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GEORGE ELIOT AND NINTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A CASE STUDY IN HISTORICISM

By

Michael Ian Carignan

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

2001

Professor Peter Vinten-Johansen

ABSTRACT

GEORGE ELIOT AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A CASE STUDY IN HISTORICISM

By

Michael Ian Carignan

This dissertation responds to the following question: Why did George Eliot, in the midst of a promising career as an editor, translator, and reviewer of philosophy, science, and history in the 1840s and 1850s, turn to fiction? The evidence suggests that Eliot undertook novel writing because she saw its potential to be an alternative form of historical representation and a tool of historical inquiry. Eliot's correspondence, manuscript diaries, journals, notebooks, and novels indicate that she used fiction to illuminate the social and cultural complexities of the major historical turning point she believed had occurred in Europe in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Eliot challenged the academic distinctions between literature and history—at the very moment of their disciplinary delineation at the English universities in the 1870s—with her view of history that was increasingly complicated by the subjective dimensions of historical interpretation and the fictive elements of realist historical narrative.

Two forms of nineteenth-century historicism contextualize Eliot's evolving treatment of history in her fiction. One form derived from the Herderian romantic critique of Enlightenment understandings of history by stressing the importance of development and celebrating the historically unique. Eliot's version of Young Hegelian historical philosophy, which followed Hegelian notions of dialectical development, situates her in

this tradition. Eliot's fictional depictions of the complex ways people in the English provinces responded to the emerging modern world in the early 1830s derives from this Young Hegelian historicist perspective. The other form, "crisis historicism," refers to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discussions of the implied temporality of all cultural forms, including cherished western values, and the apparent impossibility of understanding the process of history from outside that process, i.e., objectively. Eliot's later fiction used narrative strategies that extended the limits of realism while probing problems similar to those found in the historical philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, commonly associated with the crisis of historicism.

This dissertation widens the current scholarship on nineteenth-century historical thought, and especially on historicism, which tends to focus on German historians and historical philosophers. While contributing a much needed English example, this study also offers a view of a novelist using fiction to develop historicist perspectives sensitive to dimensions of cultural struggle at moments of historical transformation, and to represent the past in ways that the new academic historians could not. Eliot's understanding of the blurred relationship between fiction and history adds to current theoretical debates on the literariness of historical knowledge and writing because it suggests that historical knowledge can be expanded through alternative literary forms. Furthermore, Eliot's challenge to objective history in the 1870s suggests that theoretical concerns with the subjectivity-objectivity tension, which the profession now addresses, are as old as the profession itself.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents and to Paula,
all of whom showed me the extraordinary patience and
love I needed to complete this project

Acknowledgements

Many people belong on the by-line of this dissertation, for they have contributed to my intellectual development in ways that significantly shaped this project. Convention insists, however, that one acknowledge these kinds of contributions in the following way.

I first must thank Peter Vinten-Johansen whose trust, patience, and attention to my growth as a scholar and as a person is more than anyone can safely expect from a mentor. I cannot adequately thank him for everything, so I limit myself to mentioning that I am grateful for his teaching me how to write. I would also like to thank Betty Vinten-Johansen for tolerating my sometimes intrusive need of Peter's attention, for her general warmth, and for a couple of very well-timed hugs.

I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee, each of whom read my work more carefully than I dared to expect. In addition to their willingness to discuss my work and their many helpful suggestions, I would like to thank Professor David LoRomer for his years of encouragement, without which I would not have chosen history as a profession, Professor Richard Peterson for teaching me how to read Hegel (no small feat), Professor Judith Stoddart for teaching me how to read Eliot (an important contribution, to say the least), and Professor Christopher Celenza especially for taking the time to help me develop a more sophisticated understanding of German traditions in historical and philological scholarship in the nineteenth century.

I finally must thank Paula and my parents, George and Yolaine, for more than I can ever say. It is to these three I dedicate this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables viii

List of Abbreviations ix

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. A Young Hegelian Historicist 39

Chapter 2. *The Mill on the Floss*: A Natural History of English Life, or, Eliot's Riehlism 69

Chapter 3. Analogy, Veracity, and Eliot's Middle Novels 88

Chapter 4. *Middlemarch*: A Young Hegelian Historical Experiment 128

Chapter 5. *Daniel Deronda* and Appropriating the Past 155

Conclusion: Looking Backward 183

Notes 189

Bibliography 209

List of Tables

Table 1 2

Table 2 28

Table 3 171

Abbreviations Used for In-Text References

AB	*Adam Bede*
DD	*Daniel Deronda*
Essays	*Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney
FH	*Felix Holt*
Haight	*George Eliot: A Biography*, by Gordon S. Haight
MF	*The Mill on the Floss*
Mm	*Middlemarch*
R	*Romola*
Scenes	*Scenes of a Clerical Life*

Introduction: George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness

> Surely the difference between the historian and the novelist is narrower than what we may have been accustomed to think: but this has happened because of the growth of historical consciousness in the West, because historical thinking affected the novelists more profoundly than the novel affected historianship. (John Lukacs, 1968)[1]

> I become more and more timid—with less daring to adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience, and perhaps that is a sign that if I help others to see at all it must be through the medium of art. (George Eliot to Dr. Joseph Frank Payne, Jan. 25, 1876)[2]

* * *

The year was 1856 when Marian Evans, at the age of 36, made the significant decision to write historical fiction. On September 23, in a typically austere journal entry, she wrote: "Began to write 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,' which I hope to make one of a series called 'Scenes of a Clerical Life.'"[3] After years of writing and editing articles and reviews on a wide range of philosophical, literary, and scientific topics, during which time she also translated monumental works by Strauss, Feuerbach, and Spinoza, Evans tried her hand at a completely different way of writing. Under the pen-name George Eliot, "Amos Barton" appeared in 1857, and within the year two more short stories completed the series published together as *Scenes of a Clerical Life*. These were sufficiently popular as to invite solicitations from her publisher. By the end of 1860

"George Eliot" had published two more works of historical fiction, the novels *Adam Bede* and *Mill on the Floss*, which distinguished her as a major author (already more popular than Dickens), enabled her and George Henry Lewes, her pseudo-husband, financial independence from piece-work journalism, and ensured the opportunity to devote her professional life to the writing of novels. But why did George Eliot turn to historical fiction?[4]

Table 1

Eliot's Fiction and Their First Serial Publication

Publication	Publisher	Year
Scenes of a Clerical Life "Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton" "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" "Janet's Repentance"	*Blackwood's Magazine*	1857
Adam Bede	*Blackwood's*	1859
The Mill on the Floss	*Blackwood's*	1860
Silas Marner	*Blackwood's*	1861
Romola	*Cornhill Magazine*	1862-63
Felix Holt	*Blackwood's*	1866
Middlemarch	*Blackwood's*	1871-72
Daniel Deronda	*Blackwood's*	1876

Nineteenth-century Europeans were perhaps the most historically minded in Western civilization. Auguste Comte observed at mid-century that "the characteristic of the present century will be the overwhelming importance it assigns to history, by the light of which philosophy, politics, and even poetry will be pursued." For someone who interpreted human history as a series of stages with inherent, identifying characteristics, and who assumed that his own time was a kind of culmination of the development of human consciousness, history was indeed a significant rubric in his epistemology. But Comte was on a band-wagon of sorts in that most philosophers, social theorists, men and women of letters, and novelists in the nineteenth century wrote works that were animated by historical dimensions. Most of the best-known philosophers of the nineteenth century—Hegel, Comte, Saint-Simone, Marx, Nietzsche, for example—grounded their systems in specific perspectives on historical transformation. This was true of creative literature, too. Sir Walter Scott was the most widely read author of the nineteenth century, and all over Europe the most widely read books were also historical fiction. Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, Hugo's *Les Miserables*, Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*, were each national treasures. Eliot's turn to historical fiction, in light of this literary context, seems not surprising, for historical novels were extraordinarily popular. If she was to try fiction at all, historical fiction was a reasonable, if not obvious, choice.

However, if we view Eliot's novels against the backdrop of the works of nineteenth-century historians, philosophers, and social theorists—i.e., the kinds of works she had been reviewing and editing for the *Westminster Review* since 1851—then the choice of fiction is more perplexing. How was writing fiction going to contribute to historiography? What theoretical basis was there behind the view that an art-form could develop our understanding of the past? How can Eliot say, as her last novel was appearing in serial publication, that "if I help others to see at all it must be through the medium of art"?

Eliot's expansive intellectual interests have given Eliot scholars a wide variety of possibilities by which to analyze her fiction. Major undertakings that situate Eliot in an intellectual milieu have tended to focus on her philosophical association with science in general and positivism in particular. Sally Shuttleworth's *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science* traces Eliot's use of organic models—in which individuals are seen in harmony with their environment—employed in the natural sciences to study social situations. It argues that in the course of her career, Eliot explored the effectiveness of the organic model through a method of experimental novel-writing, and that her later fiction began to examine implications of the failure of organic models to account for the psychological dynamics of her characters. Peter Alan Dale's *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture* plots Eliot's work within a wider story of Victorian explorations in positivism that culminated in an aestheticized worldview. Dale argues that Eliot's later fiction articulates a potential incompatibility between mental constructs that attempt to understand the world and the structure of the world itself. He associates Eliot's examination of the moral implications of this perspective with pragmatism. Shuttleworth and Dale both suggest that Eliot held philosophical views that made imagination not merely compatible with scientific advancement, but especially useful when studying social dynamics, and that her novels represent experiments in that endeavor.

While most Eliot scholars seem to recognize that her interest in history was a significant feature of her novels, few have isolated Eliot's historical thinking for analysis. A recent exception is Neil McCaw, whose *George Eliot and Victorian Historiography* (2000) analyzes her fiction in terms of a desire to invent a national, English past, and as it reflects tensions between Whiggish and Carlylean interpretations of history. Suzanne Graver's *George Eliot and Community* indirectly treats Eliot's historical view as it examines the social ramifications within the context of *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* tensions. Graver's work focuses on Eliot's concern with the nineteenth-century social transformation associated with modernization, and how Eliot looked for ways to maintain *Gemeinschaft* sensibilities in a world that was becoming increasingly dominated by *Gesellschaft* values. By placing two novels at the turn of the nineteenth century, and three more around 1830, Eliot tried to understand how preindustrial social networks provided a basis of community feeling and a sense of historical interdependence, and how those communities experienced the disintegrating influence of modernity. More directly concerned with historical representation, Sophia Andres's analysis of *Middlemarch* suggests that the novel "challenges" monological Victorian historiography by presenting dissonant and multivalent perspectives.[5] These approaches offer provocative ways to begin considering Eliot's historical thought, but none seem to figure in the Young Hegelian historicism that inspired Eliot as a young woman and was so central to the way she conceived the past in (and with) her fiction. The significance of Hegelian and Young Hegelian historical philosophy in Eliot's work is generally underdeveloped in the scholarship.[6]

This dissertation places Eliot's historical philosophy, which I identify with certain trends of historicism, at the center of her worldview because it provides a vantage point from which her novels fall into a pattern of development that extends from her earlier career as a progenitor of Young Hegelian historical philosophy through her last published work. Rather than compare her to other novelists, which many literary critics have done and continue to do, this study examines Eliot's novels in the context of the transformations in historical philosophy and the emerging, scientifically inclined profession of history in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Eliot's career as a writer of historical fiction—spanning the 1850s, '60s, and '70s—coincided with major shifts in historical thinking. Three notable shifts form a dynamic set of tensions within which Eliot's historical perspective developed and her novels appeared. First was the rise of historicism as a general philosophical orientation to the relationship between the past and the present. Second was the scientific transformation of historical writing within the emerging discipline of history at the English universities after mid century. Third was the development in historical philosophy of a critique of objective history from the proto-modernist, perspectivism that we associate with Friedrich Nietzsche, and the hermeneutical critique of historical reason associated with Wilhelm Dilthey, both of which challenged scientific claims to truth and objective access to reality, such as those made by the new professional historians.

Eliot designed her novels to be tools of historical inquiry in a Young Hegelian-historicist perspective. Though her conception of the relationship between fiction and history evolved through her novel writing career, Eliot always strove, through the use of fiction, not merely to add to the store of knowledge about the past, but to understand how the present evolved out of that past, and to experiment with the literary basis of that understanding. In the way she practiced it, Eliot's historical fiction offered representations of the past that enabled her to convey a historicist perspective (especially with respect to the historicity of cultural forms), in ways the emerging analytical-empirical historiography of the young historical profession could not. In her final examples, a proto-modernist rejection of the Rankean legacy of objectivist history became explicit. As an alternative, Eliot proposed a kind of neo-romantic perspectivism that centralized the roles of consciousness and imagination in appropriating history as they construct a past, which has suggestive parallels to the historical philosophy of Dilthey.

Nineteenth-Century Historiography

For much of Western history, history itself has been considered a branch or special form of literature, an art-form. The first written histories from ancient Greece, for example, though they were intended to be more than mere entertainment, were written to be performed. Even into early modern times, historians were distinguished from scholars and antiquarians by the fact that they were writers.[7] From the times of the ancients, questions of historical method were often questions of narrative style and presentation. It was not until the Enlightenment that the question of objectivity—which concerned the nature of the relationship between viewer and object viewed—was systematically considered by philosophers such as Hume and Kant. Two responses to this "problem" arose, beginning in the latter part of the eighteenth century and continuing through the first half of the nineteenth century. One came from the romantic and German idealist perspectives, which distinguished history from the natural sciences. The other, developing in the twilight of the romantic period, was comprised of positivist and utilitarian theories, which tried to make history another of the natural sciences. While there are important exceptions and qualifications to be made, for the most part the historical profession emerged after 1870, in the English-speaking world, as an empirical enterprise in which practitioners assumed that the past was a reality independent of the consciousness of the historian who could represent it objectively.[8] Though it has been increasingly problematized in the last quarter-century, the objectivist perspective, with respect to both the relationship between the historian and the object of analysis and to the separation of history from literature, has dominated the profession ever since.

Many historians in the first half of the nineteenth century—sometimes lumped within the category of romanticism—maintained the view that history was a branch of literature. Romantic historiography was motivated by a search for continuities with the past and origins of present conditions, and was usually guided by presentist concerns. According to Lionel Gossman, romantic historians thought of history as the "means of restoring contact with origins and of reconstituting what was experienced as a fractured totality."[9] Implied in this conception is that no individual can experience a comprehensive consciousness of self in the historical flow. Through reflection and writing, that "fractured totality" can be reconstituted into a coherent narrative. In the romantic perspective the challenge for the "historian-genius," as it was for the poet-genius, was to connect specific, individual experiences to a totalizing conceptualization of the human historical experience. Michelet, for example, connected French political struggles in the middle of the July Revolution to his history of ancient Rome, as if they were part of a single continuity.[10]

Herder and the Grimm brothers had earlier given the sense that their present moment belonged to a larger narrative of German and human history. As Romantics, most of these writers were not bothered by the idea that individual consciousness shaped the conceptualization of that narrative.

Hegel's philosophy helped organize the idea that the past was organically connected to the present and that its coherence depended on the consciousness of the historian. Hegel was no Romantic, however; the significance of Idealism in his philosophy parallels much of the romantic movement in many of its manifestations. For Hegel the central story of human history was the expansion of consciousness that absorbed previous modes of understanding and stages of development into its own new perspective: this was the Absolute Mind, or Spirit, striving to resolve itself in its own self-awareness. He famously insisted that "[t]he function of our own and of every age [is] to grasp the knowledge that already exists, to make it our own . . . to make of it something different from what it was before."[11] This parallels the romantic orientation to the relationship between the perceiver and what is perceived, which in this case is the historian and the past. In this sense, history is not the actual experience of what happened, but the construct developed by a later age for its own needs. It was understood by Hegel and romantic historians alike that studying the past involved a kind of "appropriation," reflecting the desire for a coherent, totalizing narrative of the past that could not otherwise be experienced as a totality. In this conception, the perspective of the inquirer was not considered a problematic, but as the necessary, animating force behind the representation of coherence.

The view that history is a branch of literature dominated romantic historiography in the 1820s and 1830s, and many of the well-known historians of this period strove to write grand narratives that were appealing as literature. In England, for example, T. B. Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle both wrote histories that were intended to be read as good literature. In Macaulay's mind, the historian's talent "bears a considerable affinity to the talent of a great dramatist."[12] At a time of increasingly rapid industrialization, the English reading public was keenly aware of change and had an intensified need for histories that presented continuities with the remote past.[13] Questions of objectivity and strict adherence to documents were the questions of a later generation of professional historians, as the discipline embraced scientific tendencies. The early Victorian historians, according to T. W. Heyck, "concerned themselves more with the truthfulness of a historical account as a whole, with judging the essence of an interpretation, rather than with testing the correspondence of propositions to individual facts. . . . The Victorian idea of testing historical evidence (or 'authorities') for truth was not so much correspondence with facts as compatibility with preconceived principles or interpretations."[14] This romantic conception of historical truth prizes the quality of the narrative construction more than the reliance on documentation. Histories written in the first half of the nineteenth century had to have a poetic quality that not only celebrated the historically specific, but connected those specificities to a sense of totality. Their totalizing narrative constructs had to resonate with the reading public more than the minute details had to withstand the close scrutiny that late nineteenth-century historians would want to apply.

Leopold von Ranke, the German historian credited for establishing the principles of scientific analysis of the past adopted by the English and American historical professions, was also linked to the generation of historians and historical philosophers who believed history was a branch of literature. Ranke did think history was a specialized kind of literature that had to make a commitment to report on the past "as it actually happened." But this famous dictum is often uncritically taken to mean that Ranke was a historical empiricist, or proto-positivist, largely because the scientific historians of the latter part of the century adopted him as a father to the new profession. He would have been surprised at what he has come to symbolize for the historical professions in England and the United States.[15] In the tradition of German Idealism, Ranke's conception of history held that historical development was the same thing as the perpetual unfolding of God's work. History should be the study of the past so as to illuminate this unfolding and thus be closer to God.[16] For Ranke, *wie es eigentlich gewessen* meant that the past needed to be properly contextualized; that things needed to be related to some sense of a wider worldview or larger narrative. Ranke believed the historian's most important task was to write "great, comprehensive narrative."[17] So in terms of the relationship between history and literature, it might be best to view Ranke as a transitional figure who developed methods of historical inquiry, especially the devotion to original sources, which fit in well with the scientific worldview of historians in the second half of the nineteenth century. But he also held common views with those who saw own history as a specialized branch of literature.

The impact of science on the practice of history was first and most keenly felt in Britain after mid-century. Through the latter half of the nineteenth century, the writing of history had become dominated by professional historians who actively sought to distinguish the *scientific* study of the past from literature. J. B. Bury, for example, in his 1902 inaugural address as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, declared that though history "may supply material for literary art or philosophical speculation, she is herself simply a science, no less and no more."[18] According to Heyck, it was the "impact of science" that led to the professionalization of history at the English universities. The famous successes and prestige that science had gained in the natural sciences suggested to many that all fields of inquiry should adopt the methods and outlook of scientific investigation. After 1850, some were beginning to apply this principle to history. According to Gossman, a similar transformation began in France after 1848, which accompanied the disillusionment caused by the revolution of that year, and exemplified by Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime*.[19] While the best known works of history from the first half of the nineteenth century had been written by people with a talent for storytelling and for drama, professional standards adopted later dispensed with, or stopped valuing, these literary qualities.

The transformation in historical writing in the mid- to late-Victorian period is characterized by a desire to remove the presentist bias and didactic functions of history, and to study the past for its own sake. Taking their inspiration from the natural sciences, Victorian historians of the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as Bury, H. T. Buckle, J. R. Seeley, William Stubbs, E. A. Freeman, and John Richard Green, assumed that history could be a science as well. In order to make it one, these historians sought to distance history's association with literature. In striving to be objective, they wanted history to not serve any specific present purpose, because that would indicate the taint of bias. The past was interesting in itself, a playground for antiquarians, and under their leadership, historians now had a duty as scientists to report on their findings.[20] History therefore deserved its own departments at the universities—which was achieved at both

Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s—and a corps of professional practitioners who were trained in scientific method and would continue the work of mining the past for its data.

Eliot took a different direction with her method of historical inquiry. While working on her last novel in the mid 1870s, Eliot made an entry into one of her personal notebooks that reads like desiderata for writing historical fiction. She called the passage "Historic Imagination" in the margin of the notebook.

> The exercise of a veracious imagination in historical picturing seems to be capable of a development that might help the judgment greatly with regard to present and future events. By veracious imagination, I mean the working out in detail of the various steps by which a political or social change was reached, using all extant evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation. . . . Utopian pictures help the reception of ideas as to constructive results, but hardly so much as a vivid presentation of how results have been actually brought about, especially in religious and social change. And there is the pathos, the heroism often accompanying the decay and final struggle of old systems, which has not had its share of tragic commemoration. What really took place in and around Constantine before, upon, and immediately after his conversion? Could a momentary lash be thrown on Eusebius in his sayings and doings as an ordinary man in bishop's garments? Or on Julian and Libanius? There has been abundant writing on such great turning-points, but not such as serves to instruct the imagination in true comparison. I want something different from the abstract treatment which belongs to grave history from a doctrinal point of view, and something different from the schemed picturesqueness of ordinary historical fiction. I want brief, severely conscientious reproductions, in their concrete incidents, of pregnant movements in the past.[21]

There are three complementary notions at work in this very rich passage that enabled Eliot to represent her historical worldview in a fictional format. As an historian Eliot was first of all concerned with particular dimensions of "great turning-points," such as the given examples of early ecclesiastical history (an interest of hers that dates back to her youth), which are left out of the typical writing of history. These are the dimensions that make key moments pregnant. Much of her historical fiction can be viewed as devoted to enhancing the reader's sense of this pregnancy, or what we lately refer to as "thickness."

Eliot indicates that "Utopian pictures" have their value, but not, as was true for Marx and Saint Simon, in helping us understand how things have come to be the way they are. Eliot wanted to help people see how religious and social change develops in moments when the historical people caught up in the given transformation do not yet know what form the changes will take, nor is it clear which concepts will win the day. Her career was shaped by the belief that historical fiction, if done veraciously, could do this better than anything else.

Another notion from the "Historic Imagination" passage concerns Eliot's understanding of the role of analogy in the creation of historical knowledge. It is this aspect of Eliot's historical philosophy that allowed her to see her fiction as a legitimate alternative to the "grave" and "doctrinal" history of the emergent profession. The passage asserts the problem familiar to all historians that extant evidence can only go so far in generating pictures of past moments of interest. It cannot, for example, tell us "what really took place" in Constantine's mind as he converted to Christianity. Only "careful analogical creation" can fill out the "deficiencies" in the record. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 3, Eliot's use of "analogy" is contextualized by nineteenth-century discourses on epistemology. J. S. Mill, for example, viewed analogical reasoning—"the inferring one resemblance from other resemblances without any antecedent evidence of a connection between them"—as valid but imperfect substitute for induction, the only "positive" or "scientific" form of truth.[22] Historical fiction meant to be taken seriously depends on the efficacy of analogical creation. According to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, an historical novelist whom Eliot had read as a girl and to whose work she referred while working on her own novels, "analogical hypothesis" is required to provide the psychological motives and "modes of thought" behind the acts of important historical figures, which are usually available in the extant evidence.[23] Few would have been shocked by his description of the usefulness of historical fiction because he was not suggesting that what he wrote was history, only that it could effectively add to it. For Eliot, however, the distinction became, in the course of her career, more obscure. Furthermore, her later fiction began to theorize, in effect, this obscurity. I argue that the philosophical context of this orientation can be highlighted by considering a number of intellectual modes of inquiry that gather under the problematic rubric of historicism.

Historicisms in the Nineteenth Century

The underlying orientation in the "Historic Imagination" passage isolated in this dissertation is the historicist conceptualization of the rise and fall of systems of thought. Historicism is a term used variously throughout the twentieth century to describe a number of threads in historical philosophy from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The most general theme is described in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as a post-Hegelian "insistence on the historicity of all knowledge and cognition."[24] In other words, there is no permanence to any particular cultural form: "historicity" implies a birth and a death, or a waxing and waning. This dimension of the historicist worldview grew out of early German romanticism, chiefly from Johann Gottfried Herder, and was later systematized by Hegel. The wide variety of nineteenth-century historians and historical philosophers who embraced this Herderian orientation makes it impossible to identify any single historicist "movement." This point is especially apparent when we consider that "historicism" has been used to describe an Hegelian view of historicity as well as Ranke's and the German Historical School's rejection of Hegelian metaphysics, in favor of objective, empirical approaches to the study of the past.[25] But the more general, Herderian view of historical specificity does provide one of the meanings of historicism, which I call "romantic historicism," used to describe Eliot in this dissertation.

The historicity dimension of romantic-historicism derives from the wholly romantic themes of historical specificity and development. Franklin Baumer calls these "twin ideas," for they are complementary parts of the romantic critique of the Enlightenment.[26] Early Romantics, such as Herder, Goethe, and Burke, wanted to preserve the dignity of bygone ages, especially the medieval world. Herder's work in particular comprised a great critique of Enlightenment assumptions about human nature, culture, and history. The mechanistic framework of Enlightenment versions of history, Herder believed, tended to suppress the historically unique and ignore the fundamentally developmental character of history.[27] He, along with Goethe and other *Sturm und Drang* figures, tapped into the power of poetry and fiction to reestablish contact with the special qualities—the *individuality*—of specific historical cultures and to articulate continuities between those cultures and their current time. Hegel's historical dialectic likewise insisted on the organic unity of past cultures, to which he assigned particular characteristics that formed the basis of his periodization, as he tried to show how the present historic moment *developed* out of previous stages of development. According to Friedrich Meinecke, who wrote the classic account of the rise of "*historismus*,"[28] no one exemplified the historicist spirit better than Goethe, who wanted to let past ages enjoy (so to speak) their own dignity, and to celebrate their individuality, rather than subsuming them into a presentist teleology like Hegel's.[29] Meinecke also credits Ranke for resisting teleologies that would flatten the historical field:

> Ranke . . . could not subscribe to any belief in a steady upward trend of human progress (apart from in material matters) if one was to allow the moral and spiritual values produced by each epoch to have their own proper and distinctive weight. Otherwise one would have to mediatise each of the earlier epochs and reduce its importance to that of a mere stepping-stone to higher things.[30]

The general romantic tendency to celebrate the historically unique perhaps had the most profound impact on the nineteenth century of any single intellectual movement or cultural trend. Meinecke called it "one of the deepest and most incisive revolutions in the history of Western thought in general, whereby the Western genius worked out its own individuality in distinction from that of the ancient world without, however, losing the thread of continuity that bound them together."[31] Cultural manifestations from architectural styles and literary fashions to the study of philosophy, law, languages, and religion exhibited the influence of this historicist quality; even the rise of nationalism had at its core the belief in the historical uniqueness of the nation.[32]

As romantic-historicism began to affect historical scholarship in the nineteenth century, however, it became more than the mere appreciation of historical individuality. Donald Kelley argues that romantic historicism

> did not so much establish a philosophical program as cultivate a variety of cultural insights—including the discovery, or rediscovery, that poetry does not merely lie, that mythology may be (as Herder said) the "oldest history," that imagination is a portal to a kind of historical truth not accessible to pure reason, and that history promises a sort of wisdom as well as knowledge not accessible to abstract thought.[33]

Historicism, in this sense, was a kind of attitude descriptive of a wide variety of approaches to old and new fields of inquiry. Kelley's point is that "mythistory" was an essentially historicist approach practiced by a number of nineteenth-century scholars who viewed law, language, and the stories of ancient mythology as the symbolic representations of past ages. This orientation emphasized the importance of a poetic imagination for historical interpretation. "Through the imaginative reconstruction of cultural remains–and especially of law, language, and symbols—the historian could plumb the depth of the 'well of the past.'"[34] The romantic drive to resuscitate the vitality of lost ages was served by confidence in the ability of imagination to make the kinds of connections that the mechanistic worldview was unable to do. But, as Kelley need hardly mention, the historical profession followed Ranke's emphasis on empirical, quantifiable remains, and the mythistory approach was for the most part abandoned.

The group that perhaps most famously sought to find truths about history in religious mythology was, again, the Young Hegelians. David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach took the bold steps of applying the mythistorical approach of their professors, who had opened up new fields in the study of ancient Greek and oriental mythologies, to Christianity.[35] For example, the miracles of the gospels were, for Strauss, best understood as myths, or the "poetry" of the first Christian community that contains a view of that community's spirit.[36] The Hegelian historical framework, with its emphasis on the unfolding essence of Spirit in history, was perfectly suited for mythistorical interpretation. But the inspiration behind the work of the Young Hegelians was not the antiquarian interests of the Romantics so much as it was the desire to understand the "essence" of humanity, which would suggest the possible directions that future social progress and consciousness expansion might take. One can see Hegel's teleology leaking through. Nevertheless, the Young Hegelian orientation to Christianity held it to be the "jewel" of the medieval stage of human consciousness; if we are to understand how the human Spirit grew and grows, they believed, the very best thing we can do is examine how it expressed itself at the Christian stage.

The "Historic Imagination" passage indicates that even to the end of her career, Eliot held a Young Hegelian, historicist worldview.[37] Before her career as a novelist, Eliot had introduced the English-speaking world to Young Hegelian thought by translating Strauss's and Feuerbach's seminal works, respectively *The Life of Jesus* in 1846 and *Essence of Christianity* in 1854, and to a large degree adopted their historicized view of Christianity. Towards the end of her career as a novelist we can see that this is a central animating feature of her goals as an artist. According to the "Historic Imagination" passage, Eliot wanted to dramatize, to revivify, the transitional historical periods, or more precisely, people in moments just before major transformations. Her point was not to condescend to a more simple-minded past: Eliot wanted to "enlarge our sympathies" by showing readers the "heroism often accompanying the decay and final struggle of old systems, which has not had their share of tragic commemoration." In finding integrity in a decaying system, Eliot called upon her readers to tap into a romantic-historicist impulse to appreciate the historically specific for its own sake and as an episode in the developing consciousness of humanity. Casaubon and his antiquated "Key to All Mythologies," in

Middlemarch, is a prime example of Eliot's "commemoration" of those heroes who would end up on the losing side, and her novels are full of others. The Young Hegelian framework, which featured Hegel's dialectic of history, contributed to Eliot's peculiar sensitivity to the *developmentality* of human history, by insisting that the triumph of any system of thought includes the absorption of the previously dominant mode. In order to better understand the human "essence" at work in the modern world, Eliot followed the Young Hegelian path of examining the preceding developmental stage to see how that essence manifested itself there.

The origins of Eliot's general Hegelian dialectical perspective are subject to speculation, because it is not clear that she ever read Hegel. The very few scholars interested in the connection, Sara Putzell-Korab and Lisa Ann Montanarelli in particular, are satisfied in thinking Eliot would have known about Hegel through her correspondence with John Sibree, the first English translator of Hegel (though no letter survives that addresses Hegelian philosophy), through Lewes's sketch in his *Biographical History of Philosophy*,[38] or through her general experiences as a mid-Victorian intellectual who simply would have had to know about something as significant in German thought as Hegelian philosophy.[39] These speculations are apt enough to make a case for Eliot's tapping into a small but general dissemination of Hegelian thought in England around mid-century. However, there is more to say about the way Eliot came to an Hegelian way of thinking, indirectly and yet so thoroughly, through Feuerbach.

Though Feuerbach was critical of his master's metaphysical predilections, the *Essence of Christianity* closely followed Hegel in the way it centralized the dialectical development of consciousness in the story of both individual growth and human history.

> [R]eligion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge. Hence, religion everywhere precedes philosophy, as in the history of the race, so also in that of the individual. Man first of all sees his nature as if *out of* himself, before he finds it in himself. His own nature is in the first instance contemplated by him as that of another being. Religion is the childlike condition of humanity; but the child sees his nature—man—out of himself; in childhood man is an object to himself, under the form of another man. Hence the historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognised as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something *human*.[40]

Feuerbach's analysis of Christianity follows the dialectical pattern of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in which the developing consciousness advances through successive stages by objectification and reabsorption of the object into self. In this manner, the subjective and the objective are seen as identical in the context of the historical process—an insight at the root of the Hegelian version of historicism. For Hegel, Christianity and his philosophy held the same content, in the sense that both recognized the union of man in the divine. In the former case, the union is represented in the symbol of Christ.[41] Feuerbach, however, turned this orientation upside-down, arguing that the opposite had happened—that the divine has now been reabsorbed into man. The Young Hegelians all seemed to agree that their master's philosophy had favored too much the metaphysical or theological side, and proposed instead what they called "anthropology" in order, as Marx said, to stand Hegel right-side-up. Feuerbach was thus more willing to describe Christianity as representing an outmoded (historicized), immature (metaphysical) perspective. Despite the increasing remoteness from her 1854 translation of the *Essence of Christianity,* as her career advanced Eliot seems to have become increasingly Feuerbachian in her portrayal of the development of individual consciousness and in its synecdochic relation to human history within an Hegelian-historicist framework.

Another important form of historicism contextualizes Eliot's later fiction particularly well. "Crisis historicism" refers to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophical inquiries into the nature of the relationship between human consciousness and the past.[42] The "crisis" arose as theorists such as Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Ernst Troeltsch began to articulate the apparent epistemological solipsism of self-referential knowledge and the implied relativity of all values given that they are historically conditioned and subject to change.[43] Dilthey's line of inquiry presents especially striking parallels to the development of Eliot's fiction in her last two novels. Throughout his career, Dilthey sought a philosophical basis on which to establish a scientific study of history that was sensitive to the centrality of subjective experience in knowledge creation. Because the nature of that experience is historically conditioned, this basis always seemed to elude Dilthey. The "facts of consciousness" (*die Tatsachen des Bewusstsein*) on which he believed any knowledge system must rest, were fluid and inherently unstable.

Dilthey's historicist perspective corresponds closely to the way some Eliot critics, such as J. Hillis Miller, have read her later fiction. In his influential article, "History and Narrative," Miller takes the Jamesian premise that a novel's narrator must act like an historian for the novel to work, and uses it to demonstrate the ways in which the *Middlemarch* narrator undermines his own objective authority as an historian through shifting perspective. Senses of multiplicity and uncertainty derive from the instability of the apprehending consciousness of the narrative-historian, as it were. As I discuss in chapters 4 and 5, I find Miller's characterization of the unstable narrative perspective of *Middlemarch* to be a better description of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's next novel. Whatever the case, Eliot's late explorations into the ways in which the past itself changes as the shifting consciousness of the narrator parallels Dilthey's crisis historicism, which suggests that Eliot's novels follow an important nineteenth-century trajectory in historical philosophy concerning the nature of historical knowledge.

Realism, Objectivity, and Historical Representation

Cultural and literary scholars employ realism as an analytical concept in varying ways, which makes it difficult to find a stable definition of the term. Baumer, for example, attends to the artists of the nineteenth century who rejected certain romantic excesses and focused on the quotidian as the more *real* experience. Realist painting sought both a commoner subject, such as Courbet's peasants, rather than the grand allegories of someone like David, and a commitment to photographic accuracy in representation, which was shared by literary realists. Baumer follows Proudhon in associating realism with science and Comtean Positivism, which together try to reject metaphysics in favor of describing only what is observable; a mimesis of the actual, the real.[44] However, the literary scholar George Levine considers it a naive realism that presumes an external reality that is wholly independent from the language used to describe it. In his analysis of nineteenth-century literary realists, Levine argues that the "serious" realists were aware of their ironic position in using "language to get beyond language."[45] In a similar orientation, Hayden White views realism as the central problem of nineteenth-century historiography and historical philosophy, both of which looked for ways to get around the seeming irreconcilability of subjective consciousness and objects of historical analysis. In both Levine's and White's applications, realism was a method employed to overcome, or transcend, the problem of subject/object duality that, at the very same time, ironically reenforced that duality.

Levine's treatment of literary realism highlights the philosophical problem of subject/object duality that inheres in representations that use words to describe reality. For him realism took the form of a "quest for unmediated experience" that was permanently elusive.[46] It was a "struggle to avoid the inevitable conventionality of language in pursuit of the unattainable unmediated reality." The irony arises because "[n]o major Victorian novelists were deluded into believing that they were in fact offering an unmediated reality; but all of them struggled to make contact with the world out there, and even with their knowledge of their own subjectivity, to break from the threatening limits of solipsism, of convention, and of language."[47] To limit mediation, realist novelists shifted focus to the small rather than the large, or suggested the general by focusing on the particular. Their quest was to make the ordinary seem significant, and in so doing, they made the novel an instrument of knowledge.[48] But in the hands of Levine's "serious" realists—and Eliot is one of them—realism always had the inner contradiction of "positing the reality of the external world [while] it self-consciously examines its own fictionality."[49] The epistemological orientation implied in realist prose is that there is an "external world" that can be depicted accurately, but in the explorations of the realist novelists, that philosophical position—vis-a-vis objectivity—was also undermined.

The rise of realism as an artistic style in the nineteenth century dovetailed with the romantic-historicist impulse to celebrate examples of historical specificity. Gossman and White have argued that the emergence of historical writing in the nineteenth century occurred within a realist literary program. Gossman suggests that historians *turned* to realism in order to celebrate the specific, and that this was a romantic development occasioned by the French Revolution. The Enlightenment style of writing history had employed strategies that "reconciled" individual experiences and unique events with greater forms of social and historical continuity, but the appearance of radical historical change wrought by individuals called for a new way to write history. "Writing history at a time when 'life,' in the guise of new individual and collective energies, had triumphantly asserted itself against prevailing social forms, the romantic historian had to come to terms with an especially acute sense of the uniqueness and originality of historical phenomena, and therefore of rupture and discontinuity." The romantic historians turned to realism as a descriptive form that produced a sense of immediacy—i.e., veiled mediation—with individual phenomena and conveyed the specificity of their moment; a technique, according to Gossman, that they "borrowed from the contemporary novel."[50]

White's discussion of nineteenth-century historians and historical philosophers employs the same literary perspective on the inherent irony of realist prose. In his conception, all historiography is involved with making narrative choices that shape the way the material from the "historical field" is arranged and comprehended, but which is couched in a language (realist prose) that tries to veil that subjective condition. He places the birth of the ironic "problem" in the eighteenth century, during the Enlightenment. Most of the major Enlightenment figures tried to work out what they perceived as the special problems inhering in historical knowledge. They believed that all truth had to be based in reason, and therefore, historical truths needed a set of principles that established a basis for constructing narratives that avoided falsity and fantasy. Voltaire coined the phrase "philosophy of history" to describe his own attempts to provide rational principles on which historical knowledge could be based. He and Bayle, Montesquieu, Hume, Gibbon, and Kant, all failed to articulate such critical, "metahistorical" principles by which historical truth could be established independently from human consciousness.[51] For White, this failure constituted the Enlightenment "crisis" in historical thought, for without a rational basis to distinguish between truth and fantasy in history, all written history that purported to be truthful could only do so ironically.

