

## George Eliot, Hegel, and *Middlemarch*

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### Introduction

‘George has just finished the revision of his History. I am working at something I want to go on with’, George Eliot wrote in December 1870.<sup>1</sup> The ‘History’ was George Henry Lewes’s *Biographical History of Philosophy* which he was revising for the two-volume fourth edition of 1871; the ‘something’ was ‘Miss Brooke’, which became the first book of *Middlemarch*. This was Lewes’s last shot at the *History*, ‘Corrected and Partly Re-Written’, which he had restlessly revised under different subtitles since the first edition of 1845. He expanded the Hegel chapter to more than sixty pages from an original much less than half that length. Not satisfied, he revised the chapter thoroughly for 1871,<sup>2</sup> regretting that he did not begin his chapter with the *Phenomenology* — ‘I ought to have begun by an exposition of the Phenomenology [...] But it is now too late.’ He felt wretched about the chapter’s shortcomings, writing with a sense of lost opportunity that every critic will recognize: ‘I am very much disgusted with the result of my labors now I see them in proof. What is clear enough in my own mind does not stand out clearly in my exposition.’<sup>3</sup> While her companion was ending a long dialogue with Hegel, Eliot was beginning a new phase of hers.

She never translated Hegel, though her earlier translations of Strauss and Feuerbach were both in the conceptual orbit of Hegelian thought and indicate an authoritative understanding of it.<sup>4</sup> But there is something

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Eugène Bodichon, 12 December 1870, in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954–78), VIII: 1840–1870 (1978), 489.

<sup>2</sup> George Henry Lewes, *The History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*, 4th edn, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1871), II: *Modern Philosophy*, 587–653.

<sup>3</sup> Lewes to Charles Edward Appleton, 6 February 1871, in *Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, IX: 1871–1881 (1978), 10–11 (p. 11).

<sup>4</sup> Eliot’s translations of David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* was published in 1843 (she was 22 when she began the task), and Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* in 1854. See David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by George Eliot (London: SCM, 1973); Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by George Eliot

almost better than a translation in that first book of *Middlemarch*, ‘Miss Brooke’. Chapter 11 condenses, in a deft paraphrase, the core principle of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. If Lewes gave up on that text, Eliot took it over. This brilliant paraphrase amounts to just a few words and comes at the end of a massive sentence about social change and ‘subtle movement’ in ‘old provincial society’, all elements of which find themselves ‘altering with the double change of self and beholder’ (p. 95, emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> It is this act that makes both self and other real to each other and to themselves. It means that they are not things. This is a succinct rendering of the Hegelian principle of recognition, the mutual recognition between self and other, self and beholder. Thus this Hegelian drama, the act of mutual recognition, is the genesis of psychic and social change — it is always relational: ‘They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another’, Hegel wrote.<sup>6</sup> The doubleness of this movement is crucial: one of the nineteenth-century interpreters of Hegel, James Stirling, described this core principle of recognition in *The Secret of Hegel* (1865) as a ‘double transition’ in which the

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(London: Harper, 1957); Anthony McCobb, *George Eliot’s Knowledge of German Life and Letters*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, 102.2 (Salzburg: Salzburg University, 1982). The latter is a detailed record of the evidence for George Eliot’s knowledge of German texts. The two translations, however, are saturated in Hegel’s thought. In *The Life of Jesus*, Hodgson elaborates the formative influence of Hegel on Strauss, who made an intensive study of the *Phenomenology* in the winter of 1829, a study that entailed an exploration of the tension between the Hegelian concepts of *Vorstellung* (religious imagery) and *Begriff* (philosophical concept), an ongoing concern which is central to Strauss’s thinking about the form in which religious experience is mediated (pp. xx–xxii). Feuerbach’s assumption that theology is anthropology, that consciousness is achieved through the othering of ‘I’ as ‘Thou’, and thus assures that ‘man is the God of man’, is a reinterpretation of Hegelian thinking by inversion (p. xiv). What for Hegel is mind is sensuous being for Feuerbach. Even at second-hand, Eliot would have had to achieve an inwardness with Hegelian thought to undertake these translations. There is an intriguing note in U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *George Eliot’s Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 29, n. 23: in the Beinecke Library of Yale University (no details), he writes of ‘a manuscript [undated] (possibly in George Eliot’s hand) giving a detailed criticism of Lewes’ treatment of Hegel in *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845–1857). The author of the manuscript complains: “Being and Existence are here treated as identical terms — And we here want to be told what Hegel means by Being, which I have not seen quite satisfactorily explained anywhere in the chapter.” Knoepfelmacher conflates two editions of Lewes’s *History* and does not mention 1867 or 1871. It would be strange to find Eliot critiquing her own companion’s work in this way after 1854: perhaps this is a response to 1845, with the earlier translation of Strauss as a context. This would suggest an early familiarity with Hegel, but one can only speculate.

<sup>5</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), para. 184, emphases in original. Subsequent references will be cited by Miller’s paragraph numbers parenthetically within the text.

self both registers the change that comes about through the interaction of self and other *and* both actants mirror that change in each other — the very act of recognition *is* change.<sup>7</sup> That is why recognition is the agent of transformation. Eliot has prepared for the finale of her sentence with an optical metaphor registering the reciprocal interaction between observers and observed: families and persons present ‘new aspects’, a planetary term, to their environment, a dual word implying not only that these families present new *facets* to the observer but that they also, as observing subjects, possess new cognitions, new *views* of the world. The principle of alteration and double change means that history turns on the act of recognition, altering with change and changing with alteration. Self-consciousness and social consciousness happen together.

This social moment is a repetition and extension of the process by which individual self-consciousness comes into being. To become a reflective self-consciousness, it is necessary to other the self by negation, to be someone else to one’s own being, as it were, in a process of duplication before reintegrating that double self in a new understanding (para. 175). From Chapter 11 on, this process of mutual recognition unfolds in the lives of Dorothea and Casaubon, Lydgate and Rosamond in particular, but almost all characters go through processes of recognition in different ways. It is, however, a highly unstable process, prone to asymmetry, one-sidedness, and reversal. Governed as it is by desire, it is potentially dysfunctional. The Hegelian paraphrase is an instruction as to how to read the larger structure of the novel. The overt metaphor of the web and its organic ‘threads of connection’, occurring also in the account of Middlemarch’s ‘subtle movement’, and often thought to be the governing trope of the narrative, is the result of processes of recognition, which instantiate it.

