt since, unlike many critical approaches which concentrate on dualities - such as the obvious gender polarities (Beer 1986, 196-7) - to consider *Middlemarch* as an ecosystem highlights *all* the many relationships, correspondences and influences as parts of an organic whole. It illustrates how all characters are in a state of interdependence and the importance of this connection, also how the internal changes in one character may seriously affect the external and internal environments for others. Thus Featherstone's fluctuating passions produce adverse material and emotional states for Fred Vincy, his family, the Garths and eventually even for Bulstrode. It is a wonderful mapping of the 'law of consequences'; or then again, chance as being the laws that we do not yet know. Such a holistic consideration also

illustrates more clearly than Eliot's earlier works that the personal is always both public and political; it also encourages a consideration of the natural laws *and* Spencer's warning that we meddle with the complex interactions of cause and effect at our peril. In particular, *Middlemarch* as ecosystem demonstrates how gender construction, false virtues and conventions impede the growth to happiness, freedom and tolerance.

Eliot presents established groups of organisms who variously support and nourish each other, such as the Garths, Farebrothers, Chettams and even the Vincys. There are others who neglect, pervert or fail their parental, clerical and proprietorial duties such as Brooke, Bulstrode and perhaps Cadwallader. Changes in the external environment affect all: so that the railway, changing education and increased class and social mobility have many repercussions. Meanwhile changes in various internal environments also have far-reaching effects: Dorothea would claim knowledge, reason and vocation beyond that normally expected by women; Fred Vincy evolves to disobey his father with regard to both love and vocation; while Ladislav lacks the usual male growth to positional masculinity and is thus one of the most pleasantly feminine of men. Some organisms are seeming-outsiders with scant connection, such as Casaubon, while others are outsiders-within like Featherstone, Bulstrode and even Dorothea. These, in their own way, cause disturbance, even chaos. Outsiders such as Lydgate and Ladislav have good intentions, make connections, but are never accepted and choose to leave both to stabilise the environment and to develop elsewhere. Finally some such as Rigg, Raffles and even poor Casaubon and Rosamond are parasites, capable of doing various degrees of damage, utterly lacking in intuitive sympathy and duty, and operating according to their own maxims regardless of the natural laws and the effects on their and others' environments.

While Eliot creates and examines each one of these characters in detail, they are never imagined or represented in isolation. The debate over whether Eliot is more concerned with community, relationships or individuals is not an issue, for - as consideration of *Middlemarch* as an ecosystem illustrates - the individual is always also a member of the species, part of the 'I/Thou', a self-in-relation. Of course the individual is always important, Eliot repeats this in her letters and novels, and does not advocate self-sacrifice. Given the influence of Spinoza and Spencer she may even accept that self-preservation is primary. However, the surest means of self-preservation is to be in relation, to be part of a mutually supporting group. In fact, Spinoza's idea of punishment is the inability to live in harmony with others. Thus Eliot values both the individual and the species, and as Spinoza, Spencer, Feuerbach even Schopenhauer have indicated, sympathy best preserves the community and the overall conditions that make life possible for all individuals. Therefore the narrator is always variously reporting, commenting and revealing from multiple viewpoints, from individuals and from species. The reader's creative task is to sift this data and arrive at conclusions concerning what is best and what is not, for all; balancing in a constant feedback process all the various shades of emphasis and relevance between individual and species. The reader becomes almost as much a scientist as Lydgate.

Lydgate is described as searching for the 'primitive tissue' (*Mm* 147), and critics have debated whether Eliot was searching for the same via her texts - although Beer insists that Eliot knew there was no *one* tissue (quoted in Barrett 1989, 142). However, while Eliot demonstrates infinite individual differences between the organisms within the tissue of her community, she did accept Spencer's theory of differentiation and growing heterogeneity from homogeneity. Therefore her characters are the primitive cells - if not tissue - in her natural history analysis and what she is investigating is the

various relationships, connections, internal and external changes, which variously cause differentiation. *Middlemarch* is her most consummate 'experiment in life' (*GEL* VI, 216); the text observing, hypothesising and demanding that readers do the same in order to determine exactly what produces a Rosamond or a Dorothea, a Lydgate or a Ladislaw.

Paxton reports Shuttleworth's opinion that Eliot's commitment to organicism restrained her feminism (1991, 190). Undoubtedly, Eliot's concern is with all humanity, not just women. She values men and women equally and her novels are humanist as well as feminist. Her organicism helps her to understand that for any individual 'organisms' to survive and prosper, all must also be cared for. The entire ecosystem must be considered. However there are many aspects to this questioning of her feminism. Despite Eliot's own skills and intelligence, - and the knowledge that women were not permitted the education and experience to sift their potential - at the time of writing *Middlemarch* she was aware of science declaring that women were irrevocably determined by their nature and biology. Darwin's *The Descent of Man* was published at this time, and over the years Spencer had increasingly adopted the scientific belief that women were more altruistic, less judgemental, and were constrained by their biological construction.

As she read, discussed and understood all this research, Eliot was probably undecided - torn in her opinions. A letter of 1868 to Emily Davies discusses physical and psychological differences between the sexes that she believes cannot be ignored (*GEL* IV, 467-8). Further, as with Florence Nightingale, while Eliot wished women to have the full opportunities of education and experience so that their nature might develop to a stage to be 'treated with scientific certitude' (*Mm* 4) - and perhaps to be

free of the endless demands and assumptions that they will always nurture everyone - she also acknowledged and valued women's sympathetic, caring values. The same letter to Emily Davies stresses that we cannot afford to lose all the gentle, affectionate and maternal values that are associated with the feminine character (IV,468). All this evidence means that Eliot is always qualifying the 'feminism' in her texts – and in her letters – and she does not rule out the possibility that a definiteness of both nature and function might be resolved via our evolution proceeding toward a more 'clearly discerned distinction of function' (*GEL* IV, 364), although she does not know what this may be. Further, any moral solutions which she suggests for women's advancement do not necessarily take a form that modern feminists would agree with. I believe that her advocacy of happiness in mutual relationships - where women are more autonomous but men are more maternal than was expected by Victorian standards - has much in common with the ideas presented by Chodorow and Gilligan which suggest that changes in gender construction will benefit men as well as women, although – as already stated – Eliot would not advocate degendering.