"Realism" was the chosen method of historical representation of the nineteenth-century historians in White's analysis that developed out of the romantic repudiation of Enlightenment mechanism, which failed to appreciate historical individuality and specificity. For many Romantics who followed Herder and Goethe, a more "realistic" view of the past could be achieved by focusing on the individual and specific as historical facts, which represented ideal unities or coherencies. Just as each individual plant is a manifestation of Goethe's "*Urpflanze*," events could be understood as representations of a deeper story of human history. Though romantic inspirations began to fade in the middle of the nineteenth century, historians still employed realism as the best way to describe the individuated facts from the past. Levine would call the realism of White's "master historians"—Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt—naive, so long as they did not apprehend the ironic position of their writing. According to the plot of *Metahistory*, it was not until Nietzsche in the early 1870s that the irony of realistic historical narrative was fully faced. The achievements of Levine's literary figures, however, suggest that ironic consciousness in general had been faced earlier, even if they had not addressed history writing specifically. But then there is the case of George Eliot, whose novels were tools of inquiry that eventually employed experimental modes of historical representation that probed the self-contradiction of realism by centralizing the role of imagination in developing historical awareness.

The Evolution of George Eliot's Historicism

I have divided the evolution of Eliot's historical thought into three phases: an initial historicist phase, an early-novels phase, and a mature-novels phase. (See Table 2) The first phase, discussed in chapter 1, follows Eliot's acquisition of an historicist's frame of mind through her emersion into higher criticism and Young Hegelian historical philosophy, which used conceptions of past ages as organic unities and a dialectic mode of change that assumed the Christian stage had passed and a new one had been, and was being, born in a modern world. The major moments that contribute to the character of this early phase include: Eliot's joining the Coventry circle of higher critics and her reading of Charles Hennell's *Origin of Christianity* in 1841; the repudiation of her Christian faith based on an historicized view of religion and human spirituality the same year; and what

Table 2

(Mode of Analysis)	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Events and publications	Meeting Brays and Hennells Reading Hennell's *Inquiry* Repudiation of Christianity Translation of Strauss Review of Mackay Editing *Westminster Review* Translation of Feuerbach	Review of Riehl [*Romola*] Trip to Ilfracombe The turn to fiction *Scenes of a Clerical Life* *Adam Bede* *Mill on the Floss* *Silas Marner*	*Felix Holt* *Middlemarch* *Daniel Deronda* *Theophrastus Such*
Historical philosophy	Young Hegelian historicism	Young Hegelian historicism with new interest in positive science, anthropological/mythistorical orientations, natural history/ naive realism narrative strategies	Young Hegelian, critical of mere objectivity, active consideration of paradoxes of realism and historical representation
Historical interpretation	Nineteenth century as new, positive, post-Christian age	Search for understanding the interplay of religion and life, when modernity is emergent	More specific about historical transformations under way: politics, culture, class, medicine, science, history, etc.

might be called the onset of a dissemination mode from the mid 1840s to the mid 1850s. The Strauss and Feuerbach translations, appearing respectively in 1846 and 1854, are major elements of this period of dissemination in which she also expanded her reading in many subjects and became a reviewer and editor at a hub of intense intellectual activity by progressive British and European critics, including Lewes, contributing to the *Westminster Review*. The end of Eliot's stint at the *Westminster* in 1853 coincided with the start of her life with Lewes, with whom she shared a number of expanding intellectual interests. Though there was no formal collaboration in any of their published work, their frequently converging intellectual pursuits and deep mutual support were beneficial for all of their subsequent work.

The second phase began at such a moment of converging interests on the north Devonshire coast, and spanned the next five years as Eliot developed her brand of historical fiction. Eliot's decision to try writing historical fiction, and to use it as a tool of historical inquiry, has origins in the naturalizing trip she and Lewes made in the summer of 1856. She wrote a review of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, "The Natural History of German Life," on this journey, and as I suggest in chapter 2, her beach-combing and early fiction went hand-in-hand with Riehl's version of historical-naturalizing. Eliot's own mythistorical orientation to the ways in which social and cultural forms endure through successive generations derived from her immersion in Young Hegelian thought, and she recognized a similar orientation in Riehl. But Riehl's recorded impressions of German societies also had another sort of appeal to Eliot. At a time when the well known successes in fields of natural science encouraged many to try to apply natural-scientific methods to social analysis, Riehl's work seemed to her like good social science: he wrote as if he were a naturalist increasing the store of observations in a great inductive project to understand German societies. For the translator of Strauss and Feuerbach, Riehl's ethnography complemented the kind of anthropology the Young Hegelians were trying to theorize and develop. They perceived a compatibility between the intuitive dimensions of the mythistorical perspective and inductive science, which the new genertion of scientific historians in the latter half of the nineteenth century did not share. Insofar as Eliot also assumed this compatibility, she could move toward fiction as a serious method of historical representation and inquiry.

Eliot began acting on her hope that someone should apply his methodology to the English social classes. In the Riehl review, she raised—in terms of her career as a fiction writer—the most significant methodological problem in pursuing this line of inquiry. Riehl's analysis of German social classes was done in an environment that was, in many ways, preindustrial and precapitalist. In the review, Eliot noted that to study English peasants one has to look to the past, because the social relations that maintained a peasantry were, by 1856, nearly gone. Therefore, Riehl's method of ethnographic observation was not appropriate for the English case. This was a key moment when Eliot's sociological interests posed an historical-methodological problem. As she acknowledged in the review, one must go back 50 years, before modernization had thrown social and cultural forms into flux, in order to understand the nature of traditional English social classes. When Eliot turned to fiction, she translated the naturalist's observational perspective she found in Riehl, which she had practiced herself on the beaches of Ilfracombe, into a narrative voice in her first short stories and then into her early novels.

The "turn" also manifested her philosophical position that there was a usefulness in fiction, which she applied specifically to the study of the early nineteenth century. In one important respect the short stories in *Scenes of a Clerical Life* resemble most of Eliot's later work: there is a sense of lost continuity with the not-so-remote past. A quick look at the opening lines that establish the setting of two of these short-stories evidences Eliot's economy in transmitting that sense. "Shepperton Church was a very different-looking building five-and-twenty years ago [1832]," (*Scenes*, 41) which opens "Amos Barton," is a breathtakingly simple sentence that still manages to convey Eliot's central historical idea that connects all the novels she set in this period. The extensive changes that visited the English countryside between the early 1830s and the late 1850s reflect but one part of a major historical turning point in which the religious sentiment in country parishes was undergoing deep transformation and the mental and emotional lives of ordinary people were subject to the dramatic effects of these convulsive changes. The passage establishing the setting in "Janet's Repentance" is similar.

> More than a quarter of a century has slipped by since then, and in the interval Milby has advanced at as rapid a pace as other market-towns in her Majesty's dominions. . . . Milby is now a refined, moral, and enlightened town; no more resembling the Milby of former days than the huge, long-skirted, drab great-coat that embarrassed the ankles of our grandfathers resembled the light paletot in which we tread jauntilly through the muddiest streets. . . . " (*Scenes*, 252-53)

Less naive, less backward, less quiet, less *gemeinschaftlich*, more fashionable, cosmopolitan and bourgeois are the small towns of the English countryside in the 1850s. For Eliot the predominant leitmotif of the three novels she later set in the period was that it was an historical watershed.

Eliot's first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, set at the turn of the nineteenth century, demonstrates her interest in the period before industrial intrusion. Though a more quiet time, in Eliot's mind, she knew this period had some movement of its own. She first treated this period in the second "scene," "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story," which looks back from the end of the title-character's life in the late 1820s to the time of his prime in the 1790s. On the heels of the critical success of *Scenes*, Eliot went to work on a treatment of the Wesleyan movement. *Adam Bede* added tremendous popular success to Eliot's critical acclaim. Two years later, after completing *The Mill on the Floss*, she returned to this period in her third novel, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*. Perhaps it was the near-pastoral shades these turn-of-the-century works evinced that appealed to the mid-Victorians, whose memories of a preindustrial past were no doubt shaped by nostalgia. Bede the carpenter and Marner the weaver are able craftsmen whose trades had been rapidly replaced by industrial technologies and were becoming rare in the world of Eliot's readership. The sense of simple, community-feeling that Eliot strove to create in a number of the scenes in *Adam Bede* in particular seem idealized. Yet, *Adam Bede* also represents a kind of Young Hegelian study of religious sentiment among ordinary provincials. The dialectical dimension is implied in the way Eliot, in her post-Christian consciousness, could sympathetically portray the religious fervor of a female Methodist preacher. The kind of seriousness and compassion of a character like Dinah, who tries to guide people toward spirituality through "fellow-feeling," is what Eliot believed was the positive aspect of Christianity. In Hegelian terms, she believed it was the "truth" of the Christian stage that would outlive Christianity itself. By isolating it in an earlier stage of religious development Eliot wanted to maintain the positive aspect after the negation of theology.

I use Eliot's first novel-length treatment of the time of her childhood, *The Mill on the Floss*, to represent her early novels and the second phase in the development of her historical thought. As I discuss in chapter 2, *Mill* is a concerted application of the hopes and methods she identified in the Riehl review. The narrative voice is that of a naturalist-historian studying a human ecosystem. As a Young Hegelian historical inquiry, the novel depicts strained religious, family, and community feelings that industrial-modernization caused among (once again) ordinary provincials. In comparison to later novels set in the same period, *Mill* does not represent those forces of modernization with the same specificity. And it would seem that the naturalist's objective eye cannot locate, and his narrative voice is unable to articulate, historical self-awareness in the characters, who are always "ant-like" in their work and in their ignorance of the wider world.

The third phase of Eliot's development, the mature-novels phase, emerged in the 1860s as she modified her technique for writing novels. In the context of Eliot's evolving thinking about the relationship between history and its representation, as I discuss in chapter 3, her fourth and fifth novels, *Romola* and *Felix Holt,* show an intensified interest in and a determined use of source material to develop accurate pictures of their respective historical periods. Due mostly to its remote setting, *Romola* was in many ways Eliot's most difficult novel to write. Her developing idea of the usefulness of fiction in historical representation prized faithfulness to the documentary record, and her initial unfamiliarity with late fifteenth-century Florence led to a stifling obsession with veracity. She experienced, in the summer and fall of 1861, a syndrome familiar to all historians: she kept putting off the writing of her work as she continued to find new sources on the history of the period that she felt compelled to read. So unsure of her mental conception of the world of Savonarola, Eliot poured through vast amounts of secondary sources (in French, Italian, German, and English) and a long list of primary materials (in Latin and Italian) to avoid errors in her representation. This intense commitment to avoid contradiction with extant evidence carried over into *Felix Holt*, which was set in the more familiar time of her childhood, but which nevertheless needed to be researched if she was to accomplish the kind of verisimilitude she believed was required.

Whereas Eliot's initial turn to fiction represented an interest in historical study that was clearly different from the Rankean methodology ascendant in Britain, her methodological shift with *Romola* and *Felix Holt* has the appearance of an orientation to documentation that would be canonized by the profession a decade later. In terms of objectivity, this is a false impression. The experience of writing novels with the help of intense research and commitment to veracity only helped Eliot to clarify her conception of the role of imagination and intuition in historical representation. Furthermore, *Romola* and *Felix Holt* also show an emerging ironic stance with respect to objectivity and historical representation. This ironic stance, which distinguishes her mature fiction, emerges in the feminized history narrated at the end of the novel by Romola herself, as a counterpoint to the political history that is male-dominated, represented earlier in the novel by her husband, Tito. The novel thus implies that there are many potential ways to recount the past and to connect to one's origins. In *Felix Holt* Eliot advanced the idea of organic development at the level of individual and of community. Her commitment to veracity had her consult *The Times*, the *Annual Register* for 1832 and 1833, and almanacs to help her portray the political upheavals associated with the passage of the first Reform Bill. And yet the trial scene that again challenges the notion that the past can be recounted in a completely objective and unbiased way gives *Felix Holt* its ironic stance vis-a-vis historical representation.

Eliot's treatment of the Reform Bill period in consecutive novels is indicative of her continued interest in that period as a significant historical turning point. *Middlemarch* is in many ways an expansion of her synchronic view of a period whose historical character and significance is unfolded in the many manifestations of reform. There is much in common with the other two novels set at this time: the steady advancement of modernity in its many manifestations is welcomed by some, resisted by others, and the pervasive sense of inevitable transformation. The ant-like Dodsons and Tullivers have their counterparts in *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*, but the more cosmopolitan Dorothea, Lydgate, and Ladislaw, and to a lesser extent, Felix Holt, all seem to have the broader perspectives that help them to divine the direction of historical change, even if some of them cannot participate directly in its flow. And "reform" as a specific historical topic emerges only in *Felix Holt*, in which the expanded franchise and the riotous election of 1832 are portrayed as evidence for proceeding with caution in political reform. As I discuss in chapter 4, *Middlemarch* represents two other, more subtle, manifestations of the dominant character of this period by portraying Dorothea's social-reformist efforts and Lydgate's efforts at medical reform.

Middlemarch shows a secular world emergent in the reform bill period. That is to say, Eliot's unwavering insistence on the importance of religious feeling in life now focused more sharply on the post-Christian elements she believed were taking seed in the provinces at this time. The dominant character of this synchronic portrait is the condition of historical transition. The historical conception behind the St. Teresa experiment holds many of the same historicist assumptions that Eliot acquired from the Young Hegelians. But this mature work, written almost 20 years after the Feuerbach translation, suggests a direction in her thinking that paralleled new developments in German historical thought.

In the cases of the theorist Dilthey and the historian Burckhardt, their general historicist frames of mind led them to explore certain problems in conceiving and representing the past as they tried to overcome what many thought to be the pernicious effects of Hegelianism. Burckhardt's approach to cultural history shunned progressive teleology and any overture to "Universal History" then commonly associated with Hegel.[52] Dilthey's hermeneutical *Geisteswissenschaft* was an attempt to conceive of past cultures as organic unities that strove to go beyond the excesses of romantic and idealist conceptions of history. Dilthey's interest in thinking about history "from the inside" is related to the old Hegelian problem of the world-historical figure's consciousness (or lack thereof) in moments of historical significance. For Dilthey, the most important aspect of historical consciousness is that it must be achieved *within* the flow of history itself.[53] Eliot's fiction shows an increasing interest in this problem, and it is centralized in her St. Teresa experiment. The world-historical woman could see how to apply herself to reform in late sixteenth-century Spain because, in Eliot's mind, that world of "coherent social faith" was easier to comprehend from the inside than Dorothea's world. Because Dorothea's world is in flux, and because it seems to be less welcoming of women's influence (this point is subdued), her reforming spirit must find subtler ways of effecting change. The narrator's self-reflective discussions of historical representation in comparison with other historians, such as Herodotus, and novelists, such as the early realist, Fielding, interjects into *Middlemarch* the ironic view that telling a story as it actually happened involves narrative choices that no historian can avoid.

Of all Eliot's novels, *Daniel Deronda* presents an historical worldview that was most challenging to the perspective adopted by the new historical profession. As I discuss in chapter 5, the sharper focus in the novel on the role of the intuitive consciousness that "fills in the gaps" between phenomena that are otherwise unconnected has an important parallel in Lewes's work. The novel's avoidance of any single, objective account of the plot in favor of multiple perspectives, provided by the characters who often use indeterminate, literary categories to interpret meaning in their lives, combine to form a modernist, perspectivist aesthetic orientation that reflects Eliot's view of history as an art-form. *Daniel Deronda* can be read as a continuation of Eliot's mode of historical inquiry within a Young Hegelian framework, in that she was interested in the pregnant movements of the past. But her last novel has significant new twists. Its setting in the 1860s makes it less remote for her readers who may have found comfort in the historical distance of all her other fiction. The occasional departures from the realism that had kept her previous work anchored in a genre more closely related to romantic historiography must have been as disconcerting as the wholly modern scene of "dull, gas-poisoned absorption" that opens the novel, or the "problematic sylph" the reader is asked to consider, or the Jewish theme of the Deronda story, which many critics wished she had left out. In the end, Deronda's impassioned search for his origins and his appropriation of his Jewish heritage is the vehicle for the theoretical argument that subjective historical consciousness drives our interest in the past, and that history must be written from the standpoint of the desire for self-knowledge, i.e., from within.

If we follow Levine's distinction between naive and ironic realism, a clearer picture of Eliot's historiographical critique emerges. Whereas the scientifically inclined profession of historians, with an anti-romantic perspective on subject/object duality, would describe a past reality as if it were unmediated by language, Eliot acknowledged the realist irony and called for active imagination in developing an understanding of the past as she came to see history as an appropriation made by the needs of human desire. Far from wanting to tell lies, Eliot believed that historical fiction, in the way she practiced it, offered a deeper instruction about the meaning of the past than history written from an ostensibly objective perspective—the "grave" and "abstract" history writing mentioned in the "Historic Imagination" passage. Such histories lacked, in her view, the "concrete incidents": the fully contextualized details that enrich an historical picture of a "great turning-point." Andres refers to Eliot's desire to portray concrete incidents as a pursuit of the "significance in everyday life, particularly in occasions of dissension and resistance to tradition."[54] Eliot's realism reveals a plurality of experiences that constitutes her "challenge" to monological Victorian historiography by demonstrating a multivalent conception of history at work in her novels. While Eliot's work does represent multivalence, her deeper challenge to Victorian historiography comes from a Young Hegelian historicist vision of "great turning points," which determined the shape of the "concrete incidents" she chose to contextualize.

The medium of the novel guided her considerations to specifically literary examples of historicist relativism and to imply that the problem of narration reflects the problem of the historian's relationship to the past and to the history he writes. While J. Hillis Miller associates the shift to a potentially relativistic worldview implied in the later novels with Nietzsche's aestheticism, Eliot's historicist perspective is closer to Dilthey's philosophy of history, in which he sought to carve out a role for the subjective consciousness of the historian in writing about the past.

Chapter 1. A Young Hegelian Historicist

The construction of this brief biography is guided by the needs of the dissertation. While there would be, and have been, many ways to tell George Eliot's life-story, this outline is based on what her biographers regard as major intellectual turning points, or watershed moments. There is an implicit teleology in this construction that does not reflect her own experience: it is not useful to say that George Eliot was "destined" to write historical fiction. This sketch emplots her life as an evolution of an historical novelist, which centralizes those moments when a developing historical consciousness is discernable. For students of nineteenth-century intellectual history, perhaps the most important moment occurred in 1856, when Eliot decided to write historical fiction. That was the moment when Marian Evans became "George Eliot." The fact that we refer to a "George Eliot" even before she adopted that pen-name is indicative of the way our hindsight insists itself upon our arrangement of the past into "plots" that have meaning for us. We care about George Eliot nowadays because she wrote interesting novels, and this is why we bother to reconstruct the years that precede that career; we look for the developing novelist in those years. This chapter, however, describes the emerging *historicist*, and so it concentrates specifically on those aspects of Eliot's developing perspective that culture has historicity–that systems of thought and social forms come into and go out of existence.

Eliot's historicism began to develop at the moment when her youthful, religious fervor collided with the higher criticism of her Coventry neighbors in the early 1840s, and the former gave way. Her work in translating Strauss into English further developed an historicist orientation to the distant past of early Christianity, and a wider world of scholarship that included continental influences began to open up for her. Eliot's joining with John Chapman to edit the *Westminster Review* in 1852 positioned her at the hub of an intellectual elite in London (with ties throughout Europe) and gave her exposure to European and American literature, evolutionary theories, Comtean philosophy, and the latest histories written by a new generation of historians in England, France and Germany. Then in 1856, with the encouragement of her new lover, Lewes, Eliot tried her hand at historical fiction. This move represents a culmination of a series of experiences that led Eliot to develop a perspective that centralized historical processes in determining the nature of human affairs, and which suggested that fiction could provide a useful means by which to advance our understanding of the historicity of systems of thought, and to illuminate historical periods and cultures.

Mary Anne[1] Evans was born on November 22, 1819, near the town of Coventry in the midland shire of Warwick. Her father was a prized land-manager for the baronet at Arbury Hall, Francis Parker-Newdigate. Robert Evans was a successful surveyor, builder, land evaluator, and arbitrator frequently consulted in his parish. Not much is known about Eliot's mother, Christiana Pearson, who died in 1836. It was then, at the age of sixteen, that Eliot took over domestic duties and began to tend to her aging father, which she continued to do until his death in 1849.

As a young girl, Eliot attended two boarding schools, and Maria Lewis, the governess of the first, became a significant older-sister figure through Eliot's teens. Lewis impressed her own sentimental evangelicalism on Eliot, which is reflected in all of the remaining correspondence from this part of Eliot's life. Eliot made numerous references to the bible as a guide for living in her letters to her former teacher, and frequently espoused a fervent aceticism. At age 18 she confessed:

> I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful enjoyments the world can offer and yet live in near communion with their God; who can warmly love the creature, and yet be careful that the Creator maintains His supremity in their hearts; but I confess that in my short experience and narrow sphere of action I have never been able to attain this; I find . . . total abstinence much easier than moderation. (*Letters*, I, 6)

Though Eliot would outgrow this theocentric worldview, the austerity of lifestyle suggested by "total abstinence" characterizes the post-Christian Eliot as well as it does the young Miss Evans. Eliot maintained a regular and intimate correspondence with Maria Lewis until the early 1840s, when the two began to drift apart and their letters became politely phatic.

At the second boarding school, Miss Franklin's in Coventry, Eliot studied English, French, history, math, music, and drawing, and generally began to demonstrate her intellectual strengths in composing both prose and verse.[2] Students at Miss Franklin's school were also permitted to read novels, a freedom that was unusual in midland girls' schools of the 1830s. Eliot described herself as a "voracious" reader of novels and especially enjoyed the historical fiction of Sir Walter Scott, which she routinely read to her father in the evenings of his waning years. In a letter of 1839 to Maria Lewis, Eliot commented on the narrow usefulness of fiction, which both evidences her austerity and anticipates her later contributions to realism and historical fiction.

> As to the discipline our minds receive from the perusal of fictions I can conceive none that is beneficial but may be attained by that of history. It is the merit of fictions to come within the orbit of probability; if unnatural they would no longer please. If it be said that the mind must have relaxation, "Truth is strange--stranger than fiction." When a person has exhausted the wonders of truth, there is no other resort than fiction; till then I cannot imagine how the adventures of some phantom conjured up by fancy can be more entertaining than may safely draw inferences. . . . Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones. They are a sort of Centaur or Mermaid and like other monsters that we do not know how to class should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born. The weapons of the Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance. (*Letters*, I, 23)

Though Eliot was soon to renounce Christianity as her doctrinal faith, the fervency of her religious feeling, and even the crusader mentality suggested by this censorious jeremiad, maintained throughout her career as a novel writer. The dismissive view of mere romance and what is merely fictitious also remained until her death, although the orientation to the relationship between truth and fiction articulated here was problematized by her later novels. It is suggestive to note that at this early age Eliot found the only "benefit" derived from fiction was its potential to teach history, for this perspective may have guided her towards writing historical fiction 17 years later.

Eliot continued her studies in earnest after she left boarding school. In 1839 she engaged an Italian language instructor to give weekly lessons, which no doubt helped her independent study of Latin. In the next year she began studying German. The widowed mistress of Arbury Hall permitted Eliot unlimited access to its ever increasing library, which she exploited, according to Haight, in developing a project to construct a Chart of Ecclesiastical History. Eliot described this chart, which does not survive, to Lewis in an 1840 letter.

> The series of perpendicular columns will successively contain, the Roman Emperors with their dates, the political and religious state of the Jews, the bishops, remarkable men and events in the several churches, a column being devoted to

> each of the chief ones, the aspect of heathenism and Judaism toward Christianity, the chronology of the Apos[tolical] and Patristical writings, schisms and heresies, General Councils, eras of corruption, under which head the remarks would be general, and I thought possibly an application of the Apocalyptic prophecies, which would merely require a few figures and not take up room. I think there must be a break in the chart after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, and I have come to a determination not to carry it beyond the first acknowledgment of the supremacy of the Pope, by Phocas in 606 when Mahommedanism became a besom of destruction in the hand of the Lord, and completely altered the aspect of Ecclesiastical Hist[or]y. (*Letters*, I, 44-45)

Nowhere in her correspondence does Eliot say why she undertook this project, which occupied a great deal of her time from November 1839 to well into 1840. It must have helped her to organize the tremendous amount of information she was trying to absorb in her avid reading of Church history. She described herself as a "glutton" with books "hurrying through one course that I may be in time for the next and so not relishing or digesting either" (*Letters*, I, 11), and another time, when construction of the Chart was underway, as "surrounded by unread books" that she felt in dire need to get to (*Letters*, I, 34). Eliot had intentions to publish the Chart, according to another letter to Lewis (*Letters,* I, 40), but was beaten to it by the publication of a similar chart by Seeley and Burnside about which Eliot remarked, with characteristic modesty, "[it] has been executed much better than if left to my slow fingers and slower head" (*Letters*, I, 51).

Several months later, she recommended the Seeley and Burnside chart to Lewis and her students for its effectiveness in "presenting epochs as nuclei round which less important events instinctively cluster" (*Letters*, I, 64). It is possible that an historical understanding of the Church was a chink in the edifice of her Christian faith. Her studies for the development of the chart, and her admiration of the one published by Seeley and Burnside, suggest a parallel to the contemporaneous Young Hegelian movement. It was through their historical interpretations of Jesus and Christianity that Strauss and Feuerbach had established a post-Christian perspective. Eliot was not yet a Young Hegelian, but the major intellectual transformation she was about to make was partly prepared for by her developing historical perspective.

In 1841, Eliot and her father moved from her childhood home, Griff House near Arbury Hall, to a house at Foleshill, about a mile outside of Coventry. Several of Eliot's biographers mark the move as a watershed, for it was through connections she made in her new home that Eliot became acquainted with a peculiar branch of the intellectual movement known as "higher criticism." The Evans's new house was attached to another house that was the home of Abijah Hill Pears and his wife Elizabeth Bray Pears. Elizabeth introduced Eliot to her brother, Charles Bray, and his wife Caroline Hennell Bray, with whom she formed a close friendship (Haight, 36-39). Charles Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity*, which espoused a deterministic, materialistic worldview that bolstered his enthusiasm for phrenology, was in the process of being published at this time. Caroline Hennell Bray's brother, Charles Hennell, another member of this Coventry circle, had published *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* in 1838, which Eliot read shortly after moving to Foleshill. Haight reports that Elizabeth Bray Pears's motivation for introducing her to the Brays was to see whether Eliot's serious evangelicalism might have some effect on the rather independent way of thinking her brother and sister-in-law had cultivated (Haight, 38-39). The effect was quite the opposite, however, as the Brays and Hennells helped Eliot to overcome an evangelical worldview that she had already begun to question.

The impact of Hennell's *Inquiry* on Eliot is difficult to estimate, but as one of her first tastes of "higher criticism," the work conforms with the attitude and direction she would soon take in her intellectual pursuits. The *Inquiry* began as a response to a plea made by Hennell's sister, Caroline Bray, who was disturbed by the materialistic determinism of her husband's book, and its implications for the miraculous foundations of Christian faith (Haight, 38). Hennell thought, at the outset of the project, that he would be able to reassure his sister by finding a basis for a belief in the miracles in the Bible. His textual analysis, and comparison between books within the Bible, revealed certain discrepancies suggesting that the various books had been written at different times, by people with different motivations, who probably were not eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus anyway.[3] Hennell constructed a secularized history of Jesus, accounting for his deeds with explanations in conformity with natural laws. For example, the resurrection is explained as a conspiracy between Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who secretly removed the body of the fallen leader from its tomb and told the disciples that he had risen and gone to Galilee, hoping the disciples would disperse. When the disciples saw the body gone, they began to believe that he was the Messiah, and that his return to establish the earthly kingdom of heaven was immanent.[4] There is some disagreement about the significance of Hennell's book on Eliot's discarding of evangelism. Basil Willey describes the *Inquiry* as a "bomb" dropped into the young woman's "mental conglomerate."[5] However, Haight sees many antecedents of shaken orthodoxy to Eliot's reading of the *Inquiry* and her "inevitable" secular turn (Haight, 40).[6] The ecclesiastical history chart may also have prepared Eliot to view the events and people in the Bible historically and to infer the historicity of Christianity. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that her joining the intellectual circle of the Brays and Hennells shaped the direction of Eliot's development. Ernst Renan, Eliot's French contemporary, reflected at the end of his life, "My faith was destroyed by historical criticism, not by scholasticism or logic," in reference to his Parisian education in the 1830s, which undermined Christianity not by Enlightenment principles so much as through historicism.[7] Historical criticism similarly effected Eliot's divergence from Christianity, but it also led to problems at home.

Eliot's embrace of new, historical orientations to Christianity, the Bible, and Jesus were at the root of a nasty squabble with her father. What she described as a "holy war" erupted when Eliot announced to her father in January 1842 that she would not be attending church with him anymore. Eliot described her position to Elizabeth Bray Pears as wanting "to be among the ranks of that glorious crusade that is seeking to set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free from a usurped domination" (*Letters*, I, 125). Her father was furious, and suspected Unitarian influences from the Brays. Haight enumerates many close friends and relatives enlisted by Mr. Evans to help "bring Mary Ann to her senses," efforts that she continued to resist (Haight, 40). They lived together for some time under the strain of Eliot's rebellion. It must have been a great strain, for Eliot eventually had to explain herself to her father in a letter because they were unable to speak to each other "unobstructed by feeling."

> I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined visibly to unite myself with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than with other classes of believers in the Divine authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness. (*Letters*, I, 128)

The influence of Hennell's book is apparent in the way Eliot describes the scriptures as "histories mingled with truth and fiction." This does not mean, to her or to Hennell, that scriptures are without value. Hennell argued that "[m]any of the finer thoughts and feelings of mankind find a vent in fiction, expressed either by painting, poetry or the poetic tale; and the perception of historical inaccuracy does not prevent our sharing the thoughts and feelings which have embodied themselves in this manner."[8] By understanding scriptures from a mythological perspective, they could be appreciated as stories of human thought and feeling without being understood literally or dogmatically.[9] But insofar as the church represented a "system of doctrines" derived from mingled truth and fictions, which Eliot considered "pernicious," she would not attend services anymore.

The letter seems to have had little effect on her father who, after several months of the feud, was sufficiently embarrassed in his parish as to want to turn his daughter out of the house, and to remove himself from Coventry all-together. Through the mediation of family members, this rash act was delayed, and Eliot went to stay with her brother Isaac and his wife, back to her childhood home of Griff House. After a month of exile, and continuous efforts by her brother and her Coventry friends to soften Mr. Evans's resolve, Eliot and her father reached a compromise. Haight describes the arrangement as one in which Eliot "agreed to attend church with him as ususal, and he tacitly conceded her the right to think what she liked during service" (Haight, 44). What she thought during those services is a matter of pure conjecture, for once she had returned to her father at Foleshill, there is no more mention of the matter in her correspondence. Given the direction of her subsequent work, however, one can guess that Eliot did not recant her historicized conception of Christianity, for she soon began the work of disseminating a German version of this perspective.

The exchange of ideas on biblical criticism between the English and the Young

Hegelians in the 1840s began with the reception of Hennell's book in Germany by the like-minded scholar, Strauss, who upon reading the *Inquiry* immediately arranged for its translation into German. Writing the preface himself, Strauss indicated his own surprise at finding an Englishman who could not read German and was therefore ignorant of his own *Das Leben Jesu* (1836) and most German biblical criticism since Schleiermacher, but could nevertheless develop so compatible an orientation to scripture.

> [T]he subject is treated in the earnest and dignified tone of the truth-seeker, not with the rancour of a passionate polemic; we nowhere find him deriving religion from priestcraft, but from the tendencies and wants of human nature. . . . These elevated views, which the learned German of our day appropriates as the fruit of the religious and scientific advancement of his nation, this Englishman, to whom most of the means at our command were wanting, has been able to educe entirely from himself.[10]

Strauss had come by Hennell's work via another Englishman, Dr. Robert Herbert Brabant, a German scholar who sent the *Inquiry* to him. Brabant admired Strauss's work and had his daughter, Rufa, begin translating *Das Leben Jesu* in 1841. In an all-too-tidy coincidence, Rufa married Charles Hennell, shortly after which she gave up the translation project, and in 1844 she recommended that Eliot take it over (Haight, 52-53).

Eliot enthusiastically seized upon the project and worked exclusively on Strauss for the next two years.[11] Though she had battled recurring headaches before beginning the translation, Eliot appears to have suffered keenly from them throughout the project, and by the end had grown tired of the whole business. The sometimes tedious work of translation was often almost too much for her to bear. At times of weakness, she "sicken[ed] at the idea of having Strauss in my head and on my hands for a lustrum, instead of saying good bye to him in a year." In better moments she did not "regret either that the work has been begun, or that I have undertaken it. I am only inclined to vow that

I will never translate again if I live to correct the sheets for Strauss" (*Letters*, I, 176). She not only managed to finish the work in the spring of 1846, but undertook two more major translations in the next seven years. It seems that the act of translating Strauss did little for her admiration of his work. She found the last 100 pages, "totally uninteresting" because Strauss had "anticipated in the earlier part of his work all the principles and many of the details of his criticism, and he seems fagged himself" (*Letters*, I, 207). Eliot also appears to have been a bit fagged at this point.

In Strauss's work Eliot did find a more systematic treatment of the new testament as a collection of mythology than in Hennell's *Inquiry*. For those well-read in the early nineteenth-century German tradition of biblical criticism, the *Life of Jesus* offered little that was new in the way of biblical interpretation. Strauss's achievement, according to William Brazill, was synthetic. He brought the numerous examples of biblical criticism and historical research together within Hegelian philosophy. "Strauss first accepted the truth of the [Hegelian] philosophical system and then sought to use the conclusions of biblical exegesis to demonstrate not only the truth of the system but also the passage from the age of religion to the age of philosophy."[12] In other words, Strauss's mythological approach to biblical exegesis augmented the historicization of Christianity begun by Hegel, but which the Young Hegelians, of whom Strauss was the first leader, were to continue with great enthusiasm.

The general sense of a "passing" that Eliot found in Strauss is probably the most pervasive characteristic in the intellectual history of the first half of the nineteenth century, and it does help to contextualize Eliot's intellectual development in the 1840s and 1850s. Since the late eighteenth century, increasing numbers of literary figures and philosophers wrote with the sense that things were changing in rather permanent ways—and not necessarily for the better. For many, the French Revolution was the watershed, after which it was easier to doubt and challenge all certainties about systems of political organization and social relationships. Hegel developed his philosophy in this environment, and explicitly associated his system with the French Revolution. For him the Revolution was the dawn of an epoch in which man's reason, not arbitrary will, would rule nations. The political revolution in France accompanied the philosophical revolution in Germany, marked by the passing of the "theological" stage of consciousness to the "philosophical" stage. Saint Simon and his followers in France, including Comte, had a similar conception of the passing of the *ancien regime* during what he called a "critical" period, which was to be followed by an "organic" period of general progress and reduction of human suffering through the rational organization of society.

Beginning with an Hegelian historical framework, the Young Hegelians, in the 1830s and 1840s, set out to study the elements of the theological stage of history, i.e., Christian history and the Bible, as antecedents to their own philosophical age. Hegel's dialectical model for historical change had special resonance among his students and followers. In the hands of the Young Hegelians, who were comprised of the more liberal of Hegel's many adherents, the dialectic became the framework for interpreting the historicity of Christianity—the jewel of the theological stage—which arose out of the ashes of the Roman world. According to Hegel, the theological stage had been in decline since the Reformation and especially since the Enlightenment.[13] The subsequent stage in the development of consciousness was characterized as philosophical, because it was philosophy that created the new understanding of humanity as the history of the unfolding of its Spirit, a.k.a. Reason, into its explicit form since the Revolution.[14] So while Hennell had introduced Eliot to the historicization of Christianity, Strauss's *Life of Jesus* brought her out into the wider intellectual movement that assumed the Christian-theological period of human development had passed. This is an implied assumption in Strauss, and one which Eliot was now poised to incorporate into her own worldview.

After the publication of the Strauss translation in 1846, Eliot's energies once again became diffuse as she returned to wide reading and began to develop her skills as a writer. In 1847, she made several contributions to the *Coventry Herald*, which Bray had recently purchased. Collectively entitled "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of an Eccentric," the pieces are mild attempts at humor and philosophical and artistic observations, with an occasionally didactic tone. Apart from a short poem in 1840, these comprise Eliot's first published original writing.[15]

In 1848 Eliot began a brief but intense correspondence with John Sibree, who later translated Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, with whom she shared her opinions on intellectual and political topics. She described their correspondence to Sara Hennell as "one purely moral and intellectual carried on for the sake of ghostly edification, in which each party has to put salt on the tails of all sorts of ideas on all sorts of subjects" (*Letters*, I, 244). The topics included Disraeli's fiction, theories of races, and art. In a long letter dated March 8, 1848, Eliot endorsed the recent revolution in France, indicating a political orientation that might surprise readers of *Felix Holt*, which condemns political revolt and revolution. "I would consent . . . to have a year clipt off my life for the sake of witnessing such a scene as that of the men of the barricade bowing to the image of Christ 'who first taught fraternity to men.'" Furthermore, she had

> little patience with people who can find time to pity Louis Philippe and his moustachioed sons. Certainly our decayed monarchs should be pensioned off: we should have a hospital for them, or a sort of Zoological Garden, where these worn-out humbugs may be preserved. It is but justice that we should keep them, since we have spoiled them for any honest trade. Let them sit on soft cushions and have their dinner regularly, but for heaven's sake preserve me from sentimentalizing over a pampered old man when the earth has its millions of unfed souls and bodies. (*Letters*, I, 253-4)

Eliot's enthusiasm for the February Revolution may have been exaggerated to please her correspondent, who was "just as sansculottish and rash as I would have you," but she supported what she believed to be a genuine working class uprising in France.