‘Destiny stands by sarcastic with our *dramatis personae* folded in her hand’, Eliot wrote in the same Chapter 11 (p. 95). *Dramatis personae*, that is, are not merely roles — they are the motivating force of social movement, our parts, passional parts, in the theatre of conflict at the macro level creating change and created by it. Change, alteration, or altering change and changing alteration, does not occur without changing power relations. The account of recognition occurs at a point of the *Phenomenology* in what is today often termed the ‘master/slave dialectic’.<sup>8</sup> Recognition for Hegel was part of the dynamic of power relations and bound up with them. It was so for George Eliot. Though we tend to occlude the intensity of power

<sup>7</sup> James Hutchison Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Origin, Principle, Form, and Matter*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), II, 533.

<sup>8</sup> Miller translates this as ‘Lordship and Bondage’ (p. 111). Though this relationship has been extrapolated as the structure of many power relationships, its origin is the virtually feudal system of Hegel’s Germany.

relations in *Middlemarch*, Eliot worked out ‘recognition’ through the affective complexities of bourgeois marriage and explored the way two couples destroyed each other. Of course, she was far from simply taking over a theory schematically. She critiqued Hegelian thought and modified its terms, though she seized upon its essentials. Hegel provided her with *structural* ideas, a way of patterning power. We do not find an overt Hegelianism in the novel because Eliot was never a novelist of ideas in the conventional sense. She was a philosophical and speculative writer who inhabited ideas imaginatively and passionately and lived out their possibilities in an exploratory way and with such particularity that they are assimilated into the deep structure of the novel, unnoticed.<sup>9</sup>

What follows is in three parts. Before considering the implications of patterns of recognition in the text, I consider briefly what Eliot would have known of Hegel translation and the state of research to provide a context for *Middlemarch*’s thinking.<sup>10</sup> This can be done most succinctly by tracing Lewes’s often fraught reading of Hegel.<sup>11</sup> I end with brief comments on the politics of the text.

<sup>9</sup> There seem to be two kinds of textual reference in the novel: one is submerged and allusive — Hegel, Spinoza, and Darwin belong to this category; the other is explicit and overt — Lydgate’s reliance on Bichat, Brooke’s reading of Humphry Davy, and Dorothea’s of John Claudius Loudon are examples. See S. Pearl Brilmyer, ‘Plasticity, Form, and the Matter of Character in *Middlemarch*’, *Representations*, 130 (2015), 60–83. In this important discussion, which argues that ‘character for Eliot is fundamentally *plastic*’, Brilmyer adduces the work, among others, of Xavier Bichat, Robert Brown, Michael Faraday, John Tyndall, and William James as active presences in the novel to support her argument for the ‘malleable state’ of character (pp. 63, 60, emphasis in original). Eliot is in active dialogue with the concealed references.

<sup>10</sup> The scholars who began sustained research into Eliot’s reading and intellectual affiliations in the 1960s, George Levine, U. C. Knoepfelmacher, and Bernard Paris, do not see Hegel as a significant context. In Bernard J. Paris, *Experiments in Life: George Eliot’s Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), there are three marginal references to Hegel: Lewes’s dislike of the philosopher (p. 76), Strauss’s relation to Hegelian dialectic (p. 92), and Feuerbach’s opposition to Hegel (p. 93). Knoepfelmacher in *George Eliot’s Early Novels* has two, likewise marginal, references: to his ‘metaphysical subtleties’ as irrelevant to Eliot (p. 29), and to Eliot’s rejection of Hegelian idealism (p. 30). George Levine, the most searching reader of the three, also has interests elsewhere: *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) contains a chapter on Eliot and Philosophy (pp. 76–97), which simply states that Eliot read Hegel (p. 77). Given Eliot’s broad intellectual interests it is not surprising that Hegel goes unnoticed, but useful to fill these lacunae.

<sup>11</sup> Rosemary Ashton’s *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) was a pioneering work, opening up British readings of German thought in the nineteenth century. See also, Kirk Willis, ‘The Introduction and Critical Reception of Hegelian Thought in Britain 1830–1900’, *Victorian Studies*, 32 (1988), 85–111; Darrel Mansell, Jr., ‘A Note on Hegel and George Eliot’, *Victorian Newsletter*, 27 (1965), 12–15.

## Part 1

G. H. Lewes began by leading the way to Hegelian texts but ended by attempting to keep up with contemporary thinking on Hegel. He read Hegel over four decades, from 1842 and over the four editions of the *Biographical History of Philosophy*, from 1846 (the early and modern phases of philosophy were published in two volumes in 1845 and 1846 respectively) to 1871, when he greatly expanded his chapter. His reading became increasingly sophisticated — yet the repudiation of Hegelian thought intensified. Beginning with respect in 1842, he became progressively disgruntled with Hegel, antagonistically lampooning his thought. He was an empiricist, and Hegel's idealist epistemology required from him an act of intellectual imagination that, as the author of *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859–60) and numerous works of materialist science, he was increasingly reluctant to make. Yet his attempts to become inward with this thinking are instructive.

He entered the field, perhaps helped to create it, at least for a wider audience, with a review of Hegel's *Aesthetics* among other works, well before he and Eliot met.<sup>12</sup> Here he says that he has been reading Hegel for the past four years, which would mean that he began his project in 1838, early on in Hegel studies in England. It is clear that he was struggling with an unfamiliar form of thought, but he foregrounded two elements that to him were new in intellectual and cultural history: first, the coming into being of a historical impulse, thought, or a set of ideas — 'the idea' — that works itself out in and through the culture. For Lewes that dominating idea is 'liberty, equality, humanity', which he saw as the master concept of the nineteenth century (p. 20). Though the notion of a dominant 'idea' is Hegelian, the specifics of the 'idea' are originated by Lewes in a politically provocative and radical way (a radicalism that is much franker than in his later work). This cluster of aspirations, he says, is the epoch's 'idea' — for 'all Europe'. It is religious in origin though political in form. Secondly, he tried to articulate what he thought of as a new mode of theorizing, a new mode of thinking in modernity. Hegel expressed this as '*Every reality must pass through the representative medium*' (quoted in [Lewes], review, p. 22, emphasis in original). Lewes was thinking of the concept of mediation: perception and ideas have to go *through* a reflexive process in consciousness before they can *be* perception and ideas. Experience is both changed and made visible to itself, becomes dynamic and living, because it evolves through a process of interaction within the self. Though Lewes grapples with this thinking often in a clumsy way, these *were* core Hegelian ideas. This is a genuinely ambitious essay.