As with Eliot's other communities, intuitive sympathy and duty are relatively lacking in *Middlemarch* and are also overshadowed by tremendous egoism in all of the main characters. Dorothea and Celia are more alike than they imagine in that both believe that they are always right. The same is variously true of Casaubon, Lydgate and Rosamond. All of them, in failing to recognise difference are unable to transcend it and enter into an empathic, understanding relationship with the other. All the characters begin the novel very much alone, in spite of family connections. The crucial question is whether they can gain knowledge and understanding from experience and thus extend their faculties and achieve imaginative intuitive sympathy, value duty over convention, and finally advance to mutual relationships. Despite his 'scrapes' and for all that he is

not presented as exceptional, Fred Vincy begins the novel with the greatest moral profile because love and fellow-feeling with another allow him to realise his lack; he knows there is a higher duty he could be performing - beyond entering the church for prestige, position and pleasing his father, or observing societal norms such as not eating smoked herring at mid-morning, or marrying according to his station.

As Celia repeatedly points out, Dorothea 'sees what nobody else sees' and 'yet never see[s] what is quite plain' (*Mm* 35-6). While reporting this observation is one of the narrator's means of removing Dorothea from any pedestal upon which the reader may have placed her, as well as anticipating the misjudgement over Casaubon, this is not a universally negative quality. Hillis Miller observes that Dorothea's 'literal myopia is a metonymy' (1975, 19), but while her short-sightedness stands in for Dorothea and is responsible for her recognition of, and linkage to Casaubon, with greater experience and knowledge Dorothea is also able to recognise, value and relate to Lydgate, Farebrother and Will. As Dorothea is used to not having her 'different voice' heard, so she is adept at hearing the different voices of others – although more reason and judgement are required. As yet, Dorothea is ill-made. While not exceptional, her ardour and moral stance exceed her environment. She possess the philanthropic urge which Will calls her 'fanaticism of sympathy' (*Mm* 216). However, this suggests the first capacity for sympathy that Eliot describes in her Riehl essay, that which 'requires a moral sentiment already in activity' (1992, 263). It is as if she were educated towards some compulsory altruism, as Comte would advocate for women. Dorothea may have been well-mothered, for she did not lose her parents until aged twelve and, like many of Eliot's heroines, she is both relational and autonomous. However, as for so many women of the day, her ideas and desires of vocation have been drawn into an altruistic mould. Barrett suggests that, as she lacks a father figure and Mr Brooke is so inadequate, she

may be attempting to remedy that absence in her life by marrying Casaubon (1989, 127). Yet the text has already suggested that she likes to worship at the feet of learned older men (*Mm* 10), perhaps first encouraged in this by her father.

However, Dorothea is not being selfless when she wishes to be with Casaubon. She wants to work, learn and 'become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom' (*Mm* 208). Eliot believed that women deserved the opportunity of some engrossing study, and should not be expected to live 'too exclusively in the affections' (*GEL* V, 107). Dorothea's philanthropic sympathy represents such self-repression, yet she does already 'delight in ideas' (V, 107), while Casaubon may be the first intelligent man to whom she 'could confess without being laughed at' (V, 107). Because of this recognition of 'difference' and acknowledgement of each other's isolation and loneliness, Dorothea and Casaubon believe that they empathise, but they do not. As realisation grows in Dorothea, her 'individual awareness' slowly develops to 'deal with the world it has not made' (Ermarth 1985(b), 112). As she perceives her own 'moral stupidity' (*Mm* 208) she is able to grow in knowledge, reason and experience, until a fusion with her naturally benevolent nature permits first pity and then sympathy with Casaubon. The description provided of Dorothea's realisation of Casaubon's 'equivalent centre of self' (208) mirrors the wonderful experience of sympathy as empathy that Adam Smith so valued: 'to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense' (208). The critic Neil Hertz sees this realisation as Dorothea accomplishing an 'exemplary action, the acknowledgement of an irreducible difference between persons' and signifying that she not only overcomes her own egoism, but also a troublesome inner difference (1979, 79). That the narrator addresses the reader directly here, announcing that we are all 'born in moral stupidity' (*Mm* 208), is one of the many examples where a presence is invoked by the narrator

(Smith 1977, 194-5) to prompt the actual reader into a response, in this case an analysis of both the characters and themselves.

Throughout, Dorothea has no community of like minds to cling to (Beer 1986, 164), unlike Eliot once she had met the Brays – so again we are considering alternative stories. Hence Eliot's novels are neither for the initiated nor the exceptional but for all isolated women with aspirations greater than their opportunities or abilities. Casaubon too is isolated and appears to have been so, both professionally and personally, for much of his life. Like Dorothea, he also operates within his determined freedom, yet chooses not to evolve. It is this egoistic certainty that makes sympathy for Casaubon so difficult for the reader. The many-levelled, multiple discourse that takes place concerning Casaubon will vary in its influence on the reader according to our response to Celia's dislike of white moles, Sir James's contempt for thin calves, and Mrs Cadwallader's spite at being thwarted in her match-making. Rather than the opinions of the other characters, it is Casaubon's own revelations, via the narrator, that decide the matter. For example, his letter of proposal to Dorothea is yet another study of the masculine 'I', dwelling on how Dorothea is eminently suited to meet his needs (*Mm* 42); her intelligence is a bonus but she is wanted primarily for her feminine qualities of 'ardent self-sacrificing affection' (49).

Casaubon's egoism far outweighs Dorothea's, and it is the narrator's simple straightforward remark that Dorothea was asking if she was good enough while not teaching Casaubon 'to ask if he were good enough for her' (50) that first reveals this fact, irrespective of the opinion of others. Later, it is his complete lack of imagination and sympathy *and* his rigid maxims born of convention that alienate the reader. Casaubon's realisation of his lack of 'masculine passion' and the shallowness of his

feelings (61) do not raise his concern for Dorothea, although the reader may be alarmed for her; further, when he fails to exhibit any imagination, 'interest or sympathy' (195) for the glories of Rome even his intellect may be questioned; finally, his complete inability to understand Dorothea's desire to work with him suggests Spencer's idea that women should not work, and further prompts the reader's concern. Of course, Casaubon conceals a secret. He fears discovery as a failed intellectual and initially fears the keen spur of Dorothea's intellect, judgement and imagination. Instead he retreats into inadequate knowledge. His 'Key to all Mythologies' has become his bondage, to which he clings for identification and certainty just as Tom Tulliver clings to his maxims. Meanwhile, Casaubon blames all outside agents and refuses responsibility. He spirals into a fancy or paranoia that corresponds to Spinoza's most basic form of knowledge.