Eliot's interpretation of the significance of the 1848 Revolution betrays a sense of historicist perspective. She told Sibree, "I thought we had fallen on such evil days that we were to see no really great movement–that ours was what St. Simon calls a purely *critical* epoch, not at all an organic one–but I begin to be glad of my date" (*Letters*, I, 253, GE's italics). St. Simon's conception showed history as a series of alternating epochs of philosophical crisis and harmony, or organic unity. The critical periods consisted of reevaluation and disintegration and the organic periods represented relative unity in thought. For example, the medieval period was thought of as a time of organic unity insofar as most people (in Europe) followed a Christian faith and a feudal social orientation, while the Reformation and the Enlightenment were critical movements that undermined that faith and unity. As I discuss in chapter 4, Eliot maintained this generalization, in modified form, in *Middlemarch*. The French Revolution struck another serious blow to feudalism, and after the Napoleonic wars, many Europeans were hoping for and anticipating a new kind of organic unity.[16]

Eliot's reference to St. Simon and his historicist framework suggests a parallel to the Young Hegelian movement. The St. Simonian conception of history was in many ways compatible with the Hegelian system of historical philosphy, and most of their adherents–from Strauss, Feuerbach, and Marx, to Auguste Comte—believed that a new age of coherence was dawning in their lifetimes, in the wake the "double revolution."[17] Eliot joined in this sentiment upon hearing the news of the Parisian revolt in 1848 and the overthrow of Louis Philippe.

Eliot's father died in the following year, immediately after which she joined the Brays on a trip to the continent. By the time the Brays were angling for home, Eliot had decided to remain on the continent and stayed in rented rooms for a year in Geneva. Returning to England in the late spring of 1850, Eliot visited various members of her family and, of course, the Coventry circle of friends. In the fall, John Chapman, a friend of Bray's and the publisher of Eliot's Strauss translation, came to visit the Brays with Robert William Mackay, whose *The Progress of the Intellect, as Exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews* Chapman had just published. While there, it became apparent to Chapman and Mackay that Eliot would be an able reviewer of *Progress of the Intellect*, and she was invited to do so for the *Westminster Review*, of which Chapman was a financial backer and soon to be its owner. Published in January 1851, Eliot's review opened the door to a brief editing career and was itself an indication of her expansive awareness of the leading intellectual endeavors at mid-century.

The untitled and anonymous review of *Progress of the Intellect* was highly laudatory, and the translator of Strauss found much in common with her own thinking in Mackay's intellectual history. *Progress of the Intellect* treats the texts of Greek mythology and the old and new testaments as containing the symbolic forms of cosmologies, moralities, and epistemologies appropriate for their specific historical moments, which are now gone forever. Eliot's review defended Mackay's project because she shared his belief that human progress was retarded by adherence to the theological worldview:

> Our civilization, and, yet more, our religion, are ananomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifactions from distant ages, with living ideas, the offspring of a true process of development. We are in bondage to terms and conceptions which, having had their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality, and are for us as spells which have lost their virtue. The endeavour to spread enlightened ideas is perpetually counteracted by these *idola theatri*, which have allied themselves, on the one hand with men's better sentiments, and on the other with institutions in whose defence [*sic*] are arrayed the passions and the interests of dominant classes. (*Essays*, 28-29)

Eliot wields her historicist outlook in the first part of this passage in a way that recalls the message she gleaned from Strauss about the historicity of religious systems. Eliot never hinted at supporting class warfare in England, and the identification of resistance to "enlightened ideas" with the "dominant classes," from the latter part of the passage, did not develop into a class-based social philosophy in her work. Instead, this review marks the early stages of Eliot's desire, which continued into her novel-writing career, to educate the public about the relationship between historical processes and the decay of certain forms of thought. By studying those forms, one can gain more than the antiquarian's satisfied curiosity because one can appreciate the historicity of systems of thought and faith.

> [T]hough the teaching of positive truth is the grand means of expelling error, the process will be very much quickened if the negative argument serve as its pioneer; if, by a survey of the past, it can be shown how each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and its stage of development, and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms of the past, is as futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul. (*Essays*, 29)

What one learns, in other words, is that if a system of thought or belief was suited for times long gone, those forms are now empty shells into which the present mind cannot fit. Mackay's work is an historicist interpretation, what Kelley calls "mythistory," in the way it subjugates the Greek and Christian belief systems to the historical process that has subsumed them: they are each a "negative argument," which clarifies what legacies the present age retains to its detriment. It is worth noting that this passage bears a striking resemblance to the implied historicism of Eliot's "Historic Imagination" journal entry from near the end of her career as a novelist. In the latter, Eliot indicated that she wanted her fiction to dramatize those moments when decaying systems of thought were in their death throes. In the Mackay review 25 years earlier, Eliot seemed to be linking herself to the "endeavours" of the group of intellectuals who were trying to educate the public and show them the shape of the new age: Bray, Hennell, Carlyle, Strauss, and now Mackay.

Another suggestive comparison between Eliot's fiction and her interpretation of Mackay concerns the theme of experimentation. The point of Mackay's history is to understand the historicity of systems of thought, to place them in their own historical contexts to see how they might not be suitable for new circumstances. "[E]very past phase of human development is part of that education of the race in which we are sharing; every mistake, every absurdity into which poor human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we may reap the benefit" (*Essays*, 31). The allusion to science is no accident, for it is in just this way that Eliot and other historicists thought of history as a science around mid century. The decaying systems of thought in history are a set of failed experiments from which humanity can learn, most importantly, the historicity of systems of thought. This formulation runs deeper than the adage that "those who don't learn from their mistakes are destined to repeat them," because this concerns the evolution of worldviews. The message that Eliot underscores in the review is that we must dispense with the worn out systems of thought, for their historical ages have passed. The theological and metaphysical stages of human history have prepared the way for the new age of positive philosophy and historical investigation.

The positive philosophy that Eliot mentions is indeed a reference to Comte, and the Mackay review is the first indication that she knew about positivism. She uses it first as a kind of foil, to say that while positive philosophy, i.e., inductive, scientific investigation, is the characteristic of the present age and its fundamental task, the study of history will be able to contribute to that project. Eliot was not a Positivist, she found Comte's system "one-sided" (*Letters*, III, 439), but she did support the notion that systematic investigation was the key to human progress. Historical investigation like Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect*, she argued, makes an important compliment to positive science.

Six months after the Mackay review, John Chapman began making arrangements to purchase the *Westminster Review*, and he wanted Eliot to write the prospectus and be the managing editor. Her decision to move away from her friends and family in Coventry and take on this huge enterprise in London suggests that she had a burgeoning desire to join progressive intellectual efforts in a more cosmopolitan environment. Her work was done anonymously because Chapman wanted to pitch himself as the journal's front man, and probably because it was thought that her being a woman would raise doubt in the efficacy and seriousness of the project. However, the other side of the problem was that people who knew Chapman also knew he was not intellectually equipped to carry on the journal with the high standards with which it had begun in 1824, under its founders Jeremy

Bentham and John Mill, and its later editor, John Stuart Mill. In June 1851, Eliot suggested that "it will perhaps be the best plan for you to state, that for the present *you* are to be regarded as the responsible person, but that you employ an Editor in whose literary and general ability you confide" (Haight, 91).[18] By the fall of 1851, Eliot was in London, living at Chapman's house at 142 Strand, and busily working on all aspects of the first number of the new series, which appeared in January 1852. There is no record that she was ever paid for her services. Haight suggests that her room and board at 142 Strand were probably given in exchange (Haight, 91). If true, these arrangements are another indication of Eliot's personal commitment to the project itself.

The move to London and her central role in the *Westminster* led to associations with the leading lights of mid-Victorian literary and philosophical culture. Though she had met J. A. Froude and Harriet Martineau before 1851, she was now in frequent contact with them as they contributed to the early numbers of the new series, along with the phrenologist George Combes, and jack-of-all-trades George Henry Lewes. Chapman's house at 142 Strand was a meeting place for London's liberal-minded literati. Herbert Spencer, who had recently published the influential *Social Statics* (1851) and worked across the street as a sub-editor for *The Economist*, was a frequent visitor at 142 Strand and became a close friend of Eliot's.[19] She met article contributors Thomas Henry Huxley and Richard Owen, the French historian Louis Blanc, the exiled Italian Giuseppe Mazzini, even Dickens made an appearance. Chapman's house was a meeting-place of progressive thinking and writing in the 1850s where Eliot must have felt like she was a contributing agent.

The constant bustle of Chapman's house had disadvantages, however, and in the early fall of 1853 Eliot found new lodgings near Hyde Park. Now away from the many watchful eyes at 142 Strand, Eliot was able to cultivate a relationship with Lewes in relative privacy. They were never able to marry because Lewes was legally trapped in his marriage to Agnes Jervis. Before she and Lewes became estranged, Agnes had borne a son in 1850 by Thornton Leigh Hunt, a close friend and colleague of Lewes. Apparently aware of the child's origins, Lewes nevertheless acknowledged him as his own, and thereby closed the door to the only recourse for pursuing a divorce available at that time: the claim of adultery. By the time he and Eliot began their serious intimacy in the summer of 1853, Lewes was firmly separated from his wife, who continued her affair with Hunt and bore two more of his children (Haight, 131-35).

Lewes was a polymath who applied himself to a wide variety of interests. He wrote articles, plays, and novels, and in 1845-46 he published a four volume set entitled *A Biographical History of Philosophy*. In 1849, for example, he accompanied Manchester and Edinburgh performances *The Merchant of Venice*, in which he played Shylock, with a lecture series on the history of philosophy. He wrote a review column for the *Leader*, which he and Hunt had started, and was invited by Chapman and Eliot to write a section on French literature for the *Westminster Review*; Lewes was one of the few regular contributors to the *Westminster Review* in the 1840s who continued to do so under the new editorship.

Eliot's activity in the early 1850s constitutes a striking conjuncture, with respect to the various continental intellectual movements, the new *Westminster Review*, and her own efforts to disseminate progressive philosophy in England. Many of the characteristics of this combination are associated with the mid-century perspective that has come to be called the Religion of Humanity. The Religion of Humanity is usually a reference to the Comtean cult of Positivists in France, and more especially to the English movement led by Richard Congreve, from which the name derives.[20] Baumer argues that the Religion of Humanity is a perspective that should also apply to the Young Hegelians and the Philosophical Radicals, like J. S. Mill, all of whom held the common belief that a new secular religion must replace the now outmoded Christianity. Unlike skeptical Enlightenment critiques of Christian dogma and superstition, the Religion of Humanity was more historically oriented, more sensitive to the developmental nature of human consciousness. Whereas Christianity "had been thought to deal with the unobservable, and [was] therefore . . . unscientific, . . . the new Higher Criticism represented Christianity not as imposture, but as myth, not as pathology, but as psychological projection or 'alienation.'"[21] The distinction is crucial for it highlights the degree to which historicism had come to shape mid-nineteenth-century perspectives on philosophical problems that the Enlightenment's static view of human nature was unable to resolve. In the Religion of Humanity perspective, Christianity was the expression of an earlier spiritual stage that needed to be raised to its secular fulfillment, a new religion of man. There were significant differences among the individuals and groups adhering to the Religion of Humanity,[22] but they shared a set of views that formed a powerful cultural force: that Christianity had served spiritual needs under other historical circumstances; that those needs have not disappeared, but have been transformed by changing circumstances, i.e., modernization. A new form of secular religion that does not contradict known laws of nature, e.g., no miracles, and which focuses on social problems and the relief of human suffering, needs to replace theocentric forms of religious convictions and metaphysical philosophy. One of the very few places in Europe where the various national versions of the Religion of Humanity converged was on George Eliot's desk at 142 Strand.

Another sentiment shared by the adherents to the Religion of Humanity perspective was that the public should be exposed to the updated way of thinking. When Eliot said in the Mackay review that the past is "part of that education of the race in which we are sharing," she meant that the development of mankind depended on studying the past in a way that revealed the nature of changing spiritual needs. She used an example from Lyellian geology to illustrate the point:

> A correct generalization gives significance to the smallest detail, just as the great inductions of geology demonstrate in every pebble the working of laws by which the earth has become adapted for the habitation of man. In this view, religion and philosophy are not merely conciliated, they are identical; or rather, religion is the crown and consummation of philosophy—the delicate corolla, which can only spread out its petals in all their symmetry and brilliance to the sun, when root and branch exhibit the conditions of a healthy vigorous life. (*Essays*, 31)

This passage presents a heady celebration of positivism, where knowledge is both grounded in the minute, observable details, and soars to a level of religious feeling. The conciliation and identification of religion and philosophy was the high hope of Comte, and the guiding principle of the Religion of Humanity. The assumption was that philosophy had finally emerged from its mistaken adherence to metaphysics by evolving into a science of positive laws proven by observation, which elevated religion itself from its theological stagnation. In this the Young Hegelians agreed. Strauss and Feuerbach did not seek to abandon religion or philosophy, but to supercede their theological and metaphysical stages, represented by Christianity and Hegel, respectively. This striking convergence of perspectives of the French Comtists (and their English adherents) with the Young Hegelian movement in Germany seems to have occurred without much, if any, association between the two groups. Eliot represents perhaps the earliest effort to explicitly weave together these two movements.

Under the new editorship of Chapman and Eliot, the *Westminster Review* was committed to introducing the English reading public to the latest continental intellectual movements, like those related to the Religion of Humanity. One of the results of this commitment was the frequent review and discussion of the work of Auguste Comte, for which the editors were obliged to call on Lewes. Lewes was one of the early English exponents of Comtean thought. Though neither were Positivists, Lewes and J. S. Mill together had developed an interest in Comte's positive philosophy in the 1830s and 1840s. Lewes's *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences* was a freely translated exposition of Comte's *Philosophie positive*, which appeared in 1853—the same year that Harriet Martineau's abridged translation of the same work was published.

As Eliot began to think of leaving the *Westminster*, she undertook her second major translation. The reasons for deciding to translate Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* are not explicit in her correspondence. There was a budding tension between herself and Chapman that bloomed when he printed an announcement that he would publish a translation of Feuerbach, "by the translator of Strauss." Eliot had told Chapman of her desire to leave the *Westminster* in the fall of 1853, and Chapman successfully convinced her to stay on until the following April (*Letters*, II, 127-28). According to Rosemary Ashton, Eliot was beginning to think of making a living as a writer because the editorship provided no income. Moving out of 142 Strand into a rented space on Cambridge Street presumably strained her finances.[23] The Feuerbach translation, which Chapman announced as forthcoming in his "Quarterly Series," would not add much to her income either. In an angry letter dated December 2, 1853, Eliot castigated Chapman for advertising the translation, in addition to an original work, "The Idea of a Future Life," which was never pursued. It is not clear from the letter why Eliot was so upset with the advertisement. Perhaps she was feeling less gratuitous with her time for Chapman's benefit. Chapman's own finances were in desperate shape by this time, and it must have been understood that he might not be able to pay Eliot for her translation.

> I bitterly regret that I allowed myself to be associated with your Series, but since I have done so, I am very anxious to fulfil my engagements both to you and the public. It is in this sense that I wish you to publish Feuerbach, and I beg you to understand that I would much rather that you should publish the work and *not* pay me than pay me and not publish it. I don't think you are sufficiently alive to the ignominy of advertising things, especially as part of a subscription series, which never appear. . . . [You must] consider the question of Feuerbach as one which concerns our *honour* first and our pockets after. (*Letters*, II, 130-31)[24]

Eliot did the Feuerbach translation, for which Chapman paid £30 and published in the summer of 1854 (Haight, 158). By this time her editorial tenure was over, she was composing articles for the *Westminster* and other London periodicals for pay, and she living openly with Lewes.

One way to explain Eliot's decision to translate Feuerbach is to consider the milieu in which she was working when she undertook the project. The progressively edged *Westminster Review*, whose seemingly fearless (if occasionally ignominious) owner was willing to put into print all kinds of counter-orthodoxy, was a cell for rethinking the future after the passing of the theological stage of human history. As the managing editor, George Eliot was the nucleus of this cell. While her new friends Spencer, Lewes, and Harriet Martineau were advancing scientific and positivistic perspectives, Eliot's strength and experience in the German language made Feuerbach a likely candidate for her next big project, and a useful contribution to the progressive discourse of these several years.

Feuerbach's own intellectual framework had developed like so many others who attended Hegel's lectures at the University of Berlin in the 1820s. Feuerbach went there in 1824 to study theology, but, according to his own account, he learned from Hegel that philosophy, not theology, was the right line of inquiry.[25] Hegelian historicism was one of the most important characteristics that guided Feuerbach's investigations and writing for the rest of his life. Hegel's insight, that all of the various worldviews of mankind were born in and appropriate to specific historical moments in the general development of Spirit, was the historicist view that Feuerbach eventually turned back against Hegel's philosophical system, arguing that the system itself was a product of its milieu. However, he and his Young Hegelian contemporaries did not throw out the system, but steered it away from its overemphasis of the Ideal while maintaining the central story of the expansion of consciousness.[26]

After Strauss, Feuerbach led the way in making new paths of inquiry for the Young Hegelians. The most popular manifestation of his activity was *Das Wesen des Christentums* in 1841. The *Essence of Christianity* led intellectuals of the 1840s "forward from the views of Strauss to this new piece of radicalism that was concerned not with the content of dogma [as with Strauss] but with the origin of dogma in human aspirations and fears."[27] With a rhetorical style that seemed to turn all theological dicta upside-down, Feuerbach asserted that everything humanity associated with the divine was nothing more than the best of human striving. The creation of the Christian God, for this Young Hegelian, was humanity objectifying its own essence; a self-alienation rationalized and maintained by theology. Theology must be replaced by *anthropo*logy in order to return the Spirit of humanity to humanity. What Feuerbach meant by "anthropology" was a humanistic interpretation that showed religious beliefs and practices as dimensions of psychological needs and desires.

Feuerbach's anthropology is nearly the same approach that Kelley identifies as "mythistory." Kelley relates an internal contradiction in nineteenth-century historicism in which he opposes the source-intensive approach of Ranke with the mythistory approach of people like Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Grimms, Michelet, and Cruezer. The distinction goes back, according to Kelley, all the way to Thucydides's critique of Herodotus, for whom he coined the term "mythistoria" to describe Herodotus's search for origins that lay beyond memory or what the documentary evidence cannot support. In the nineteenth-century version of this critique, Ranke insisted that "[h]istory cannot discuss the origin of society," and that historians would be "over-bold who should venture to unveil the mystery of the primeval world."[28] The mythistorians saw the living symbols of older cultures, in law, language, and religion, but they had to exercise their intuition in order to interpret the characteristics of those cultures. "Through the imaginative reconstruction of cultural remains . . . the historian could plumb the depths of the 'well of the past.'"[29] While Kelley focuses on Creuzer and Michelet, who themselves focused on language and law, respectively, the Young Hegelians studied Christianity in the same mythistorical vein.

Feuerbach was an important figure for many of his contemporaries because he articulated the humanistic credo of a new generation. Engles reflected, "Enthusiasm was general: we all became at once Feuerbachians."[30] Eliot's was among this general enthusiasm, but she worried over the reception of her translation in England. She told her friend Sara Hennell, who had helped with the Strauss translation and was, in the early spring of 1854, reading the whole of Eliot's new translation, "It is considered *the* book of the age [in Germany], but Germany and England are *two* countries" (*Letters*, II, 137). As the manuscript neared completion Eliot asked Sara,

> I am so far removed from the popular feeling on the subject of which it treats that I cannot trust my own judgment. With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree, but of course I should, of myself, alter the phraseology considerably. Before I do this however, I want you to tell me what I *must* leave out. Mind, I want to keep in as much as possible. (*Letters*, II, 153)

Eliot's feeling of being "far removed" is an indication that since leaving Coventry three years earlier, her intellectual development was beginning to isolate her from the mainstream. Feuerbach's sometimes bald attacks on orthodox belief, Eliot thought, might be too abrasive for the English reading public, but she could no longer be sure since joining the legion of counter-orthodoxy.

When Eliot's translation was published in the summer of 1854, she was already on the continent, having taken the dramatic step of a pseudo-elopement with Lewes. They spent the next eight months in various German towns and cities where Lewes was able to gather material for what became his most popular work, *The Life of Goethe*. Eliot wrote several articles and reviews for the *Westminster Review* and the *Leader*, translated long passages of Goethe for Lewes's book and half of Spinoza's *Ethics*, which was never completed. And she read furiously. John W. Cross, her first biographer and second husband, lists three pages of works she read, either silently to herself or out loud in the evenings to Lewes. The list includes Goethe, Rameau, most of Shakespear's plays (she spent time comparing Schlegel's translations to the original), Lessing, Spinoza's correspondence, numerous German scholars and critics, Heine, and Macaulay's *History of England*.[31] Upon her return Eliot began a productive period in which she wrote numerous articles reflecting the breadth of her reading. Within the next year, between the summer of

1855 and the early fall of 1856, the topics of Eliot's articles ranged from Liszt and Wagner to Milton, from Tennyson and Carlyle to Evangelism, from ancient tragedy to contemporary philosophy and biblical criticism. There is perhaps no thread that connects all of Eliot's writing in this period. However, those on topics of German cultural developments are most numerous: "Three Months in Weimar" and "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar" in *Fraser's Magazine*, "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister" and "The Future of German Philosophy" in the *Leader*, and "German Wit: Heinrich Heine" and "The Natural History of German Life" in the *Westminster Review*.

The last of these, "The Natural History of German Life," reflects Eliot's continuing efforts to combat Germanophobia in the English-speaking world,[32] and an emerging interest in realism and the problem of representation. "The Natural History of German Life" is a review article for two books by Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, *Die burgerliche Gesellschaft* (1851) and *Land und Leute* (1853), in which he studied social classes in various German regions with an approach he called *Naturgeschichte*. Eliot heaped praise on Riehl's empirical rigor and methods of "picturing," using his portrayals of the German peasantry as the best examples, which for her highlight how the British are lacking in accurate representations of the nation's social classes. "What we are desiring for ourselves has been in some degree done for the Germans by Riehl . . . and we wish to make these books known to our readers . . . as a model for some future or actual student of our own people" (*Essays*, 273). Many Eliot scholars refer to the article because it is apparent that she was forming ideas about how to represent social groups in writing—ideas which she then developed in her fiction. The temporal proximity of this article and her first fictional foray supports this interpretation: the article was published in

July, 1856, two months before she began the first of her "Scenes."[33]

Shuttleworth argues that Eliot was developing her own "commitment to Natural History" at this time, and that the sense of history she derived from Riehl and applied to her first novel, *Adam Bede*, was a static one.[34] This view is consistent with the practice of natural history in the nineteenth century, for it was hardly historical and emphasized the observation of nature in its particular aspects. Riehl's natural history of German peasantry recorded the details of their appearances, and not an account of the historical conditions that make them the way they are. In fact, he stressed the timelessness of their characteristics. Eliot contrasted Riehl's "accuracy" with the English tendency to idealize and romanticize images of laborers.

> The notion that peasants are joyous, that the typical moment to represent a man in a smock-frock is when he is cracking a joke and showing a row of sound teeth, that cottage matrons are usually buxom, and village children necessarily rosy and merry, are prejudices difficult to dislodge from the artistic mind, which looks for its subject into literature instead of life. The painter is still under the influence of idyllic literature, which has always expressed the imagination of the cultivated and town-bred, rather than the truth of rustic life. (*Essays*, 269)

Eliot provides other similar examples of bad generalizations to stress the point that if art is to help "exten[d] our sympathies," it must strive for better accuracy.[35] She argued that Riehl's generalizations derive inductively from the "facts" of his observations, which represent his "contribution to that knowledge of the German people" (*Essays*, 291).

Eliot's celebration of Riehl's work fell in line with her interest in doing something similar in the English case. As I discuss in the next chapter, Eliot was sensitive to the fact that Riehl's study of peasants in particular could not be replicated in the English case. One would have to look back to a time before industrialization had transformed not only the English countryside, but also the nature of social relationships, because English peasants had nearly disappeared. This posed a kind of problem familiar to historians of every age: how to tap into lost frames of reference. Eliot's solution to this problem was historical fiction. Two months after the Riehl article was published, Eliot began her career as a writer of fiction by developing "scenes" from earlier in the century that explore varieties of religious sentiment: two from the 1820s and one from around the turn of the nineteenth century. The first of these, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," begins with a passage the speaks to Eliot's keen sense for the historicity of cultural forms: "Shepperton Church was a very different-looking building five-and-twenty years ago" (*Scenes*, 41). The opening line of her first novel, *Adam Bede*, which begins with a different kind of lost form—the artisan's workshop—indicates that Eliot believed fiction had a kind of power for historical conjuring:

> With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799. (*AB*, 7)

When she began writing the three short stories that comprise *Scenes of a Clerical Life*, Eliot could not have known that she was going to make a career of it. But the decent reception of *Scenes* encouraged her publisher, John Blackwood, to solicit a full-length novel. Eliot began *Adam Bede* in 1858, and its publication the following year met with instant critical and popular success. With this further encouragement, she set about right away on her next novel, *The Mill on the Floss*.

Chapter 2. *The Mill on the Floss*: A Natural History of English Life, or Eliot's "Riehlism"

> [Riehl] sees in European society *incarnate history*, and any attempt to disengage it from its historical elements must, he believes, be simply destructive of social vitality. What has grown up historically can only die out historically, by the gradual operation of necessary laws. The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium, and development can take place only by the gradual consentaneous development of both. (Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in *Essays*, 287)

* * *

The excerpt in this epigraph highlights Eliot's historicist frame of mind as she reviewed Riehl's "natural history of German life" the summer of 1856. The purpose of the passage in its original context was to explain Riehl's philosophical conservatism, which disposed him to oppose radical reforms that sought to erase social forms that had developed historically and "consentaneously," with the "internal conditions" of human sentiments and needs.[1] The analogy of the "organism and its medium" projects a conception of the relationship between individuals and their social milieus as dynamic and evolutionary, as well as sensitive to the destructive tendencies of revolution. By "incarnate history," Riehl suggests that European society embodies the historical development of customs, which are themselves a connection to a remote past in the mythistorical orientation. Individuals who live with and reproduce those customs thus manifest the history of their society. In this, Eliot's sense for the historical dimension of the organic relationship between individuals and their environments embodies the romantic-historicist ideas of development and historical uniqueness.

Riehl's anthropological method for studying and writing about German peasants appealed to Eliot on a number of levels, the most fundamental of which was the historical. This appeal inspired Eliot, in part, to try to write historical fiction in 1856, and was still a major animating force behind her second novel. The notion of "consentaneous development" is an especially important component of Riehl's appeal to Eliot, for it characterizes her conception of how unique, individual experiences can be related to general historical changes.

Eliot began writing *The Mill on the Floss* almost immediately after finishing *Adam Bede* in 1859, and chose for its setting the provincial world of her childhood. It is generally agreed that *The Mill on the Floss* is at least partially autobiographical, and the spirited, intelligent heroine, Maggie Tulliver, has often been compared to Eliot in her own childhood.[2] The obvious parallel is their age: Eliot and her brother Isaac were born in the same respective years as Maggie and Tom, and grew up in provincial England in the 1820s. While a full comparison between Maggie and her author can be interesting, the focus of this chapter is the setting of the novel and the narrative strategy that reflects Eliot's interest in Riehl's anthropological, or natural history, approach to history.

Like Eliot's other early fiction, *The Mill on the Floss* is narrated from the perspective of a natural historian studying people—an anthropologist, which is the predominant characteristic of the second phase of development in her historical thought.

St Oggs is a riverside town described as if it were a colony of ants next to a tidal pool, and the Tullivers and Dodsons as families of ants more or less oblivious to the wider world of apparently monolithic historical and natural forces, except as these forces disrupt their own lives. Many critics who sense a general transformation in Eliot's fiction consider *The Mill on the Floss* to be the last novel of the first phase of her development. A number of these critics argue that Eliot is still under the heavy influence of Riehl, and they read the early novels as attempts to do her own brand of "natural history of English life."[3] Many elements in *The Mill on the Floss* bear this out. The natural history approach manifested itself in a narrative strategy that was omniscient, anthropological, and apparently objective. From the standpoint of conceptual complexity, *The Mill on the Floss* resembles Eliot's other early fiction, for the dynamic between individuals and their historical milieu is more one-sided, i.e, dominated by the historical, than one sees in her later work. Furthermore, the narrator's perspective on St Oggs is one of uncomplicated objectivity. But if we centralize history in Eliot's thinking, we can see that she employed the natural history approach in *The Mill on the Floss* to serve an historicist purpose. That purpose was to describe provincial English life before the flood of industrialization, especially inner, religious sentiments in ordinary people who faced the destructive forces of that transformation. Whereas Riehl studied German social classes, which, as "incarnate history," offered access to the past, Eliot "observations" had to be fictional because by the late 1850s, industrialization had transformed the English social classes so much that it was not possible to read the past as clearly in them as one could have during the time that coincided with her childhood.

* * *

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Eliot's laudatory review of Riehl's work commends his ability to describe German classes in their social setting. Eliot makes no effort in the review itself to disguise her own desires to continue this line of work in English cases. Before even mentioning Riehl in the review, Eliot spends a great deal of time (six book pages) discussing a number of the wrong ways the laboring classes are represented in various English artistic media. Often misrepresented in paintings, on stage, and in literature, peasants especially have been hopelessly idealized.

> Idyllic ploughmen are jocund when they drive their team afield; idyllic shepherds make bashful love under hawthorn bushes; idyllic villagers dance in the chequered shade and refresh themselves, not immoderately, with spicy nutbrown ale. But no one who has seen much of actual ploughmen thinks them jocund; no one who is well acquainted with the English peasantry can pronounce them merry. (*Essays*, 269)[4]

Eliot calls for remedying this problem of idealized, badly generalized, conceptions by collecting observations and establishing a "real knowledge of the People" by which someone might write a book like those of Riehl, "well nourished with specific facts," so that it "would be a valuable aid to the social and political reformer." But the English case held a special problem if one wanted a study of peasants, for they had been disappearing for at least a century. Eliot acknowledged this disparity between the German and English experiences of industrial transformation of social classes, adding that for access to preindustrial social relations in England, one would have to go back 50 years.

Eliot began looking for that access in the Riehl article itself.

> In order to appreciate what Riehl says of the German peasantry, we must remember what the tenant-farmers and small proprietors were in England half a century ago, when the master helped to milk his own cows, and the daughters got up at one o'clock in the morning to brew,–when the family dined in the kitchen with the servants, and sat with them round the kitchen fire in the evening.

This stream continues as Eliot weaves together a number of images, such as the "quarried parlour . . . innocent of carpet," where farmers' daughters were "spinning their future table-linen," (*Essays*, 273). Eliot appears to be almost carried away with this sort of depiction and one cannot help anticipating her turn to fiction several months later. With her imagination tweaked, she fleshed out the contrasts between the more cosmopolitan farmers of the mid-1850s, "whose style of living and mental culture are often equal to that of the professional class in provincial towns" and those of the preindustrial countryside beginning to change at the turn of the century. In this, Eliot is animated by the romantic-historicist impulse to seek out the charms of lost ages and cultures, and found in Riehl a kind of methodology for revivifying what was lost.

Eliot especially admired Riehl's methodology for studying people, and she used the review to make an argument against a priori speculation and conjecture, and a call for a more inductive approach to understanding social classes. However, in her representation, Riehl seems to carry (a priori) assumptions of his own, especially with respect to the German peasantry.

> In Germany . . . it is among the peasantry that we must look for the historical type of the national *physique*. In towns this type has become so modified to express the personality of the individual, that even "family likeness" is often but faintly marked. But the peasants may still be distinguished into groups by their physical peculiarities. In one part of the country we find a longer-legged, in another a broader-shouldered race, which has inherited these peculiarities for centuries. (*Essays*, 274)

Eliot admires what she takes to be Riehl's contribution to the natural history of German people. The observations of "types," and the assumption of the timelessness of physical qualities and characteristics, resembles the kind of "naturalizing" that was a passion among many amateur British naturalists who had been combing the fields, forests, and shores of the British isles while enjoying the feeling that they were contributing to science.[5] Eliot scholars point to the naturalist expedition that she and Lewes made in the late spring of 1856 to Ilfracombe on the Devonshire coast as a precursor to her early commitment to realism.[6] The main reason for the trip was Lewes's new work on scientific investigation that culminated in a piece called *Sea-side Studies*.[7] He was probably stimulated by his admiration of Goethe's version of *Naturphilosophie*. Eliot's interest in natural history sharpened as she tagged along.

> I never before longed so much to know the names of things as during this visit to Ilfracombe. The desire is part of the tendency that is now constantly growing in me to escape from all vagueness and inaccuracy into the daylight of distinct, vivid ideas. The mere fact of naming an object tends to give distinctness to our conception of it–we have then a sign that at once calls up in our minds the distinctive qualities which mark out for us that particular object from all others. (*Letters*, II, 251)

Eliot was, in fact, writing the Riehl review while in Ilfracombe. Together, her journal and the review reflect a joy in identifying types, whether they be a particular species of sea-weed or a specific trait of "national *physique*" among Hessian peasants. Eliot's "desire" for accuracy while traipsing along the rocky shores of Ilfracombe, looking for sea anemones, is intimately related to her admiration of Riehl, a naturalist of the German people.

Eliot responded especially to the way Riehl's work on German peasants enabled contact with the remote past. Though today we may bristle at the huge leaps of generalization and apparent condescension that pepper Riehl's work, it does represent an early anthropological assumption that "primitives" could give insight into the past of human development. Eliot's romantic-historicist imagination, which had been stimulated in a similar way by Feuerbach's version of anthropology, was eager for that kind of insight. Her inspiration swelled as she followed Riehl in thinking that peasants have basically remained unchanged for centuries.

> In the cultivated world each individual has his style of speaking and writing. But among the peasantry it is the race, the district, the province, that has its style; namely, its dialect, its phraseology, its proverbs and its songs, which belong alike to the entire body of the people. This provincial style of the peasant is again, like his *physique*, a remnant of history to which he clings with the utmost tenacity. In certain parts of Hungary, there are still descendants of German colonists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who go about the country as reapers, retaining their old Saxon songs and manners, while the more cultivated German emigrants in a very short time forget their own language, and speak Hungarian. (*Essays*, 275)

In this passage the peasants of central Europe are an undifferentiated "race" in contrast to the "cultivated world" of individuation. As a "remnant of history," the peasants' "provincial style," if carefully described, provides access to the remote past.

The concept of "incarnate history" is an example of the romantic-historicist perspective that Kelley calls mythistory. Kelley argues that before the various national versions of the historical profession gravitated toward empirically-based analysis of the past in the nineteenth century, there had been a lively field of historical research that held an important role for the imagination. Herodotus used "tall tales," or mythology, in his attempts to trace the origins of the Persian wars back to points beyond living memory.[8] The romantic critique of the limitations of Enlightenment historiography operated within the same tension (see introduction). Ranke, who admired many of the accomplishments of romantic historiography, nevertheless articulated a nineteenth-century version of Thucydides's criticism in saying, "History cannot discuss the origin of society, for the art of writing, which is the basis of historical knowledge, is a comparatively late invention."[9] Ranke's famous devotion to documents is apparent in his claim that if something is not written, it is not within the province of history. Romantic-historicists from the early types like Herder and the Grimms to a later generation that could include Riehl and Eliot, however, did not submit themselves to this restraint. Law, language, and mythology were vestiges of the past that afforded insights into origins that are not available in records, but that required the use of imagination to reconstruct the historic cultures.[10] For Riehl and Eliot, preindustrial social classes were "incarnate history," or vestiges of the past that could provide means for reconstructing European culture from many centuries ago.[11]

Eliot was well prepared for the mythistory orientation implicit in Riehl from her work on Feuerbach and Mackay, and in order to explain the historicist principles that undergird Riehl's work, she used a mythistory notion of "historical language" in her review.

> The historical conditions of society may be compared with those of language. It must be admitted that the language of cultivated nations is in anything but a rational state; the great sections of the civilized world are only approximately intelligible to each other. . . ; one word stands for many things, and many words for one thing; the subtle shades of meaning, and still subtler echoes of association, make language an instrument which scarcely anything short of genius can wield with definiteness and certainty. Suppose, then, that the effort which has been . . . made to construct a universal language on a rational basis has at length succeeded, and that you have a language which has no uncertainty, no whims of idiom, . . . no hoary archaisms . . . which effects the purpose of communication as perfectly and rapidly as algebraic signs. Your language may be a perfect medium of expression to science, but will never express *life*, which is a great deal more than science. With the anomalies and inconveniences of historical language, you will have parted with its music and its passion, with it vital qualities as an expression of individual character. . . . Language must be left to grow in precision, completeness, and unity, as minds grow in clearness, comprehensiveness, and sympathy. And there is an analogous relation between the moral tendencies of men and the social conditions they have inherited. The nature of European men has its roots intertwined with the past, and can only be developed by allowing those roots to remain undisturbed while the process of development is going on, until that perfect ripeness of the seed which carries with it a life independent of the root. (*Essays*, 287-88)

Like Riehl, Eliot is now opposed to social revolution[12] because her conception of the relationship between "moral tendencies" and "social conditions"—which she earlier called "internal and external conditions"—is developmental. Her language analogy suggests that just like the efforts in the natural sciences to establish a rationalized, universal language for the purposes of clarity would destroy the "music and passion" of historical language, efforts to establish a rational society through radical means (and she mentions the socialists specifically in the next paragraph) would destroy social systems that have evolved historically and in dynamic relation with individuals within.[13] Eliot's orientation to language is quintessentially historicist because it takes the customs of speech to be remnants of past knowledge, out of which current knowledge springs.