<sup>12</sup> [G. H. Lewes], review of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, *British and Foreign Review*, January 1842, pp. 1–49.

Then follow the four editions of what Eliot called Lewes's 'History'. The first was published in 1845, and the account of Hegel is brief and hostile.<sup>13</sup> By 1857, the date of the second edition, the title of his work was changed to *The Biographical History of Philosophy from its Origin in Greece down to the Present Day*. It was advertised as a Library Edition, 'Much Enlarged and Thoroughly Revised'. But the Hegel chapter was identical (so far as I can see) with the earlier chapter and occupied a scant twenty pages (the smaller format of the original edition published by Charles Knight & Co was reset in John W. Parker and Son's Library Edition).<sup>14</sup> This was after three years of companionship with Eliot. It seems that neither Lewes nor Eliot, at this stage, saw Hegelian thought as significant for their projects and shared intellectual life.

This second edition, however, coincided with John Sibree's translation of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1857), relying on Karl Hegel's 1840 manuscript. Sibree was the son of an independent minister in Coventry, well known to Eliot before she and Lewes met.<sup>15</sup> In 1848 she had corresponded with him excitedly and a trifle shrilly on a range of issues, challenging notions of racial purity and rejoicing in the French revolution of 1848 among other topics (as with Lewes this political intensity became more muted later). It is clear, from a discussion of music, that Eliot had some knowledge of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*.<sup>16</sup> She speaks of 'the inherent superiority of music', a Hegelian tenet: 'Painting and sculpture are but an idealizing of our actual existence. Music arches over this existence with another and a diviner. Amen too, to that ideen-voll observation of Hegel's'.<sup>17</sup> In writing to Sibree she was addressing a sophisticated thinker who advanced Hegelian ideas. In 1857 he was to set out key terms in Hegel's thought. We owe to him careful discriminations: *Sittlichkeit*, *Moralität*, *Geist*, *Moment*. Sibree was one of the earliest critics to understand that this last term was taken from mechanics: 'contending forces which are mutually dependent and whose contradiction forms an equation' (*Lectures*, trans. by Sibree, p. v). It is an oppositional process where thinking starts, a self-generating process. Similarly, '*Geist*' is for him 'Intelligence and Will', particularly the latter, covering 'man's entire mental and moral being' (p. iv); its translation as 'Spirit' is only approximate.

<sup>13</sup> G. H. Lewes, *A Biographical History of Philosophy*, 4 vols (London: Knight, 1845–46), iv: *Series II: From Bacon to the Present Day* (1846), pp. 198–230.

<sup>14</sup> George Henry Lewes, *The Biographical History of Philosophy from its Origin in Greece down to the Present Day*, Library edn (London: Parker, 1857), pp. 600–20.

<sup>15</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (London: Bohn, 1857).

<sup>16</sup> Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* were compiled from his notes by H. G. Hotho and published in 1835.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to John Sibree, 11 February 1848, in *Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, 1: 1836–1851 (1954), 245–48 (p. 247).

These clarifications are sharper than anything we find in Lewes's chapter. It is possible that Sibree prompted a more serious reading after 1857 than the one, left over from 1846, that Lewes made in the second edition of his *History*. (And maybe Sibree, her old friend, touched Eliot as well.) For the 1857 edition is truculent, far removed from the new seriousness of 1871. The twenty pages of 1857 are scattered with pejorative remarks — Lewes is a Johnson kicking the stone of anti-idealism: 'a thousand absurdities bristle up' (p. 603): 'logical audacity' (p. 605): 'preposterous' (p. 607): 'delusions', 'absurdities' (p. 608): 'Not only is it useless; it is worse, it is pernicious' (p. 609). There are few quotations and barely any specific references. But the fundamental misprision was to see Hegelian thought as an abstract and static system, a 'Method' (p. 603), whereas it is a theory of change and process. Lewes failed to see the significance of the labour of the negative as a source of the energy of change: he saw the 'identity of contraries' simply as an illogical way of eliding opposites (p. 604); 'Being and Non-Being are the same' for Hegel; 'Is it the same thing to have a house and not to have it?', he asked, failing to see that the negation of an entity is a mode of reasserting its ontological being (p. 611). Humean scepticism in German disguise was the essence of Hegelian thought, the 'insanity of Logic' (p. 612). Hegel was derivative of Schelling, Spinoza, and Heraclitus.

Lewes said that the third edition of the *History* 'will almost be a new book',<sup>18</sup> but apart from two denigrating paragraphs the Hegel chapter is essentially unchanged.<sup>19</sup> It was preceded in 1865 by Stirling's aforementioned *Secret of Hegel*, which clearly influenced Lewes despite his condemnation of its eccentricity. 'Stirling's book is even less intelligible than Hegel', he wrote in 1871, and yet in the revised chapter of the fourth edition he quoted freely from this work.<sup>20</sup> Stirling invented a highly eccentric but rational language to deal with Hegelian thought. But, though accused of writing in a rhapsodic conceptual muddle, his prose attempts a *concrete* translation eschewing heavy abstraction, and he clearly understood Hegelian principles. He grasped the central importance of two axioms, 'Reflexion' and 'doubling', expressed through the term, 'out-being': 'The *is*, to know itself — even to continue itself — must *other* itself, must become *not*' (II, 537, emphases in original). This was Stirling's gloss on what Lewes could only see as 'Being and Non-Being are the same'. Stirling understood a principle of contradiction and self-movement so that the self or ego lives through what he termed 'reflexional forms' — 'their truth consists only in their reference to another' (II, 533). The self becomes a reality

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Thomas Adolphus Trollope, 1 January 1866, in *Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, VIII, 357.

<sup>19</sup> George Henry Lewes, *The History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1867).

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Appleton, 11 February 1871, in *Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, IX, 10–11 (p. 11).

for itself when it is being for another, when it is reflected back to itself by and through the other. He recognized ‘the necessity of the *double* transition’ (11, 533, emphasis in original). This process happens to *both* the selves in the reflective process — it is not, in one moment at least, one-sided. Reflection ties selves to one another inalienably.

This influence is consummated in Lewes’s highly serious fourth edition of the *History* which finally expanded those early twenty pages into over sixty.<sup>21</sup> It carefully referenced quotations and allusions in a scholarly way, but it is also a radical transformation of the readings of 1857. Yet there were other reasons for Lewes’s new seriousness and the expansion of the chapter.