Apart from pity the reader can offer little. However, the narrator's direct insistence that we consider Casaubon's centre of consciousness instead of always following Dorothea (*Mm* 275-6) again demands and provokes a reader response; perhaps even greater imagination and sympathy in life. Both Dorothea and Casaubon had wished to fill the absence in their lives and fail. Dorothea is to evolve in sympathy, while Casaubon becomes intellectually and evolutionarily extinct. However, the greater danger was Dorothea's seduction to self-sacrifice. When Casaubon has consulted Lydgate and realises that he may not live for much longer, his rejection of Dorothea's concern and pity hurts and angers her (*Mm* 418-21). However, as she constantly debates and questions herself she comes to realise the pain, grief and fear he must be facing. Briefly, Dorothea gains a notion of the full intensity of 'that roar which lies on the other side of silence' (192). With this revelatory burst of intuitive sympathy, Dorothea is able to forgive and turns again to Casaubon; acknowledging with respect to

her own hurt that she would 'never again expect anything else' (422). She is grateful that she has not hurt this 'lamed creature', however, her enduring emotion is pity. Sympathy has enabled her to recognise the gulf between her and Casaubon, and imagine his state, but Dorothea is still growing morally and cannot yet understand all the other fears that torment her husband.

The moral chasm between Dorothea and Casaubon was greatest over his complete denial of Dorothea's concept of justice concerning Will's inheritance (Paxton 1991, 193). Her arguments represent a fusion of Gilligan's justice and care ethics, honouring Will's moral and family rights, caring for him, yet including herself in the decision. Yet then and later Casaubon can only insist that Dorothea adhere blindly to his judgement. In this alone does he mirror back her image of helping the poet Milton. When Dorothea moves to her later stage of pity and selflessness in the face of Casaubon's fear of death, she is again vulnerable to his demand that she put aside her own judgement and obey only his. While Dorothea is unaware that part of Casaubon's demand is for her not to marry Ladislav, pity almost leads her into sacrificing herself to the completion of Casaubon's work. She is saved from this by his death - a convenient *deus ex machina* (Postlethwaite 1990, 214). However, Dorothea's moral development continues, she is not yet skilled in sympathy, and has not fully learned to include her self in her care, but increased experience and knowledge will permit her growth to a stage beyond selflessness.

Early reviews of *Middlemarch* judged the work to be largely about women, their condition and their education (Beer 1986, 147-8), with the *Saturday Review* most concerned lest all women express discontent at the state into which they are born and become subversive, particularly if these same women begin to question their nature as

well as class and economic issues (149). Yet although contemporary readers recognised these feminist issues, they were largely ignored by critics until the 1970s. Instead, most critical comment presented Eliot's fiction as a hymn to the *status quo*, and in the seventies feminists often objected because Dorothea did not succeed in the way that Eliot did (Austen 1976). That Eliot's subversive message was repressed suggests how disturbing it was. Much of Eliot's writing is about the act of persuasion, and 'As Wolfgang Iser has noted, the purpose of literature is more often to change our view of reality than confirm it, with the result that all good literature is disturbing' (Smith 1977, 192). However, *Middlemarch* is also about men, and how they are damaged in this environment of dictated gender norms, false virtue and convention.

Caleb Garth and Camden Farebrother represent maternal men who extend sympathy and care to all who require it, almost to the point of being selfless. Further, Caleb represents the only positive father-figure in the novel. Significantly he plays a major role in ensuring that Mary and Fred are happily united. Fred, influenced by Caleb's fatherly presence as a child, finds his vocation via Caleb's reverence of 'business'. The egos of Mary and Fred are like two candles reflected in a pier glass and always circling around each other, merging and moving apart, always, especially in the case of Mary, maintaining their ego, ensuring self-preservation, yet aware of and caring for the other. Yet Fred is also his father's property - whereas Rosy has to be exchanged - and his father can demand any role of him. An early essay by Chodorow 'Being and Doing' is an examination of the psychological significance of role training and identity formation. Their precise role was often withdrawn from middle-class Victorian sons, who knew only that they had to reject all 'feminine' behaviour. Chodorow's work suggests that Fred's irresponsible behaviour is an indication that he has 'little "real" place in the surrounding adult world' (Chodorow 1989, 28). Mary's maternal thought

and feeling reflect the best of relational care and autonomous independence. While she achieves no exceptional success, although she does produce a book, she saves Fred and is the strongest woman in the text. What is more she achieves happiness, freedom and even blessedness, and regardless of conventional feminist comment, this is an exceptional achievement.

The character of Will Ladislaw is often criticised as a dilettante and not good enough for Dorothea, yet the descriptions of Will as poet, painter, dramatist, writer and journalist could easily be about the young George Henry Lewes. For Will is a maternal man. He is well-mothered, with a father he revered, but he definitely originates from a line of spirited women. He is an outsider, like Dorothea, yet learned, sympathetic and caring. It is this very unconventionality that has him condemned as unmanly (Brady 1992, 165) both by characters and critics. Further, his relation to money, inheritance, work and vocation is very much like that of a woman (Beer 1986, 172). He has not been constructed as a positional male, has no more idea of vocation than Dorothea, yet love for her causes him to seize his independence and work, with the result that the importance of Reform reveals his vocation. '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'. Will accepts the idea of working for reform, even though it is not 'that indeterminate loftiest thing which he had once dreamed of as alone worthy of continuous effort' (*Mm* 454).

The attraction between Will and Dorothea is another stage of development in Eliot's representation of mutual relationships, for Will is not a mentor like Philip Wakem or Felix Holt, but an equal who openly looks to Dorothea for moral guidance. It is perhaps the closest representation of Eliot's relationship of mutuality with Lewes.