* * *

When developing a narrative strategy for *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot turned to the tidal pool perspective—a "*Riehlist*" approach—she gleaned in the summer of 1856 on the shores of Ilfracombe and in the Riehl review. In careful narrative interventions, the depiction of the town of St Ogg's resembles the natural history approach discussed above. Chapter 12 of Book I is especially important in this respect, for it very explicitly draws a long historical view of St Ogg's, within which the actors are more or less ignorant of their place in that history.

> It is one of those old, old towns, which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature as much as the nests of the bower birds or the winding galleries of the white ants: a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history, like a millennial tree, and has sprung up and developed in the same spot between the river and the low hill from the time when the Roman legions turned their backs on it from the camp on the hill-side, and the long-haired sea-kings came up the river and looked with fierce, eager eyes at the fatness of the land. (*MF*, 181)

The narrator is very much the naturalist observing an "outgrowth of nature," which is, in this case, St Ogg's. Compare this depiction with one Eliot made on a walk, during the naturalizing expedition, of a small village near Ilfracombe: "Lee is a tiny hamlet which has lodged itself, like a little colony of *Aurora Actiniae* [a species of anemone], in the nick between two ranges of hills, where the sea runs in and makes a miniature bay" (*Letters*, II, 244). The narrator's perspective in *The Mill on the Floss* is the same as Eliot's voice in her Ilfracombe notebook, with respect to the object under observation. The reader is to see St Ogg's as if it were like a "little colony" that naturally lodged itself "between the river and the low hill."

The naturalist-narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* is also an historian whose gaze spans the centuries as well as the landscape of St Ogg's. He catches glimpses, for example, of the "Saxon hero-king" and the "gloomier shadow of the dreadful heathen Dane" coming up the river. Then the gaze comes to rest for a moment on the "old Hall."

> It was the Normans who began to build that fine old Hall, which is like the town–telling of the thoughts and hands of widely-sundered generations; but it is all so old that we look with loving pardon at its inconsistencies, and are well content that they who built the stone oriel and they who built the gothic façade and towers of finest small brick-work with the trefoil ornament, and the windows and battlements defined with stone, did not sacrilegiously pull down the ancient half-timbered body with its oak-roofed banqueting-hall. (*MF*, 181-82)

The "old Hall" is just one of the more conspicuous of those "galleries of the white ants," which is an architectural cacophony built on the ruins of older structures. The cacophony is forgiven, however, from an historical standpoint. Indeed, architecture was another of the historicist's tools for "plumbing the depths of the past," as Kelley points out, where one can read the remains, as the narrator here does, and infer—even speculate—much about their construction. For like German peasants, architecture is a kind of incarnate history, insofar as structures still visible represent a connection to a former age.[14] There is again another striking parallel in the Ilfracombe notebook.

> But when one sees a house stuck on the side of a great hill, and still more a number of houses looking like a few barnacles clustered on the side of a great rock, we begin to think of the strong family likeness between ourselves and all other building, burrowing house-appropriating and shell-secreting animals. The difference between a man with his house and a molusc with its shell lies in the number of steps or phenomena interposed between the fact of individual existence and the completion of the building. (*Letters* II, 242)

The comparison between human architecture and the shelter-building of sea critters encourages one to think of human beings as just another of the world's animals, just as the narrator's first observation of St Ogg's compared its buildings to "the nests of bower birds."

The narrator's view of architecture arises later in a way that brings together the novel's realism and its historicism. In a very important chapter entitled "A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet," the narrator establishes a comparative analogy by taking the reader on a brief journey down the Rhône, where the river's occasional flooding has left only "remnants of commonplace houses, which in their best days were but the sign of a sordid life, belonging in all its details to our own vulgar era" (*MF*, 361). The narrator contrasts his vantage with the scenery one enjoys while floating down the Rhine, whose crumbling castles are in "harmony" with the surroundings that "seem to have a natural fitness."

> [N]ay, even in the day when they were built they must have had this fitness, as if they had been raised by an earth-born race who had inherited from their mighty parent a sublime instinct of form. And that was a day of romance! If those robber barons were somewhat grim and drunken ogres, they had a certain grandeur of the wild beast in them–they were forest boars . . . not the ordinary domestic grunter. (*MF*, 361)

Here again we have the naturalist's view of animals in their domiciles. However, the contrast between the grand ruins of a romantic day and the remnants of the "commonplace houses" of the Rhône gives a sense of historical depth that is augmented by the attribution of a "certain grandeur" with Rhineland barons' primitive wildness, much preferred (so it would seem) to quotidian, grunting, domesticity associated with "our own vulgar era." The narrator further insists that feudal times were times of "colour when the sunlight fell on glancing steel and floating banners: a time of adventure and fierce struggle–nay, of living, religious art and religious enthusiasm. . . . Therefore it is that these Rhine castles thrill me with a sense of poetry: they belong to the grand historic life of humanity, and raise up for me the vision of an epoch" (*MF*, 361-62). The poetry of the medieval world whose ruins are still visible on the Rhine, from the narrator's perspective in the nineteenth century, form a discrete "epoch" now gone—given way to a more prosaic, less heroic world represented by the remains on the Rhône. And it is, of course, the type that occupied those that Eliot's fiction describes.

The natural historian's perspective and descriptive language in *The Mill on the Floss* is not limited to the passages that establish the setting. The action of the characters is related to the activity of animals, as if to provide objective distance. Clams, birds, and toads are variously used as referents, but the most recurring metaphor of this kind is of ants. Not only is the built environment of St Ogg's likened to the "winding galleries of the white ants," but as we zoom in, the two main families of the story, the Dodsons and the Tullivers, are described as "emmet-like," i.e., ant-like, in their ignorance of the "beatings of the world's mighty heart" (*MF*, 363).

Though the chapter begins with a nod to the Byronic taste for medieval castles and the kind of life they symbolized, *The Mill on the Floss* is really concerned with the kind of mundane, forgotten life represented by the Rhône and depicted on the Floss. The narrator actually pauses to apologize for making the reader "irritated" with "this sense of oppressive narrowness" (*MF*, 363). But in order to make an effective natural history of this little community, the story of the Tullivers' demise is precisely what needs to be told.

> [I]t is necessary that we should feel [their pain], if we care to understand how [the force of history] acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie–how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that 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. The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths: and we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? In natural science . . . there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life. (*MF*, 363)

This passage explicitly links the project of the novel with natural history as it justifies realism in art. As the mid-century realists turned their attention to the lives and environments of ordinary people, they perhaps had no better excuse than the one Eliot offers here. Just as Riehl's work illuminated the conditions and circumstance of ordinary Germans, this natural history of "obscure hearths" will fill out our understanding of ordinary provincial people on the eve of an "historical advance."

The novel itself provides the very sort of wider, historical perspective that the ant-like characters lack. According to the narrator, *The Mill on the Floss* is a "history of unfashionable [ordinary] families," (*MF*, 385). Maggie and Tom represent a mix of the more respectable Dodson family with the suspect clan of the Tullivers. Though Tom has the fair complexion of the Dodsons, he unfortunately did not inherit the quicker wits of the Tullivers. Maggie, also unfortunately, is quite the opposite. "It seems a bit of a pity," according to her father, "as the lad should take after the mother's side istead o' the little wench. That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't" (*MF*, 59). He would prefer that Tom were sharper, for it would help him to succeed in a career, a need made keener by Mr Tulliver's own troubles. Maggie's intelligence, on the other hand, can only come to "mischief" because she is female. Mr Tulliver's sense of husbandry, however, and his immanent financial ruin, for that matter, are within a narrow frame of reference that is somewhat obviated by the narrator's more historical perspective that can take in more than the immediate generations and see beyond the horizons of St Ogg's.

The litany of disasters that the Tullivers face overcomes the "oppressive narrowness" that the narrator apologizes for. Mr Tulliver's troubles, which become Tom's and Maggie's, are caused by a new enterprise nearby. Various family obligations and his own struggling business have already strained the family's finances when he learns that the sale of the farm upriver of Dorlcote Mill will bring about bad consequences. Purchased by Privart, "a new name," i.e., backed by new capital, the farm was to be expanded by irrigation innovations that would drain the water, and thus the power, from Tulliver's mill. His failed lawsuit against Privart ensures the family's ruin, which precipitates Mr Tulliver's stroke. While Tom's decision to pay off the family's debts out of the principle of his and Maggie's annuity is seen as honorable, it becomes obvious that his dearly bought education will not result in a profession. At the age of sixteen he must, as he sees it, start over again as an apprentice to his merchant uncle. Maggie's Thomas à Kempis-inspired resignation, in the wake of this disaster, to an utterly selfless life, which her friend Philip Wakem perceives as "unnatural," produces a severe psychological conflict that eventuates in her taking a headlong plunge into an apparent elopement with Stephen Guest. This causes Tom to estrange her from the house. Their eventual

reconciliation lasts but a moment as the flooded Floss unleashes some machinery from a nearby wharf that plows them under, where they drown in each other's arms. As the family experiences this series of tragedies, it is impossible for them to understand it as a part of an historical context; but that is just what the natural-historian provides in the narration.

What Eliot had been interested in since translating the Young Hegelians, and what the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* says this "history of unfashionable people" is about, are the workings of religious feeling in a particular historical context. After excusing this story as natural history, the narrator hones in on the Protestant variation "unknown to Bossuet"[15] that is "too specific to be arrived at deductively." Instead, conscientious "observation" is needed, the details of which are provided by Eliot's imagination. In the case of the Dodsons and Tullivers, their religion, with only a "tincture of theology," was more "of a simple, semi-pagan kind." While the Dodsons' religion "consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable," the Tullivers' had the "same sort of traditional belief," but which was "carried in richer blood, having elements of generous imprudence, warm affection and hot-tempered rashness" (another allusion to Maggie's unfortunate inheritance) (*MF*, 363-65). This description of a religious variant follows the anthropology that Feuerbach called for in *Essence of Christianity*, which was the kind of natural science Eliot wanted to advance.

This natural history of religious sentiment is animated by Eliot's historicism, which insists on the specificity of the historical context. The "religion" of the Dodsons and Tullivers was a sort of syncretic amalgamation that was practical only until the modernizing world began encroaching upon the British provinces.

> If such were the views of life on which the Dodsons and Tullivers had been reared in the praiseworthy past of Pitt and high prices, you will infer from what you already know concerning the state of society in St Ogg's that there had been no highly modifying influence to act on them in their maturer life. It was still possible, even in that later time of anti-Catholic preaching, for people to hold many pagan ideas and believe themselves good church people notwithstanding. (*MF*, 365)

In the absence of the "highly modifying influence" of modernity, whose notable sign in this passage is the reference to the Corn Laws, which were an attempt to regulate the price of corn for the benefit of provincial landed interests,[16] the Dodson and Tulliver ancestors had been under no pressure to change their semi-pagan version of Protestantism. But just what the specific elements requiring modification were is not quite clearly articulated in the novel. Perhaps this is an intended effect, so as to activate our sympathy and feel the Tullivers' bewilderment in their rapid demise, but this would undermine the natural historian's purpose of trying to understand and thoroughly describe organisms in their environment. Recall Eliot's organicism in the Riehl review:

> The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium, and development can take place only by the gradual consentaneous development of both. (*Essays*, 287)

With this organicist orientation, one would expect Eliot to want to be specific in describing how modernity was forcing a modification in religious feeling in the 1820s. It could be that in 1859, Eliot was herself unsure, and hence unable to depict, the nature of the modifying influence.

Instead of precise definitions of the historical forces at work in the novel, we are left only with the vague sense that whatever changes do come to St Ogg's come up the river. This is where the narrator imagined the approach of the sea-kings, the invasions of Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans, each of which had to undermine the existing social order in some way as they settled in as the new rulers. The river also links St Oggs to the new capital culture of international trade. The loss of the mill forces Tom to seek a new line of work down by the wharfs, where his uncle Deane's company engages a wider world of modern commerce. These same wharfs house the fatal machinery that floated away in the flood and killed Tom and Maggie. The river is thus more than a symbol for change, it literally conveys the historical forces that disrupt life in St Ogg's.

The conclusion of the novel seeks to appease our sorrow for Tom and Maggie by contextualizing their fate in a wider natural-historical flow. Whether or not this is satisfactory depends on the interests of the individual reader. But it is nevertheless the perspective of the tidal-pool naturalist that Eliot concludes with, which provides a sense of meaning to the small-scale tragedies we have just read.

> Nature repairs her ravages–repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour. The desolation wrought by that flood, had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five years after. The fifth autumn was rich in golden corn-stacks, rising in thick clusters among the distant hedgerows; the wharves and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unlading. (*MF*, 656)

So we are to understand that despite the loss of the Tulliver line (Tom and Maggie's only cousins were Dodsons), St Ogg's will go on as before; its natural activity erasing all traces of the flood in a mere five years. If the narrator were to leave us with this, it would seem as if time made all things the same, that history was nothing but a flat surface that rhythmically refreshes itself in an endless cycle of repetition. But the narrator continues:

> Nature repairs her ravages–but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again–the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair. (*MF*, 656)

The naturalist-historian narrator owns the eyes that dwell on the past, and all of Eliot's fiction seeks to do the same. The point of writing a "history of unfashionable families" is to keep a memory of the kinds of small-scale suffering and victimization that usually seems to get washed away without a trace. The careful naturalist of people, however, has the kind of perspective that will notice the scars on the hillside, and the marks of "past rending." With *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot became that naturalist-historian, whose historicism led her to see the period of her childhood as coinciding with seismic change—a watershed, perhaps. In this novel, the last of Eliot's *objective* natural-historian phase, the sharp focus on how the Tullivers experienced the early moments of modernization left vague the specifics of that change. When she returned to the provinces of her childhood in *Felix Holt*, she was beginning to experiment with narrative voices other than the objective naturalist, and a new penchant for research helped her develop a sharper vision of some of the specific historical forces that railroaded the premodern, English countryside.

* * *

Imagine a thirty-five-year-old Marian Evans walking along the craggy beach at Ilfracombe on the Devonshire coast with Lewes in June of 1856. It is 17 June, to be precise, and Marian is walking a little lighter today, despite being laden with glass jars and other containers of various sizes for holding their quarry, because the Riehl article and another review article for the *Westminster Review* have just been dispatched to London. She is now "delightfully at liberty and determined to pay some attention to sea-weeds" in abundant beauty at Ilfracombe. Imagine further that as they meander among the rocks in search of sea anemones and barnacles, Marian and George find a passage-way to a littoral, a tidal pool, which is usually pay-dirt for gathering seaweed.

Happy to get away from the rising tide on the windy beach, they follow the path to the semi-protected pool. They begin combing the "miniature bay" for interesting species, and as Marian struggles to learn the names of some of the varieties, she nearly treads on a busy colony of ants. She pauses to watch in amazement at their single-mindedness as the ants dart to-and-fro, working tirelessly on projects they no doubt believe to be of the utmost significance to their underground galleries. Perhaps Marian begins to imagine what sorts of trials and struggles face an individual family of these little ants. Just then, the ever-rising tide reaches the entrance to the littoral and sends a high wave into the tidal pool. Marian has time to anticipate the impending doom as the advancing wave make its steady way toward the colony of unsuspecting ants who are carrying on as before. The wave, now only a large ripple on the surface of the tidal pool, is nevertheless a deluge from the perspective of an ant, and with a cold, indifferent splash, the colony is washed away, its galleries flooded, its members drowned or hopelessly dispersed. How terrible, how tragic this must seem, Marian imagines, to the surviving members of the colony who have lost their world along with all of their relatives in the blink of an eye. Yet, how insignificant to the life of the ecosystem formed by the tidal pool. Indeed, a tidal pool is dependent on these occasional refreshments, and will go on much as before despite the loss of one of its ant colonies. There will of course be more, for "nature repairs her ravages–but not all."[17]

Chapter 3. Analogy, Veracity, and Eliot's Middle Novels

> She is "drinking in" Florence, and as far as the old past life can be restored she will, I am certain, restore it, if only from the wonderful intuition with which genius throws itself into all forms of life. (G. H. Lewes to John Blackwood, 28 May 1861. *Letters*, III, 420)

Most Eliot scholars agree that Eliot's fourth and fifth novels bear a new character that indicates a modification on the techniques she employed in her early works. In terms of historical representation, two important developments emerged in her method she prepared and wrote *Romola* and *Felix Holt: the Radical*. From 1861, when she began her research of Savonarolan Florence, to 1865, when she began *Felix Holt*, Eliot demonstrated an intensified interest in and a determined use of source material to develop accurate pictures of their respective historical periods. Due to the remoteness of its setting, *Romola* challenged Eliot in ways that none of her other novels did. Her commitment to realism—in terms of accuracy—became an obsession with veracity that led to an almost Rankean orientation to documentation. Perhaps it was because of this obsession that the question of the relationship between the imagination and the past clarified. But despite the clarification, and the suggestion at the end of the novel there could be a number of ways to tell the history of Savonarolan Florence, *Romola* maintains the epistemological presumption of objectivity implied in a natural-historian/narrator. The novel should therefore be viewed as a transitional piece in between Eliot's second and third phases of development (see Table 2). In *Felix Holt* Eliot returned to the more comfortable period of her childhood, in which her own memories could facilitate the accuracy and realism in representing the lives of ordinary people during the reform bill debates of 1832. She did not merely rely on her memories, however, for the method of researching late fifteenth-century Florence carried over, with many fewer pains, into preparing *Felix Holt*.

The idea for *Romola* initially occurred to Lewes during a May 1860 visit to Florence, where he proposed that Eliot write a novel depicting Girolamo Savonarola's meteoric rise to and fall from fame and power in the 1490s (Haight, 326). Later that summer she told Blackwood that she was "rather fired with the idea," but would hold off until she completed her next "English novel," which became *Silas Marner* (*Letters*, III, 339).[1] In the spring of 1861, after *Silas Marner* was finished, Eliot and Lewes returned to Florence, where they both took extensive research notes in the Magliabecchian Library and at various sites intended to help Eliot develop an accurate picture of the city and its inhabitants at the end of the fifteenth century. She augmented this research with standard readings on medieval Europe: Gibbon, Hallam, Sismondi, and Michelet; not to mention the primary sources: Petrarch, Boccaccio, Politian, Machiavelli, and Vasari. She read biographies of Savonarola and two volumes of his sermons she found in a London bookshop. She consulted maps of the city both in Florence and back home at the British Museum. Because the novel's main villain, Tito, is Greek, Eliot was compelled to research medieval Greece too. Despite the efforts, Eliot was nagged by doubt and held off the actual writing of *Romola* for months as she found new sources to mine. Six months after their return from Florence, Lewes wrote to Blackwood, who was soon expected to visit their London home:

> Polly [Eliot's nickname] is still deep in her researches. Your presence will I hope act like a stimulus to her to make her begin. At present she remains immovable in the conviction that she *can't* write the romance because she has not knowledge enough. Now as a matter of fact I know that she has immensely more knowledge of the particular period than any other writer who has touched; but her distressing diffidence paralyses her. (*Letters*, III, 473-73)

"Polly's" growing expertise in the history of Savonarolan Florence seemed only to enhance her sense that there was more left to discover.

Eliot's commitment to veracity led to unexpected difficulties in the summer and fall of 1861. Blackwood shared one example with his wife: "Her great difficulty seems to be that she, as she describes it, hears her characters talking, and there is a weight upon her mind as if Savonarola and friends ought to be speaking Italian instead of English" (*Letters*, III, 427). Eliot combated this particular insurmountable obstacle to complete authenticity by pouring through phrase books for Italian colloquialisms, which occur frequently in the novel.[2] She went so far as to check some of the phrases and other points of doubt with Thomas Trollope, brother of the famous writer and a fellow-Italophile, who apparently possessed some authority in Eliot's mind. A recurring difficulty was that Eliot's use of fifteenth-century colloquialisms sounded odd to the modern Italian ear. Trollope remarked on one of Eliot's choices:

> *Boto* for *voto* is a Florentinism which may be heard to the present day, though the vast majority of strangers would never hear it, or understand it if the did. George Eliot no doubt met with it in some of those old chroniclers who wrote exactly as not only the lower orders, but the generality of their fellow citizens, were speaking around them. And her use of it testifies to the minuteness of her care to reproduce the form and pressure of the time of which she was writing.[3]

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Eliot's decision to place the title character in an historical family, the Bardi, caused her more headaches as she strove for authenticity in describing this family's *popolani* origins. Trollope suggested that her source for this detail, Lastri's *L'Osservatore Fiorentino*, might be interpreted differently than she had done, but was nevertheless impressed with the "great care she took to make her Italian novel historically accurate."[4]

It may come as only a small surprise that *Romola* was a commercial disappointment and, in the minds of some critics, a failure. Besides learning antiquated Italian expressions, readers are obliged to notice the colors and fabrics of the characters' clothing, the names of the streets they turn down, and piazzas they enter. Motivated readers may also look up the references to the countless historical figures whose names pepper the novel, or those that play small parts in the story, such as the political commentaries offered by Machiavelli and Bernardo Rucellai, or the intuition of Piero di Cosimo, whose intuition and painterly eye anticipate significant plot turns. Except for experts in this period in Florentine history and ardent Eliot fans, perhaps, the seemingly inessential details make *Romola* a labor to read. One anonymous reviewer said that finding interest in "old political struggles," was like "attempting to feast on the bread and wine found in the ruins of Pompeii."[5] After the first chapters appeared in *Cornhill* in the summer of 1862, Anthony Trollope, who would have heard of Eliot's immense labors and fastidiousness from his brother, wrote her a note of encouragement that carried a significant warning: "Do not fire too much over the heads of your readers. You have to write to tens of thousands, and not to a single thousands."[6] Trollope was not specific about what he thought was outside the grasp of the "tens of thousands." He may have been thinking what other reviewers thought; that Eliot's fuller purposes—i.e., the depiction of cultural and generational tensions between the humanist scholarship of Bardo and Tito, and the fervent spirituality associated with Savonarola and Romola—were not discernable in the first part of the novel. R. H. Hutton urged readers of the serial publication to reread the novel as a unified whole in order to appreciate the achievement, though he knew that *Romola* "will never be George Eliot's most popular book."[7] The question remains whether Eliot could have represented the cultural struggle without heaping so many of the peripheral details that only serve to indicate her faithfulness to her sources, which very few could acknowledge with authority anyway. The answer is "probably," but not while her commitment to veracity had become obsessive.

Whereas Eliot's initial turn to fiction represented an interest in historical study that was clearly different from the Rankean methodology now ascendent in Britain, her methodological shift with *Romola* has the appearance of a move toward the orientation to documentation that would be canonized by the academy a decade later. In terms of objectivity, this is a false impression. The experience of writing a novel with the help of intense research and commitment to veracity only helped Eliot to clarify her conception of the role of imagination and intuition in historical representation. On the day after she and Lewes returned from their 1861 trip to Florence, Eliot made the following impression on Blackwood:

> I never heard anything so good as her distinction between what is called the real and the imaginative. It amounted to this, That you could not have the former without the latter and greater quality. Any real observation of life and character must be limited, and the imagination must fill in and give life to the picture. 'Silas Marner' sprang from her childish recollection of a man with a stoop and expression of face that led her to think that he was an alien from his fellows. The dialect of Lisbeth in 'Adam Bede' arose from her occasionally hearing her father when with his brothers revert to the dialect of his native district, Derbyshire. She could not tell how the feeling and knowledge came to her, but when Lisbeth was speaking she felt it was a real language which she heard. (*Letters*, III, 427)[8]

After a month of copious note-taking, which was about to be followed by the six-month obsession with accuracy, Eliot still privileged the intuitive part of historical representation. Using examples from his prized author's earlier works to illustrate the point, Blackwood seemed to understand Eliot's view that imagination not only fills in the inescapable gaps in the tangible evidence, it animates it, "give[s] life to the picture." Imagination is thus necessary for thinking about past. Eliot must have believed this when she first turned to fiction, but her early works were not reliant on the kind of research she undertook for *Romola,* and then again for *Felix Holt*. Blackwood's account is the first clear (if mediated) articulation of the relationship between the real and the imaginary that animated Eliot's mature fiction. Lewes similarly expressed the relationship in the passage quoted in this chapter's epigraph.

The depiction of the role of imagination in historical representation in the Blackwood passage is remarkably like that of Edward Bulwer Lytton, whose historical fiction Eliot had admired in her youth and whose novel *Rienzi* she "ran through" while working on *Romola*.[9] Witemeyer makes much of the connection between Lytton's work and *Romola* in particular, in a way that sheds some light on Eliot's general theory of historical fiction. Lytton, who sometimes prefaced his historical novels with explicit theoretical discussions of the genre, argued that the psychological motives of the historical figures he represented in his novels had to be provided by an imagination that was faithful to whatever was known about the particular subject.[10] In the preface to *The Last of the Barons*, Lytton insisted that "fiction is permitted that liberal use of Analogical Hypothesis which is denied to history, and which, if sobered by research, and enlightened by knowledge of mankind . . . tends to clear up much that were otherwise obscure, and to solve the disputes and difficulties of contradictory evidence by the philosophy of the human heart."[11] Witemeyer is correct to point out the clear affinity with Eliot's "Historic Imagination" passage from the mid-1870s, where she argued that the imagination needs to supply the "deficiencies" in the "extant evidence . . . [with] careful analogical creation" (*Essays*, 446). Lytton's "analogical hypothesis" provided the otherwise unknown motives behind the actions of historical figures, while Eliot's "analogical creation" describes her method for showing the complex network of causation hidden from a merely empirical survey of extant evidence. Witemeyer argues that Lytton and Eliot shared the assumption of "essential continuity" between their own and their contemporaries' mental states and those of people in any other time period. This continuity enables analogizing between historical periods, and Eliot lays this out at the beginning of *Romola*.

> The great river courses which have shaped the lives of men have hardly changed; and those other streams, the life-currents that ebb and flow in human hearts, pulsate to the same great needs, the same great loves and terrors. As our thought follows close in the slow wake of the dawn, we are impressed with the broad sameness of the human lot, which never alters in the main headings of its history–hunger and labour, seed-time and harvest, love and death. (*R*, 44)

Coming at the end of the novel's first paragraph, this passage sounds almost defensive about the remote setting and the huge leap backwards the reader and the narrator are about to take, which the author has, with great trepidation and colossal effort, already taken. For Eliot the past may be, like Italy itself, a foreign country. But there is, after all, some hope of historical empathy, given the "sameness of the human lot." Witemeyer further suggests, but does not substantiate, that Eliot analogized Savonarola's reform movement with the Italian Risorgimento, which she followed from home and while working on *Romola* in Florence, and that her interest in the "old reforming priest" had something to do with the Reform Bill period in which she set her next two novels. These loose associations with contemporary political developments are less than helpful in discerning what Eliot meant by "analogical creation."[12]

To describe what Eliot may have meant, it is useful to consider some available usages of the word "analogy" in the nineteenth century. The *OED* has nine different but related meanings, with contexts ranging from mathematics to linguistics. "Proportion, agreement of ratios, likeness of relations, and similarity" are among its common definitions. One interesting example, under the category of "Logic" is taken from J. S. Mill: "The word Analogy as the name of a mode of reasoning is generally taken for some kind of argument supposed to be of inductive nature but not amounting to complete induction." Here is a usage that corresponds with the "Historic Imagination" passage.[13] Eliot devoted her "veracious imagination" to the "working out in detail of the various steps by which a political or social change was reached, using all extant evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation." Whereas the extant evidence enables genuine induction, there are wide and plentiful gaps in what it can provide. This is where "analogical creation" enters to make connections and suggest motives hidden from any faithful record of observations—to "fill in" as Blackwood put it—based on one's experience of connectedness and understanding of psychological dimensions of personalities.

For Mill, analogy was a legitimate form of reasoning, even as an imperfect substitute for induction. The passage quoted in the *OED* is extracted from Mill's discussion, "Of Analogy," in his *System of Logic*, where he described the various strengths and weaknesses of analogical reasoning. Settling for a broad definition of analogy, whereby inferences are made about the possible characteristics of one thing based on the known characteristics of another with which it shares other characteristics, Mill argued that when properly used, analogical reasoning can be powerful.

> Since the value of an analogical argument inferring one resemblance from other resemblances without any antecedent evidence of a connection between them, depends on the extent of ascertained resemblance, compared first with the amount of ascertained difference, and next with the extent of the unexplored region of unascertained properties; it follows that where the resemblance is very great, the ascertained difference very small, and our knowledge of the subject-matter tolerably extensive, the argument from analogy may approach in strength very near to a valid induction.[14]

Useful as it may be, according to Mill, analogical reasoning can only come close to "valid" induction, which for him is the only "positive" or "scientific" form of truth.[15] Though its greatest usefulness in scientific inquiry is apparent when it can form testable hypotheses, analogy can also provide "probabilities" that are, if done carefully, the next-best thing to provable assertions.

Another example of "analogy" in the *OED* is more pejorative: "Analogy, however, is not proof, but illustration." This usage is provided by none other than William Stubbs, an early British champion of objective, scientific history. The passage is extracted from the close of the introduction to Stubb's monumental *Constitutional History of England*, and was meant in its original context to qualify a metaphor he used to describe the origins of English constitutional history. "The German element is the paternal element in our system, natural and political. Analogy, however, is not proof, but illustration: the chain of proof is to be found in the progressive persistent development of English constitutional history from the primeval polity of the common fatherland."[16] In this case, Stubbs's "paternal" metaphor analogizes family ancestry with historical development. But we are to understand that this is merely an illustration. Stubbs provides his "chain of proof" in the chapters that follow by unpacking his wide reading in original sources, with ample documentation. According to Heyck, Stubbs's *Constitutional History*, which remained standard reading on the subject well into the twentieth century, "taught [historians] that history should be rooted in original sources, balanced and temperate in judgement, highly detailed and analytical, and severe and austere in tone."[17]

Stubbs's lessons in severity and austerity of tone are perhaps what Eliot referred to as "abstract treatment which belongs to grave history" in the "Historic Imagination" passage. Stubbs's measured use of analogy, and his general disdain for literary affectation in writing history,[18] might lead to the kind of history that someone like Eliot would find "grave." If Eliot's use of the word "analogy" is close to Mill's and Stubbs's, i.e., a mode of reasoning one resorts to when induction is not possible, then her embrace of its usefulness in thinking and writing about the past is an open rejection of the new, soon-to-be-academic history. She came to view her fiction (analogical creations) as a deliberate alternative to, or even an improvement on, the kind of inductive history that Stubbs promoted in the 1850s and 1860s, and that the new profession of history advanced in the 1870s and beyond. That Eliot began to attend to extant evidence in the early 1860s suggests that she was not opposed to inductive reasoning. Instead, she was opposed to an epistemology that insists that induction is the only way to create useful knowledge.

As Eliot adopted historical research methods that the new scientific historians were canonizing, *Romola* also shows an emerging ironic stance with respect to objectivity and historical representation. This ironic stance is the primary characteristic of her mature fiction and is only deeply embedded in *Romola*. In offering *Romola* as an alternative to formal history, the novel implies that there are many potential ways to recount the past and to derive meaning from it. The narrative histories of the Florentine republic as humanistic scholarship began to wane, at the time of Charles VIII's Italian invasion and Savonarola's brief moment of power, which can be found in Sismondi, Hallam, Michelet, Gibbon, etc., constituted a familiar kind of public history that any of Eliot's readership could look into themselves. But the inner lives of the principle characters in those familiar stories, and the secondary and tertiary figures, whose courses were shaped by great events but are not accounted for by the historians, had to be "filled in" by Eliot's imagination. Romola makes this point more obvious at the end of the novel. Having taken over the leadership of Tito's illegitimate family, she tells young Lillo that the glory and happiness he seeks in wanting to become a "great man" will not come in the way he expects. Romola draws from three personal experiences, which for reader are the historical narratives of Bardo, Tito, and Savonarola, in order to teach Lillo what does not yet see. The stories of her own father, "who chose poverty and obscurity rather than falsehood"; Tito, who "cared for nothing so much as his own safety," and thus never made the world a better place; and Savonarola, whose "greatness which belongs to a life spent in struggling against powerful wrong" could not prevent his own horrible end (*R*, 674-75), are instructive in the hands of Romola. They are instructive in ways that Sismondi, for example, could not be in describing the power struggles in Florence after the 1594 expulsion of the Medicis.[19] In this way the novel shows both the political history and its usually unknown counterpoint. The novel thus represents Eliot's budding critic of historiography in the nineteenth century, and perhaps only a faint suggestion of her later irony.

* * *

In her fifth novel, Eliot returned to the much more comfortable setting of her childhood. Whereas *The Mill on the Floss* addressed provincial experiences of monolithic, emergent modernity in provincial England circa 1830, *Felix Holt, the Radical* treats a more specific dimension of this period of critical transition. *Felix Holt* is Eliot's only novel explicitly about politics and political transformation: it is both an historical novel about politics and a politically-edged novel about historical transformation. When she began writing her new novel in March 1865, she also began a fresh round of research that included Mill's *Political Economy*, Fawcett's *Economic Position of the British Labourer*, and *The Times* and the *Annual Register* for 1832-33.

Eliot's treatment of the political tumult of 1832 is dominated by her romantic-historicist outlook. This version of historicism stressed the developmentality of societies and was opposed to revolution. Eliot's opposition to radical reform, first articulated in the Riehl review (see previous chapter), derived from an organic view of individuals in their environment, and a concomitant view that societies and individuals evolve together ("concentaneously") and gradually. In Graver's view, Eliot's opposition to the second Reform Bill derived from a sensitivity to the loss of community when a new, heightened sense of selfish class-interest began to dominate political culture in the nineteenth century. *Felix Holt* reflects this opposition more directly than any other of her novels. As such, it represents an historicist's project to illuminate a moment in the early stages, around 1832, of a political development that was in full flower when she wrote it in the mid 1860s, on the eve of the second Reform Bill.

The novel's "argument" is formed by two complementary threads concerning historical change, one private and the other social. The first is the sense of the organic, personal connection with the past, brought out through the question of Esther Lyon's inheritance of the Transome estates, and in the troubled relationship between Mrs. Transome and her son Harold. The other main thread has to do with the meaning of political change associated with the first Reform Bill of 1832. This thread is developed through the dialogue concerning the vote, the riot, and through the character of Felix Holt, the so-called "radical," in his critique of the general direction of political reform that arises in a context of class interest and antagonism. These two threads together form an argument against political revolution, a position based in Eliot's gradualist view of history and change in human society and the organic interdependence among the classes.[20]

The specific historical problem of *Felix Holt* is this: How did the expanded franchise, under the Reform Bill of 1832, affect people in provincial England? The answer to that question is constituted by the action of the novel. The Reform Bill is the central contingent event that shapes every major turn in the plot. The novel's conclusion seems to be that the expanded franchise in 1832 ignited civil unrest that nearly turned into a catastrophe, and that this was not the best way to achieve social justice and human progress. Instead, what was needed in 1832, and presumably still in the mid 1860s, was the kind of reform that the title character is devoted to: the education of the poor and working classes. The novel suggests that without education, the new electorate will vote merely on their selfish, private interests rather than with the good of the whole of British society in mind. Education was for Eliot, as it was for J. S. Mill, the more immediate need.

Underlying her own version of liberalism, which feared revolution in Britain and opposed expanding the franchise to the uneducated, was Eliot's gradualist perspective on historical change, that was consistent with Young Hegelian ideas on the historical process. As she worked on *Felix Holt*, Eliot manifested an understanding that societies evolve organically through time, and each new social form has to grow out of and supersede its predecessor, while trying to maintain what was good and abandoning what was harmful or unjust. According to Graver, Eliot's entire corpus stresses the danger of losing the community-oriented, preindustrial kinds of relationships in the wake of the industrial revolution; that Eliot sought to revitalize *Gemeinschaft* sensibilities in a *Gesellschaft* world.[21] Eliot was not interested in turning back the clock to reinstall already superseded, preindustrial forms of social relations. Rather, she wanted to maintain feelings of community she associated with the period of her youth in the 1820s, but in the new industrial society of the mid-Victorian period.

Eliot used *Felix Holt* as an historicist's tool to teach an audience, engaged in 1865-66 in a new reform bill debate of its own, about the near catastrophe at the time of the first Reform Bill. Using a recalled (and researched) experience from her youth, when she witnessed the 1832 election-day riot in the town of Nuneaton, Eliot pointed to a narrowly escaped revolution in England when the nation's political power seemed up for grabs. Like Treby Magna, the fictitious town in *Felix Holt*, Nuneaton was a new polling site under the reformed-borough system inaugurated by the 1832 Reform Act. While Eliot might have simply recreated her experience of that riot from memory, she instead "researched" it by spending a great deal of time in 1865 in the National Library, reading through the *Times* from 1832 and 1833.

In terms of representing the Reform Bill period, two primary and paradoxically related qualities distinguish *Felix Holt* from *The Mill on the Floss*. The first is Eliot's developing sense of veracity—that there was some objective truth about the dangerous moments surrounding the election under the new, expanded franchise in 1832, which inclined her to use actual accounts of the election-day riots to inform her portrayal of the riot in the novel. This quality can be seen as a new extension of the natural-history approach of her early fiction. The second quality has to do with explicit questioning of whether a single objective account of an historical event can be produced. As the trial scene shows, a number of different versions of the riot can be made compelling with anything but blind logic to arbitrate among them.