By the 1860s the study of Hegel had spread from academic life and Jowett’s Oxford into periodical culture. Stirling himself wrote on English idealism and its shortcomings for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1867, and Lewes clearly felt challenged by this movement.<sup>22</sup> Jowett’s serious study of Hegel began in 1844 and continued with unabated enthusiasm: ‘It is impossible to be satisfied with any other system once you have begun with this’, he wrote in 1845.<sup>23</sup> ‘Speaking of G. H. Lewes’s *History of Philosophy*, he said he thought it a poor thing to have studied all philosophies and to end in adopting that of Auguste Comte’ (1, 261).<sup>24</sup> Jowett was fostering at Balliol a new generation of Hegelians: among them, T. H. Green in particular was carrying Hegelian thought into moral and social philosophy. Though Green’s critique of Herbert Spencer and Lewes did not appear in the *Contemporary Review* until 1877 and 1878 (the year of Lewes’s death) it must have been clear to Lewes, with his journalist’s antennae, that British idealism was challenging his empiricism.<sup>25</sup> His response was in many ways admirable. He

<sup>21</sup> Lewes, *The History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*, 4th edn, 11, 587–653. Though this was the last account of Hegel before the publication of *Middlemarch* in 1872, Lewes tackled the philosopher again in 1874 in ‘Lagrange and Hegel: The Speculative Method’, *Contemporary Review*, June 1874, pp. 682–95. It was an extract from the as yet unpublished vol. 11 of *Problems of Life and Mind*, then in press. Here, he returned to critique yet again, but in a much more considered and thoughtful way: perhaps this constituted at last the exposition he had attempted and missed in 1871.

<sup>22</sup> James Stirling, ‘De Quincey and Coleridge upon Kant’, *Fortnightly Review*, October 1867, pp. 377–97.

<sup>23</sup> *Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, ed. by Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1897), 1, 92.

<sup>24</sup> This remark is undated, but since it is included in a chapter covering 1854 to 1860, Jowett must have made this comment in the 1850s, possibly after the publication of the second edition of the *History* in 1857.

<sup>25</sup> Green wrote three articles for the *Contemporary Review* with the general title ‘Mr Herbert Spencer and Mr G. H. Lewes: Their Application of the Doctrine of Evolution to Thought’: ‘Part I — Mr Spencer on the Relation of Subject and Object’, December 1877, pp. 25–53; ‘Part II — Mr Spencer on the Independence of Matter’, March 1878, pp. 745–69; and ‘Part III — Mr Lewes’s Account of Experience’, July



expanded his Hegel chapter with a seriousness that resulted in a rethinking of his earlier critique. He also took the advice of a convinced Hegelian who was both academic and journalist, Charles Edward Appleton, and clearly, under his tutelage, developed a more subtle reading of Hegel. His remark regretting that he had not begun with the *Phenomenology* was made in a letter to Appleton of February 1871, thanking him for advice and criticism, some of which he incorporated into footnotes. Appleton had straddled Oxford and journalism: he became editor of the *Academy* in 1869 as well as being a fellow of St John's College until the editorship took all his time. He died before he had completed his Hegelian study, *The Ego*. But from published fragments it seems more than likely that both Lewes and Eliot must have known of its ideas. And clearly, for both, the *Phenomenology* had begun to be important.

How did the chapter of 1871 differ from Lewes's earlier cavalier response to Hegel? The first eight or so pages following the brief biography are a virtual retraction of 1857 and contain some occasionally brilliant exposition. The great divide between these two discussions is Lewes's rethinking of Hegel through the principle of mobility, self-movement. He calls 'dialectic movement' (the first time he uses this term) the 'glory' of Hegel's thought (II, 590). Instead of lampooning Being and Non-Being as 'the same', he explicates the structure of negation: Being is identical with its negation; every 'conception contains within it its own negation; it is one-sided' (II, 590); every conception consists in two contraries; identity consists in a flux which is perpetuated through negation: 'Without a contrary nothing could come into being' (II, 591). In this discussion of the 'unrest of Self-movement' (II, 611), what emerges clearly is the fundamental principle of self and beholder as intrinsic to Hegel's thought, a process that occurs within and between selves. The essence of all relation is not two terms but the relation itself, he writes. Lewes quotes Stirling on the 'ultimate secret' of Hegel's philosophy: the Ego moves from being simply in itself — 'it is *An sich*' — to a position where it '*surveys itself* [...] it *gives itself* [...] it is *Für sich*' (for itself, externalized). It 'returns from survey of itself with *increase of knowledge*'. Importantly, 'it does not just reassume its old identity' but changes with the knowledge of that process of externalization and return itself (II, 594, emphases in original). Later, he uses Stirling's analogy of interaction as two pools, both reflector and reflection, subject and

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1878, pp. 751–72. These sophisticated articles deconstruct the materialism of these thinkers — their 'physical theories of the origin of mind' (Part III, p. 751). Lewes's proposition that mind derives from a 'succession of "neural tremors"' makes the existence of a 'phenomenal world' impossible (p. 753). A synthesizing consciousness and 'knowable relations' cannot be derived from a mere sequence of impressions (p. 764). For Green's idealism, see Ben Wempe, *Beyond Equality: A Study of T. H. Green's Theory of Positive Freedom* (Delft: Eburon, 1986). See also, *T. H. Green: Ethics, Metaphysics, and Political Philosophy*, ed. by Maria Dimova-Cookson and W. J. Mander (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

object, facing one another (II, 619). After these early pages, using quotations from Appleton and Stirling as interlocutors, Lewes reverts to critique, however, of Hegelian principles as he works his way through accounts of Logic, History, and Philosophy. But though this is repetitive, the struggle to reclaim empiricism is far more considered and probing. Some of the shards of 1846 and 1857 are embedded in this work, but little of it remains and there are many correctives of it. Nevertheless, he could not shake off his anti-idealism: Hegel would have it that if we are hit by a falling roof, we are not killed by a tile but by space and time, Lewes scoffed (II, 637).

What does not become prominent in Lewes's revised chapter, but which I think both Eliot and Lewes must have absorbed from both Sibree and Appleton, is an understanding of the Hegelian movement not solely through the dialectic of self but through a larger but structurally parallel process of social transformation and historical change. I will briefly indicate how these are central to the thought of both writers.