However, a frequently cited problem of their gendered relationship is that Will's adoration objectifies Dorothea (Brady, 165). Particularly, Will's declaration to Dorothea, 'you are a poem – and that is to be the best part of a poet - what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods', is considered to reduce her to an aesthetic object and part of the male poet's mind (165). While there is no escaping this interpretation, another reading is to consider Will as comparing Dorothea to the ethically sublime, that which Schopenhauer describes as a means of escape from the centrality of the ego and a possible path to sympathy. It is more than Dorothea being a muse, since she can enable Will to be a better person. Yet there is the danger that this again places her on a moral pedestal, like Comte's altruistic mother, but instead Dorothea can be that observer who helps to form the conscience - as Adam Smith describes - she is a 'Thou' to Will's 'I' as he would be Dorothea's best 'Thou'. Many mortals 'hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they love best'; as Mary is already Fred's 'conscience' so Dorothea and Will may become "The theatre of all ... actions" for each other (*Mm* 240).

By contrast, Lydgate, despite his attractiveness, lacks all awareness of difference; he treats people impartially, but does not understand the extent to which individual realities differ. Unable to recognise different voices, he has no awareness of what needs to be transcended in order to achieve sympathy. There is no suggestion of any maternal influence and relationality in Lydgate's life, and his interaction beyond the brusque politics of his profession and class is limited. He does possess a tremendous imagination, if not intuition for his scientific work. The narrator's inspiring account spirals in and out of description and free indirect speech to provide a twofold eulogy on the joys of creative imagination, 'the exercise of disciplined power ... the fullest obedience to knowledge ... energetic alliance with impartial nature' (162). It is

repeatedly conveyed that in Lydgate there is the potential for excellence. He seeks and actually begins to achieve a transcendence via his work after a manner which Schopenhauer would equate with a freedom from the will. Barrett suggests that Lydgate is presented as being what Dorothea imagined Casaubon to be, while the narrator never denigrates Lydgate's abilities in the way Ladislav is ironised and undermined (1989, 150). Yet all of this imagination is completely absent from his relationships with others. He cannot read or handle Bulstrode, fails to see that the political always becomes personal and he quickly has both his internal and external environment polluted. Most important, Lydgate cannot read or handle Rosamond: 'Each lived in a world of which the other knew nothing' (*Mm* 163).

Rosamond is the novel's egoist *par excellence*, well schooled in all the conventions and false virtues that Rousseau railed against and holding to them with a belief in right and certainty that is indomitable. Everything that Rosamond holds dear - her personal definition of 'bondage' - constitutes her definition of self. All native wit, skill and intelligence are perverted to reproduce every day 'her own standard of a perfect lady' (*Mm* 165). As with Tom Tulliver, Rosy lacks the notion of an external observer as conscience and has instead 'an audience in her own consciousness'. She is her only judge and does not grow to develop her own conscience further, much less to be advised by Lydgate as 'half [her] rectitude' (240). Eliot's employment of Herbert Spencer as the 'eminent philosopher' who provides the pier glass analogy (261-2) is significant, for Rosamond is the ultimate horror who gives the lie to his notion of pretty, non-working women making the best and most altruistic wives and caring mothers. That the candle of Rosy's ego always shows all events revolving around her, she never doubts.

While it is possible to be more sympathetic to Rosamond than to Casaubon, this is only because he has relative freedom and largely determines his own actions; whereas Rosy was subjected to, and then embraced the terrible gender construction offered by family and finishing school. However, Spady suggests there is always less sympathy in the text for those characters who are not themselves sympathetic - in particular the narrator's compassionate 'we' is often absent in comments about Rosy, and only generalisations are made to elicit sympathy (1978, 70). When she realises how little Ladislaw values her in relation to Dorothea, the narrator describes Rosamond as 'almost losing the sense of her identity ... to be waking into some new terrible existence' (*Mm* 767). Yet at this point when Rosamond is shattered, not only does the narrator fail to suggest mutual sympathy to the reader, but even details how Rosy would normally have manipulated sympathy from Lydgate in such a situation. That Ladislaw is forgiven the fact 'that he had no such movement of pity' (767) clearly condemns Rosamond.

If the reader is searching for perfection in the relationships represented in the novel, then little will be found. However, the Prelude makes it clear that these are not exceptional lives. Lydgate cannot change Rosamond, and so ultimately his vocation and ideals are compromised. Yet he is not blameless. He wanted a woman like Rosy, and as a man who failed to allow for women having their own equivalent centre of self, while also being complicit in their bondage and absorption of inadequate knowledge, he is as much responsible for his fall from grace as she. He can change, but the fact that Rosamond's ego is so rigidly constructed on maxims that constitute her very being, means that she cannot. Rosamond's only moment of transcendence is when she tells Dorothea that Will is not faithless and has always loved only her. This sympathetic identification allows Rosamond to escape from a hateful image of herself, that of being

less than a perfect lady. Thus it is not an altruistic act. Briefly Rosamond achieves a level of care that includes the self and other, but she cannot sustain it.

Based perhaps on Spencer's belief in a slow gradual evolution which would eventually result in increased sympathy by all for all, the relationships in Eliot's novels do show a trend towards mutuality and care. Fred and Mary achieve this, as do Dorothea and Will. When Casaubon dies, Dorothea is on the brink of self-sacrifice, but her escape signals the turning point of the novel. Once released, Dorothea becomes active, searching for vocation in her estate management, while her uncle braves the hustings, Fred reforms, Bulstrode's fortunes collapse and Will finds vocation. Dorothea is also able to accomplish many meliorist acts. Whereas before the subplots and themes of the novel followed an orderly existence, they now jostle for the reader's attention, as shock waves in the ecosystem have multiple effects.

If feminists are disappointed that Eliot's heroines do not achieve success, it is important to note that the men in the novel are also relative failures. The most successful males are those capable of transcending their masculine autonomy and becoming more relational and sympathetic, Fred learns the most, while Will only needed a vocation to suit his flexible nature. Eliot wrote that young men were 'just the class I care most to influence' (*GEL* IV, 397). Although she does not offer a reason for this statement, it is perhaps because they are the ones who must change the most, but also have the power to precipitate larger change in society. In a letter of 1868 to Emily Davies, Eliot reiterates her belief that men must realise the damage done to women by keeping them in ignorance and denying them truth, belief and access to full judgement (*GEL* IV, 468).