* * *

The lineage and inheritance of Esther Lyon is a synecdoche—the part that signifies the whole—of the novel's historical "problem," which concerns the nation's organic connection to its past. Esther's decision not to take over the Transome Estate is based on her perception that the manor house, and by implication, the manorial system, is an antiquated form. It is also based on her perception that to accept the inheritance would amount, ironically, to an abandonment of her own past. Her turn away from the inheritance is coupled with her turn toward Felix Holt, and the forward-looking nature of his vision and work to educate the working class. The novel depicts her growing understanding—her expanding consciousness—of herself vis-a-vis her own past, which helps her to overcome the prejudice against her adoptive father's pious and meager life. It is this expansion of consciousness that enables the forward-looking choice she makes at the end of the novel.

Initially Esther is discontented with her humble circumstances, believing that she is somehow entitled to something more "noble" (*FH*, 159). Still ignorant of her parentage, Esther loves and respects Reverend Lyon as her father. But his lifestyle had "selected everything that was least interesting and romantic in life and history," and is somehow unworthy of her. Esther's mother, she imagines, would have been someone more like her, and "she wished she could have remembered that mother more thoroughly" (*FH*, 161). If she had this memory of a mother more like herself, then her own feelings of incongruity with Reverend Lyon could be explained. The absent mother represents Esther's past that she longs to know, but which is for the moment veiled from her consciousness. The discontent arises because, the reader is led to understand, a stable sense of self is dependent on a historical self-consciousness.

Esther's gradual awakening from ignorance, which follows an Hegelian pattern of advancing consciousness, coincides first with her acquaintance and courtship with Felix. Their relationship begins with her uncomfortable self-reevaluation, because Felix harshly criticizes Esther for her attitude towards her father. "You must know that your father's principles are greater and worthier than what guides your life. You have no reason but idle fancy and selfish inclination for shirking his teaching and giving your soul up to trifles" (*FH*, 210). While outwardly outraged, Esther was "seriously shaken in her self-contentment," and felt that she would now be "haunted by self-criticism," and "dogged by inward questions." She was "stung . . . into a new consciousness concerning her father" (*FH*, 214). Esther's progress toward a higher consciousness of self in the world begins in the Hegelian manner of self-critique. According to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, individual self-consciousness emerges only in the presence of an other with competing claims. The former selfish consciousness, in which one believes her own perspective to be the only perspective, gives way under self-doubt and a re-estimation of the situation when a new view presents itself.[22] In the novel, Felix's is the new perspective that challenges Esther's. Whereas she had assumed Lyon's inferiority, because she saw him as unrefined and devoted to irrelevant pursuits, Felix awakens her from that view by demonstrating its superficiality and suggesting that the things she held to be important were but trifles.

Reverend Lyon's disclosure to Esther of her origins and relationship to the Transome family is the culmination of a slow unraveling of the complicated inheritance and a major step in her maturation as a "sympathetic" person. Here, historical awareness is associated with moral grounding. Since the berating she took from Felix, Esther had been growing more tender with Reverend Lyon. "And in the act of unfolding to her that he was not her real father . . . the odd, wayworn, unworldly man became the object of a new sympathy in which Esther felt herself exalted" (*FH*, 354). While Reverend Lyon had expected that the truth about her past would alienate Esther from him, it had the opposite effect of increasing her love for the man who raised and loved her as his own. Her growing respect for Lyon takes the form of appreciating his willingness to live meagerly, like a "working man," because he had lived by some "great and strong feeling." Eliot's sympathetic treatment of devout members of the clergy goes back to her first forays into historical fiction. Most recent to the publication of *Felix Holt* was the character of Savonarola in *Romola*, whose fervency Eliot admired, but whose egotism brings about his downfall in the novel. Esther now sees that there is something special in the way that Lyon's life is guided by a spiritual passion.

Esther's admiration, however, does not go so far as to lead her to adopt his Christian worldview, and this qualification allows Eliot to make another historical observation. There is an historical transformation at work that cleaves Esther's generation from Lyon's, and it parallels Eliot's own early development away from her father. When Eliot broke from the church in 1841, after her exposure to "higher criticism" in the Coventry circle, she nearly permanently estranged herself from her father. Compelled by her love for him, however, she eventually ended her "Holy War" and returned to her father, attended church with him, and cared for him in his old age (see chapter 1). The parallel between Eliot and Esther does not concern open revolt, and is limited to the differing worldviews. Mr. Lyon attributed his way to "supreme devotedness to the Divine Will." However, for Esther these "words did not fit on to the impressions wrought in her by what he had told her" (*FH*, 356). Like Eliot's, Esther's mind is one that will be mature through the mid-nineteenth century, and will potentially be shaped by higher criticism and the religion of humanity. In setting the expansion of consciousness at this particular historical moment, Eliot puts a non-theistic spin on Esther's development and makes an historiographical point by associating the new "feeling" with Esther's generation. The new, critical understanding was available to those born in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and is an adaptation of, and development from, the pious kind of devotedness of Mr. Lyon's generation, born before the French Revolution.

Esther encounters the need for historical continuity in the context of her relationship with Reverend Lyon. Whereas inheriting Transome Court would fulfill her childhood day-dreams, and satisfy the inklings she had that she properly belonged to a life of wealth and ease, the thought of removing Lyon from his small house next to the chapel he administered to the manor house she would occupy was, for Esther, out of the question. It would mean "forsaking his vocation, and vulgarly accepting an existence unsuited" to a man who had the "grandeur of his past sorrow and his long struggling labours." Esther now recognizes the "incongruity of that past which had created the sanctities and affections of her life with that future which was coming to her." Lyon's sacrifices had made it possible for Esther to feel affection and love. To divorce him from the life that she was just beginning to feel in harmony with, to appreciate as *her* past, would be a "mockery." (*FH*, 476)

Esther's problem is suggestive of the larger concern that with revolution, a nation disconnects itself from its past. It is in this sense that Esther is a synecdoche for humanity's emerging historical consciousness through the self-critical study of religious and political beliefs during the reform period. Shuttleworth, for example, sees the novel as making explicit a set of conservative implications of organicism; that industrial progress and democratic reforms alienate British society from a communal heritage of the rural village.[23] This perspective is echoed by Graver who views Eliot's work as an effort to recall *Gemeinschaft* sensibilities before rebellion and revolution sweep away all memory of it.[24] While Shuttleworth considers Eliot's organicism as "conservative," it is so only in the sense that Eliot thought a hasty reconstruction of the British polity could be dangerous. She was not a conservative in the sense of wanting simply to return to a golden past.

Eliot advanced her idea of "concentaneous development" and organic change, as opposed to political revolution, through Esther's relationship with Mrs. Transome and Harold. Through her introduction to the Transomes, Esther becomes aware of a negative example of the privileged life she had longed for. When Harold Transome learns of Esther's legal right to the estate he had returned from Greece to manage, he invites her to stay at Transome Court under the pretense of her becoming acquainted with the place. Harold's plan was to woo her into marriage so as to avoid losing the estate. Esther encounters surprises at Transome Court that her youthful daydreams of wealth and leisure did not anticipate. One was Harold's half-wit father, Mr. Transome: "To Esther the sight of this feeble-minded, timid, paralytic man, who had long abdicated all mastery over the things that were his, was something piteous" (*FH*, 493). This description would seem to apply to the diminishing control of the aristocracy in general over British society, an historical movement for which the Reform Bill of 1832 can be considered the centerpiece.[24] It is the character of Mrs. Transome, however, that makes the major negative example of aristocratic life. She was

> in bloom before this century began . . . [and] in the long painful years since then, what she had once regarded as her knowledge and accomplishments had become as valueless as old-fashioned stucco ornaments, of which the substance was never worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal. (*FH*, 106)

As with the image of Mr. Transome, Mrs. Transome seems to symbolize the lost vitality of a bygone age whose forms are no longer fashionable. Having a life full of disappointment, especially recently with the reappearance of Harold, who was not the kind of man she hoped he would be, Mrs. Transome had a rather "gloomy" view of things. The ways in which she tried to understand her life did not mesh with the world of the nineteenth century. When Harold told Esther that he hoped to make Mrs. Transome's last years as pleasant as possible, it became clear to Esther "what it would be to abandon her own past, and what she would enter into in exchange for it; what it would be to disturb a long possession, and how difficult it was to fix a point at which the disturbance might begin, so as to be contemplated without pain" (*FH*, 496). The prospective transfer of the estate to

Esther is a "disturbance" that she is disinclined to initiate, and her choice to marry Felix instead of Harold further grounds her commitment to the organic, historical vision.

* * *

The Esther story, especially her rejection of the inheritance works as a parallel to Eliot's political message about reform and revolution. Eliot's political stance, and its context within the mid-1860s debate on the second Reform Bill, was explicitly articulated in a curious resurrection of the character of Felix a year after the novel was published. Blackwood, in October 1867, attended a Benjamin Disraeli speech in Edinburgh that defended the second Reform Bill, which was going to extended the franchise beyond the 1832 Reform Bill.[25] Blackwood believed that the readers of his publications would like to know what Felix Holt, who represents the working class of 1832 in the novel, had to say about parliamentary reform in 1867. Lewes, ever-protective of Eliot's literary talents and efforts, had recommended against the idea. But Blackwood persisted: "I am excessively anxious that you should do an Address to the Working Men as I am thoroughly convinced that no one could do it so well. When the new Reform Bill comes into operation the working man will be on trial and if he misconducts himself it will go hard with the country" (*Letters*, IV, 398). Blackwood could not have taken a more persuasive line of entreaty. "Misconduct," in the form of a rebellious working-class mob, on the occasion of the first Reform Bill, was the primary evil in *Felix Holt*. Eliot complied, and the "Address to the Working Men, by Felix Holt" was published in the January 1868 issue of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

The "Address" concerns the expanded franchise of the second Reform Bill, and its rhetoric indicates a fear of class-based antagonism and civil unrest. Felix cautions the working classes to use restraint in exercising their new power of the ballot and to be wary of those who claim to have the workers' interest in mind.

> After the Reform Bill of 1832 I was in an election riot, which showed me clearly, on a small scale, what public disorder must always be; and I have never forgotten that the riot was brought about chiefly by the agency of dishonest men who professed to be on the people's side. . . . Let us, I say, show that our spirits are too strong to be driven mad, but can keep that sober determination which alone gives mastery over the adaptation of means. And a first guarantee of this sanity will be to act as if we understood that the fundamental duty of a government is to preserve order, to enforce obedience of the laws. It has been held hitherto that a man can be depended on as a guardian of order only when he has much money and comfort to lose. But a better state of things would be, that men who had little money and not much comfort should still be guardians of order, because they had sense to see that disorder would do no good, and had a heart of justice, pity, and fortitude, to keep them from making more misery only because they felt some misery themselves. (Quoted in appendix to *FH*, 618)

Felix recalls the dangers of the mad mob from the memorable scene in the novel to insist that class warfare is not in the interest of the workers, and that everyone has a stake in the maintenance of order. The main fear is that more rioting, like that of the 1832 elections, would break out when the new electors, untrained in the political process, will be swayed by those who "professed to be on the people's side."

The "Address" manifests the influence of Eliot's gradualist historical consciousness as it shaped her political perspective. In her mind, sudden, convulsive change had too much potential for catastrophe. The problem with revolution was that it wiped away social and intellectual forms that were of some use before anything had been brought in to replace them. "Just as in . . . the irrigation of a country, which must absolutely have its water distributed or it will bear no crop; there are the old channels, the old banks, and the old pumps, which must be used as they are until new and better have been prepared, or the structure of the old has been *gradually* altered" (my italics, "Address," appendix to *FH*, 616). By the mid 1860s, Eliot had become a sort of "gradualist" in her thinking about historical change. "Gradualism," the geological theory associated in the mid nineteenth century with Charles Lyell, had come to be accepted over its older rival, "catastrophism." In the gradualist view, geological change occurred slowly, over many thousands or millions of years. The other assumed the Earth's geology was formed at a specific, catastrophic moments. Eliot was not a participant in that debate, but her historical sensibilities and fear of catastrophe—the wiping away of "old channels, banks and pumps" without a ready system to replace them—parallel the gradualist framework for change.[26] Eliot's gradualism is consistent with the ideas of "consentaneous development" she discussed in the Riehl review (see previous chapter), which also resonated with the Young Hegelian view of historial change.

Felix manifests Eliot's understanding of consentaneous development in his discussion of class. Class is the specific form of social order in the "Address," which instructs people as to their duties, and therefore, it is a system which should not be turned on its head. The sudden removal of class distinction would produce a kind of disjunction that leaves people without a moral compass and only their own selfish interests to judge by.

> Now changes can only be good . . . in proportion as they put knowledge in the place of ignorance, and fellow-feeling in the place of selfishness. In the course of that substitution class distinctions must inevitably change their character; and represent the varying Duties of men, not their varying Interests. But this end will not come by impatience. (Appendix to *FH*, 617)

In this passage and throughout the "Address," duty and interest form the basic tension that dictates whether one will either contribute to the community, or live for himself and his own selfish interests, which destroys communities. Individualistic self-interest is what inhibits the sense of organic belonging, of community-feeling, in all of Eliot's novels. Each novel features characters who live for personal gain and individualistic satisfaction or are in the process of developing into a person who acts selflessly and for the benefit of the people around them.[27] When Felix refers to "Duties" in the "Address" he is employing the organic model of social order that is based in class division. The problem with "impatience," which means radical reform in this context, is that radical change without the necessary moral education would undermine the basis for individuals' sense of duty. Eliot feared that eradicating the traditional system of class-based duties, already strained by industrialization, would produce a non-system based simply and disastrously on individual interest.

While Haight expresses surprise at the contrast between Eliot's earlier enthusiasm for the 1848 revolution in France and her thinking about political reform in the mid-1860s in Britain, there is a significant continuity that underlies the apparent difference.[28] In the March 1848 letter to John Sibree Jr., Eliot praised "the mind" of French people, which was "highly electrified–they are full of ideas on social subject–they really desire social *reform*." She wished she could have witnessed "such a scene as that of the men of the barricade bowing to the image of Christ 'who first taught fraternity to men.'" However, she told Sibree she thought British society was not fertile ground for a conscientious revolutionary movement. "Here there is so much larger a proportion of selfish radicalism and unsatisfied, brute sensuality (in agricultural and mining districts especially) than of perception or desire of justice, that a revolutionary movement would be simply destructive–not constructive." (*Letters*, I, 253-54) For Eliot, individualistic desire, on the part of the English working men, makes a progressive, class-based movement in England unlikely, or just dangerous. This is the same mind as that behind the character of Felix Holt almost twenty years later; keenly sensitive to social injustice, but equally sensitive to rampant individualism and the potential for mere destruction of social order and the forms that tend to preserve it.

Eliot's developmentalist historicism animated her greatest fear that rebellion and revolution could cause the destruction of historical continuity—the organic connection to the past. In terms of specific dimensions of cultural heritage, the "Address" prizes the intellectual historical elements of the "common estate of society" over the physical manifestations that we associate with bourgeois domination, like "buildings, machinery, produce, shipping, and so on. . . ." The greater loss, argues Felix, would be of "that treasure of knowledge, science, poetry, refinement of thought, feeling, and manners, great memories and the interpretation of great records, which is carried on from the minds of one generation to the minds of another" (Appendix to *FH*, 621). The "great memories and interpretation of great records," are the stuff of historical consciousness. Their generational conveyance exemplifies the organic conception of historical continuity applied to historical consciousness in particular. Felix refers to the "treasure of knowledge" as an "inheritance," to which the working class is entitled but has been denied access. Thus, ignorance is the main problem with the working class, not pauperism or the vote. His argument, and Eliot's too, is that revolution can only damage or destroy that "treasure," but education can bring about a solution to the lacking access.

Consistent with his "Address," Felix's "radicalism" in the novel is antidemocratic and opposes mere erasure of class lines. He represents a kind of "radical" who is sharply contrasted with the character Harold Transome, who seeks a parliamentary seat as a member of the Radical Party. As a member of the working class, Felix is keenly aware of injustice and exploitative relations associated with both the traditional social stratification, as well as new kinds of relationships emerging along with British industrialization. His self-righteousness stems from a peculiar consciousness that led him, prior to the action in the novel, to reject a career in the medical profession, for which his father had arranged an apprenticeship. Instead, Felix found a nobler occupation in working as an artisan watch-maker and repairer. But it is from his position within the working class that his opposition to the expanded franchise has more force.

The political dimension in the novel is developed through a view of Felix among the laborers and the newly enfranchised in a setting like the kind that Eliot had told Sibree had a concentration of "radical individualism" and "brute sensuality." The novel seems to suggest that the potential for volatility is due to quickening industrial transformations. Sproxton, a village near Treby Magna, is undergoing industrial transformation in conjunction with the discovery of rich coal mines there. A major canal for transporting the coal is under construction, and the increased activity has created a small working class population of colliers, stone-cutters, and navvies, who meet of a Sunday for drink, either at the Blue Cow, or at William Chubb's establishment, the Sugar Loaf.

Eliot's view that rampant individualism tended to dominate the British working class is manifested in the scene with Felix and the Sproxton workers. Felix's efforts to bring a bit of literacy to poor laborers in Sproxton requires that he recruit these people at their drinking establishments, and convince them to bring their families to his weekly meetings. On one such recruiting trip to the Sugar Loaf, Felix encounters the shady Mr. Johnson, who works for the Radical candidate, Transome. Johnson's aim is to garner support for Transome from these laborers so that they might be enlisted to make noise and cause some tumult at both the next hustings, and at the election. "That's the way a man who has no vote can yet serve himself and his country: he can lift up his hand and shout 'Transome for ever'—'hurray for Transome'" (*FH*, 229). Johnson's strategy, in addition to treating these workers to more pots of ale, is to play into their selfish desires by offering the vague promise that a Radical representing Sproxton will ensure that these chaps never drink bad ale or whisky again. "Bad liquor will be swept away with other bad articles." The owner of The Sugar Loaf, Chubb, has similarly indicated, now that he is eligible to vote as a £40 freeholder,[29] that it will be for purely individualistic considerations that he will decide how to cast his vote. In Chubb's mind, "[t]he coming election [is] a great opportunity for applying his political 'idee,' which was, that society existed for the sake of the individual, and that the name of that individual was Chubb" (*FH*, 217). The general temper at The Sugar Loaf, with respect to the reformed election, is shaped by concerns for individual returns and self-advancement.

Eliot animated the subtleties of the political historical transformation of the Reform Bill period in her depiction of Harold Transome's motivations, and his choice to run as a Radical. From the perspective of his own class and the Tory press, Transome's political beliefs are described "in opposition to all the traditions of his family," and his example constitutes a "defection in the inheritor of a family name which in times past had been associated with attachment to right principle." The liberal newspaper, on the other hand, viewed his "defection" as a "decisive guarantee of intellectual pre-eminence, united with a generous sensibility to the claims of man as man, which had burst asunder . . . the cramping out-worn shell of hereditary bias and class interest" (*FH*, 195). But the narrator dismisses these widely contextualized interpretations in favor of a psychological one. As the second son, young Harold was forced to make his own fortune in the world and "turn his back" on his family's estate. Like many second sons of the elite and middle classes, Harold made his fortune through the enormous British imperial influence, by running a successful plantation in Greece. And the experience shaped his "innovating and moderate" personality. "The years had nourished an inclination to as much opposition as would enable him to assert his own independence and power . . . he was addicted at once to rebellion and to conformity" (*FH*, 197). In his return to England, after his brother's death, Transome was guided not by a keen sense of injustice and exploitation of the poor, but by a more vague sense of pride in his own individual ruggedness, which ran counter to ancestral pride. In a way, the narrator is more in line with the Tory press, but with a deeper understanding for how individual contexts and small contingencies are at work in potentially major movements and historical moments.

Eliot portrayed Felix articulating his peculiar version of "radicalism" in an encounter on nomination day. The nearby town of Duffield is the location of the nominations, on December 15, for the election in North Loamshire. This is where Johnson's work at The Sugar Loaf was to have its payoff. He is proud of his own cleverness at having purchased the enthusiasm of the colliers to "demonstrate" for Transome, despite the fact that the owner of the mines in which they work, Mr. Garstin, is running for the Whig nomination. And this they accomplished through "the hustling and the pelting, the roaring and the hissing, the hard hits with small missiles, and the soft hits with small jokes" (*FH*, 392). This kind of scene is repeated in *Middlemarch* with a bit more detail, indicating perhaps that Eliot found some dramatic cache in presenting this kind of public event. It also is evidence that Eliot's study of the reformed elections left her unconvinced of the efficacy of the expanded franchise. Felix's disgust with the nonsense, and especially with Johnson, the man responsible for the mood and inebriation of the colliers on nomination, day stems from his sense of honesty. "It was a little too exasperating to look at this pink-faced rotund specimen of prosperity, to witness the power for evil that lay in his vulgar cant, backed by another man's money, and to know that such stupid iniquity flourished the flags of Reform, and Liberalism, and justice to the needy" (*FH*, 393) Though Johnson's work is designed to help Transome, the Radical candidate who suppossedly represents the poor, leading the poor through chicanery is a clear sign to Felix that no one has their welfare in mind.

The novel's political argument is most explicit in the nomination-day chapter. Felix's "radical" vision is clarified by the contrast with the unnamed speaker, who is speaking with a more conventionally radical vision of Reform on behalf of the workers.

> But I say, the Reform Bill is a trick - it's nothing but swearing-in special constables to keep the aristocrats safe in their monopoly; it's bribing some of the people with votes to make them hold their tongues about giving votes to the rest. I say, if a man doesn't beg or steal, but works for his bread, the poorer and the more miserable he is, the more he'd need have a vote to send an inspector to parliament–else the man who is worst off is likely to be forgotten; and I say, he's the man who ought to be first remembered. . . . I say, if we working men are ever to get a man's share, we must have universal suffrage, and annual parliaments, and the vote by ballot, and electoral districts. (*FH*, 396-97)

The speaker articulates a skeptical view of the Reform Bill: one that sees it as simply offering a wider sanction—an expanded legitimation through the extended franchise—for the status quo. His solution is universal suffrage so that the property-less have a chance to look out for themselves, rather than to rely on the wealthy and middle classes, in their supposed benevolence, to look out for them. The speaker is actually voicing Chartist principles which can be found in the "People's Charter" of the Working Men's Association. Though a bit anachronistic, since the Chartists first meeting was in 1836 and the "People's Charter" was not written until 1838,[30] this speaker represents Chartist sentiment and its radical line of demands, which serves as a foil for Felix Holt's extemporaneous response.[31]

Felix's rejoinder to the unnamed speaker is the central moral and political statement upon which the apparently conservative position of the novel rests. The vote, according to this oration, is not going to be the source of power for working men to improve themselves and the country. It will only increase their power to do "mischief," which is the precise representation later given to the riot, because Felix believes that the majority will vote with their appetites rather than with a sense of what will do the most good for everyone. But the main thrust of his speech has less to do with articulating an alternative vision than decrying the shortsightedness of the notion that voter-eligibility equals power.

> The way to get rid of folly is to get rid of vain expectations, and of thoughts that don't agree with the nature of things. The men who have had true thoughts about water, and what it will do when it is turned into steam and under all sorts of circumstances, have made themselves a great power in the world: they are turning the wheels of engines that will help to change most things. But no engines would have done, if there had been false notions about the way water would act. Now, all the schemes about voting, and districts, and annual parliaments, and the rest, are engines, and the water or steam–the force that is to work them–must come out of human nature–out of men's passions, feelings, desires. (*FH*, 400)

Felix's impassioned plea mobilizes a physical science analogy with industrial connotations. According to Felix, acquiring "true thoughts" about national politics is like learning how steam works. The application of principles from the physical sciences to the understanding of social problems is a page out of the Positivist's book, and was the ambition of most of the social theorists in the early- to mid-Victorian period.[32] Comte also believed that passions, feelings, and desires constituted the impetus behind all scientific knowledge. But how to acquire these true thoughts?

Besides recommending temperance in the election process, Felix's main prescription for the working classes is education, and as such, embodies Mill's sense for progress. Felix claims, in the "Address to the Working Men" that one of the oldest problems facing any polity is how to regulate life according to the "truest principles mankind is in possession of," and that "[t]he solution comes slowly, because men collectively can only be made to embrace principles, and to act on them, by the slow stupendous teaching of the world's events." (Appendix to *FH*, 625) The simple idea here is that those who will be making choices about how to govern ought to know something about how the world works. Mill held the same perspective, for like Eliot, he witnessed two major expansions of the franchise to people he believed were not ready for it. One month after she began writing *Felix Holt*, Eliot recorded in her diary that she was reading "again" Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*,[33] where she would have encountered his argument that the future of the laborers was grounded in their independence from their employers, and that this future would be enabled by their education. "Of the working men, at least in the more advanced countries of Europe . . . the patriarchal or paternal system of government is one to which they will not again be subject. That question was decided, when they were taught to read, and allowed access to newspapers and political tracts."[34] Like Eliot, Mill looked to the continent for examples of working-class movement and action. And in 1868, according to Felix, the working class will have to learn the "nature of things" in order to guard against mischief and those who profit by it in subsequent elections, as had happened in 1832.

In the novel, the election-day riot chapter presents the most vivid description of Eliot's worst fears about expanded franchise and political revolt. The epigraph for the chapter, Shakespeare's "Mischief, thou art afoot," recalls Felix's warning that expanding the vote to those without developed political consciousness would lead to mischief. Initially, the agitated crowd in Treby Magna, partially the product of Johnson's work, lacked any "mischievous design," except the thorough hassling of voters who came to support either the Whig candidate, Garstin, or the Tory candidate, Debarry. As such, its presence was enough to have forced the adjournment of the polling. The crowd, however, then began to look more like a riotous mob as it failed to disperse after a constable read the Riot Act. Another constable's official standard appeared to "move about fitfully, showing as little sign of a guiding hand as the summit of a buoy on the waves." Elsewhere, "The movement [of the crowd] was that of a flood hemmed in; it carried nobody away. Whether the crowd would obey the order to disperse themselves within an hour, was a doubt that approached nearer and nearer to a negative certainty" (*FH*, 422).[35] The narrator's employment of water metaphors puts an ironic spin on Felix's earlier statement about knowing how water behaves under certain conditions. Unlike controlling the conversion of water into steam and steam into power, the unreasonable crowd is not given to an observer's comprehension or a leader's control. As windows start getting smashed, and property from the town shops gets redistributed, Felix jumps into the throng with the hope of steering the crowd away from more serious damage to property or harm to helpless individuals. In choosing this path of trying to lead the mob, Felix had all appearances of an accomplice, even an instigator of the riot. The unfortunate accident in which Felix deals Tucker a fatal blow while trying to protect Spratt suggests that the riot is impossible to control or direct deliberately. The mob instead developed a new purpose once some opportunistic members of the crowd who "were not so much richer as they desired to be, for the pains they had taken in coming to the Treby election," and with plunder in mind shout "Let us go to Treby Manor!" (*FH*, 430).

Felix's disappointment in not being able to stem the tide, and the general horror of the scene, serve as a critique of the expanded franchise for its potential to unleash individualistic appetites. As Felix was whisked along to Debarry's manor house, he reflected that the day's "multitudinous small wickednesses of small selfish ends, really undirected towards any larger result, had issued in widely-shared mischief that might yet be hideous" (*FH*, 431). The force of the criticism on the problem of selfishness has been carried through from Felix's first encounter with the workers at The Sugar Loaf through to the riot, where the dangerous tumult is blamed on "selfish ends" that have the potential to gain revolutionary coherence. This view of the novel is consistent with Eliot's declining to contribute to a fund established, at the time she was writing *Felix Holt*, by British supporters of Giuseppe Mazzini. She and Lewes claimed to have a "real reverence" for Mazzini, having met him at Chapman's house on the Strand in 1852. However, she feared the money might be used to promote conspiracy or "acts more unsocial in their character than the very wrong they are directed to extinguish" (*Letters*, IV, 199-200). She may very well have been thinking of the kinds of people represented in the character of Johnson, who use funds of political figures behind the scenes to foment discord or generally try to create opportunistic circumstances.

Eliot's anti-revolutionary sentiments and fear of disorder correspond to a developmental view of history that had connections to the romantic elements of nineteenth-century historicism. With political change, this frame of mind suggested a gradualist position that harkens back to her notion of "consentaneous development" articulated in the Riehl review. In the novel, it is the story of Esther, the discovery of her lineage, and her inheritance that manifests Eliot's gradualistic perspective of historical change. The political dimension of the novel told through Felix and the election-day fiasco needs to be read along side the message of Esther's refusal of the inheritance of the Transome estate. For someone who flaunted marriage convention for most of her adult life, Eliot has puzzled critics who expect her to be more critical of other traditions.[36] But if we respect the depth of the romantic-historicist vision of social development, then her antirevolutionary attitude is easier to understand.

* * *

Felix Holt contains elements that indicate Eliot's self-questioning about the form of the historical novel which speak to the problem of historical narration and the way to describe the past. From the beginning of her career as a novelist Eliot's narrators stress the remoteness of the period in which each novel is set from the readers' perspective. When establishing the setting in *Felix Holt* in chapter 3, Eliot's "historical project" emerges as the narrator articulates the significance of the Reform Bill to a provincial town on the fringe of early industrialization. *Felix Holt* is cast at a moment of transition in England, when certain traditions are just beginning to break down as "progress" makes its steady way out into the countryside in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Treby Magna was passing from being a relatively isolated rural district, "where the trade was only such as had close relations with the local landed interest," into something more complex, "brought by mines and manufactures, which belong more directly to the great circulating system of the nation than to the local system to which they have been superadded" (*FH*, 126). By becoming integrated (superadded) into the national "system" of capital, Treby Magna is susceptible to the political tumult and the not-quite-clearly defined class antagonisms commonly associated with British industrialization in the Reform Bill period. [37]

Eliot's specific view of the historicity of the Reform Bill period can be seen in the narrator/historian's keen awareness of the ways in which provincial England was becoming modernized. Treby Magna, for example, was unaffected by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and "remained unmoved by [Thomas Paine's] *The Rights of Man*," and seems to have been left out of the political revolution around the turn of the century. These symbols of the end of the old order and the *Ancien Regime* did not affect every place at the same time. But around 1832, Treby Magna "began at last to know the higher pains of a dim political consciousness; and the development had been greatly helped by the recent agitation about the Reform Bill" (*FH*, 127-28). The novel thus makes, by the third chapter, a kind of historiographical argument in which a more subtle understanding of the dissemination of the influence of the political revolution in France, and its association with the industrial revolution, takes more than thirty years before it reaches the British provinces.

With *Felix Holt*, Eliot continued to show interest in the abilities of historical fiction as a form of historical writing, to depict the subtle impact and contingency of major historical trends for the lives of ordinary, "unfashionable," or historically insignificant people. A passage in chapter three, where the narrator zooms in from the general historical discussion of social changes to the characters of the novel, demonstrates this strength. For while those changes were "public matters, and this history [the novel] is chiefly concerned with the private lot of a few men and women . . . there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life, from the time when the primeval milkmaid had to wander with the wanderings of her clan, because the cow she milked was one of a herd which had made the pastures bare" (*FH*, 129). This image gives the sense that the milkmaid, in her ant-like ignorance, might not appreciate how a herd depletes a pasture, but does know that her cow is migrating and that she must move with it or starve. According to the narrator, the historical contingency of this moment, which will shape the lives of the main characters, is reform and the Reform Bill, and the choice is either to follow the herd (in the opposite sense to today's pejorative meaning) and move with the times, or be left behind.

> As to the weather of 1832, the Zadkiel [almanac] of that time had predicted that the electrical condition of the clouds in the political hemisphere would produce unusual perturbations in organic existence, and he would perhaps have seen a fulfilment of his remarkable prophecy in that mutual influence of dissimilar destinies which we shall see gradually unfolding itself. For if the mixed political conditions of Treby Magna had not been acted on by the passing of the Reform Bill, Mr Harold Transome would not have presented himself as a candidate for North Loamshire, Treby would not have been a polling-place, Mr Matthew Jermyn would not have been on affable terms with a Dissenting preacher and his flock, and the venerable town would not have been placarded with handbills. (*FH*, 129)

What the narrator cannot say in the third chapter, but what the rest of the novel demonstrates, is how all of the action is shaped by the historical context of reform. Without a reformed election in Treby Magna, Esther's inheritance and her relationship to Reverend Lyon would have remained secret, Felix would not have gotten caught in the riot, Harold Transome might not have returned home from Greece if the election process had not been reformed making Treby a new polling-place, etc,. Eliot's challenge to

Victorian historiography is in this construction of historical contingency within the lives of ordinary people. Andres argues that Eliot "challenged" Victorian historiography in *Middlemarch* by resisting "monological history," the history of great moments and great men, through the presentation of "unauthorized" voices, like Dorothea's, which "offered her readers access to epochal phenomena and historical events through individual consciousness."[38] This is just as true of *Felix Holt*.

Eliot's challenge to mere objectivity in historical representation in her last two novels has an important antecedent in the trial scene of *Felix Holt*. At stake is Felix's culpability in the death of the constable who had attacked him during the riot, which spins on the question of his motivation in being the apparent leader of the riot. As with any murder trial, the key question concerns truth about what happened. And also as in any trial, the way the truth is established is the main part of the contestation. The narrator is careful to depict the apparent impossibility of doing this completely objectively. Those witnesses against Felix's character, who "tended to show that he had a virulent feeling against the respectable shop-keeping class," have been coached.

> No one else knew – the witnesses themselves did not know fully – how far their strong perception and memory on these points was due to a fourth mind, namely, that of Mr John Johnson, the attorney, who was nearly related to one of the Treby witnesses, and a familiar acquaintance of the Duffield clerk. Man cannot be defined as an evidence-giving animal; and in the difficulty of getting up evidence on any subject there is room for much unrecognised action of diligent persons who have the extra stimulus of some private motive. (*FH*, 563)

Man cannot be expected to be completely objective where there is some "private motive," however unrecognized it might be. The depiction of the rest of the trial follows this insight. Felix's testamony is unpersuasive because of the "predominance of Tory feeling in the court, and the human disposition to enjoy the infliction of a little punishment on an opposite party" (*FH*, 567). Esther's surprise testamony, which provides a perspective unique to herself that shows Felix's motives and whereabouts immediately before the riot, is effective for similarly subjective reasons: because there "was something so naive and beautiful in this action of Esther's, that it conquered every low or petty suggestion even in the commonest minds" (*FH*, 573). The general interpretation of Felix as leader of the mad mob, which had helped witnesses against him arrange their stories accordingly, was quickly given up in light of Esther's appearance. The narrator thus augments his point: "Even the bare discernment of facts, much more their arrangement with a view to inferences, must carry a bias: human impartiality, whether judicial or not, can hardly escape being more or less loaded" (*FH*, 573-4). The trial does not produce a clear and totalizing narrative about what happend at the riot so much as it produced an adequate feeling among the jurors that Felix must be a decent fellow if Esther likes him, and therefore, he need not receive corporal punishment.

The tricky interplay of narrative authority is also suggested in the opening of the novel, which establishes the sense that comprehension of the total picture of the story will be difficult. The reader is brought into the environs of Treby Magna on a stage-coach whose driver describes certain residents. Even the narrator comments on the narrative authority of the coachman: "He was an excellent travelling companion and commentator on the landscape; he could tell the names of sites and persons. . . ." As with the beginning of most of Eliot's novels, the introductory chapter tries to get the mid-Victorian audience to think about, or recall, how different things were at a particular moment in the past. In *Felix Holt*, this is accomplished while also undermining the narrative authority of the coachman. "His view of life had originally been genial, . . . but the recent initiation of railways had embittered him: he now, as in a perpetual vision, saw the ruined country strewn with shattered limbs, and regarded Mr Huskisson's death as a proof of God's anger against Stephenson" (*FH*, 81).[39] As called for in the "Historic Imagination" passage, Eliot's historical sympathy leads her to try to feel for those who clung to vanishing forms of thought and ways of life. In 1832, when the railroad was very new in England, it could still be treated as something potentially eradicable, especially in view of the gruesome accident of Mr. Huskisson. But this is not so in 1865.

* * *

In *Felix Holt*, Eliot experiments with various ways for the narrator to infuse himself into the novel with the possible reflexive purpose of suggesting some of the difficulties in representing the past. As with Eliot's other novels, the narrator is often self-conscious and appears to be making choices about how to tell the stories. Even within the individual characterizations, problems are posed about how one's memory of the past is shaped by present concerns. These examples reflect on the general problem of historical narrative that Eliot experimented with in each of her novels. In the case of *Felix Holt*, the narrator is not quite objective, the knowledge of motives is not always clear, but there is a sense of relative omniscience that Eliot problematized more explicitly in her last two novels. *Felix Holt* thus represents Eliot's emergence into a mature stage in the development of her view of fiction and historical representation.

Felix Holt is also a kind of commentary on an important political debate, which eventuated in the second Reform Bill in 1867, but using the historical antecedent, the first Reform Bill of 1832, as the related subject. Eliot's anti-revolutionary attitude is a consequence of the shape of her historicist frame of mind, which was developmental, organic and evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary. What Eliot feared, and what almost every one of her main characters have to deal with is the danger of severing oneself from one's past. She believed that revolution brings about a social severance from a group's history, and *Felix Holt* "argues" that expanded franchise will amount to allowing people to vote with their individualistic concerns and appetites in mind, a kind of anarchy, or a system which could lead to more civil unrest or revolution. At a time when industrialization was quickly and radically transforming the way people lived, when, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air," many people like Eliot was concerned about lost forms and forgotten ways of knowing and living.

Together, *Romola* and *Felix Holt* constitute a period of transition into the third phase of Eliot's historicist development. These two middle novels reflect a simultaneous desire for greater specificity and accuracy of historical details, and the Eliot's first experimentations with the more ironic stance vis-a-vis historical representation and realist prose that emerges in her mature fiction.