Sibree argued that 'Spirit' or mind worked itself out through history:

The very essence of Spirit is activity; it realizes its potentiality — makes itself its own deed, its own work — and thus it becomes an object to itself; contemplates itself as an objective existence. Thus it is with the Spirit of a people. (p. 77)

Such activity is at work 'in the whole complex of its institutions — in the events and transactions that make up its history' (p. 77). That is to say, these are the conditions of change — objective conditions that *can* be changed. This is what constitutes freedom. Lewes praised Hegel's History but did not analyse historical movement with the same acuity.

Appleton's unfinished work, *The Ego*, parts of which were published in 1876 well after Lewes's *History* was completed, was long in the making, but its use of Eliot as a model for his theory of Hegelian development suggests that he may have shared his thinking with Lewes's. Arguing in 'A Plea for Metaphysic' for the birth of a collective self or social consciousness and its manifestation through the process of evolving phases of conflict and transformation, Appleton wrote: 'The formula of our Zeit-Geist is development. We have only to read George Eliot's last two novels to see how every phase of many-sided thought, in our times, can be illuminated by this idea.'<sup>26</sup> *Middlemarch* (1871–72) was clearly in his mind, and since he was writing his essay in 1876, so too was *Daniel Deronda*, which came out in eight monthly parts that year.<sup>27</sup> This observation was made in the context

<sup>26</sup> John H. Appleton and A. H. Sayle, *Dr Appleton: His Life and Literary Relics* (London: Trübner, 1881), p. 181, emphasis in original.

<sup>27</sup> See the detailed Hegelian reading of *Daniel Deronda* by Andrew Sola in 'The Presence of Hegel in *Daniel Deronda*: George Eliot and Spirit' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2002). He argues, for example, that Gwendolen 'internalizes the master's [Deronda's] conscience through mutual recognition' (p. 121).

of an attack on Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, a work that merely seeks a 'cure for rowdyism', rather than exploring in depth the meaning of social awareness (p. 167). Social experience, he argues, begins with the very experience of consciousness. 'Arnold says [...] he does not know what "Being" means': 'Being' cannot be understood except as the relationship of self and other. This is the founding moment of collective consciousness, common consciousness:

On the one side the thinking and feeling man, and on the other an indeterminate and obscure but immense object of consciousness — the universe around him, and of which hitherto he had formed an unconscious part. This relation, in which the two correlatives merely confront one another for the first time — nothing more, is what is called in philosophy 'Being.'

Appleton continues:

There is as yet no question as to *what* is over-against me, or *what* I am, or *what* is my relation to that which is over-against me, but merely the consciousness that I am over-against an immense indeterminate object, and that this immense indeterminate object is over-against me. (p. 180, emphases in original)

This primitive feeling of isolation is the birth pang of communality and historical process. It initiates 'those seeds of internal conflict and disruption which we find in all living things' and which are inevitable in experience over time. But this itself is the dynamic of change, 'the point in which conflicting forces meet and make reality' (p. 184).

This early and mid-nineteenth-century interest in Hegelianism was not an interest in embracing a dematerialized idealism but rather its reverse. Its motive, through looking particularly at the *History* and the *Philosophy of Right* (which is where Hegel studies began), is to find an alternative to the thin and individualist liberal readings of self and social deriving from what Appleton called the 'sterile' tradition of Mill and utilitarian thought, a more generous, searching reading of historical movement and change and the place of the individual within it (p. 172). The earliest translations are of texts that are social in intent.<sup>28</sup>

In *Middlemarch* Eliot explicitly comments that 'well wadded with stupidity' we fail to see and understand different centres of self, a *relational*

<sup>28</sup> In the preface to his translation of *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Sibree documents a wide range of Hegel scholarship, testifying to a growing understanding of its importance: Tennemann's *Manual of the History of Philosophy*, Chälybaeus's *Historical Development of Speculative Philosophy from Kant to Hegel*, Blakey's *History of the Philosophy of Mind*, T. C. Sandars's *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Vera's *Introduction à la philosophie de Hegel*, and Lewes's own *Biographical History* (p. vi).

world (p. 194 (Chap. 20)); ‘But why always Dorothea?’, she writes (p. 278 (Chap. 29)). Her sense that the realization of historical change is a painful working out seems to come from this tradition rather than from Mill or from the organic tradition of Riehl and the ‘natural history’ of slow change in community life with which she is often associated.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that Eliot had far less trouble than Lewes with the concepts of the *Phenomenology* and was far more relaxed about the conflict of ideational and empirical that was so important to Lewes.

I end this section with a delicate anomaly embedded in *Middlemarch*. Book Two contains a lovely paean to the glories of research. Lydgate is totally absorbed in ‘that arduous invention which is the very eye of research’. His scientific enquiry aims to ‘pierce’ the ‘first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime’ and the physiological processes ‘which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness’ (p. 165 (Chap. 16)). He is bringing empirical methodology and theories of the cell to bear on psychic material, a way of theorizing that involves ‘provisionally framing its object and correcting it’ (p. 165). The ‘unhappy consciousness’ (the ‘happy’ consciousness is not mentioned) is a famous Hegelian phrase, of course. It follows the account of master and slave and refers to a one-sided condition of alienation. Consciousness experiences itself as contradictory, ‘*inwardly disrupted*’ but responds with a false integration, a false reading of its completeness and freedom, the solution of stoicism (para. 207, emphasis in original). Hegel would never have sanctioned the view that this phenomenological condition would be amenable to empirical research locating the source of ‘mania’ and other extreme conditions in organic tissue. At first sight this aberration looks like an intellectual mistake or misreading on Eliot’s part. But it is surely an invocation of Lewes and his view that only empirical science can address fundamental questions of mind. This passage valorizes the empirical. Yet at the same time it is a gentle reminder that the phenomenology and physiology of mind might not be as irreconcilable as Lewes believed. Concepts govern both. Eliot was less prone than Lewes to adopt dualistic positions. Her deep familiarity with Spinoza, for instance, for whom body and mind are interdependent, protected her from such oppositional thinking.<sup>30</sup> The reference to the ‘unhappy consciousness’ is a loving interpellation, deliberately relocating a Hegelian phrase in the ‘wrong’ context and implicitly crediting Lewes with that glorious intellectual ease and ‘triumphant delight’ that follows Lydgate’s intense research (p. 165).

<sup>29</sup> George Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, in *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. by A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 107–39 (first publ. in *Westminster Review*, July 1856, pp. 51–19).