Dorothea achieves transcendence in realising that she loves Will, even when she believes him to be faithless. Further, she does not blame Rosamond as a rival but forgives her as Spinoza would advise, and assists her. Waking to the dawn after her night of grief, Dorothea grasps freedom and fully realises her membership of 'that involuntary, palpitating life' (776). Her revelling in the 'largeness of the world' (776) reflects both Spinoza's freedom and the happiness that comes with our growth to an understanding of eternity, and also Schopenhauer's account of the transcendence of our will and subsequent growth to sympathy when we accept our insignificance within the world. This is the moment that Dorothea has been growing towards since her first full experience of sympathy for Casaubon. Although she believes Will to be lost, she now knows herself and her emotions fully and can move to forgiveness and understanding as well as personal freedom. Later, when Rosamond reveals that Will loves her and was true, Dorothea is torn between selflessness and selfishishness over telling him how she feels; she has to choose and take responsibility, but she is now capable of it. Brady suggests that it is only now that Dorothea truly finds her own 'will' (1992, 164). However, I think Dorothea knew her own will before, the difference now is that she can choose with adequate knowledge, and in choosing Will she includes herself in her caring. Simultaneously she rejects all convention. To marry Will is one thing, to reject money is beyond the understanding of Brooke, Chettam and Cadwallader. Yet Dorothea chooses love, mutual support and understanding, and the possibility of Spinoza's growth to blessedness. There is also a duty of sympathy, both in the relationship with Will, and in the work they will do together. While Dorothea is not to do any exceptional work of her own, she does work for reform with Will. Further, Will does become an M.P. and with the possible exception of Fred and Mary, they are one of Eliot's most successful and happy couples.

Middlemarch is not an undiluted happy-ever-after novel: in its realism it is a novel for adults. Any happiness achieved at the end results from a greater mutuality in relationship. The differences between the sexes, which were not yet clearly defined for Eliot, are not denied, but the acknowledgement of difference and the working toward an understanding of that difference is encouraged. Knowledge, reason, education and experience are seen to be the basic tools, so that ultimately maybe imagination and sympathy, even empathy, can flourish. From this, difference can be acknowledged and respected, and tolerance, freedom and happiness achieved. This scenario sounds utopian and Eliot may consider it possible only via a process as long and slow as evolution, with men becoming more maternal and women more autonomous. Further, it is a severely moralistic doctrine - as are the gender changes proposed by Chodorow and Gilligan. It advocates a moving towards sympathy, care, justice and chosen duty, by all for all, and this may be restrictive. It may even hinder the development of exceptional individuals - modern feminists fear that it is Eliot's heroines who always fail to achieve. However, the texts suggest that this is as likely for men as for women, while such failure also results from damaging relationships - such as Lydgate's and Rosamond's - where there is no mutuality. Further, 'George Eliot early recognised that the exceptional changes nothing. It carries with it no transformation of the ordinary' (Beer 1986, 202), and Eliot was concerned to effect change for all. She is therefore suggesting a long, slow growth to change and progress, where the ultimate outcome is uncertain, but where she hopes mutual relationships of sympathy, care, justice and chosen duty will result. The reader's active engagement in the questions surrounding sympathy and duty in *Middlemarch* will be one more step in extending this moral growth.

It is ironic that I should consider my reading of *Daniel Deronda* (1876) to be an unofficial epilogue to this thesis, when it is the most open-ended of Eliot's novels and one of the few without a finale or epilogue. The novel looks forward to an uncertain future for Eliot, her main characters, and for the world; but it also looks back, being almost a retrospective of Eliot's earlier fiction with multiple intertextual connections between characters and events (Brady 1992, 175). *Daniel Deronda* as an epilogue simultaneously provides a powerful endstop to any discussion of Eliot's work, and to my analysis in particular, for it is a radical departure from the continuum presented by Eliot's previous novels, with a move to a more cynical and pessimistic account of relationship. *Middlemarch* is therefore the novel where Eliot most fully develops her ideas of meliorist gender relations based around the extension of intuitive sympathy and duty, while *Daniel Deronda* is pessimistic and uncertain and warrants a study beyond the scope of this work.

The world and its horror is a central character in this final novel. Few of Eliot's works had completely excluded the wider world, but in *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* the presence of issues beyond individual, relational, rural or provincial pains and pleasures became more noticeable, with references to class struggle, reform, and imperialism. In *Daniel Deronda* Eliot extends her boundaries to investigate the moral issues surrounding race and religion, in addition to more controversial analyses of legitimacy, class decay, exploitation, sexual relations and gender roles. Beneath this analysis there is a cynicism which occasionally escapes Eliot's control in hyperbolic exhortations intended to alert the reader to action for politico-personal reform: 'this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences ... in a time, too, when ... the soul of man was waking to pulses which had for centuries been beating in him unheard ...' (DD 102-3).

While writing *Middlemarch*, Eliot had followed the horror of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1 as it played across countryside she and Lewes loved. In her journal she asked: 'Am I doing anything that will add the weight of a sandgrain against the persistence of such evil?' (*GEJ*, 141). This is perhaps the first suggestion that her work has to seek new solutions. By the time *Daniel Deronda* was being composed, both Thornton and Herbert Lewes were dead, as was Lewes's mother and Thornton Leigh Hunt, while both Eliot and Lewes were repeatedly seriously ill. Further, Imperialism dominated discussion and Eliot had observed Spencer's 'survival of the fittest' being so exploited that in 1881, he founded the strongly anti-Imperial 'Anti-Aggression League' (Wiltshire, 91). Eliot also followed the anti-slavery campaign, particularly since corresponding with Harriet Beecher Stowe. It was perhaps this input, in addition to her friendship with the Zionist Emanuel Deutsch, which prompted a novel relating to the quest for a Jewish homeland. She correctly anticipated that response to the Jewish component would be unfavourable (*GEJ*, 145) and Reina Lewis analyses the anti-Semitic reaction to *Daniel Deronda* (1996, 193-201). Eliot later wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe, with crusading rhetoric, on her desire to encourage the extension of imagination and sympathy between races and creeds (*GEL* VI, 301-2).

Beyond this extension of moral and political concerns, *Daniel Deronda* also experiments with narrative organisation (Beer 1986, 214). There is a more unstructured, dual plot, which swoops through time and space, and particularly between the characters of Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda. The novel is patterned according to the, relatively few, meetings of these two main protagonists. Above all, the ending is unsettling, promoting an alternation between pessimistic and utopian interpretations.