Chapter 4: *Middlemarch* as Experimental Historicism

Middlemarch begins with a strange question:

> Who that cares much to know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa, has not smiled with some gentleness at the thought of the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors? (*Mm*, 25)

Why did Eliot introduce a book set in the late 1820s and early 1830s with a focus on a figure from the sixteenth century? Perhaps the best answer is suggested in the opening line itself: that Eliot was conducting a peculiar kind of experiment. She placed a woman with the emotional force of will and reformative spirit of St. Teresa into provincial England circa 1830 to see what would happen. The reasons Eliot wanted to conduct such an experiment are overlapping and all relate to her own peculiar historicist worldview now in maturity in the early 1870s as she wrote her penultimate novel.

All of Eliot's novels imply a question to the effect of: "What might it have been like for these sorts of people in this particular time and place?" Still, *Middlemarch* is more explicitly experimental than her previous novels. It shows Eliot, at the height of her powers, utilizing the realist-novel form to conduct historical inquiry in a manner she called "analogical creation," that is firmly within an historicist perspective. In this case, the proposed analogy is between the lives lived by *essentially* the same person under different historical circumstances—one in which the milieu is coherent, the other in which general social and cultural transformation is the dominant character. Following Mill's usage of "analogy" (see introduction), we could say that the life of St. Teresa and her times are the known qualities, and the circumstances of the late 1820s and early 1830s are also known: the experiment yields a view of what St. Teresa's life might have been like in an provincial English town before the first reform bill. The Christian world of St. Teresa—a time of "coherent social faith"—has vanished, and one way to find out what replaced that world is to reincarnate her in the modernizing world. The results of this "experiment in Time" are the mutually reflective stories of Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate, in which the two are unable to match up their visions of effecting reformative change in their community with the particular historical circumstances of provincial English life at this time—where modern reform had not yet taken hold. Their lives seem ordinary, the kind not recorded. They must therefore be created analogically, e.g., in a fictional format.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) was a Carmelite nun, mystic, and reformer, whose life served Eliot as a basis for a comparison between premodern life, and Dorothea's and Lydgate's relationships to their respective historical contexts. St. Teresa had indeed been driven by an "ardently willing soul" and by the strength of her faith to reform the religious orders in Spain founded reformed convents and monasteries. As a nun of the Carmelite order in mid-sixteenth-century Spain, St. Teresa was in an unusual position from which a woman could exert reformatory influence in her society. The Carmelite order had been ear-marked by Phillip II for reform, and the nuns in Avila held some degree of respect in their community. Despite opposition from local political and ecclesiastical leadership, and the Spanish Inquisition, St. Teresa gained the support of prominent members of the Church in Spain, the King and the Royal Council, and sanction from the Roman Curia, and was able to oversee the founding of sixteen convents and monasteries in the last twenty years of her life.[1]

Though St. Teresa's reforms were the accomplishments that led to her fame and canonization, Eliot refers in the opening passage to a legendary story from Teresa's childhood. When she was twelve, Teresa and her brother had become inspired while reading about the heroic and glorious lives of Christian martyrs, and "agreed that we should take off for the land of the Moors, begging our way for the love of God, so that they would cut our heads off there."[2] It is not surprising that the two never got far from home, and their attempt seems like a mere childish whim. However, Eliot appears to have been taken by the inspiration that the young girl must have felt to have entertained such a choice. It is this intense passion, which momentarily inclined a young girl to risk her head to attain martyrdom, that Eliot wished to animate in the 1830 context. For Eliot, the "coherent social faith" of sixteenth-century Spain enabled Teresa to follow her passionate predilections, from melodramatic martyrdom to sweeping reform. In the Christian context of St. Teresa's lifetime, martyrdom seemed the highest of heroics and her actions had meaning and effect.

One could say that *Middlemarch* argues—that is, the conclusion drawn from the experiment is—either that Christian martyrdom is not possible in provincial England circa 1830, or that the martyrdoms of Dorothea and Lydgate are unremembered since they rest in "unvisited tombs." For certain types of people in the unfolding post-Christian context, harmonious integration into the flow of social life is not as easy as it might have been for

Teresa in her day. "Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; . . . for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (*Mm*, 26). Dorothea's and Lydgate's stories converge in the idea that their passion to do good things in the world are inhibited by the various circumstances of their positions, opinions, social environments, and in Dorothea's case, her gender. For Eliot these obstacles characterized a period that was the beginning of a new historical epoch with new contexts that needed examination. While writing her sixth novel, she was comfortable with the idea that her brand of fiction was useful in performing the historical examination of the rise of modernity.[3] Eliot continued to employ a dialectical framework for critical historical consciousness and understanding. In *Middlemarch*, this framework bears the stamp of the Young Hegelian sensibilities concerning the waning of the "Christian centuries" and the nineteenth-century emergence of "higher criticism," as well as the striving for a human-centered religion, the "religion of humanity." Dorothea's personal growth is a synecdoche of the dialectical development of humanity at the historical moment of advancing self-consciousness that Eliot associated with the time of the novel's setting.

But Eliot's continued use novels for historical inquiry had begun to raise questions about the nature of historical narrative and the subjective dimensions of historical writing. In *Middlemarch* Eliot faced the epistemological problem of objectivity and historical narrative more directly than in her previous novels. A deconstructive reading such as J. Hillis Miller's shows that *Middlemarch*, as a pretend-history, resists naively objective, monological historical interpretation, which implies a critique of naively objective historiography.[4] As such, *Middlemarch* reflects a new direction in Eliot's thinking about the nature of historical consciousness with rough parallels to the subjective dimensions and potential for relativity of Wilhelm Dilthey's "critique of historical reason" and his efforts to establish a theoretical basis for the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Dilthey insisted that any historical science would have to incorporate the subjective dimension of the historical consciousness engaging in the inquiry, a consciousness which itself is undergoing historical transformation. Eliot's previous novels did not explicitly undermine the stability of the historical interpretation and the position of the interpreter, except in experimental, isolated cases like the trial scene in *Felix Holt* (see chapter 3). The narrative structure of *Middlemarch*, however, begins to seriously undermine the possibility for ahistorical narrative position (i.e., a *locus standi* outside historical processes), and therefore, objective knowledge, in a manner akin to Dilthey's critique of historical reason. Eliot achieved the Diltheyan insight—that the instability of the apprehending consciousness affects the nature of the knowledge created, thus making any historical knowledge impermanent—through the process of writing historical novels, and gave it full manifestation in *Middlemarch*.

* * *

Sophia Andres has addressed the notion that *Middlemarch* offered a "challenge" to Victorian historiography. In her conception of Eliot's historiographical contribution, *Middlemarch* "voices resistance to monological history" by representing the lives of "unhistoric" people who nevertheless experience "epochal phenomena and historical events," and the novel thus makes a case for a "multivalent" conception of history.

Andres sees Casaubon as the symbol of monological history, and Dorothea's emergent critical perspective as an insistence on a multiplicity of historical voices. Andres's is a useful approach for interpreting Eliot's fiction as a form of social history, and is incidentally a great improvement on the brief characterization Hayden White made in "The Burden of History," where he argues that Eliot's portrayal of Casaubon and Dorothea indicates an antihistorical theme, corresponding to Nietzsche's hostility to the authority history had achieved in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, White's view of Casaubon simply as a representative of an historical frame of mind misses Eliot's point. Casaubon represents not the authority of history, but a pre-Young Hegelian version of historical thinking. Dorothea's rejection of Casaubon and eventual marriage to Ladislaw symbolizes the intellectual-historical transition to a new historicism. Neither Andres nor White acknowledges the significance of Young Hegelian historicism that Eliot had embraced, and which animates the Casaubon-Dorothea dynamic. Dorothea may represent multivalency in the face of Casaubon's antiquated conception of history. But when one considers Eliot's enthusiasm for and participation in the Young Hegelian movement, Dorothea takes on the aspect of a post-Christian consciousness that is aware of the historicity of the theological stage of human development. I argue that this interpretation better follows Eliot's life-long commitment to disseminate the implications of Young Hegelian historicist thought.[5]

It is useful to recall the "Historic Imagination" passage that Eliot had written sometime shortly after completing *Middlemarch*. She indicated a desire to work out the details of "the various steps by which a political or social change was reached," to offer a "vivid presentation of how results have been actually brought about, especially in religious and social change," as well as a presentation of the "heroism often accompanying the decay and final struggle of old systems, which has not had its share of tragic commemoration" (*Essays*, 446-47). The reform bill period was for her pregnant with historical movement, of which the reform bill itself is just one example. As a synchronic history, *Middlemarch* clusters around the general theme of transition political reform, social reform, industrialization and social fluidity, modernization of commerce and the transformation of the countryside (symbolized by the railroad), and changes in medical knowledge and practice.

Yet another historical movement of this period close to Eliot's heart was the rise of Hegelian historicism. Eliot's portrayal of Dorothea's first husband, Edward Casaubon, and his life's work, a "Key to All Mythologies," serves as an entree into the significance of Young Hegelian thinking in *Middlemarch* as well as a view of the intellectual transformation she associated with the rise of Hegelian thought in Germany. Dorothea learns from Ladislaw that Casaubon's project is obsolete because he does not take into account the German "higher criticism." Eliot was of course aware of Strauss's version of German higher criticism, but Ladislaw's mentioning of it in 1829 predates the 1835 *Das Leben Jesu*. Perhaps she uncharacteristically incorporated an anachronism. But Eliot may also have been thinking of the generation of theologians that included Schleiermacher, de Wette, and F. C. Baur, who were developing methods of mythological analysis and critical reading of the old testament, not to mention the new wave of classical scholarship in the wake of Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena to Homer*.[6] In the late 1820s and early 1830s Strauss, Feuerbach, and Theodor Vischer began to synthesize a mythological (higher critical) view of the bible with Hegelian philosophy.[7] Had Eliot been writing an historical novel on German higher criticism, she might have been more specific about whom and what she knew of the pre-Young Hegelian iterations of the movement. For the novel she did write, the mere suggestion of it served the purpose of drawing Casaubon's limits.

Casaubon's approach to mythology represents an older perspective that was insensitive to the historicity of mythological forms. His belief, and the driving principle of his doomed, life-long project, was that "all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed" (*Mm*, 46). Historicist perspectives generated by critical approaches to the bible undermined the idea of a perverted original tradition by insisting that systems of thought and culture have historicity.[8] Casaubon's assumption—that he could generate a "key" that unlocked the meaning of some perennial truth that underlay the many and various ancient mythologies—is not possible within the new orientation developed by the German higher critics. These theologians, Schleiermacher, Baur, and de Wette being among the best-known, began to suggest that old testament stories were a mythology that articulated certain perspectives appropriate to, or characteristic of, their respective stage of intellectual development and in their peculiar historical circumstances. Eliot had said in the 1851 review of Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect* that "England has been slow to use or to emulate the immense labours of Germany in the departments of mythology and biblical criticism" (*Essays*, 30). Casaubon represents this slowness. As Ladislaw says, Casaubon's immense labors were wasted, "as so much English scholarship is, for want of knowing what is being done by the rest of the world. If Mr Casaubon read German he would save himself a great deal of trouble" (*Mm*, 240). Eliot, as we know, was not only keenly aware of this English myopia, especially with respect to German thought, her translations and a number of her articles, as I discuss in chapter 1, were specifically devoted to overcoming it.

The extent to which Casaubon and his dated approach are represented sympathetically exemplifies Eliot's desire to portray the pregnancy of transitional historical moments and to extend sympathy to both sides of historical struggle. His aloof, dispassionate character offers little to like. His letter of marriage proposal to Dorothea is an hilarious caricature of the dry-as-dust scholar who, as Casaubon elsewhere admits, lives "too much with the dead" (*Mm*, 40). He is, furthermore, utterly incapable of warmth and affection, and his last act of cruelty upon Dorothea and Ladislaw make him despicable. Still, his story is meant to effect sympathy for a scholar who missed the boat. As she indicates in the "Historic Imagination" passage, Eliot thought her fiction could perform the historical function of representing that which other kinds of history neglected. As she put it, "there is the pathos, the heroism often accompanying the decay and final struggle of old systems, which has not had its share of tragic commemoration." The Casaubon story addresses this imbalance. Whereas the reader must share some of Ladislaw's dislike for Casaubon, Dorothea shows him (and us) the possibility for pathos. "If it [Casaubon's obsolescence] were as you say, what could be sadder than so much ardent labour all in vain?" (*Mm*, 254) In contrast to Ladislaw's dismissiveness, Dorothea laments "in her saddest recitative" that she did not learn German while at school in Lausanne so that she might help her husband. "There were plenty of German teachers. But now I can be of no use" (*Mm*, 241).[9]

Lydgate's story concerns another intellectual historical transformation: the evolution of medical science. This thread dramatizes the historical struggle between the old system of country physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries whose medical knowledge and treatment was based on the humoral paradigm, and the rise of new systems of analysis and diagnosis being taught in Edinburgh, London, and Paris since the French Revolution. Lydgate's story is a much fuller treatment of a theme that received minor attention in *Felix Holt*: the resistance to new medical knowledge based on the practices in the cosmopolitan centers of Europe. Felix was shown to object to his mother's sale of potions, which he knew were of no medical use, but were eagerly purchased by her neighbors who believed they had restorative powers. Lydgate's medical perspective leads him to question the traditional system of medical practice, especially the dispensing of useless drugs, in place in Middlemarch.

Lydgate's attitude toward the medical establishment in Middlemarch is dismissive. Lydgate arrives in Middlemarch a young man of twenty-seven, fresh from medical training in Paris, and idealistic about how he might help transform provincial medical treatment, which he believed was "painfully" backward.

> Yes, – with our present medical rules and education, one must be satisfied now and then to meet with a fair practitioner. As to all the higher questions which determine the starting-point of a diagnosis – as to the philosophy of medical evidence – any glimmering of these can only come from a scientific culture of which country practitioners have usually no more notion than the man in the moon. (*Mm*, 153)

The "scientific culture," by which Lydgate means the cosmopolitan schools, is set off against "country practitioners" whose medical knowledge, it is subtly suggested, is comparable to the belief in the man in the moon. In *Medicine and the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920*, Christopher Lawrence characterizes the struggle for recognition among those educated in Edinburgh and Paris as a debate that was increasingly about what constituted science. Lydgate invokes this appeal to science, which he believed would be enough to carry the day. His idealism is attributable to the fact that he views his struggle, in the early-going of the novel, as an intellectual one. But he never comes to fully understand that the real tension between old and new intellectual frameworks is also found in a social context.

One of Eliot's devices for demonstrating the social context of resistance to medical advancement in the novel is the debate over and construction of a fever hospital in Middlemarch. The main reason Lydgate agreed to come to relative backwater town of Middlemarch was the prospect of directing the proposed fever hospital with Bulstrode. Specialized hospitals, like a fever hospital, were an alternative way, after the Napoleonic Wars, for British medical men to "promote their advancement," because the way of traditional medical practice was at least partially closed to them.[10] Lydgate's own general practice, which he purchased from a retiring doctor, dwindled as many Middlemarchers grew to distrust the "exotic" ways of this new medical man. Still, he remained encouraged by the research he might do in the fever hospital, where "real medical reform" could take place.

The small community of physicians and apothecaries who make a living by dispensing drugs, correctly view Lydgate's practice of not prescribing drugs as a direct criticism of the way they have practiced medicine for decades. Mr. Wrench, one of the more respected surgeons in town, puts it this way:

> [W]hat I contend against is the way medical men are fouling their own nest, and setting up a cry about the country as if a general practitioner who dispenses drugs couldn't be a gentleman . . . I say, the most ungentlemanly trick a man can be guilty of is to come among the members of his profession with innovations which are a libel on their time-honoured procedure. (*Mm*, 487)

The social dimension of medical practice is here mobilized by Wrench's reference to himself and his colleagues as "gentlemen," who are respectable and therefore above reproach. Lydgate's medical judgement is thus viewed as a personal insult by members of the provincial medical community. Their friendship he could live without. However, when they effectively resist the reformative plans he has for the new hospital, Lydgate is stuck. Furthermore, Lydgate was compelled to link his fortunes to Bulstrode, who is widely despised in Middlemarch. Bulstrode's scandalous demise sinks Lydgate's dreams of medical reform in the provinces. One of the great charms of *Middlemarch* is the skill with which Eliot wielded the complex social nexus of the town. And indeed it was her explicit desire, according to the "Historic Imagination" passage, to represent the complexity of historic struggles. In this case, she constructs a plausible connection between Bulstrode's questionable past and Lydgate's difficulty in performing medical research.

Above all his other struggles, Lydgate's marriage to Rosamond Vincy is the one that bests his efforts to work against the medical establishment. Her expression of revulsion to the idea of autopsies is a critical moment in the novel when Lydgate begins to recognize that his charming wife was going to be a hindrance. The scene is worth a close examination, for in it Lydgate actually calls up a medical hero, a world-historical figure of medical science, from the past to explain his ambitions to his wife.

> "His name was Vesalius. And the only way he could get to know anatomy as he did, was by going to snatch bodies at night, from graveyards and places of execution."
>
> "Oh!" said Rosamond, with a look of disgust on her pretty face, "I am very glad you are not Vesalius. I should have thought he might find some less horrible way than that."
>
> "No, he couldn't," said Lydgate going on too earnestly to take much notice of her answer. "He could only get a complete skeleton by snatching the whitened

> bones of a criminal from the gallows, and burying them, and fetching them away by bits secretly, in the dead of night."
>
> "I hope he is not one of your great heroes," said Rosamond, half-playfully, half-anxiously, "else I shall have you getting up in the night to go to St Peter's churchyard. You know how angry you told me the people were about Mrs. Goby. You have enemies enough already."
>
> "So had Vesalius, Rosy. No wonder the medical fogies in Middlemarch are jealous, when some of the greatest doctors living were fierce upon Vesalius because they had believed in Galen, and he showed that Galen was wrong. They called him a liar and a poisonous monster. But the facts of the human frame were on his side; and so he got the better of them."
>
> "And what happened to him afterwards?" said Rosamond, with some interest.
>
> "Oh, he had a good deal of fighting to the last. And they did exasperate him enough at one time to make him burn good deal of his work. Then he got shipwrecked just as he was coming from Jerusalem to take a great chair at Padua. He died rather miserably."
>
> There was a moment's pause before Rosamond said, "Do you know, Tertius, I often wish you had not been a medical man." (*Mm*, 497)

Andreas Vesalius was the sixteenth-century anatomist who used his own observations of internal anatomy to overturn some of the assumptions of the Galenic system.[11] Until his time, the usually taboo practice of dissecting human bodies occurred at few learning centers, and often as an exercise to confirm the predictions of ancients like Galen and Aristotle, not for the purpose of challenging the dominant paradigm.[12] One such center was the University of Padua, where Vesalius had studied and lectured in the late 1530s and early 1540s. He was, as Lydgate mentions, returning to Italy from a pilgrimage in Jerusalem in 1564, when he died after a shipwreck.[13] By invoking Vesalius, Lydgate is telling his new wife that he is willing to engage the kind of "fighting" his hero had endured, and to be ostracized in order to challenge received medical knowledge in the provinces. This is the last thing Rosamond wants to hear. She merely wants a respectable, well-endowed husband and to avoid the kind of scandal Lydgate had already caused by asking Mrs. Goby's family if he could do a post-mortem examination on her. "I do *not* think it is a nice profession, dear," (*Mm*, 498). To the extent that Lydgate's ultimate failure to advance medical reform in the provinces is his own fault, and not simply the fault of his environment, is typified by the way he is characterized in this passage as "going on too earnestly to take much notice of her answer." Lydgate's earnest desires blind him to the specific qualities of his historical circumstances within which he *must*, but cannot, work.

The "bone-snatcher" scene captures the tension between an emerging science of medicine and the resistance to it that was grounded in long-held habits and traditions. Renaissance Padua not withstanding, the practice of post-mortem examinations did not really take off until the French Revolution. Rosy herself aspires to respectable society and adopts, with the kind of vehemence shown often by aspirants more so than representatives, the view that a tradition such as honoring the sanctity of a human body after death should not be transgressed by her husband. Many of the reforms that came from Paris since the Revolution were likely viewed as dangerous and, as Mr. Brooke would say, "going entirely too far," in the English provinces. As for Lydgate, he succumbed to Rosamond's desires, and spent his short career working on wealthy patients and their ailments. And though he wrote a treatise on gout, "he always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do" (*Mm*, 893).

Lydgate's frustrations and ultimate failure to realize his dreams of directing a provincial research facility constitute Eliot's "historic imagination" applied to the advancement of medical science. Her own research into medical history was extensive. The "Folger Notebook," which Eliot used while preparing for and writing *Middlemarch*, contains entries from John Thomson's *An Account of the Life, Lectures, and Writings of*

William Cullen, M.D., Charles Knight's *The English Cyclopaidia*, Pierre Victor Renouard's *Histoire de la Medecine*, Emile Littre's *Medicine et Medicins*, all of which concern ground-breaking discoveries and the advancement of medical science.[14] But these medical histories still lacked that sense of the moment when the struggle was in doubt and time had not yet distinguished between triumphant and vanquished. Eliot's historic imagination tried to fill that historiographical gap by suggesting that the common struggles of individuals in their social milieux played a significant part in the pace of historical transformation.

By showing Lydgate's failure to work in harmony with his specific historical circumstances, Eliot demonstrates an important dimension of the Hegelian historicist framework. One may be able to lead a people into a new age, like Napoleon, but one cannot live outside of his milieu. Isaiah Berlin paraphrased this Hegelian principle aptly:

> Reform must spring from historically prepared soil; otherwise it is doomed to failure, condemned in advance by the forces of history which move in accordance with their own logic in their own time and at their own pace. To demand freedom from these forces and seek to rise above them, is to wish to escape from one's logically necessary historical position, form the society of which one is an integral part, from the complex of relations, public and private, by which every man is made to be what he is; to which an escape from this is to wish to lose one's proper nature, a self-contradictory demand, which could be made only by one who does not understand what he is demanding, on whose idea of personal liberty is childishly subjective.[15]

This is just what Lydgate cannot see. His demand that the established medical community of Middlemarch forget its time-honored practices without sufficient exposure to the new medical science, against which the physicians are prejudiced anyway, is what Berlin would call "childishly subjective." While the reader, who knows that Lydgate is on the side of progress in medical reform, may sympathize with his frustrations, Middlemarch is nevertheless a very long way from Paris. It was not yet "historically prepared soil."

While both the Lydgate and Dorothea threads provide examples for historical pathos that Eliot called for in "Historic Imagination," Dorothea is also the synecdoche for developing humanity in the Hegelian and Young Hegelian pattern. Her progress through the novel from a naive state of yearning to one of fuller awareness and wider wisdom is told in Hegelian terms of the dialectic development of expanding consciousness.[16] In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel posited three stages of increasing human self-awareness. The first is exemplified in the "master-slave" dialectic, in which one's understanding of self as an individuated consciousness depends upon, and is determined by the nature of, one's relationship to another or to others.[17] The next stage culminates in what Hegel characterized as the "Unhappy Consciousness" in which self and the world are taken to be wholly alien. The final level is characterized by the appearance of Reason and the rational self-consciousness, where a "moral view of the world" is finally possible.[18] Progress through these stages is driven by critique, during which the mind "negates" the immature forms of understanding through reflection and revaluation. Hegel implicitly associated these levels of individual growth with stages of historical development in the *Phenomenology*, but made this more explicit in lectures on world history.[19] His interpretation of human history therefore reads like a coming-of-age story of a single mind, which he called the "Absolute Spirit."

The way that Dorothea's growth follows the pattern of Hegel's Absolute Spirit emerges in the honeymoon chapters. There is a suggestive conjuncture of perspectives at the moment of her despondency and initial alienation from Casaubon. While Dorothea broods in the Vatican Museum over her recent quarrel, the German artist, Naumann, becomes captivated by her beauty. "What do you think of that fine bit of antithesis? . . . There lies antique beauty, not corpse-like even in death, but arrested in the complete contentment of its sensuous perfection: and here stands beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom" (*Mm*, 220). Naumann's observation activates the synecdochic device. He gives the sense that as one looks upon Dorothea, one glimpses the "Christian centuries" that have expired, as well as something of ancient form. In Naumann's eyes, Dorothea symbolizes the Hegelian concept, which was so fruitfully embraced by Feuerbach, of historical pregnancy and humanity in dialectical change. She embodies antithetical, historical worldviews: she is, according to Naumann, "antique form animated by Christian sentiment—a sort of Christian Antigone—sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion" (*Mm*, 221). As a Christian Antigone, Dorothea represents a new form or quality that has absorbed the earlier historical stages.

For Hegel and the Young Hegelians, the impetus for the advance of consciousness from one stage to the next is the critical perspective that generates movement and transition. So, for example, the ego-centric consciousness of the individual is transformed into a more comprehending consciousness in Hegel's master-slave encounter by the *critique* of the former state of consciousness that did not embrace the notion of a differentiated, independent other. It was Hegel's sense for the centrality of criticism—the self-reflective act that recognizes the immaturity of the old consciousness (and thus negates it)—in the dialectical progress of humanity that the Young Hegelians embraced most closely in their own work.[20] For Hegel and the Young Hegelians, the important lesson for their own time—the final stage of development, some assumed—was the recognition that the dialectic itself was the process of history, and that this process is the reflection of the human mind. The Enlightenment, for example, is sometimes described as a criticism—a negation—of the Christian world view, and before that, the Christian stage negated antiquity. Hegel and the Young Hegelians viewed the Reformation and the Enlightenment as manifestations of the Christian age engaged in self-critique. In this way criticism is the prime mover of Spirit in history.[21] In Berlin's understanding of Hegel, "the sole method by which those who have the good of society at heart can improve society, is to develop in themselves and in others the power of analysing themselves and their environment, an activity later called criticism, the growth of which is identical with human progress."[22] A greater sense of self must include the critical consciousness in the individual, and likewise, general social progress will arise only through a critical, historical perspective.

The role of criticism in Dorothea's development in the honeymoon chapters is especially similar to that in the progress of the Spirit in Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness stage. In Hegel's narrative of advancing self-consciousness, the self achieves a degree of self-awareness at the master-slave stage. But the inherent identity of the self-consciousness of the two is as yet unknown to either. The description of the first argument between Dorothea and Casaubon has the central features of this Hegelian stage of consciousness. "She was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers; she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her husband which claim our pity" (*Mm*, 232). From the master-slave stage, the self has been trying to get to know the world in relation to itself. With the help of Ladislaw, Dorothea gains the awareness that she had idealized Casaubon, and that her hope to join him in his great work was a subjugation that cannot have the anticipated effect.

> Today she had begun to see that she had been under a wild illusion in expecting a response to her feeling from Mr Casaubon, and she had felt the waking of a presentiment that there might be a *sad consciousness* in his life which made as great a need on his side as on her own. (*Mm*, 243; my italics)

Eliot's use of "sad consciousness" is perhaps a coincidence with Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness, and she was probably not thinking of Hegel in particular. But the coincidence is all the more striking because, as with Hegel, the sad consciousness is a kind of middle term in a dialectic logic between the two "sides," Dorothea and Casaubon. The moment is developmentally significant, for it "changed [Dorothea's] longitude extensively," and that "changed all prospects." (*Mm*, 234) The new prospects brought about by the higher consciousness constitute Dorothea's altering view of her own future with Casaubon. "She was inwardly seeing the light of years to come in her own home and over the English fields and elms and hedge-bordered highroads: and feeling that the way in which they might be filled with joyful devotedness was not so clear to her as it had been" (*Mm*, 235). The tidy picture that Dorothea held of her future life was becoming blurred by new revelations enabled by critical perspective. In dialectical terms, the two who supposedly had been united in marriage have just experienced an alienation—a critical distancing—in the form of an argument, which reveals a new perspective of opposition. It also represents Dorothea's more comprehending understanding that her life might be more complicated than one in which she could bridge the gap she perceived between herself and the world of knowledge simply by marrying a scholar.

Whereas Dorothea had previously assumed that in marriage to Casaubon she would become a part of something greater than herself—his great project—the new consciousness of individuation was the first step in the emergence from a state of moral naivety. The honeymoon chapters conclude with the sense that she is maturing in a manner similar to Hegel's system.

> We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent center of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain distance. (*Mm*, 243)

Dorothea's emergence from "moral stupidity" comes through her understanding of Casaubon's "center of self" as distinct from, and yet like, her own. In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, morality is a final stage of development in a process in which the self began with a consciousness that did not differentiate itself from the world, i.e., the world as an "udder to feed our supreme selves." The stage of differentiation has unpleasant manifestations, but eventually gives way to a higher consciousness of mutual, universal interdependence that is necessary for morality, according to Hegel.[23] So if Casaubon and Dorothea were ever to have a full relationship in the Hegelian sense of mature consciousness, they would have to recognize each of themselves in the other. In this construction, individuated self-interest is childish, given that the other is a kind of self-reflection, which yields the moral insight that to harm the other is to harm oneself. Eliot's central moral principle of sympathy thus has much in common with the Hegelian path to moral consciousness.

Dorothea's continued growth after achieving a critical view of Casaubon involves overcoming illusions by reconciling her own ideas about how she can fit into the world with the specific realities of her circumstances. After Casaubon's death, Dorothea struggles against his "dead hand," the symbol of his control over her from the grave, and specifically, his presumption that she would continue his work. She now sees "with a judgement that was truer than his" (*Mm*, 519) not only the project, but that the man to whom she had imagined a union as a fitting life-purpose, is "lower than she had believed" (*Mm*, 535). Free from the "Key," Dorothea turns to her own projects, but only as they become adjusted to circumstances. The cottages at Lowick are not in need of refurbishment, so she goes to work on those at Freshitt. Casaubon's codicil prevents her from helping Ladislaw financially, but she finds another good cause in Lydgate's fever hospital. As a woman in 1830 provincial England, Dorothea cannot lead great social or political reform, but her energies and aspirations are quietly subsumed into Ladislaw's parliamentary career. As St. Teresa represented for Eliot a kind of world-historical figure who encapsulated the single-mindedness of an age, Dorothea's example highlights the cacophony of her own.

In developing Dorothea's growth as an overcoming of illusion, Eliot seems to be following the Young Hegelian critique of Hegel's favoring the ideal side of the dialectic. Feuerbach differentiated his own approach from Hegel's by insisting that his was "the direct opposite of [metaphysical] speculation" because his "generates thought from the *opposite* of thought, from Matter, from existence, from the senses."[24] Lewes joined the general positivist critique of Hegel's metaphysical excesses that led Hegel to ignore certain features of the real world if they did not conform to his system. Lewes went so far as to say that Hegel's philosophy of history was "fiction, not history."[25] Dorothea's ability to reevaluate her circumstances and change her course of action accords with the general positivist critique of metaphysics. Although Lewes's simple opposition between fiction and history does not withstand in *Middlemarch*.

* * *

As J. Hillis Miller's influential reading of *Middlemarch* indicates, the novel effectively dismantles the conceptual opposition between fiction and history.[26] Miller's argument derives from a premise that was articulated by Henry James, a great devotee of Eliot in his early career: novels work only insofar as they seem to be history. As James himself said, "It is impossible to imagine what a novelist takes himself to be unless he regards himself as an historian and his narrative as history."[27] Realist novels and histories have in common a more or less omniscient narrator who tells a story from a "*locus standi*," from which a more or less totalizing picture of the various cause and effect relationships is rendered. While *Middlemarch* ostensibly reads like a story told by a conventional historical narrator positioned in a "*locus standi*," Miller reads the cumulative effect of the "demythologizing" that takes place—such as Dorothea's new critical view of Casaubon—as undermining the narrator's solid ground. Miller further argues that this has implications for history.

> The effort of demythologizing in *Middlemarch* . . . can be defined as a dismantling of various versions of the metaphysical system on which the traditional idea of history depends. In spite of its recourse to the conventional *locus standi* of defining itself as a displaced form of history, the novel, so to speak, pulls the rug out from under itself and deprives itself of that solid ground without which, if Henry James is right, it is "nowhere." Her fiction deprives itself of its ground in history by demonstrating that ground to be a fiction too, a figure, a myth, a lie, like Dorothea's interpretation of Casaubon.[28]

For Miller, *Middlemarch* achieves a kind of modernist aesthetic, with respect to the destabilized narration. Because of the inherent similarity between (if not identity of) the narrative voice in novels and those in histories, *Middlemarch* implies that history cannot be told from a position of objective permanence, i.e., from solid ground.

Though Eliot had always appreciated the Jamesian insight regarding historians and fictional narrators (indeed, James probably developed this insight while reading Eliot, his favorite realist), the problem of narration and depicting the past is one that she treated with increasingly sharper focus. *Middlemarch* highlights the parallels between historians and fictional narrators in a number of places. In one example, the narrator mentions Herodotus in the context of making narrative choices. While describing the rise of social fluidity in the early nineteenth century, the narrator observes that "much the same sort of movement and mixture went on in old England as we find in older Herodotus, who also, in telling what had been thought it well to take a woman's lot for his starting-point" (*Mm*, 122-23).[29] The reference is to Io and Dorothea as the "starting-points" of the two respective stories. The loose and uncertain connection between the abduction of Io and the Persian Wars make Herodotus's choice seem more arbitrary than starting *Middlemarch* with "Miss Brooke," the central heroine of the novel. But the narrator suggests that in either case, a narrative choice had to be made—implying that the story might be told in any number of ways, which, by further implication, could yield any number of meanings. This highlights Eliot's understanding of the significance of the subjective dimension of the historian's craft: that the concerns of the given writer of history will bring to light selected details pertinent to their interests.

The narrator makes another explicit connection to the historian's craft in the opening of chapter 15. This time a contrast is made that speaks to historiographical concerns.

> A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago, and so to take his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to bring his arm-chair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty

> ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a camp-stool in a parrot-house. I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe. (*Mm*, 170)

Here the historian's problem, as Eliot understands it, is plainly faced: that innumerable things may have relevance to a history of "human lots" and it is the modern historian's painful job to be selective about what to leave out. The criteria for selection derive from the "needs" of the particular historical culture. Fielding, the eighteenth-century novelist, seems to have anticipated the Jamesian insight that the narrator is an historian.[30] This passage indicates the narrator's awareness that there could be many ways to tell this story, and that he has to make the choices that story-tellers like Fielding, and historians like Herodotus had to, within the contexts of aesthetic concerns, expectations of the readers/listeners about things like amount of detail or narrative logic.

Eliot's growing interest in the effects of narrative subjectivity on representing the past has a striking parallel with Dilthey's "critique of historical reason." Dilthey's work attempted to address the potential relativism associated with the "crisis of historicism" that arose from the kind of condition that Miller identifies in *Middlemarch*: the lack of a stable ground from which to describe the past puts the past itself into flux. The "crisis" concerned the apparent relativism implied in the nineteenth-century historicist orientation to the nature of historical knowledge. Unlike the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), Dilthey argued that knowledge in the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) had to have its basis in what he called "the facts of consciousness."

> Only in inner experience, in facts of consciousness, did I find a firm anchorage for my thinking. . . . All science is a science of experience, but all experience has its original constitution and its validity in the conditions of our consciousness, in which experience takes place—in the totality of our nature. We call the standpoint—which logically sees the impossibility of going beyond these conditions, which would be like seeing without an eye or directing the knowing look behind the eye itself—the epistemological standpoint; modern science can recognize no other.[31]

Dilthey's struggle to establish a stable basis—an epistemological standpoint—for historical knowledge seemed always thwarted by his insistence that this basis had to be in conscious experience, behind which one cannot see, and which itself was a part of the historical flow and therefore always unstable. Permanent historical truths are thus impossible given the historicity of their foundation in the experience of consciousness. Dilthey was perhaps writing ironically when he described his finding a "firm anchorage" for his thinking in the ever-fluctuating facts of consciousness, for it was the lack of firm anchorage in concrete, external reality in Dilthey's system that constituted the crisis of historicism.

The apparent solipsism in Dilthey's framework for knowledge of history derives from the importance he placed on the subjective side of experience. Knowledge of the world in general is always self-referential for Dilthey, because we live, as he put it, in a "mind-affected world."[32] Keenly aware of this problem, Dilthey devoted much of his career to resolving it.

> Thus, on the one hand, the comprehending subject creates this mind-affected world and, on the other, tries to gain objective knowledge of it. Hence we face the problem, how does the mental construction of the mind-affected world make knowledge of mind-affected reality possible? Earlier I have described this task as a critique of historical reason.[33]

Dilthey believed that his critique of historical reason had the potential for establishing "universally valid interpretation" (*allgemeingültigen Interpretation*) sensitive to the historicity of the apprehending consciousness.[34] Dilthey thus hoped to establish a permanent interpretive framework (hermeneutic) for history that showed the apprehending consciousness in dynamic relation to the world “affected” by its own apprehension. The standpoint for understanding history is *within* the historical process, not outside it, as the objectivist historians would want.

It is Dilthey’s sense of the dynamic interpretive standpoint that Eliot begins to approximate in *Middlemarch* and the narrator, when engaged in establishing the setting, activates something like the Diltheyan critique of historical reason. The narrator frequently reminds readers that 1830s provincial England is in many ways unlike the world of the early 1870s. A long excerpt acknowledges the affect of modern social fluidity on perception and interpretation.

> Old provincial society had its share of this subtle movement [of individuals between social classes]: had not only its striking downfalls, its brilliant young professional dandies who ended by living up an entry with a drab and six children for their establishment, but also those less marked vicissitudes which are constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse, and begetting new consciousness of interdependence. Some slipped a little downward, some got higher footing: people denied aspirates, gained wealth, and fastidious gentlemen stood for boroughs; some were caught in political currents, some in ecclesiastical, and perhaps found themselves surprisingly grouped in consequence; while a few personages or families that stood with rock firmness amid all this fluctuation, were slowly presenting new aspects in spite of solidity, and altering with the double change of self and beholder. Municipal town and rural parish gradually made fresh threads of connection – gradually, as the old stocking gave way to the savings-bank, and the worship of the solar guinea became extinct, while squires and baronets, and even lords who had once lived blamelessly afar from the civic mind, gathered the faultiness of closer acquaintanceship. (*Mm*, 122)

The narrator alludes to the social-historical modernization topics treated in *Mill on the Floss* and *Felix Holt*; expanding political consciousness and the spread of capitalist economy (symbolized by the savings-bank) being the more important transformations that occurred in this period. There is also, hiding in plain sight, an articulation of the awareness of the instability of perspective in the modern maelstrom. Corresponding with social fluidity, those families who "stood with rock firmness" nevertheless were seen to change from the altering perspectives of everyone else: "the double change of self and beholder." This is precisely the kind of destabilization Miller identifies with the novel, and it corresponds to Dilthey's insight regarding the foundation of historical knowledge in the experience of consciousness. As self-consciousness shifted in the historical flow of the early nineteenth century, "new aspects" emerged "in spite of [apparent] stability."