<sup>30</sup> See my ‘George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions’, in *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 294–308.

## Part 2

Expositions of Hegelian accounts of power often rigidify its principles — the reifying definite article in the customary formulation, *the* master/slave dialectic, has a lot to answer for. (For instance, Hegel did not call this aspect of his thought ‘the master/slave dialectic’, we did. In the *Phenomenology* it goes under the heading ‘Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage’.) If Eliot saw that the conflictual master/slave relation, what Robert Pippin has described as Hegel’s ‘politics of recognition’, created new formal possibilities, a way of patterning her novel, what she took from it was its fluid, ever-changing propensities, its unexpectedness.<sup>31</sup> She saw that the principles of recognition could be examined critically through the power relationships of bourgeois marriage. What Appleton called ‘the seeds of conflict and disruption’ (p. 184) enabled her to explore the unpredictability of change.

Eliot’s highly critical and demystifying reading of master and slave enabled her to open *Middlemarch* with an exuberant Hegelian comedy. The first chapter ends: ‘The younger [sister] had always worn the yoke, but is there any yoked creature without its private opinions?’ (p. 15). The ‘yoke’ is Eliot’s shorthand throughout the novel for the power structure subjugation.<sup>32</sup> Celia has just been humiliated in the conflict about the allocation of their mother’s jewels. Dorothea has condescended, with a certain amount of superior spiritual exhibitionism, to what she makes clear is Celia’s trivial interest in adornment. Yet she has appropriated some of the jewels to herself (even the ones Celia secretly has her eye on). Seeing them suddenly catching the light with sensuous power, she has endowed them with a transcendent religious significance that justifies her change of mind and endows her with ethical superiority. The episode brilliantly places Lordship and Bondage in the domestic sphere, the psychology of sibling rivalry and the ethics of possession, right at the novel’s start.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Yoke’ is used insistently in the context of marriage: Dorothea surmises ‘some intention on her husband’s part which might make a new yoke for her’ (p. 477 (Chap. 48)); she suffers ‘the real yoke of marriage’ (p. 481). Note how physical the yoke and the fetter are. Lydgate, exasperated by the constraints of money, ‘writhed under the idea of getting his neck beneath this vile yoke’ (p. 648 (Chap. 64)). ‘Poor Lydgate! the “if Rosamond will not mind”, which had fallen from him involuntarily as part of his thought, was a significant mark of the yoke he bore’ (p. 714 (Chap. 70)). He has resigned himself to ‘a yoked loneliness [...] to go on loving without too much care of being loved’ (p. 668 (Chap. 66)).

<sup>33</sup> Celia has her revenge in Chapter 72 when she joins the three powerful men of the group in preventing the widowed Dorothea from aiding Lydgate and taxes her with subservience: ‘I should not give up to James when I knew he was wrong, as you used to do to Mr Casaubon’ (p. 736).

What did Eliot want to capture from Hegel's philosophical framework? The account of Lordship and Bondage follows Hegel's theory of self-consciousness. The chapter on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is about the rhythms of life and desire and the myriad forms these can take. For the *Phenomenology* there is no such thing as a stable ego. Consciousness is a series of volatile states kept in movement by the logics of contradiction. This flux, says Hegel, is 'Life' (para. 168). Dissolution, flux, fluidity, are repeated terms.<sup>34</sup> In a flash of sunlight Dorothea can move from condemnation to delight in the sensuous beauty of jewels; Lydgate commits to marrying the girl he has decided not to marry in an instant of tearful blue eyes; Bulstrode murders Raffles through a sudden impulse to give the housekeeper keys to the drinks store; Will Ladislaw just avoids an affair with Rosamond by the accidental intrusion of Dorothea. Consciousness's capacity for self-duplication, returning to the self with new knowledge, as Lewes had put it, keeps this flux under awareness. But this self-consciousness itself opens the way to further progressive complications. As early as February 1848, in the second letter to Sibree that survives, Eliot had described consciousness as a flux ordered by 'the superadded life of the intellect' — sympathy, love, ethics. But consciousness is in a state of constant movement:

Thus matter is in a perpetual state of decomposition — super-add the principle of life, and the tendency to decomposition is overcome. Add to this consciousness, and there is a power of self-amelioration. The passions and senses decompose, so to speak. The intellect by its analytic power, restrains the fury with which they rush to their own destruction.<sup>35</sup>

She seems to be paraphrasing Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness here. She had faith in the 'moral nature' that 'purifies' and 'transmutes', but in her reading experience was essentially mobile, quixotic.

The exposition of Lordship and Bondage is predicated on the way self-consciousness others itself to reclaim itself and the knowledge achieved in this reflexive act. But, as we have seen, the structure of 'recognition' means that identity is in the keeping of another self-consciousness: it must exist for another in order to be real to itself. The struggle of the two elements in Lordship and Bondage is, at one level, all about the ontological necessity of being real to oneself, the struggle not to be an object or a

<sup>34</sup> See Theodore W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, new edn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). 'The substance of Hegel's philosophy is process, and it wants to express itself as process' (p. 121). Adorno's discussion of Hegel's 'Bacchanalian revel' of consciousness expands on this (pp. 134–35).

<sup>35</sup> Letter to John Sibree, February 1848, in *Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, 1, 250–52 (p. 251).

thing.<sup>36</sup> There are both ontological and material consequences when the catastrophic failure of this relationship — when it becomes one-sided — initiates a struggle that precipitates a fight to the death. A struggle for freedom against the other's desire for mastery and exploitation ensues. Hegel's exposition allows for both an existential and a brute political reading of this pattern of oppression. Fear is crucial to this structure. Fear saturates the relationship, becomes a somatic condition: it is the element in which both sides exist. Eliot explores the Hegelian model agnostically and agnostically. Her innovation — to read the master/slave through the passionate relations of modern marriage and its manifold economic and other subjugations — means that the anguish of power relations is unpredictable and complex.