The two main protagonists, Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda, represent both moral and 'romance' extremes, with Gwendolen as Eliot's first wholly non-sympathetic primary heroine and Daniel as a cross between a gentrified Adam Bede and Keats. Gwendolen is a total egoist emerged from a 'Silly Novel' and completely trapped by 'silly' images of women (Beer 1986, 223). The early chapters present her as so self-centred that it is difficult for the reader to admire or sympathise either with the character or a society that produces such a specimen. For Gwendolen knows 'that she herself was admired' (*DD* 7), while Daniel Deronda's seeming disapproval of her gambling represents only a 'single negative' (7), suggesting that society has confirmed her high opinion of herself. Yet adoration is heaped on Gwendolen by her mother - from whom she has not separated - in their relationship of mutual mothering. But Gwendolen is also selfish and uncaring with her mother, adopting a masculine domineering role as if her mother has no separate life. As Gwendolen's conversation in the early chapters maintain her image of self-constructed exceptional woman, despite growing comment from other characters and the narrator's feedback, it is a shock for the reader to realise in Chapters Five and Six that she really is a non-sympathetic, non-exceptional foundress of nothing, who is subject to fits of terror (52). It is the description of her fear at the vastness around her (52), a typical Schopenhaurian image of the egoist, that first suggests a different moral emphasis in this novel.

Deronda appears the radical opposite to Gwendolen, caring, selfless, feminine almost, yet with a strong moral stance that Spencer would never consider feminine. He has great ability and 'would have been first-rate if he had more ambition' (151), yet his passion for rowing and drifting on the river suggests a rhythmic, semiotic return to the mother. For Deronda is motherless, living with a man he assumes to be his father, yet multiply rejected as a result of realising he is illegitimate (141), at the thought that Sir

Hugo may not mean him to be a gentleman (143), and from the continued lack of any sense of true belonging. He eschews relationship because he cannot account for his family, yet like Will Ladislaw presents a feminine aspect in his lack of role and vocation. His reverie on the river describes a sense of almost negative capability as he indulges in a 'half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at' (160). This empathic loss of self, coupled with his 'yearning after wide knowledge' and a general sense of disengagement with the world - a lack of striving for its own sake - suggests a Schopenhauerian sympathetic man, willing to be seduced by the ethically sublime or some vast aesthetic belief.

The advent of Henleigh Grandcourt as Gwendolen's suitor further supports a Schopenhauerian reading. Grandcourt is pure malice and renders Gwendolen's egoism trivial. For Schopenhauer egoism is the main characteristic, with sympathy and malice as opposing poles (McCobb 1983, 324). Grandcourt's permanent air of *ennui* initially masks his role as Eliot's most sadistic character and in the earlier scenes, as Grandcourt woos Gwendolen, he speaks so little that it is easy to believe in her triumph, particularly as we are always hearing her thoughts or perceiving things from her point of view, while Grandcourt remains an enigma. However, there are hints of gossip from Mr Gascoigne, Grandcourt's cruel teasing of his dog, and ultimately the revelation about Lydia Glasher. As the reader soon knows more than Gwendolen, sympathy for her grows; meanwhile we are told little about Grandcourt's background to avoid any sympathy for him developing.

Later, when yachting off Genoa, Grandcourt's free indirect speech reveals that he has no idea that Gwendolen finds him repulsive (574). His ego is so massive that he conceives himself as wholly attractive, he has no understanding of her feelings, and

seemingly no conscience. Grandcourt measures himself against his own ego, never that of others, and he therefore cannot grant others equality or the possession of a centre of self. He has no sympathy or true compassion “which is the basis of justice and morality” (McCobb 1983, 324, quoting Schopenhauer). Tony McCobb’s work on *Daniel Deronda* and Schopenhauer predates and eclipses mine (1983; 1985), although his work did explain why *Daniel Deronda* exceeds my reading of sympathy and duty. Eliot read Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea* (1818) in 1872-3 while writing *Daniel Deronda* (McCobb 1983, 323).

Grandcourt is part of the mass of degenerate English gentry and aristocracy that Eliot condemns so strongly via *Daniel Deronda*. In addition to annoying the anti-Semitic lobby the novel also attacks materialism and capitalism, from the casino scenes to the realisation that Gwendolen’s only value is as a wife or prostitute (Barrett 1989, 164). Such a stance from Eliot - antagonising a large part of her audience - is yet another departure. Some critics claim that *Daniel Deronda* is incoherent and ill-structured (Doyle 1981, 161), but this is the point, for its form and content mirror Eliot’s own pessimism and anger, the state of the world the novel is describing and the condition of the central characters. Although often overlooked, only Catherine Arrowpoint represents a coherent centre and a heroine who is a descendant of Eliot’s other spirited, autonomous yet sympathetic and morally sound women who are destined for a happy mutual relationship. In trying to escape her class, Catherine is one of its few admirable members. When she opposes her parents and insists on marrying Klesmer, she denounces their values, customs *and* their duty as ‘a name for what they desire any one else to do’ (DD 210).

Barrett also anticipates my argument to some extent, observing the change in *Daniel Deronda* in comparison to Eliot's earlier works. However, she suggests that Eliot has finally accepted that ordinary life is not peopled by saintly sympathetic personalities (1989, 155-6). Thus Gwendolen's world is selfish, unspiritual and uncaring reality, while altruistic figures such as Dinah or Dorothea are no more. The 'beacon' of sympathy has passed to Deronda (158) and because Eliot still desires a haven for such figures of 'superhuman virtue' (160) she creates the idealistic, spiritual quest world of Mordecai and Mirah. However, I have two objections to this otherwise plausible reading. First, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, Eliot's heroines are not altruistic, nor do they have superhuman virtues. While some may be in danger of self-sacrifice, such as Janet or Dorothea, and others experience periods of selflessness such as Romola or Dinah, they all ultimately prefer situations - whether with husbands, female friends, or community - where they are happy, loved, and in mutual, supportive relationships. Also, such groupings are not so rare or full of excess virtue in the earlier novels for them to be ticketed as 'superhuman'. Although there are few good family relationships in *Daniel Deronda*, the Meyrick and Cohen families do demonstrate care and a duty of sympathy, that is not excessive. Secondly, while Barrett considers Deronda to be sympathetic, he is actually altruistic. To tutor Hans to the detriment of his own studies, or to risk Grandcourt's displeasure towards Sir Hugo in order to aid Gwendolen are acts beyond empathy. Mirah even imagines him giving himself to be eaten by a poor starving tigress (*DD* 399)