According to Miller, the instability of the narrator's subjectivity in *Middlemarch* becomes the dominant character of the history that is told. In my mind, however, this quality better describes the narration in *Daniel Deronda*. The narration in *Middlemarch* still clings to the objective pretense conveyed by a "*locus standi*," even as it describes shifting perceptions. The characters, not the narrator, suffer from unstable perspective. Either way, Eliot's explorations into the instability of consciousness—whether the narrator's or the main characters'—marks a significant development in her historicist worldview that led to some surprising manifestations in her last novel.

Chapter 5. *Daniel Deronda* and Appropriating the Past

> Insofar as a novel "deconstructs" the assumptions of "realism" in fiction, it also turns out to "deconstruct" naive notions about history or about the writing of history. (J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative and History")

"Was she beautiful or was she not beautiful?" *Daniel Deronda* opens with an uncertainty that strikes the dominant tone of Eliot's final novel. In a complex scene that takes place in a casino, the reader's gaze is that of Daniel Deronda, who is watching the "problematic sylph," Gwendolen Harleth, lose her money at an alarming rate at a roulette table. Few of Eliot's legions of fans could have been prepared for the opening scene of *Daniel Deronda*. Whereas her other novels congenially ask readers to travel back and try to remember a more quiet and pleasant time on the edge of memory, before the railroad had perforated the English countryside, or even earlier, when craftsmen worked and kept time by the rising and setting of the sun rather than by watches, *Deronda* confronts them with the uncertain mood of modernity. As Deronda surveyed the "scene of dull, gas-poisoned absorption" he thought "Rousseau might be justified in maintaining that art and science had done a poor service to mankind" (*DD*, 9). Even progress is dubious.

Furthermore, as the modern casino brought together the "distant varieties of Europe," there was a "certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask–as if they had all eaten some root that for the time compelled the brains of each to the same narrow monotony of action" (*DD*, 8-9). The grim spell arresting Gwendolen and the other players is "superstition": in this case, a belief that "Providence" on your side—that one's luck is superior to that of all the others. Superstition and doubt combine in the gas-lit spectacle to provide a suggestive overture to Eliot's final historical experiment.

The gambling theme unfolds in the novel in a number of surprising ways. Besides the opportunity for the simple moral rejection of greed on the grounds that one's profiting from another's loss is the opposite of "fellow-feeling," gambling also provides a metaphor for the central philosophical problem of novel: How does one act with conviction when the future is and can only be uncertain? Insofar as Deronda represents the best striving of humanity, it is historical consciousness that provides the best light in the uncertain darkness of time unfolding. The basis of social improvement and human progress, according to the novel, is in our understanding of the past. However, it is not in the sense that the past provides a road map for how things will unfold in the future, but because it guides us in self-discovery, from which progressive action derives.

Many literary critics regard *Daniel Deronda* as a departure from the realism of Eliot's other novels because it contains many unlikely coincidences, as well as a mystical visionary whose expectations are always on the mark, and because the plot structure is more like a romance, which the realist orientation rejects as fantasy.[1] Furthermore, the many scenes in which the narrator avoids presenting an objective account of what is seen and known, by describing only what the characters think and feel about each other is more than a deferment of objective understanding. In many of those cases, those characters employ *literary* categories (modes of emplotment) for organizing their understanding of the events they are witnessing, or they sometimes use other art forms, like music, painting, and theater, as referents in their understanding of what is happening to the other characters, which only adds to the sense of instability and uncertainty. As an alternative form of history, the novel has a Diltheyan irony, whose story told by a potentially fallible narrator aware of this condition and relies on the uncertain and sometimes contradictory perspectives of the characters, as with the opening line.

While Eliot scholars agree that *Deronda* is a major departure from realism and represents a new direction in Eliot's experimentation with fiction and the novel, there is considerable variance on the nature of Eliot's departure. Shuttleworth calls it the "breakdown of the organic idea."[2] Where her previous fiction examined how attaining organic social unity could be possible, *Deronda* abandons that possibility in favor of a "fragmented" vision of society in which it makes more sense, for example, to work on establishing a Jewish nation-state rather than finding purpose in a sense of commitment to the more abstract ideal of humanity as a whole.[3] Similarly, Graver argues that the novel *begins* with disunity, fragmentation, and lack of community, and offers Deronda's story as the best possibility for attaining community, and Gwendolen's isolation at the end as the negative example.[4] They both seem to recognize that history is somehow significant, and Shuttleworth rightly acknowledges Feuerbach as a guiding influence on the novel's conception of the historical development of humanity.

If, however, we view all of Eliot's fiction as experimental history-writing in a Young Hegelian framework, it is possible to view the shift in *Deronda* as a new path in historical inquiry, developing out of the complexity of *Middlemarch*, and taken to a point that undermines the kind of objective history that was gaining institutional sanction as she composed the novel. Heretofore, Eliot's fiction already implicitly challenged the new objective history by carving out a role for the imagination in historical thinking in which her "historical picturing" and complex plots vivified those "pregnant moments" of the past. *Deronda*, however, advances a perspective that admits that because our perception and consciousness are unstable, the past too can be indeterminate, except insofar as it is appropriated by impassioned inquiry. From this Dilthey-like conception of understanding history from within its flow, Eliot more directly rejected the idea of understanding history as if one was outside the process, which was the underlying assumption of the scientific style of history-writing the new academic historians were enshrining.

* * *

By the 1870s, Eliot was long past her active enthusiasm for the German Young Hegelians, but the plot structure of *Deronda* indicates that certain features of Hegelian thought were permanent fixtures in her worldview. In particular, Eliot still used the pattern of consciousness expansion found in Hegel's *Phenomenology* for the development of individual characters, and the Religion of Humanity orientation of the Young Hegelian philosophers remained as her guiding purpose for writing historical fiction. Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda, in their attempts to find fulfilling life-paths, engage struggles shaped by their differing levels of sympathy. Gwendolen is the "spoiled child," always encouraged to believe that the world and everyone in it would bend to her will. Deronda, on the other hand, is equipped with a unique ability to sympathize and those he encounters are "glad to have been born" because of their knowing him. Gwendolen's and Deronda's respective developments resemble different stages of Hegel's system, but in the novel form they take on symbolic significance that makes their stories comparable to the work of the Young Hegelians insofar as they represent the spiritual advancement of humanity. If Deronda represents the essence of humanity (in the Young Hegelian sense) in the modern world, then Eliot's last novel insists more than all of the others on the centrality of historical consciousness in the progress of humanity.

Gwendolen Harleth's retarded development represents the early Hegelian stage of consciousness in which self is barely differentiated from other. In the first book of *Daniel Deronda*, "The Spoiled Child," Gwendolen's whims rule her entire family. She has high expectations for a life filled with the adoration of others, as if she were an actress on stage. She judges Offendene, the house into which her family moves, in terms of its fitness as her "background" (*DD*, 26). "I am determined to be happy–at least not to go on muddling away my life as other people do, being and doing nothing remarkable" (*DD*, 29). Most of the young men she meets find her irresistible, and while she enjoys their attention–and more importantly, her mastery of them–her selfishness disposes her against returning affections. "I shall never love anybody," she confesses to her mother. "I can't love people. I hate them" (*DD*, 82). It turns out that Gwendolen would rather remain independent and imagines marriage only as a new venue for her mastery. Her initial interest in Grandcourt, for example, is inspired only by the thought of his potential titles and her wider visibility as the wife of a baronet, or if the right sequence of deaths occur, the wife of a peer.

Gwendolen's first encounters with criticism and with situations she is unable to control begin to awaken in her a higher level of consciousness, characterized by the differentiation of self from other. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel depicts the birth of consciousness at the moment of encounter with another consciousness, when the previous understanding of self alone is revised. Gwendolen's youthful fantasy was that she would live life as a kind of heroine-princess, and Grandcourt's interest in her seems to make that a possibility. These hopes are subverted, however, when the appearance of Lydia Glasher, makes Gwendolen realize that the fulfilment of her own desires will come at the expense of Grandcourt's children, because it is assumed that her marriage would alienate the illegitimate children from his legacy. Unable to fathom this new reality, Gwendolen flies to the Leubronn casino and entertains the fantasy that she can be the "queen of the roulette table," which is undermined by odds over which she has no control. Faced with her family's financial ruin, she then imagines her beauty and voice could lift them out of difficulty with the pleasant side-effect of celebrity and public praise. But the judgement of Herr Klesmer, who she "dreaded...as part of that unmanageable world which was independent of her wishes" (*DD*, 251), compels her to see that her gifts were admirable only "from a drawing-room *standpunkt*" (*DD*, 256), and that her notion to become a rich and famous stage-performer has "no more resemblance to reality than a pantomime" (*DD*, 258). Klesmer's criticism is "epoch" making for Gwendolen, who had "a vision of herself on the common level, and had lost the innate sense that there were reasons why she should not be slighted, elbowed, jostled–treated like a passenger with a third-class ticket" (*DD*, 262). The "spoiled child" was not prepared to think of herself as anything but exceptional, but nevertheless is forced to see herself simply as one among others, which corresponds to the first moment in Hegel's *Phenomenology* (see previous chapter).

Deronda exists at a much more advanced stage in the dialectic of Spirit. His supreme sympathy not only enables him to commiserate with others, he makes them feel "happy to have been born." However, his enormous ability for sympathy is also a disadvantage. In carefully unpacking Deronda's intellectual background and proclivities in order to describe his first awakening interest in Judaism (long before there is any suspicion of his origins), the narrator says he has a "many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any persistent course of action. . . . His imagination had so wrought itself to the habit of seeing things as they probably appeared to others, that a strong partisanship . . . had become an insincerity for him. His plenteous, flexible sympathy had ended by falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralise sympathy" (*DD*, 364). "Sympathy" is the center of Eliot's moral philosophy, but it has its potential pitfalls: if too diffuse, it can paralyze action. Whereas Dorothea's wide ability for sympathy was checked by her marginalized gender in *Middlemarch*, Deronda has been unable to commit to any particular cause because by taking on "strong partisanship," he gains the negative side of rejecting the opposition, for which he can also find sympathy. In terms of Hegelain dialectics, Deronda would be seen to have perfect consciousness of all competing arguments in the process of becoming. He is thus unable to commit to any of the temporary movements.

The association of the narrator's description of Deronda's wide sympathetic ability with his becoming acquainted with the history of Judaism not only foreshadows his later self-discovery, it also forms the crux of Eliot's point concerning historical consciousness. One important dimension of Deronda's ability is "historic sympathy." An instructive example of this ability occurs in his discussion with Grandcourt on a rebellious uprising in the British colony of Jamaica. Grandcourt believes "the Jamaican negro was a beastly sort of baptist Caliban." Deronda, however, "always felt a little with Caliban, who naturally had his own point of view and could sing a good song," and furthermore, he believed if the problems in the colony were caused by racial mixing, "the whites had to thank themselves for the half-breeds" (*DD*, 331). Here Deronda shows his knack for feeling for the opposition: though raised as an Englishman, he seems to be keenly aware of how the English can be viewed by colonized people as the source of problems. Despite this ability, however, it is not until his contact with Mirah that Deronda begins to change his perspective on Judaism, in which he had previously assumed it to be "a sort of eccentric fossilised form which an accomplished man might dispense with studying, and leave to specialists" (*DD*, 363). Mirah, for whom her religion "was of one fibre with her affections," (*DD*, 362) makes Deronda consider that "Judaism was something still throbbing in human lives, still making for them the only conceivable vesture of the world" (*DD*, 363). A subsequent trip to Frankfurt affords Deronda the opportunity to visit a synagogue where he begins to look at "human types there; and his thought, busily connecting them with the past phases of their race, stirred that fibre of historic sympathy which had helped to determine in him certain traits worth mentioning for those who are interested in his future" (*DD*, 363). That future is Deronda's appropriation of the history of Judaism as his own.

The description of Deronda's sympathetic frame of mind contains subtle clues that Eliot wished to oppose his "historic sympathy" to the objectivist approach to history that was becoming more wide-spread in the 1870s. The "specialists" to whom Deronda would previously have left the history of Judaism may refer to the new professional. According to Heyck, the major movement in the direction of specialization in natural and social sciences resulted in the delineation of new university disciplines: history was separated from law at Oxford in 1873, and from moral sciences at Cambridge in 1875. While the first Regius Professors of history at Oxford and Cambridge, Thomas Arnold in 1841 and Charles Kingsley in 1859 respectively, were "men of letters" who wrote popular histories, subsequent professional historians were obliged to make their developing discipline seem as scientific, objective, and empirical as possible in order for it to be considered a legitimate area of inquiry.[5] To bring this about, many historians believed they needed to distinguish their discipline from literature so that the taint of literary affect would not mar the objective presentation of facts. In the move to make history more scientific, British historians like Buckle in the late 1850s, Seeley and Stubbs in the 60s and 70s, and an increasing number of new professional historians thereafter, sought to divorce history both from its super-disciplines at Oxford and Cambridge, and from its real parent, literature.[6]

The "reflective analysis which tends to neutralise sympathy" might very well describe Eliot's impression of the new academic historians. The unimpassioned approach makes history seem like a "dwelling-place of lost souls, that dead anatomy of culture which turns the universe into a mere ceaseless answer to queries, and knows, not everything, but everything else about everything–as if one should be ignorant of nothing concerning the scent of violets except the scent itself for which one had no nostril" (*DD*, 365). Instead, Deronda, for whom "[a] too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralysing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force," began to long for "either some external event, or some inward light, that would urge him into a definite line of action, and compress his wandering energy" (*DD*, 364-65). The weakness of the "reflective analysis" that "neutralised sympathy," in Eliot's view, represents the kind of disinterest that the new professional history sought to achieve in its bid to be respected as a science.

One could argue that Deronda had no choice but to accept Jewish history as his own, that *appropriation* does not accurately describe one's relationship with his past. What has happened, after all, has already happened, and we do not have the choice to alter the past; as Deronda tells Mordecai, "What my birth was does not lie in my will" (*DD*, 502). The novel, however, poses a counter-argument in the character of Princess Leonora Halm-Eberstein, Deronda's mother. Born to an insistent father with strict ideas about the way Jewish girls and young women ought to live, Deronda's mother associated being Jewish with stifling obligation. She rejected her Jewish heritage, and gave her baby up for adoption in order to follow her calling to the stage. The Princess has no regrets about turning her back on Judaism, and though she was born a Jew, Deronda's mother is, for all practical purposes, no longer Jewish. This example suggests that one is not bound to accept the heritage into which she is born. However, there is no mistake that her decision also to turn her back on her child is a grave one. By denying herself and her son that peculiar kind of filial love, her sacrifice seems rather severe. Furthermore, Deronda's active adoption of the heritage that she rejected for fame makes her seem supremely selfish.

Deronda's appropriation of Jewish heritage begins with his relationship with Mordecai. The consumptive Jewish mystic is "a frail incorporation of the national consciousness, breathing with difficult breath" (*DD*, 517). Mordecai feels that his soul is inhabited by a medieval cabalist who "had absorbed the philosophy of the Gentile into the faith of the Jew, and . . . still yearned toward a centre for our race" (*DD*, 498), and is convinced that Deronda is the next heir to this soul. So he begins to teach Deronda about his visions of the future of Judaism. These visions are indelibly linked to the Jewish past.

> The world grows, and its frame is knit together by the growing soul; dim, dim at first, then clearer and more clear, the consciousness discerns remote stirrings. As thoughts move within us darkly, and shake us before they are fully discerned–so events–so beings; they are knit with us in the growth of the world. You have risen within me like a thought not fully spelled: my soul is shaken before the words are all there. The rest will come–it will come. (*DD*, 501)

Mordecai's conception is a Feuerbachian construct that is sensitive to the growth of ideas becoming manifest. The "growing soul" is Hegelian Spirit gaining higher levels of consciousness.

The weighty significance of the past is the central theme of the chapter depicting Mordecai's "Philosophers" club. Mordecai describes a "faint likeness" between his companions and "the great Transmitters, who laboured with their hands for scant bread, but preserved and enlarged for us the heritage of memory, and saved the soul of Israel alive as a seed among the tombs" (*DD*, 521). But the comparison is ironic because the topic of the evening's discussion—the "law of Progress"—occasions some (who call themselves "rational") to advance their impression that human progress tends away from Jewish nationalism and toward the assimilation of Jews into the dominant cultures of their respective European countries. The only one to disagree is Mordecai, who does so based on a specific conception of the relationship between the past and the present.

> But what is it to be rational. . . ? It is to see more and more of the hidden bonds that bind and consecrate change as a dependent growth–yea, consecrate it with kinship: the past becomes my parent, and the future stretches towards me the appealing arms of children. . . . When it is rational to say, "I know not my father or my mother, let my children be aliens to me, that no prayer of mine may touch them," then it will be rational for the Jew to say, "I will seek to know no difference between me and the Gentile, I will not cherish the prophetic consciousness of our

> nationality–let the Hebrew cease to be, and let all his memorials be antiquarian trifles, dead as the wall-paintings of a conjectured race." (*DD*, 528-29)

Mordecai's appeal to Jewish national sentiment rests on the common feeling of kinship and inter-generational love, the kind that Deronda's mother forsook. To ignore one's Jewish heritage would be to trivialize all that one's ancestors held dear, to make memorials into "antiquarian trifles," and to somehow disown one's children.

Mordecai's forceful speech also contains an indirect critique of the dispassionate approach of the new historical profession. Heyck describes an "antiquarian influence" at Oxford just after mid-century, in which the interest in the past for such historians as Freeman, Stubbs, and Green, was for its own sake, i.e., they were driven to study the past simply because they loved the architecture, languages, and other forms of antiquity. In their minds, according to Heyck, this antiquarianism "dovetailed" with the prescripts of natural science in "promoting the idea of knowledge for its own sake."[7] Their conception of history as a science like any other natural science led them to think of writing history as contributing to the "sum total of historical knowledge itself."[8] Whereas Eliot may have been more sympathetic to the "Oxford School" perspective on history at the time of its emergence in the 1850s—which coincided with her review of Riehl and her enthusiasm for the idea of a "natural history" of societies—the several examples in *Deronda*, such as Mordecai's dismissal of "antiquarian trifles," indicate that by the mid 1870s, she had rejected that perspective in favor of one which looked to the past with keen personal interest.

The sense of appropriation of the past in *Daniel Deronda* has a number of parallels to Nietzsche's philosophy of history, but is ultimately too committed to the Hegelian historical dialectic to be as creative/destructive as in Nietzsche's sense. What Nietzsche called the "disadvantage" (*Nachteil*) of history—that forms a repressive yoke, diminishing creative life—Eliot viewed as dialectical origins that informed self-knowledge and instructed sentiments. Foreshadowed as the "final necessary piece," Deronda's appropriation of Jewish heritage is completed by learning of his parents and grandparents, and the circumstances of his birth. Once he can fully identify himself with a 1500 year-old struggle he is then able to apply himself to a cause: he calls it "restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national centre such as the English have." (*DD*, 803). Being dumb to the past begets a state of consciousness like Gwendolen's, whose selfishness is alienating and whose choices are always a gamble based in fantasy. Deronda's mother resembles a kind of Nietzschean hero who consciously, and destructively, turns her back on her past because for her it would have been a heritage that prevented her from developing her artistic genius. I would suggest that *Deronda* does not fully examine the implications of the Princess's choice.[9] But she is certainly the anti-hero in contrast to Deronda's example.

* * *

The perspectivist dimensions of *Daniel Deronda* parallel what Hayden White has described as the highest achievement in nineteenth-century historical imagination: the Nietzschean realization of our ironic historical condition.[10] The condition is *ironic* because the kind of historical interpretation that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century involved a prosaic pretense to realism, i.e., the nature of historical prose at this time assumed that there is one best way to shape the chaos of the historical record into a narrative form, yet we realize (after Nietzsche)[11] that there is no permanent basis for establishing the truth of any particular account. Since truth claims are thus beside the point—and White himself is operating within this Nietzschean frame of mind—his analysis of the work of major historians and philosophers of history focuses on the tropes and modes of emplotment that inhere in their writing because he sees these literary factors as fundamental to our conceptualization of any narrative. The Nietzschean rejection of the scientific claim to objectivity in general, and the importance of the appropriation of the past for self-development in particular, manifests what White has called the ironic self-awareness of our historical condition. Dilthey's work represented an early effort to systematize the study of the past while maintaining the self-awareness of this ironic condition. The extent to which he was unable to do so produced a sense of "crisis" for those who felt that historicism had undermined the possibility for truth claims. Eliot approached the same problem of the irony of prosaic, objective truth claims in *Daniel Deronda*, and Deronda's historical appropriation and his decision to join the cause of Jewish nationalism constitute a possible "solution" to that problem.

The sense of crisis historicism for Eliot was thus a literary problem, and the best way to contextualize her achievement in *Deronda* is to consider the implications of her shifting use of realism. Like realism in painting, literary realism presented ordinary scenes of contemporary, usually lower and middle class, life–as opposed to the allegorical, mythological, and classical topics of the romantic styles. It is often linked with various anti-metaphysical philosophies, especially Comte's, around the mid nineteenth century.[12] Many believed that "philosophy," by which they meant metaphysical philosophy, focused too much on the imaginary and not enough on "concrete," material things. According to

M. H. Abrahms, literary realism is supposed to represent reality as an imitation, or to use Erich Auerbach's word, a "mimesis," of the real world.[13] The intended effect is that the reader recognize the descriptions of people and events as ordinary, common, and likely. In order to produce the sense of the individual experience through language, realists such as Fielding, Jane Austen, Balzac, and Tolstoy tried to make their readers feel like they shared the experience. Realism involves the writer's "selection" of a number of elements so as to produce the "illusion" of ordinary lived experience and is thus a fictive act.[14] Maupassant, at the end of the nineteenth century, had recognized this very well.

> The realist, if he is an artist, will endeavor not to show us a commonplace photograph of life, but to give us a presentment of it which shall be more complete, more striking, more cogent than reality itself. To tell everything is out of the question: it would require at least a volume for each day to enumerate the endless, insignificant incidents which crowd our existence. A choice must be made–and this is the first blow to the theory of 'the whole truth . . .' Whence I conclude that the skilled Realists should rather call themselves illusionists.[15]

While there is a dimension of realism that represents a human striving for sharing individual experience, there is another dimension that seems, when we read Maupassant's comment, like a parlor trick. Levine's take on realism assumes that best examples of nineteenth-century realism were written by authors who had Maupassant's ironic self-awareness that their ability to relate experiences of reality were illusory.[16]

Eliot's approach to historical fiction had all along assumed a kinship between fiction and history, and the realism of her earlier fiction helped to suggest that veracious historical fiction was a way to do history. Her departure from realism in *Deronda* into a style that might be called perspectivism implies that historical writing could also move beyond the limits of realist prose.

Eliot's familiarity with the parallels between fiction and history, developing in her previous novels, make some of the moves in *Deronda* seem keenly opposed to the pretense of objectivity of the professionalizing community of historians in the 1870s. The novel begins by challenging a narrative convention of chronological sequence. Even before the reader encounters Deronda's uncertain gaze on Gwendolen, the epigraph to the first chapter highlights the subjective nature of narrative and human knowledge.

> Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off *in medias res*. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out. (*DD*, 7)

This passage does many things, and its location at the beginning of the novel is a clear sign that Eliot was, at the very least, complicating the notion of historical interpretation, because even though readers' comprehension of the novel's action is at "Nought," they should know that we are starting in the midst of an historical flow. The first two chapters take place in Leubronn. In the latter, Gwendolen is called home to Offendene after her family's fortune is lost. (See Table 3) The third chapter goes back almost a year to describe Gwendolen and her family moving into Offendene. From here the chapters proceed chronologically through Gwendolen's courtship with Grandcourt until chapter 14, when Gwendolen flies to Leubronn, and in chapter 15 we learn that Grandcourt was on his way to look for her just as Deronda was observing her for the first time in chapter 1.

Table 3

Chapters	1-2	3-14	15	16-20	21-70
Chronology of Events	III	II	III	I	IV

Chapters 16-20 discuss Deronda's upbringing by his adoptive father, Sir Hugo Mallinger, his years at school, and his finding of Mirah. Chapter 21 then describes Gwendolen's return from Leubronn, the moment suspended since chapter two. We look backward and forward from the position of present awareness of the "all-presupposing fact." The epigraph makes explicit that the flashback tactic of the novel reflects historical inquiry, which begins with the present mind—we look back with interest. The histories of Deronda and Gwendolen will be of interest because we know from the outset about the middle part of the story, when their two streams meet at Leubronn. By chapter 20, that moment has become enriched by knowing the personal-historical circumstances and their states of mind. As "background" to that scene in the casino, the histories of Gwendolen and Deronda are arranged to explain that moment and set up the interpretation of the turns of plot that follow.

The first chapter's epigraph stresses the subjective dimension of human perception and knowledge by focusing on how science relies on conventions of narrative structure. We are asked to consider the way "Science" constructs narratives that "reckon forward and backward" from *in medias res*. The specific example in the epigraph reminds us that it was an arbitrary moment, in the context of cosmic time, when we on Earth set our sidereal clocks at "Nought," and "pretend" that this is the beginning of a new cycle, while the star of reference is in its "unceasing journey," unrelated and unaware that anything new (like the "make-believe unit" of an Earth year) has begun. Truth is therefore relative to the position of the stars as viewed from Earth. Knowledge and "Science," represented here by astronomy, seem like a systems that merely organizes experience in local human terms, and in doing so, they must employ the narrative strategy of "the make-believe of a beginning," for "men can do nothing without it."

In a later chapter, Eliot employs another astronomy analogy that insists on the central role of imagination in developing historical narrative and knowledge. With a metanarrative sense that Eliot is reflecting on her own difficulties in composing the novel, the epigraph to chapter 16 reads:

> Men, like planets, have both a visible and an invisible history. The astronomer threads the darkness with strict deduction, accounting so for every visible arc in the wanderer's orbit; and the narrator of human actions, if he did his work with the same completeness, would have to thread the hidden pathways of feeling and thought which lead up to every moment of action, and to those moments of intense suffering which take the quality of action–like the cry of Prometheus, whose chained anguish seems a greater energy than the sea and sky he invokes and the deity he defies. (*DD*, 164)

This epigraph introduces a chapter describing the peculiarities of Deronda's childhood, which were invisible to us at the casino. Those peculiarities were his ignorance of his own origins, his sensitivity to that circumstance, and the simultaneous development of a "passion for history" and a tendency to speculate on what his origins were. He had been "making conjectures about his own history, as he had often made stories about Pericles or Columbus, just to fill up the blanks before they became famous" (*DD*, 168). The historical "blanks" are the "hidden pathways" and "invisible histories" referred to in the epigraph, and in the context of this chapter, they are Deronda's feelings. If they are to be "threaded," the unobservable "invisible histories" must be developed with an imaginative faculty, like Eliot's "historic imagination" or Deronda's conjectures.

Eliot's view of historical imagination, used to "fill up the blanks," gives subjectivity a significant role in knowledge creation, a view that her husband had begun to theorize ten years earlier. Lewes wrote that all perception depends on "mental vision," i.e., imagination, which "supplies the deficiencies of ocular vision,"[17] or what the senses fail to provide. Eliot applied this understanding to historical knowledge, reasoning in the "Historic Imagination" passage that "veracious . . . historical picturing" involved "supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation" that the "extant evidence" was unable to provide. The "grand elements of history require the illumination of special imaginative treatment" because physical evidence alone cannot provide the historical connections—the "threads"—between objects, people, and events (*Essays*, 446-47). As if to demonstrate the efficacy of imaginative approaches to reconstructing the hidden passages of the past, Deronda's early speculations about his origins turn out to be close to the mark. When Sir Hugo suggested to him that he might consider a career as a great singer, Deronda, who had singing talent, recoiled: "That Sir Hugo should have thought of him in that position for a moment, seemed to Daniel an unmistakeable proof that there was something about his birth which threw him out from the class of gentlemen to which the baronet belonged" (*DD,* 170). The revelation that his mother had herself been a great singer confirmed Deronda's conjecture, made possible by his considerable imaginative faculties.

The same notebook in which the "Historic Imagination" passage appears contains a number of writings that show Eliot working out her understanding of narrative and its centrality in historical inquiry. An entry she called "Story-Telling," in particular, raises several concerns that are addressed in one way or another in *Deronda*. The passage poses the question: "What is the best way of telling a story?" The simple answer is that there is no "best" way, but "many good ways" depending on the "interest of the audience." Eliot then defends the approach she came to use in *Deronda* by associating the "fragmentary and unchronological way" of telling a story with the ways in which we develop knowledge of the past. "[W]e get interested in the stories life presents to us through divers orders and modes of presentation. Very commonly our first awakening to a desire of knowing a man's past or future comes from our seeing him as a stranger in some unusual or pathetic or humorous situation, or manifesting some remarkable characteristics." Our motivation for learning comes from our "incompleteness of the first information."[18] Memory, she says, works in a similar way: "[S]ome salient experience appears in inward vision, and in consequence the antecedent facts are retraced from what is regarded as the beginning of the episode in which that experience made a more or less strikingly memorable part" (*Essays*, 444-45). The point of these opening remarks is to establish that knowledge about the past is a combination of "processes of outward and inward life," or objective and subjective experiences, and the successful story-writer should keep that in mind before presenting the elements of the story in mere chronological order.

The passage then turns to the theory of knowledge that Lewes had addressed in his *Principles of Success in Literature*, in a section called "Psychology of Mental Vision." Lewes and Eliot both celebrate the ability to raise mental "images" to analytical power. For Lewes, imagination is the "mind's eye," which sees what is not apparent to "ocular vision." Perception, inference, reasoning, and imagination are all kinds of this mental visualization. One of his examples will sound familiar to those who have read the epigraphs of *Deronda*.

> A chain of reasoning is a chain of inferences: *ideal* presentations of objects and relations not apparent to Sense, or not presentable to Sense. Could we realise all the links in this chain, by placing the objects in their actual order as a *visible* series, the reasoning would be a succession of perceptions. Thus the path of a planet is seen by reason to be an ellipse. It would be perceived as a fact, if we were in a proper position and endowed with the requisite means of following the planet in its course; but not having this power, we are reduced to infer the unapparent points in its course from the points which are apparent. We see them mentally.[19]

Because we cannot put ourselves in an actual position to trace the elliptical path of a planet, we connect the "facts" of our observations into a shape drawn by our mind, the "ideal presentation." Imagination is that ability to "infer" or "perceive" what we do not actually see. It is what Eliot meant in the epigraph describing the astronomer who "threads the darkness with strict deduction, accounting so for every visible arc in the wanderer's orbit," which was then associated with the narration of "human actions." In the "Story-Telling" notebook-entry, Eliot draws a distinction between the effective story-teller who has a "superior mastery of images and pictures in grasping the attention," and the "desire for orderly narration," which could characterize the kind of history writing to which Eliot objected (*Essays*, 445).

Deronda contains many passing remarks by the narrator and various characters that betray that Eliot was thinking, and even joking, about how the imagination "threads the darkness" in ways that make sense in some narrative ideal. The Meyrick girls and Gwendolen's sisters, who seem to be an audience within the novel to the primary action of the novel, provide references to literary styles and try to force their knowledge of the other "characters" into storylines that fit, in particular, with romance. When the Meyricks first meet Deronda, they "thoroughly accept him as an ideal" and Mab presciently romanticizes that he is "Prince Carmaralzaman," from *The Arabian Nights* (*DD*, 184). One imagines that they picked up this tendency from their mother, who reads the newspapers for the list of marriages, which gives her "the pleasant sense of finishing the fashionable novels without having read them, and seeing the heroes and heroines happy without knowing what poor creatures they were" (*DD*, 726). When listening to Anna Gascoigne describe familial connections hitherto unknown to the Meyricks, Mab insists that she incorporate Deronda into the picture, "You *must* bring him in" (*DD*, 655), as if to accomodate her idea of a good story. Gwendolen's yachting trip with Grandcourt "made a striking part of the sisters' *romance*, the book-devouring Isabel throwing in a corsair or two to make an adventure that might end well" (*DD*, 708, my italics). Gwendolen's life is her "sisters' romance," and through these continued suggestions by the narrator, the novel becomes, in many ways, the reader's romance as well. These light-hearted moments have a serious point behind them, for they reflect the reader's comprehension of the novel's plots, which must happen within literary frameworks.

The Gwendolen story poses the consequences, however, of what can happen when literary frameworks form a kind of trap by leading one to bad inferences, and then to bad choices. Gwendolen's difficulties arise because her consciousness is shaped primarily by romance. When conjecturing, for example, where Grandcourt's affections might lay, she thinks that "men have been known to choose some one else than the woman they most admired, and recalled several experiences of that kind in novels" (*DD*, 114). Gwendolen's "horizon" was for her a "genteel romance" in which she plays the heroine (*DD*, 53), and everywhere likes to imagine herself on a stage, which is why Klesmer's critique came as such a blow. She wanted to be the "heroine of the gaming table" (*DD*, 272). She speaks of herself with a "tragic air" as her family's troubles start to weigh on her (*DD*, 276). The trap of her marriage to Grandcourt was laid by her muddled imagination, which led her to expect to be able to command a husband. Though she did not love Grandcourt, she did anticipate a "fuller power of managing circumstance–with all the official strength of marriage, which some women made so poor use of" (*DD*, 355). But these thoughts were nothing more than "the yeasty mingling of dimly understood facts with vague but deep impressions, and with images half real, half fantastic" (*DD*, 354). Gwendolen's life might have been more like Deronda's mother's: the contrast between the two is direct, for the Princess held absolute command over her husband, and had become a famous singer. Had she better command of imagination, so that images "half fantastic" would not have clouded her judgement, each of her choices would have been less like a gamble.

Deronda and Mordecai form the major positive example of effective imagination in knowledge creation in the novel. We have already seen how Deronda's historical imagination enabled him to divine some of the circumstances of his birth. It also disposed him to be open to Mordecai's claim that they had a mysterious kinship.

> This claim, indeed, considered in what is called a rational way, might seem justifiably dismissed as illusory and even preposterous; but it was precisely what turned Mordecai's hold on him from an appeal to his ready sympathy into a clutch on his struggling conscience. Our consciences are not all of the same pattern, and inner deliverance of fixed law: they are the voice of sensibilities as various as our memories. . . . And Deronda's conscience included sensibilities beyond the common, enlarged by his early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others. (*DD*, 511)

The narrator makes an excuse for Deronda's openness to Mordecai's claim by suggesting that because inner lives are not merely mechanical processes, our perception of outward processes must be more than simple adherence to "fixed law." In other words, Deronda's imagination enables him to see things that most others cannot. Eliot calls upon Aristotle in the epigraph of this chapter to prepare the reader for what may seem impossible. "This, too, is probable, according to that saying of Agathon: 'It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen'" (*DD*, 509). Mordecai's claim seems improbable only because it is so extraordinary—beyond common experience. Deronda's imaginative sympathy, however, allows for the possibility.

Mordecai has imaginative power in spades, which gives him an apparent knack for seeing into the future. His mind was "wrought . . . constantly in images." His ways of thinking and speaking "often resembled genuine dreams in their way of breaking off the passage from the know to the unknown" (*DD*, 473). Even when Mordecai was not actually on his bridge gazing westward, "his imagination spontaneously planted him" there. The vague representation of his longing became discernable through the "progress of his imagination." In his quest for an heir, he developed the image of a face "gathered from his memory of faces seen among the Jews of Holland and Bohemia, and from the paintings which revived that memory." In this way Mordecai threaded the darkness of the unknown and anticipated Deronda's face before he ever saw him.

> Reverently let it be said of this mature spiritual need that it was akin to the boy's and girl's picturing of the future beloved; but the stirrings of such young desire are feeble compared with the passionate current of an ideal life straining to embody itself, made intense by resistance to imminent dissolution. The visionary form became a companion and auditor; keeping a place not only in the waking imagination, but those dreams of lighter slumber. (*DD*, 474)

By relating Mordecai's visions to a child's unrestrained yet immature imagination, Eliot is adding a new level to Lewes's list of perceptive faculties that make the unwitnessed connections and create knowledge. Perception, inference, reason, and imagination formed a kind of hierarchy of complexity for Lewes,[20] to which Eliot is now adding Mordecai's somnambulant, visionary ability.

Mordecai's visionary ability, sometimes referred to as "second sight," can be viewed as Eliot's daring experiment to see whether it is possible to characterize realistically the apparently supernatural. She seems to have known that some readers would want to dispute this new direction, for the chapter in which Mordecai is first described at length opens with an "apology" for second sight. "'Second-sight' is a flag over disputed ground. But it is matter of knowledge that there are persons whose yearnings, conception–nay, travelled conclusions–continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power. . . . [These persons are not] less sane than the commonplace calculators of the market" (*DD*, 471). Mordecai's anticipation of Deronda is a demonstration of this "foreshadowing power." The apologies continue as Mordecai's power to intuit the future is further described as "a wise estimate of consequences . . . fused in the fires of that passionate belief which determines the consequences it believes in." Here Eliot builds upon the theory of knowledge that includes perceptive imagination, and goes one step further in stressing the subjective side. As if to legitimate the move, the narrator continues:

> The inspirations of the world have come in that way too: even strictly-measuring science could hardly have got on without that forecasting ardour which feels the agitations of discovery beforehand, and has a faith in its preconception that surmounts many failures of experiment. And in relation to human motives and actions, passionate belief has a fuller efficacy. Here enthusiasm may have the validity of proof, and, happening in one soul, give the type of what will one day be general. (*DD*, 513)

Science, too, carries on by a "forecasting ardour," where discoverers are guided by the belief that their intuition is accurate. Copernicus and Columbus are the examples that make the case. They advanced their respective searches with a passion that could only come from a belief in their conceptions. Copernicus somehow had a vision of a solar system with the sun at the center *before* his observations could be brought to bear on the issue. Likewise, Columbus had a conception of the globe that led him to risk everything in order to prove that one could sail west and reach India. The narrator argues that with these heroic examples firmly rooted in the western view of science and progress, there is little reason not to entertain the possibility that Mordecai has tapped into something that allows him foresight.