I can best demonstrate the embeddedness of these ideas by looking closely at the Casaubon–Dorothea relationship. But first it is important to emphasize the centrality of violence and death to these explorations. Eliot began her career with an exploration of the sheer motiveless violence of domestic abuse in 'Janet's Repentance' (1857): 'And an unloving, tyrannous, brutal man needs no motive to prompt his cruelty [...]; his lust of torture.'<sup>37</sup> In *Middlemarch* the Hegelian structure of oppression makes this violence readable. Nevertheless, though conflict is so much more nuanced that we might hesitate to think in terms of murder and violence, it is present. Dorothea does not kill Casaubon, but the stress caused by her unknowing attack on his identity does kill him, by directly precipitating his heart attack. His first attack occurs after sharp, rebellious words from Dorothea in response to his insulting remarks about Will (and implicitly about her), the first sharp words since the honeymoon: 'Why do you attribute to me a wish for anything that would annoy you? [...] Wait at least until I appear to consult my own pleasure [that Hegelian word] apart from yours.' Half an hour later the 'loud bang of a book on the floor' announces the attack (pp. 282, 283 (Chap. 29)). Rosamond kills Lydgate's soul and imagination through the slow attrition of her dissent from him, kills his ambitions and intellectual freedom by refusing to recognize his creative needs, exacting only his attention to hers. Arguably, he kills something in her. Hegel's dialectic is a fluid movement that could go in many directions and be arrested at any stage.

Eliot prepares very carefully for the affective power relations of the marriages by presenting *Middlemarch* through a nexus of power relations — Appleton's 'seeds of conflict and disruption' — well before we reach the drama

<sup>36</sup> Adorno points out that it is important to see this aspect of the master/slave through the idea of 'labor', work on the world, on the self, and between selves (p. 24). He stresses that 'the subject-object toward which his philosophy develops' has fundamental implications for 'civil society and politics' (p. 87).

<sup>37</sup> 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. by Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 167–301 (p. 239 (Chap. 13)).

of the marriages. ‘You like to be Master’, Vincy says to Bulstrode when he refuses to help Fred (p. 131 (Chap. 13)).<sup>38</sup> Chapter 25 has as its epigraph, warningly, two stanzas from Blake’s ‘The Clod and the Pebble’: the second runs:

Love seeketh only self to please,  
To bind another to its delight,  
Joys in another’s loss of ease,  
And builds a hell in heaven’s despite.

The malleable clod and the adamantine pebble, two resistant forms of matter, grind against one another as joy becomes an act of violence. ‘Yoke’ is used insistently as a short cut to structures of power in marriage.

The trauma of Rome and the trauma of Dorothea’s marriage are concurrent. In each there is a Hegelian presence. Chapter 19 opens with Dorothea’s abstracted gaze by ‘the reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra’, in the Vatican museum (p. 188). The narrative tells us only in the subsequent chapter that this mute gaze has been preceded by the first defining catastrophic quarrel of the marriage — ‘Both were shocked [...]’. On a wedding journey, the express object [...] is to isolate two people on the ground that they are all the world to each other’ (p. 201). This grief is the first intimation of the intrinsic one-sidedness and aridity of the marriage and the conflict that will follow, a conflict that follows the logic of Hegel’s reading of oppression.

But before we know this, the Vatican scene occurs, deliberately directing us to sculpture and to another Hegelian context in the account of sculpture in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. The Cleopatra lies in ‘the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness’ (pp. 188–89 (Chap. 19)). This in the context of the ‘weight of unintelligible Rome’, we are told a little later, the ‘Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings, the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world’ (p. 193 (Chap. 20)). Eliot’s interpolation of the Cleopatra is intentionally anachronistic. The sculpture’s identity had been questioned by Winckelmann and the Ariadne had replaced the Cleopatra definitively by 1816.<sup>39</sup> But this referencing of the historical sexual power of Cleopatra as late as the 1830s immediately signs the erotic deficit of the marriage and

<sup>38</sup> Eliot carefully establishes the filaments of the net or web of control and entrapment in *Middlemarch* from the start of the novel. Well before the marriages are developed, Bulstrode’s and Featherstone’s love of power is made clear and, before his marriage to Rosamond, Lydgate has already given the fatal vote for Tyke that has made him subservient to Bulstrode.

<sup>39</sup> Winckelmann questioned the sculpture’s identification as Cleopatra in his *Storia delle arte* (1779) and Ennio Quirino Visconti subsequently identified it as the sleeping Ariadne. By 1816 it was established as Ariadne.



allows a double pathos to emerge. For this lack is joined to another. Unlike Ariadne, Dorothea, without her saving clue, will be lost in Casaubon's 'accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand (p. 85 (Chap. 10)), the 'Tartarean shades' (p. 86) of Lowick that Will later describes as the home of the Minotaur (p. 220 (Chap. 22)), the 'ante-rooms and winding passages that seemed to lead' nowhere (p. 195 (Chap. 20)).

It is the *weight* of Rome that presses upon us in the Roman episodes, the material weight of sculpture in particular. Hegel, assigning sculpture as the supreme representative of the classical phase in art, stressed the 'astounding project' of 'making Spirit imagine itself in an exclusively material medium'.<sup>40</sup> But about this he had extreme reservations. Sculpture is not 'living form' (III, 115). It is bound to '*material conditions*' of 'immediate corporality' and tied to the 'externality of body [...] reproduced in gross material' (III, 110, 112, emphasis in original). Sculpture, like architecture, is bound to the laws of gravity. It must always belong to pure matter, confined to the 'stereometric body, merely [...] in the three spatial dimensions' (III, 114). It is merely a 'mould' for spirit (III, 115). It cannot convey 'subjective life', but works only through the body, which is *given*, not created by 'human inventiveness' (III, 123, 126). Mostly 'hewn from white not varicoloured marble', 'self-identical', 'undifferentiated', it offers no play of light, which is 'in fluxion', congealed (III, 116). One of its defects is the 'sacrifice' of the eye — 'the *glance* of the eye is also absent' — and its living intensity, the outlet of the soul (III, 148, emphasis in original). Sculpture is predicated on the sightlessness of its figures, those white forms and marble eyes whose deadness Eliot understands so well. Drapery, Hegel says, works like architecture in classical sculpture: Dorothea, in an antithetical movement to the 'folding' drapery of the Cleopatra/Ariadne, has released herself from the 'grey drapery' of her cloak, 'thrown backward from her arms' (p. 189 (Chap. 19)). But she does not release herself from the weight of Rome, which is the correlative of the unresponsive deadweight of the marriage. Some critics have seen in the 'red drapery [...] being hung for Christmas spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina' a febrile image of menstruation as Dorothea's erotic distress sexualizes the eye (p. 194 (Chap. 20)).