In meeting first Mirah then Mordecai, Daniel finds a 'family' and some sense of connection. He is drawn by a sense of recognition and belonging that transcends difference, for there is immediate empathy. Daniel was with his mother until aged two before Sir Hugo adopted him - long enough for much rejection, with a mother more

‘absent’ than most. The psychology for such a character explains the sense of alienation and absence that Eliot constructs around Deronda. He repeatedly separates himself from groups, disentangles himself from conversations, is always at tangents, on the edge, and is felt as a presence but rarely speaks - until he meets Mordecai. If Alcharisi was as indomitable with her child then Deronda’s calm will-lessness makes sense; perhaps he perceived there was no point in striving. It is almost trite that he should prefer the meek, loving and subservient Mirah - who is happy to be rebuked by the men in her life - than a Gwendolen who with talent could have been another Alcharisi. That Deronda is summoned to meet his own mother when the sense of the Cohen’s mutual mother-love is enveloping him, is a major evolutionary move.

When Deronda’s mother reveals his history, particularly that she deprived him of his Jewish heritage, the narrator remarks that to Daniel this news ‘made an epoch’ (538). This echoes Eliot’s remark when she first read Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Learning of his own ‘origins’ is not just devastating and revelatory news for Deronda, but it signals a catastrophic leap from the decaying life of the English gentry, to a new life of mutual relation, spiritual quest and total absorption in a sublime movement. The presentation of Alcharisi is mixed. There is sympathy for her illness, yet repulsion at her cold unemotional reaction to her son. Eliot obviously values the woman’s gift and her right as a genius to pursue her vocation, lauding it with the declaration, ‘you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl’ (541). Yet Deronda’s ‘pain of repulsed tenderness’ and her rejection of his love: ‘you owe me no duties’ (543) cause her action to be lamented, even as she declares, ‘I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel’ (539). In this representation of Alcharisi, Eliot seems to be balancing a woman’s desire for vocation against her own repeated fears that women could become unsexed

and lose their precious caring ability. A reading that develops from the conclusion to *Middlemarch*, yet which is also appropriate to a Schopenhauerian interpretation, is that exceptional people may have to stand outside the realm of mutual relationships, in order to be excused the reciprocity demanded by sympathy and duty. Alcharisi is treated ambivalently because she briefly tried to have both. While Eliot acknowledges that Alcharisi was not able to control her life and thus her fertility, to have a child is to accept the duty of sympathy and care – and as Eliot has argued repeatedly in the novels maternal or paternal care is far more important duty than was generally accepted in her period – thus Alcharisi has transgressed. Eliot's fears, at scientists' pronouncements of women's determination by their biology, appears to lead her to a conclusion that women may have to choose between genius and relationship, or motherhood.

It is a deeply ironic arrangement that Deronda should encounter Gwendolen, and aid and counsel her in the aftermath of Grandcourt's drowning, subsequent to the meetings with his mother. Thus coincidence is employed to ensure that Gwendoline and Deronda will not travel the same route again. For Gwendolen is free of Grandcourt just as Deronda discovers he is free to pursue Mordecai's dream. Further, Gwendolen is thrown into frightening perspective by the image of Alcharisi. It is not clear if Gwendolen could have done, or willed, more to save Grandcourt - or what Deronda really thinks - but she has possibly rejected a drowning man, just as Deronda's mother had rejected him, his father, her father and the Father of their faith. Further, if Gwendolen is compared to Mirah, then a man who makes her unhappy has drowned, while Mirah's unhappiness because of her father almost caused her to drown herself.

Since first perceiving the extent of Gwendolen's unhappiness, Deronda has been her therapist - her Comtean priest. Beer considers that Deronda is duplicitous in not

revealing his other life and love to Gwendolen, and that ultimately he leads her on and then abandons her (*DD* 224). There is a certainly a strange ambiguity in his manner. Since learning of his origins Deronda is full of love, happiness and zeal for the homeland quest. This recognition of personal bonds has briefly enriched his relationship with Gwendolen, but his altruism is replaced by sympathy with her pain, which prompts his delay in telling her his news. Deronda is not uncaring, but the impression conveyed is that the higher nature of his sublime political and religious endeavour will replace all other chosen duties and caring. Effectively, Deronda does to Gwendolen what his mother did to him. Eliot seems to have moved from the organicism of her personal and political union, to suggesting that some abstractions are more important than individuals.

Gwendolen undoubtedly grows in understanding and sympathy; meanwhile her will to strive and survive supports her, as she repeats endlessly to her mother 'I shall live' (692). However, the message of her letter to Deronda is unclear. That she may 'live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born' (694) may suggest a moral growth in that she will no longer think only of herself and may evolve to become an Esther or a Romola; it may even indicate the possibility that she will herself eventually accomplish sublime works; however, it may just as easily suggest that she will *be* the caring nurturing one, rather than the *doer*. Further, the letter both suggests an overall sense of relationship, which is obviously still valued, yet there is also the image of Gwendolen in isolation. Thus the fate of both protagonists is multiply open and uncertain. Eliot does still accept the ability of individuals to change themselves and grow towards sympathy and a personal definition of duty, although in Gwendolen's case it is a muted celebration and the success begins to seem limited. However, Eliot also embraces a new option, that in some situations the only alternative

to the beating and bruising of wings is to make dramatic moves and change the environment itself. Thus the move to the 'Promised Land' is utopian, pragmatic yet also pessimistic.

Conclusion

Having established my definitions of Eliot's 'intuitive sympathy and duty' in Chapter Three, I maintain that throughout her fiction Eliot's primary concern is to encourage a growth to sympathy and duty in her readers. Overall, Eliot furthers her aim by illustrating the concepts of sympathy and duty, by demonstrating how they contribute to the 'growing good of the world' (*Mm* 822), by detailing the damage caused when they are absent or false, and by investigating how their action is impeded or improved by society. In particular, Eliot inducts her readers into the realisation that for sympathy and duty to be acquired and practised by all, then knowledge, reason and understanding are required - as are imagination and emotion - and that all of these need to be practised and extended. In short, she gives scientific explanations of profoundly moving experiences. Her portrayal of the moments where her characters finally achieve intuitive sympathy - such as Dorothea's extension of sympathy and support to Rosamond, despite her belief that Will may love Rosamond - demonstrate epiphanic experiences where difference is recognised and transcended so that tolerance, understanding and growth are possible.