* * *

The novel's departure from realism is one indication that Eliot had joined a number of nineteenth-century figures in reassessing the subject/object duality implied by Cartesian philosophy in general, and by objective history in particular. Shuttleworth reads *Deronda* as Eliot's application of new psychological theory that Claude Bernard was developing in France in the 1860s, which Lewes followed with great interest.[21] Bernard described life as a process, "the result of contact between the organism and its milieu,"[22] suggesting that self is transitory and that consciousness transcends the individual human organism. The subject (the perceiving agent) and the object (another person or group, work, or culture) are "abstractions" of the real thing, which is the process of experience. For Bernard, electricity, which is what we call the process of charged particles interacting with their environment, provided the appropriate metaphor. Dale argues that Eliot's later career represents an interest in "new physics" in which she abandoned the positivist hope to find "exact correspondence between structures of mind and structures of nature, recognition of the inescapability of metaphor/interpretation, pushes her towards an understanding of mind as an independent expression of energy, constituting an order of its own, rather than seeking to conform to some putative primordial order outside itself."[23] These interpretations share not only a similarity of metaphor, but also the perception that Eliot was moving into a post-positivist phase. If, however, we consider the significance of the framework of Young Hegelian historicism behind Eliot's worldview, and its parallel to the crisis historicism of Dilthey, then a view of her uniquely literary approach to the problems of nineteenth-century historicism emerges.

The Hegelian dialectical orientation of her previous novels is still crucial in Eliot's last novel because it continues to provide the model of process. Hegel's own critique of the one-sidedness of Enlightenment thought bears a striking resemblance to Eliot's critique of the one-sidedness of objectivist history in the 1870s. Hegel tried to show that the fundamental quality of the Enlightenment theory of knowledge—the Cartesian dualism of subject and object—was an illusion by arguing that subject and object are merely moments in the process of Spirit becoming. Eliot's (and Lewes's) theory of knowledge in general, and of historical knowledge in particular, continues the struggle to overcome the impression that what is known is really outside of the perceiving consciousness. Eliot insists in *Deronda* that the creation of historical knowledge is a process involving the imagination of the perceiving agent that "fills in the blanks" endemic to a merely objective view.

But the Hegelian inspiration to historicize systems of thought has turned back on itself. Once truth is historicized, uncertainty reigns. When personal development is centralized within a worldview that has historicized truth, as it had for Eliot in the 1870s, perspective becomes multiple and unstable, as it does in *Daniel Deronda*. At the level of the individual, action is a problem of self-consciousness in the Hegelian system : how does one act according to the flow of history when one does not fully comprehend his relationship to that history? That history itself is not fixed reflects back on the subjective consciousness which, therefore, cannot be stable. Dilthey had reached a similar conclusion with respect to subjectivity in locating the basis of knowledge in the "facts of consciousness," which carried this same dynamic relationship with history. Eliot realized that there is a subjective element in any response to this condition, that any construction of a history that one is trying to be connected to involves an appropriation—a shaping—of the past with the use of imagination to "thread the darkness." In the novel, Deronda adopts a heritage from Mordecai (who happens to be looking for an heir), a move facilitated by the discovery of his Jewish parentage, and he (re)appropriates the history of the Jews as his own. Deronda follows his feeling to Palestine, with the deep resonance in his perception that he belongs to a historical process.

Conclusion: Looking Backward

> Most of us, who have had decent parents, would shrink from wishing that our father and mother had been somebody else whom we never knew; yet it is held no impiety—rather, a graceful mark of instruction—for a man to wail that he was not the son of another age and another nation, of which also he knows nothing except through the easy process of an imperfect imagination and a flattering fancy. (George Eliot, "Looking Backward")[1]

* * *

In this opening line from an essay in her last published work, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot touched on themes ubiquitous in her fiction with characteristic economy. The passage advances the organic model of the relationship of an individual to his milieu and to his past—one of the specific messages that runs through Eliot's work. The use of the parental example lends a poetic air to an implication of that central message: that the responsible thing to do is accept one's lot and view one's contemporaries as familial. The passage utilizes a romantic-historical framework—in which "another age and another nation" is a unique temporal-cultural unity—and criticizes the over-idealization, the "imperfect imagination," of the past, where the grass often looks greener. Theophrastus Such, the narrator, is trying to avoid what we might call a

Burckhardtian syndrome, after the historian who saw the brief flower of the Renaissance a mere reminder of a much greater culture of antiquity, both of which he seemed to prefer to his own age. Such warns that if we do not feel connected to our own times and hold sympathy for our contemporaries, "some attempt to regard them with the same freedom from ill-temper . . . as we may hope will be felt by those who will call us ancient . . . [then] the looking before and after, which is our grand human privilege, is in danger of turning to a sort of other-worldliness, breeding a more illogical indifference or bitterness than was ever bred by the ascetic's contemplation of heaven"[2]

"Looking Backward," like much of Eliot's fiction, looks back on the early nineteenth century. Nearing the end of her life in the late 1870s, Eliot continued to search for new ways to reconcile the historical transformation that occurred in the first third of the nineteenth century with the memories of her youth in the 1820s and 1830s and what she knew about the world of her father's generation. In "Looking Backward," Such recalls the charms of the preindustrial English countryside—the world of his father just after the turn of the century—in a consciously nostalgic manner. But the piece is ultimately ironic from the standpoint of historical consciousness, for not only does it question the ability to remember the past without sweetening it, "Looking Backward" endorses the philosophical position that Eliot mobilized in her novels: the centrality of imagination in developing historical awareness.

> Perhaps this England of my affections is half-visionary,—a dream in which things are connected according to my well-fed, lazy mood, and not at all by the multitudinous links of graver, sadder fact, such as belong everywhere to the story of human labour. Well, well, the illusions that began for us when we were less acquainted with evil have not lost their value when we discern them to be illusions. They feed the ideal Better; and in loving them still, we strengthen the precious habit of loving something not visibly, tangibly existent, but a spiritual product of our visible, tangible selves.[3]

The remembered past must be shaped by an ideal, an inner feeling that makes it a spiritual product that also feeds back into the ideal itself. McCaw uses the first part of this passage, ending with "human labour," to support his argument that Eliot's historical sense was both Whiggish—i.e., liberal and present-centered—and self-aware of its Whiggishness, thus creating a paradox.[4] The rest of the passage helps considerably to draw a picture of the epistemological framework of Eliot's philosophy of history, which, whether she was creating a "national past," as McCaw argues, or a more general, European history of the rise of modernity, it is something born from of the tension between a spiritual ideal that is not tangibly existent and the "graver, sadder facts" of prosaic, quotidian life.

Perhaps it was something like "Looking Backward" that Dilthey had in mind when he called for the creation of historical knowledge based in the "facts of consciousness," or in a way that derived from life-experience. Such's description of the act of remembering the early nineteenth century is constantly burdened with/informed by the self-awareness that he infuses spiritual meaning into that past from his own peculiar historical standpoint. Eliot seems to have been aware, as Dilthey was, that history can only be understood from a particular moment in time, and because the basis of consciousness is *within* the historical process itself, it also is subject to the shifting orientations wrought by historical change. Such indicates a sensitivity to the Diltheyan insight: "To me . . . that parental time, the time of my father's youth, never seemed prosaic, for it came to my imagination first through his memories, which made a wondrous perspective to my little daily world of discovery."[5] Such's qualification of his own historical awareness locates the standpoint (a temporary *locus standi*) of his interpretation of the turn of the nineteenth century within a specific set of life-experiences unique to his generation. The passage continues, "And, for my part, I can call no age absolutely unpoetic: how should it be so, since there are always children to whom the acorn and the swallow's eggs are a wonder. . . ?"[6] In stating that the past will always undergo reinterpretation by new generations whose senses of wonder and needs for appropriating a past are themselves historically determined, Eliot not only parallels Dilthey's effort to theorize how historical understanding is based in specific, historically-determined experiences. She also advances the idea of the impermanence of historical knowledge. In doing so, Eliot undermined the objectivist worldview of the pseudo-scientific historical profession in the 1870s, reached a similar relativistic conclusion to that of crisis historicism in the 1880s, and anticipated the more general sense of crisis, doubt, and uncertainty the permeated the fin de siecle.

This dissertation describes the route Eliot took to arrive at this point of critical, ironic, historicist consciousness. The three phases I use to chart her development represent various characteristics of her historical philosophy and views on historical representation. The early phase, before Eliot turned to fiction, (discussed in chapter 1) describes her acquisition of an historicist frame of mind through the Coventry circle and in her translation of the Young Hegelians, Strauss and Feuerbach, in the 1840s and 1850s. The primary characteristic of the second phase is Eliot's discovery of her talent for using fiction to demonstrate the Young Hegelian historicist vision of historical change as experienced by ordinary people (discussed in chapter 2). The early fiction itself resembled narrative strategies gleaned from Riehl's ethnography of German peasants, which she applied as a "natural history of English life" in the early nineteenth century in a manner that was naively objectivistic.

The final phase in the evolution of Eliot's historical thinking corresponds with the development of an ironic realism that implied a rejection of the objectivist principles that were contemporaneously adopted by the emergent English historical profession at Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s. As I describe in chapter 3, the deepening commitment to veracity and historical research helped Eliot to clarify the role of imagination (and subjectivity in general) in developing historical representations. In treating a number of themes in nineteenth-century history in her last two novels with greater detailed specificity, Eliot challenged the possibility of permanant truth claims implied in the work of the new "scientific historians" as she explored representational strategies indicative of her concern with the problem of trying to understand the historical process from within that process. In chapters 4 and 5, I associate this phase with the "crisis historicism" philosophy of Dilthey, in which he, like Eliot, looked for ways to represent the past in a manner sensitive to the inescapable fact that the perceiving consciousness that is trying to describe the past is itself historically conditioned.

Like the literary historians from the early nineteenth century, Eliot did not see an unbridgeable opposition between imagination and empirical data. While the new academic historians defined themselves by repudiating the literary history of the early nineteenth century, Eliot advanced a romantic, mythistorical, historical framework and developed an alternative method of historical representation, which she called "analogical creation," that effectively collapsed the disciplinary boundary as it was first delineating. Only someone with a sense for the paradox of language and a conception of historical picturing in a nexus of the real and the imaginary, could turn to fiction as a legitimate and useful form of historical representation. Eliot's work was not a simple return to the romantic sense of their relationship. With a firm footing in the old romantic view of history as a branch of literature, she reformulated the point, especially in her mature fiction, by suggesting the nature of historical knowledge was literary. And as her novels increasingly demonstrated, Eliot's realistic historical representations were made with the ironic sense that the language and consciousness of the narrator-historian is always mediative.

George Eliot is thus an example of a major nineteenth-century intellectual figure who made an unusual path through the medium of historical fiction writing to probe philosophical and historical topics from an historicist orientation. What is striking is that this path led her to the same basic problems that other paths (historical philosophy, history, philology) brought theorists like Dilthey and Nietzsche. Furthermore, in suggesting the literary nature of history, Eliot's work anticipated more recent developments in the field of intellectual history associated with Hayden White. Eliot's example suggests that in lines of inquiry other historiography and historical philosophy, it just might have been possible to achieve the heady, uniquely modern consciousness (which White attributed to Nietzsche) of the inherent irony of our prosaic language that claims to describe the past as it actually happend. I believe that the relationship between literary forms and historiographical perspectives needs more examination so that we might better understand how certain forms of history writing limit the varieties of historical philosophies. How did realism come to predominate in historical scholarship? Why was it conducive to the mobilization of a correspondence theory of language and an objectivistic epistemology? Is there room today for professional historiography to incorporate Eliot's "analogical" approach to historical representation?

Notes for the Introduction

1. Lukacs, 115.

2. *The George Eliot Letters*, (hereafter cited in the text as *Letters*) VI, 216-17.

3. *The Journals of George Eliot*, 63.

4. Among the important scholarship on Eliot that places her work in intellectual-historical contexts are Peter Alan Dale, *In Pursuit of Scientific Knowledge*; Daniel Cottom, *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation*; Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community*; Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*.

5. Andres, 79-95.

6. I have found only two works that focus specifically on the parallels between Hegelian philosophy and Eliot's fiction. These works are in the field of comparative literature, and tend to value the exploration and identification of parallels, especially in metaphor, between Hegel and Eliot. Sara M. Putzell-Korab has made a fascinating comparison between Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Eliot's fiction, showing that characters in all the novels develop in a more or less Hegelian pattern of consciousness expansion. See *Evolving Consciousness: An Hegelian Reading of the Novels of George Eliot*. Lisa Ann Montanarelli also acknowledges this underdeveloped dimension in Eliot scholarship, and compares Hegel's use of the sun's rising and setting as a metaphor for world history with Eliot's use of a similar metaphor in *Daniel Deronda*. See "Time in Person: History, the Sun and the Ages of Life in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*," 165.

7. Gossman, "History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification," 4-5.

8. For brief synopses of this development, see Part I, "Objectivity Enthroned," in Novick, *That Nobel Dream*; and chapter 5, "The Impact of Science: The Case of History," in Heyck, *Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*.

9. Gossman, "History as Decipherment: Romantic Historiography and the Discovery of the Other," 23-57."

10. Ibid., 27.

11. Hegel, *Hegel's Lecutres on the History of Philosophy*, 1:3.

12. Macaulay, *Life and Works of Lord Macaulay*, V, 144.

13. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, 122.

14. Ibid., 126-27.

15. For a discussion of how the American historical profession missappropriated Ranke and made him the symbol of positivist history, see Novick, 26-31.

16. For a brief discussion of this dimension of Ranke's conception of history, see Gilbert, 25.

17. Vierhaus, 61-62.

18. Quoted in Heyck, 122.

19. Gossman, "History as Decipherment," 28.

20. Heyck, 138-150.

21. *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (hereafter cited in the text as *Essays*), 446-47.

22. Mill, *System of Logic*, 367-68.

23. Lytton, "Dedicatory Epistle," in *The Last of the Barons*, 2.

24. See Thornhill, "Historicism" in *The Routledge Encylopedia of Philosophy*, 443-46.

25. For a discussion of "historicism" and the German Historical School, see Iggers, "Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term," 131-32, 142-43.

26. Baumer, 295.

27. See Herder, "Yet Another Philosophy of History," in *Against Pure Reason*, 38-48.

28. Meinecke's *historismus* was translated as "historism," which is used interchangeably with historicism.

29. Meinecke, 493-95.

30. Ibid., 505.

31. Ibid., 495.

32. See, for example, Anderson, 67-68.

33. Kelley, "Mythistory in the Age of Ranke," 5.

34. Ibid., 19.

35. I say bold because both were forced to give up their academic positions because their counter-orthodoxy put them at odds with the governors of the universities at which they

served.

36. Brazill, 109.

37. Brian Rosenberg argues that the "Historic Imagination" passage synthesizes the greatest aspirations of the best-known Victorian historians and historical novelists. Using Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Rosenberg argues that their historiographical methods mirror what Eliot articulated in "Historic Imagination." However, he does not believe that Eliot herself accomplished what she hoped for in her novels. Unfortunately there is no analysis of her novels to substantiate this claim, and he instead refers to the judgement of another literary critic, Avrom Fleishman, who said of *Romola*, "[t]here is nothing in the main movement of the plot . . . that could not be situated in another time and place" (quoted in Rosenberg, 5). According to Rosenberg, this means that Eliot failed to successfully balance historical fact with imaginative vision. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that her novels almost always do accomplish what she had hoped to do with her "historic" imagination.

38. It is not likely that this sketch or its author would have encouraged Eliot to read Hegel. See Lewes, *Biographical History of Philosophy*, 715-39. While Lewes indicated some value in Hegel's systematizing the idea of the identity of subject and object, his sketch is mostly derogatory towards Hegel's philosophy, and frequently sarcastic. "Hegel is very consistent; consistent in audacity, in absurdity" (731). "As for the system itself, we may leave to all readers to decide whether it be worthy of any attention, except as an illustration of the devious errors of speculation" (726).

39. Putzell-Korab, 10-24; Montanarelli, 163-65.

40. Feuerbach, 13.

41. See, for example, Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 105-6.

42. I borrow the term "crisis historicism" and its usage from Thomas Albert Howard's recent book *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 13.

43. Ibid.

44. Baumer, 308-310.

45. Levine, 6.

46. Ibid., 12.

47. Ibid., 8.

48. Ibid., 12-13.

49. Ibid., 21.

50. Gossman, "History as Decipherment," 26-27.

51. One could argue that current debates on objectivity in history indicate that these principles still elude us.

52. For a recent discussion of Burckhardt's historical perspective as compared to Hegel, see Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 217-18, 247-48.

53. See Dilthey, *Meaning in History*, 161-68.

54. Andres, 80.

Notes for Chapter 1

1. Alternate spellings for "Mary Anne," the one given in the parrish registry, appear in Eliot's correspondence: Mary Ann, Maryann, and Marian.

2. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (hereafter cited in the text as "Haight"), 11-13.

3. One possible exception is the aged John, whom Hennell believed may have been the actual author of the book that bears his name. For Hennell's discussion of the gospels, see *An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of Christianity*, chapters 3-6.

4. Ibid., 48-54; 230-35.

5. Willey, 209.

6. Rosemary Ashton says that Hennel's book merely "struck a chord" with Eliot. See *George Eliot: A Life*, 38; or Frederick R. Karl's assessment: "While the Brays and the Hennells did not change the course of Mary Ann's life themselves, they did insert their views into hers and challenge what was already beginning to waver," in *George Eliot: A Voice of a Century*, 47.

7. Quoted in Baumer, 315, from Renan, *Souvenirs de 'enfance et de jeunesse* (1883), chapter 4, *Le Seminaire d'Issy*.

8. Hennel, 322-23.

9. See Kelley, "Mythistory in the Age of Ranke."

10. Quoted in Willey, 219.

11. The *Life of Jesus* was a translation of the fourth German edition of his work, the first appeared in 1836.

12. Brazill, 101.

13. See, for example, Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 412-57.

14. See "The Modern World" section in Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 412-57.

15. "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of an Eccentric" are reprinted in *Essays*, 13-26.

16. See Iggers, *The Cult of Authority*, 7-24.

17. See introduction to Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*.

18. This correspondence is not published in *The George Eliot Letters* but is quoted in Haight's biography. Presumably Haight, also the editor of the *Letters*, had not yet found this letter, dated June 9, 1851, by 1954 when Eliot's correspondence was published, but did so before 1963 when the biography appeared.

19. They were constant companions in 1851 and 1852, and Spencer's role as theater review writer at *The Economist* entitled him to good tickets for all kinds of performances, to which he usually brought Eliot. The level of their intimacy was and continues to be subject to much speculation. See forthcoming work by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, who sees Eliot's novels as a revenge on Spencer, who rejected her on Social Darwinist principles: he thought she was too ugly.

20. For an analysis of the British Positivists, see Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain.*

21. Baumer, 315.

22. For example, Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* draws a neat dichotomy between essentially revolutionary orientation of Young Hegelian philosophy, as it is manifested in Marx, and what Marcuse considered the antirevolutionary nature of Comtean Positivism.

23. Ashton, 111.

24. For further evidence of Eliot's anger towards Chapman, the close of this letter is here quoted: "I have been making a desk of my knee so I fear some of my words may be illegible, which will be a pity because of course you can't substitute any half as good." (*Letters*, II, 131)

25. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 138.

26. Ibid., 144.

27. Ibid., 145.

28. Ranke, *Universal History*, ix.

29. Kelley, "Mythistory in the Age of Ranke," 19.

30. Quoted in Brazill, 145.

31. Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, 268-71.

32. For a discussion of Eliot and Lewes as the leaders of a second generation (after Carlyle and Coleridge) of English scholars who introduced varieties of German thought to a reticent English reading public, see Ashton, *The German Idea*, chapters 3-4.

33. See Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, 202; Graver, 28-79; Shuttleworth, 24-25.

34. Shuttleworth, 27-28.

35. Eliot offers Dickens as the best example of realistic representation, but who misses the "psychological character" (*Essays*, 271).

Notes for Chapter 2

1. As Gossman argues, Riehl's conservative political attitude derived from his assumption that the traditional social divisions among the classes were more or less permanent features of the species. See *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 257.

2. See, for example, Haight, 5-7, 79; Karl, 17-20, 42-47.

3. See, for example, A. S. Byatt's introduction (*MF*, 12, 30); Graver, "Natural History and the Recovery of Community," (chapter 2), 28-79; Shuttleworth, "*Adam Bede*: Natural history as social vision," (chapter 2), 24-50.

4. "The Natural History of German Life" *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856), 442-61. Reprinted in *Essays*, 266-299, (citations in text refer to the reprinted version).

5. Eliot later personified this well-known British passion in *Middlemarch* as Reverend Farebrother

6. See, for example, Haight, 199-200.

7. George Henry Lewes, *Sea-side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, the Scilly Isles, and Jersey*, Edinburgh, 1858.

8. Kelley, "Mythistory in the Age of Ranke," 5-6.

9. Ranke, *Universal History*, ix.

10. Kelley effectively describes the Romantic-Enlightenment historiographical tension when he says that mythistoric Romantic historicism "was the attempt to recreate the life and thought of the remote past through a new combination of human faculties. For mythistory required the union not of memory and reason, as in Baconian method or the *histoire raisonnée* of the Enlightenment or perhaps the scientific history of Ranke, but rather of memory and imagination, which was the basis, too, of Romantic hermeneutics. Through the imaginative reconstruction of cultural remains–and especially of law, language, and symbols–the historian could plumb the depths of the "well of the past"" (ibid., 19).

11. It seems to me that Riehl's "incarnate history" conception works in the same, Neoplatonic way that Goethe's *Urplanze* does: that the perceiving consciousness can "imagine" the ideal, or the historical origin, that manifests itself as some varietal form in the present.

12. Recall the letter Eliot wrote to Sibree in which she indicated admiration and support for the Parisian revolutionaries in 1848. This passage in the Riehl review, it seems to me, is a clear reversal of that position.

13. For discussion of various efforts in Western history to establish a universal language see Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language.*

14. Kelley, "Mythistory in the Age of Ranke," 6.

15. Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, published *Histoire des variations des Église protestante* in 1688.

16. See Thomson, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, 35-37.

17. This last section is largely a creative reconstruction of my own derived from Eliot's example and based carefully on her own account in "Recollections of Ilfracombe 1856," but also informed by what she did in *The Mill on the Floss*. See especially *Letters*, II, 244.

Notes for Chapter 3

1. It is interesting to read Eliot's correspondence to John Blackwood about *Romola*, because it was the only novel she wrote that he did not publish. Lewes and Eliot accepted *Cornhill's* offer of £10,000 for it in 1862. Believing it was the most anyone had ever paid for a novel, they assumed Blackwood would never be able to match it (*Letters*, IV, 17-18; 34-35). Blackwood was initially furious about *Cornhill's* "bribe," not the least because he was obliged, through a previous arrangement with *Cornhill*, to advertise Eliot's new novel in the pages of his own magazine (*Letters*, IV, 38). Blackwood and Eliot were able to mend their relationship in time to publish her next novel in *Blackwoods* in1866. For *Felix Holt* Blackwood paid Eliot £5,000.

2. The two sources she mentions in this correspondence are BenedettoVarchi and Giovanni Vallani. Eliot and Lewes owned Varchi's *Storia fiorentina* and Villani's *Chroniche di Firenze*. (See *Letters*, IV, 431, n. 3, 8; and Haight, 344.)

3. Quoted in *Letters*, III, 432, n. 2.

4. Ibid., 431, n. 8.

5. *George Eliot: A Critical Heritage*, 196.

6. Ibid., 195.

7. The Hutton review presents an unusual opportunity to interpret Eliot's intention with a particular novel, for she responded to him by saying "I am confirmed in the satisfaction . . . at finding that certain chief elements of my intention have impressed themselves so strongly on your mind. . . . You have seized with a fulness which I had hardly hoped that my book could suggest, what it was my effor to express in the presentation of Bardo and Baldassarre; and also the relation of the Florentine political life tothe development of Tito's nature" (*Letters*, IV, 96-97).

8. It is very likely that Blackwood was reiterating a moment from a conversation he had with Eliot. Haight tentatively dates the letter to Mrs. John Blackwood June 15, 1861, the day after Lewes and Eliot returned from Florence, when it is known that they met Blackwood for lunch.

9. *The George Eliot Journals*, 100.

10. Hugh Witemeyer, "George Eliot's *Romola* and Bulwer Lytton's *Rienzi*," 63-64. It is curious that Witemeyer, who speculates that Eliot would have known Lytton's *Rienzi*, does not seem to know that Eliot not only read it, she in fact did so while working on *Romola* (see note 9).

11. Lytton, 2.

12. Witemeyer, 65-67.

13. We know Eliot had a copy of Mill's *Logic*, for she lent it to Herbert Spencer in 1852 (Haight, 115).

14. Mill, *System of Logic*, 367.

15. Ibid., 368.

16. Stubbs, 11.

17. Heyck, 145.

18. See Heyck's discussion of Stubbs and the Oxford School of historians, who provided the main models of historical writing that were followed by the new professionals at the universities (141-45).

19. For his account, which Eliot drew from, see Sismondi, 286-90.

20. Marx, another London resident at this time, was also highly concerned about social change and revolution. But Eliot's view, enabled by the fictional form, precluded her from sharing Marx's philosophy on the necessity of revolution in the progress of humanity. Whereas Marx reeled from his own observation that "all that is solid melts into air," Eliot was greatly troubled by the prospect of lost forms.

21. See Graver, chpts. 1 and 3.

22. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111-19.

23. Shuttleworth, 115, 124.

24. Graver, 109-49.

24. See, for example, David Thompson, 58, 73-76.

25. For the text of the speech see "Speech at Edinburgh on Reform Bill, Oct 29, 1867," 470-89.

26. Pinney makes a similar connection between Eliot's fiction and Lyellean geology in a footnote to her review of Macay's "Progress of the Intellect," where she refers to laws of geology. Pinney's simply adds, "The analogy between the gradual, uniform processes of character and action in George Eliot's novels and the uniformitarianism expounded by Lyell is a close one. (*Essays*, 31, n.5).

27. Incidentally, Felix Holt, and Adam Bede from her first novel, are Eliot's only main characters with fully developed moral attitudes who do not need to undergo any kind of growth or maturation. See Shuttleworth, 116, for a discussion of Felix as an unproblematic Christ figure.

28. According to Haight, "Her family would have been surprised to know how thoroughly conservative Marian had become. The revolutionary sentiments of those years in the Strand were gone forever" (395).

29. In addition to the £40 freeholder qualification, £40 copyholders and lease holders, £10 households, and £50 renters were now eligible. The Reform Act increased the electorate in England and Wales by 49 percent. See Appendix 1, in J. R. Conacher, *The Emergence of British Parliamentary Democracy in the Nineteenth Century*.

30. See Llewellyn, especially chapter 5, "The Chartists."

31. The speaker's list of demands include four of the "six points" advanced in "The People's Charter" of 1838. The full title of that pamphlet provides enough for this comparison: "The People's Charter; Being the Outline of an Act to Provide for the Just Representation of the People of Great Britain in the Commons' House of Parliament: Embracing the Principles of Universal Suffrage, No Property Qualification, Annual Parliaments, Equal Representation, Payment of Members, and Vote by Ballot."

32. For the legal dimensions of this novel, Eliot had obtained the advice and suggestions of an attorney she was close friends with, none other than Frederic Harrison, Comte's best English exponent and the leader of British Positivism.

33. *The Journals of George Eliot*, 124..

34. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 756.

35. The Riot Act of 1715 stipulated that a crowd had one hour to disperse once it had been deemed by authorities as riotous.

36. See, for example, Zelda Austin's "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot."

37. See, for example, E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

38. Andres, 80-81.

39. Here is Linda Colley's account, in *Britons*, of Huskisson's death by Stephenson's "Rocket:"

> The accident happened on Wednesday, 15 September 1830. The show train had stopped to take on water at a small quarry mid-way between Liverpool and Manchester, and some of the gentlemen had jumped down onto the line, examining the glittering new machinery, strolling around to admire the view and chatting idly to the musicians who were to play "God Save the King" when they finally steamed into the station. Those inside stretched their legs discreetly and consulted their watches, wondering how long it would be before the other engine reached them. "I think you had better get in," called the Duke of Wellington to the loiterers

> outside. Only then did they see the Rocket bearing down on them fast on the other rails. There was not enough room, they suddenly realised, for them to stand safely on the opposite side of the line, and no space either between the two sets of rails. So men began scrabbling to open the saloon car doors of the stationary train, desperately trying to haul themselves inside, for the carriage was high off the ground and no steps had been provided. The former Secretary of State had already tried to escape the oncoming train by crossing the track. He now ran back in panic and was clutching at one of the doors when the engine caught him and flung him on the rails. Even inside the carriage, Lady Wilton could distinctly hear the crushing of bones, followed by Mrs. Huskisson's piercing shriek.
>
> The strange death of William Huskisson has become a set-piece in British history because it seems so easily symbolic. Even at the time, there were suggestions that the reason he had been wandering about the track so carelessly was because he was used to getting out of his own coach whenever it stopped to change horses. (334-35)

Notes for Chapter 4

1. For a fairly recent biography, see Victorian Lincoln, *Teresa: A Woman*.

2. Quoted in ibid., 12.

3. In a recent article, Henry Staten defends the aptness of Eliot's historical portrayal of class against recent critics, most notably Terry Eagleton, who find *Middlemarch* to be dominated by bourgeois ideology, and this bias makes it ahistorical. Staten shows that underneath the narrator's moralizing are extraordinarily subtle depictions of class, especially ones that demonstrated the ways the bourgeoisie were "aristocratizing" themselves, which other critics charge Eliot with overlooking. See "Is *Middlemarch* Ahistorical?" However, Staten's use of "historical" and "ahistorical" are very different from my own. Whereas he finds the novel "historical" because it is depicts the subtlety of the actual historical experience and not something merely idealized by bourgeois ideology, I use "ahistorical" to mean something allegedly outside of history—something that is presumed to have no historicity. For Eliot, things like archetypal human qualities, such as an ardently willing soul or the impulse toward spirituality, are timeless and ahistorical. It is the shape of their manifestations that Eliot found to be historical.

4. As I discuss below, Miller's "Narrative and History" and "Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*" both perform deconstructive readings of the novel in ways that can highlight the nature of Eliot's critique of the methodological approaches of the new historical profession.

5. *Middlemarch* can be read as a revision of *Felix Holt*. It posits a relationship between history and fiction that both lays the ground work for her last novel's fuller exploration of the conclusion, and anticipates late nineteenth-century theorizing about the relationship between science and reality. Here, I am following Peter Allan Dale's argument, from *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art and Society in the Victorian Age* (1989), that Eliot had reached a moment in composing *Middlemarch* when she had completed her turn away from a positivist epistemology. Her new view, according to Dale, was of an aesthetic consciousness akin to Kant's position that all knowledge springs from an initial "*imaginary*," which is to say *human*, structure imposed upon experience. What is central to this transition, in my view, and what *Middlemarch* can show us, is that it is most fundamentally a *historical* consciousness that enables the kind of transition that Dale is talking about. In other words, Eliot's experimental, historicist imagination brought about, in *Middlemarch*, Dale's notion of the Kantian conclusion. While trying to come to terms with the historical significance of the reform period, in her third novel on the subject, Eliot had brought together the Romantic notion of perspectival limits to knowing reality, within a realist descriptive style that tried to embrace the ideal of scientific objectivity, and yet conveyed a sense of the historical moment with characters and events that were wholly fictional.

6. Some consider Wolf to be the main progenitor of German higher criticism, for many nineteenth-century German philologists found his method of treating the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* to have wide applicability. See Anthony Grafton's introduction to *F. A. Wolf: Prolegomena to Homer, 1795*.

7. By 1829 Feuerbach, who had gone to Berlin to study theology with Schliermacher in 1824 but quickly became a committed devotee of Hegel, was teaching in Erlangen. Strauss was finishing his degree at Tübingen under F. C. Baur, and making plans to go to Berlin to study under Hegel. He arrived the same month that Hegel died in November, 1831. See Brazill, 137-39; 102-5.

8. Thomas Albert Howard argues that the German theological tradition played a large role in generating the scholarly historicism in the mid- to late nineteenth century. He lists many important figures who began their studies in theology and then shifted to history or to a generally historicist posture, e.g., Hegel, Schelling, Ranke, Droysen, Jakob Grimm, Kugler, Strauss, Nietzsche, and Burckhardt (5).

9. My reading of Eliot's representation of Casaubon contradicts Dominick La Capra's interpretation of Casaubon as unsympathetic in his analysis of the relationship between Casaubon and the narrator, in "In Quest of Casaubon: George Eliot's *Middlemarch*," which also discusses the historical figure Isaac Casaubon as a partial inspiration for Eliot's character.

10. Lawrence, 34.

11. Vesalius, born in Brussels to a family of court physicians and pharmacists, became a lecturer in medicine at the University of Padua, where he gave his first lecture that criticized the long accepted authority of Galen in 1539. For a scholarly biography, see O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels, 1514–1564*.

12. Seale and Pattison, 32.

13. For a description of the various conflicting accounts of Vesalius's death, see O'Malley, 304-12.

14. Cited in Haight, 413.

15. Berlin, 57-58.

16. Putzell-Korab, who reads the development— the "spiritual progress"—of many Eliot characters against Hegel's *Phenomenology*, treats Dorothea's development in ways similar to my own, with the major exception that my reading associates it with the representation of the historical appearance of a specific stage of development. (30-43; 96-104)

17. Hegel's complex understanding of recognition is at work in the master/slave dialectic. The idea is that it is only by encountering another conscious being that one could acknowledge or recognize herself as possessing consciousness. Seeing conscious behavior

in another enables a kind of objectification of one's self-consciousness, or a projection of it into the other, and vice-versa. Thus the appearance of "self-consciousness" is a two-sided event, shared by two individuals when they interact.

18. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 364-73.

19. See, for example, Hegel, *Philosophy of History*.

20. Brazill, 37.

21. Criticism is an essential dimension of Hegelian and Young Hegelian philosophy because it is the basis for the movement of the Spirit. History is nothing but the Spirit actualizing itself in ever-greater human self-awareness. The advancement through the various historical stages is brought about by criticism, or the self-questioning of an age. Another way to say it is that history is the process of Spirit critiquing each successive age of development as it seeks to realize itself. The passage from one historical period to the next, in the Hegelian conceptualization of history, is actualized by a critical perspective which has the effect of self-negation. For example, the Enlightenment is usually described as a criticism—a negation—of the Christian world view, and before that, the Christian centuries negated antiquity. Hegel and the Young Hegelians understood the Enlightenment as the Christian age engaged in self-critique. So criticism is the prime mover of Spirit in history. For more on this see Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. For more on the elements of Hegel's historical philosophy which his disciples embraced, see chapter 1 in Brazill's *Young Hegelians*.

22. Berlin, 59-60.

23. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 364-82.

24. Feuerbach, xxxv, original emphasis.

25. Lewes, *Biographical History of Philosophy*, 736.

26. See Miller, "Narrative and History."

27. James, 59.

28. Miller, "Narrative and History," 467.

29. The first episode in Herodotus is the abduction of Io. See *The Histories*, 3-4.

30. I have not been able to find a passage in Fielding that corroborates Eliot's reference.

31. Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 72-73.

32. In *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*, H. A. Hodges explained Dilthey's philosophy as transcendental and described the concept of "facts of consciousness" thus: "Instead of regarding consciousness as something which is inherent in minds and which therefore

occurs, like them, as an incident in nature, transcendental philosophy makes consciousness the primary unit; it regards nature and minds alike as 'facts of consciousness,' constituents of human experience; and the relations which it finds between mind and nature are not ontic relations, but epistemological ones, i.e., relations which spring from unity of apperception" (28-29).

33. Dilthey, *Meaning in History*, 67.

34. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5: 329.

Notes for Chapter 5

1. Graver, 83-84; Shuttleworth, 176-77.

2. Shuttleworth, 201.

3. See Shuttleworth, "Daniel Deronda: Fragmentation and organic union," 175-200.

4. Graver, 224-43.

5. See chap. 5, "The Impact of Science: The Case of History" in Heyck, 120-54.

6. Ibid.,135-50.

7. Ibid., 141.

8. Ibid., 144.

9. One cannot help thinking that if Eliot had lived long enough to write another novel, she would have followed her pattern of taking a secondary character from one novel and developing her more fully in the next and treated this theme in greater detail.

10. White, 41-42, and chapter 9, "Nietzsche," 331-74.

11. The benchmark publication was Nietzsche's *Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, in 1874. See *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*.

12. Baumer, 308-10.

13. See "Realism and Naturalism" in Abrams, 152-54.

14. Ibid., 153.

15. Quoted in Lukacs, 121.

16. Levine, 12.

17. Lewes, *The Principles of Success in Literature*, 30.

18. Finney, the editor of *Essays of George Eliot*, points out that this is exactly how *Deronda* begins: "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?"

19. Lewes, *Principles of Success in Literature*, 31.

20. Ibid., 29.

21. Shuttleworth, 186-200.

22. Quoted in Shuttleworth, 19, (my translation).

23. Dale, 130.

Notes for the Conclusion

1. *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, in *The Works of George Eliot*, v, 260. First published by Blackwood in 1879.

2. Ibid., 264.

3. Ibid., 277.

4. McCaw, 37.

5. Eliot, *Theorphrastus Such*, 261.

6. Ibid.

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