Yet Eliot's texts repeatedly demonstrate that the sympathy and duty operating in the communities of her fiction are not the intuitive sympathy and duty that she valorises. Instead they comprise an expectation of selflessness, largely from women, and the imposition of mores, maxims and artificial duties which are largely dictated by state, church and family - and which have often lost any real relevance. The reader is actively involved in evaluating the virtues on offer. Eliot also reveals how women suffer as a result of the demands made on them by the expectation of selflessness, or by the action of other false duties. When her heroines die their sacrifice is never condoned - although

it may require readers already skilled in sympathy and duty to fully perceive this. Further, Eliot is not solely concerned with the lot of women, she also explores how men suffer from a gender construction which always expects them to be judgmental, ambitious and to eschew caring. All these considerations are explored in the early fiction and the reader is encouraged to question and consider all sympathy, duty, care and justice, weighing up the different evidence. It is also necessary to be tolerant of the new and the different, while not jumping to swift conclusions. Above all, a consideration of relationship is stressed, for sympathy and duty operate within relationship.

While there is a tendency for sympathy to be prioritised in the fiction, Eliot also establishes the centrality of duty and the imperative that the two need to work together in harmony. In particular, Eliot opposes the gendering of sympathy and duty, or care and justice. This is best illustrated in *The Mill on the Floss*, where the text emphasises that the ethics of both Tom and Maggie are necessary and need to be valued and encouraged by all, for all. Further, from the beginning of her work she always portrays women characters who are strong, independent and capable of observing intuitive duty and sound justice provided they are not coerced by convention, Dinah Morris being one example. Equally, there are always caring men who have maternal sympathy, such as Mr Cleves and Mr Tryan. Whatever Eliot's reservations about the precise difference between the sexes, sympathy and duty are demonstrated as too important for either to reside wholly in one sex.

As Eliot's *oeuvre* develops, her texts also consider how these virtues and values can best flourish. Her early works acknowledge the importance of surroundings and community, and characters may need to develop sympathy and tolerance in order to

adapt and cope with a changing environment. Those later works which are influenced by Spencerian and Darwinian evolution begin to explore the psychology of the characters closely, considering the internal environments in order to examine what facilitates a growth to sympathy and duty. In *Silas Marner*, both Silas and Godfrey are seen as products of their early environment, with Silas the one able to recognise and follow the duty of sympathy because he had received the type of care he will give to Eppie. While Eliot does not anticipate the type of 'degendering' advocated by Chodorow, she does experiment with ideas of nature versus nurture, and repeatedly demonstrates that men can become as caring and maternal as women, while some women, such as Priscilla Lammeter or Hetty Sorrel, are not maternal.

Felix Holt develops the issue of maternal men further, but is also concerned with changing the wider environment to develop communities where sympathy and duty may flourish. Here both 'Reform' and Felix's ideas of personal reform suggest the way forward. Not only will Felix and Esther change themselves and each other to grow into more caring, sympathetic, relational yet autonomous and independent people, but they will work to do good small work in their community, in order to bring about a meliorist change that corresponds to social evolution. Thus all may grow to intuitive sympathy and duty. This theme is pursued ever further in *Middlemarch*. Lydgate may fail to improve the health of the environment and the people living in it, but Fred and Mary, Will and Dorothea, via political reform, education, land reform and the love and care of children, all promote changes that will facilitate increased sympathy and duty.

Eliot therefore concentrates on changing the internal environment of individuals, so that they may become more caring and just, but this is ultimately to lead to changes in the wider environment, so that conditions for all may improve. She may seem to be

very Comtean, borrowing his ideas of a slowly improving environment, where sympathy and sociality begin in the family but move out to society, but while Comte may have provided the utopian blueprint, the more generous ideas for sympathy and sociality come via Spinoza, Feuerbach and Spencer. Further, much of the philosophical, psychological and physiological detail stems from the many and varied influences who all contribute towards Eliot's doctrine. Finally, unlike Comte's supposed utopia, there is fun, freedom and happiness in most of Eliot's futures. This meliorist growth to intuitive sympathy and duty in family and community may not foster the growth of the exceptional individual, but then as Barrett has noted (1989, 175), the triumph of the exceptional woman [or man], does not make the lot of the ordinary [man and] woman easier, and Eliot was primarily concerned with ordinary people.

However, by *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot appears to be doubting her ideas of a growing sympathy and duty. In response to the growing nihilism of the period, the imperialism, racism, capitalism and general degeneracy of the ruling classes and institutions, Eliot deviates from her main strategy of slow gradual improvement. Instead she opts for a catastrophic break, where Deronda and Mirah will transplant themselves. Eliot has not lost faith in the value of sympathy and duty, but the prevailing mood of *Daniel Deronda* exhibits a fear of growing egoism and suggests that societal change is so fast that the moral growth of humans cannot keep pace. Spencer had always warned that the moral growth that he described could only proceed when the environmental conditions for all were improving towards greater stability and security, but the society Eliot depicts in *Daniel Deronda* is fragmenting and growing more intolerant.

Throughout her fiction, Eliot's aims for her characters and readers are happiness and freedom. However, by the end of her career, pessimism suggests that her meliorist ideals may be insufficient to counter the growth of self-interest. In an untypical utopian yet pragmatic gesture, Eliot has her male protagonist retreat to the 'Promised Land', while both she and he seemingly abandon her reformed, egoist, anti-heroine to survive alone, facing an uncertain future. Eliot made it fairly clear after *Daniel Deronda* that it was unlikely she would write a major work again. She suggests in a letter to John Cross that she would be beckoning 'death by writing any more novels' (*GEL* VI, 415). Perhaps the symbolic gesture of her final novel is to suggest that happiness and freedom were found, via intuitive sympathy and duty while in relation, in her 'Promised Land', with Lewes, while the heroine all alone was a role she had attempted and did not enjoy. Overall, despite the pessimism and recourse to the utopian in *Daniel Deronda*, all Eliot's texts maintain an emphasis on the importance of sympathy and duty, but they all also stress the value of mutual relationship.

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