Naumann indulges in a pastiche of Hegelian aesthetics when speaking of Dorothea — 'antique form animated by Christian sentiment — [...] sensuous force controlled by spiritual passion' — and Will answers with an irritated parody of idealism — 'the divinity passing into higher completeness and all' (p. 190 (Chap. 19)). But it is the way Dorothea's ardour interacts with the heavy, oppressive inertia of Casaubon's mind and its 'blank

<sup>40</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. by F. P. B. Osmaston, 4 vols (London: Bell, 1920), III, 121. This translation is for me a compromise between Bernard Bosanquet (1886) and T. M. Knox (1988).

absence of interest or sympathy' that precipitates the phases of struggle between them (p. 197 (Chap. 20)). Eliot, moving from Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* to the *Phenomenology*, seized imaginatively on the way the dyadic conflicts of a marriage could be paced through the dyadic patterns of his analysis of oppression and domination, beginning with the interplay of mutual misprision, and shown to have an inner logic. In doing so she shifts the context of Lordship and Bondage from a political to a psychological or existential register. But it is nonetheless a study of an ever-changing and volatile balance of power. In his Hegelian study of *Daniel Deronda*, Andrew Sola warns that though the novel is saturated in Hegelian thought 'it is not reducible to it' (p. 105), and the same goes for *Middlemarch*. I have interleaved this account of Eliot's analysis with relevant quotations from Hegel, two distinct but parallel discourses.<sup>41</sup>

*'They have not as yet exposed themselves to each other'* (para. 186): there is a possible ideal moment of pure reciprocity in the movement of self and other.<sup>42</sup> But Casaubon, for whom the tale of Cupid and Psyche is a 'romantic invention' (p. 197 (Chap. 20)), and who intimates to Dorothea that her expressions of affection are 'rather crude and startling' — a fundamental rejection of her sexuality — cannot achieve this, cannot respond to Dorothea: her questions about art, 'But do you care about them?', are met with blankness (pp. 198, 197). Her function for him is not as a companionate figure in a mutual exposing of self, but, we learn in the engagement period, 'an encouragement to himself': in her self-abnegating respect he finds 'the reflected confidence of the pedagogue', which replaces the 'chilling ideal audience' of his critics (p. 86 (Chap. 10)). Self-consciousness '*exists only in being acknowledged*', as the other '*gives it back again to itself*', so the Hegelian

<sup>41</sup> In the following discussion, in order to distinguish more clearly quotations from the *Phenomenology* and *Middlemarch*, the former have been set in italics. Any emphases in the original have been set in roman type.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Sola sees the Lordship and Bondage phase of the *Phenomenology* in existential terms that make much of this moment in Hegel's changing sequence of relationships. For him, it is the prime moment of the series: the obvious difference between Hegel and Eliot and the representation of mastership is that Eliot's is 'humanized and individualized' and Hegel's is 'stark and almost depersonalized'. 'Regarding this notion of "exposing oneself" through "recognizing another", it echoes what Hegel later says about the life and death struggle, which is the only way two self-consciousnesses attain freedom. The life and death struggle I understand to mean the exposure of the innermost feelings of one self-consciousness to the other [...]. It is certainly an extreme moment with fatal qualities. When one subject reveals his innermost being to another, he or she is staking his core self on the other recognizing it' (p. 279, n. 25). This is one legitimate way of viewing exposure. But to halt Hegel's sequence of relationships at this stage, seeing this as an existential and affective matter only, is to ignore the possibilities of violence and aggression which are explicit in the Hegelian exposition. It is to remove the Lordship/Bondsman movement from the political aspect of power, which operates in the state just as much as in personal relations.

argument begins (para. 178, 181). While two self-consciousnesses ‘recognize *themselves as mutually recognizing one another*’, a fatal one-sidedness is built into recognition as it becomes dysfunctional, ‘*one being only recognized, the other only recognizing*’ (para. 184, 185). ‘*The outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal*’ (para. 191). Already in the engagement period Dorothea has to subdue a guilty irritation when her status as subservient subsidiary to Casaubon becomes evident in her subordination to his research zeal — ‘I should feel more at liberty if you had a companion’ (p. 87 (Chap. 10)). ‘*The other is the dependent consciousness, whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman*’ (para. 189). On the honeymoon, in only six weeks, terror and anger supersede self-abnegation as the dynamic of this one-sided relation follows its course. Dorothea ‘had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger or repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness’ (p. 196 (Chap. 20)). ‘Repulsion’ on a honeymoon is a strong word: the ‘*whole being has been seized with dread; [...] has trembled in every fibre of its being*’ (para. 194). There is ‘temper’ in Dorothea’s response to Casaubon’s reiteration of her subordination when he tells her that she is a useful antidote to excessive thought: ‘I am very glad that my presence has made any difference to you’ (p. 199). ‘*The unessential consciousness is for the lord the object*’ (para. 192). Anger, fear, and violence gather rapidly when, in this double movement, two self-consciousnesses fail to mediate one another, when the other becomes an inessential element and thus inessential to itself, while the lord ‘*takes to himself only the dependent aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it*’ (para. 190).

The shock of the quarrel, in which Dorothea has instanced the pile-up of never-to-be-published researches — ‘will you not [...] begin to write the book [...]? I will write to your dictation’ — elicits Casaubon’s fury (p. 200). Since identity rests in another’s being, *exists only in being acknowledged*, is in the keeping of the ego of another, a reversal of power is always incipient. Suddenly, his ‘young bride’ seemed

to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference [...]. He had formerly observed with approbation her capacity for worshipping the right object; he now foresaw with sudden terror that this capacity might be replaced by presumption. (p. 200)

A presumption that Dorothea intensifies when she says, ‘I never heard you speak [of publication]’ (p. 201). The extremity of ‘*two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves*’ (para. 187). It is the struggle of an ‘*independent*’ and a ‘*dependent*’ consciousness in which the protagonists almost change places, a struggle about being made real to themselves (para. 189). And what dominates

this exchange is the sheer extremity of fear — Dorothea’s ‘certain terror’, Casaubon’s ‘sudden terror’: in dependence, the ‘*whole being has been seized with dread; [...] [it] has trembled in every fibre of its being*’ (para. 194). At stake in this honeymoon is genuinely the destruction of the other: ‘*each seeks the death of the other*’ (para. 187).

For Dorothea this exchange is a ‘catastrophe’; for Casaubon it creates a realization that this ‘close union’ was ‘more of a subjection than he had been able to imagine’ and threatens a reversal of his power (p. 202 (Chap. 20)). In the event Dorothea resolves that ‘there was clearly something better than anger and despondency’, conceding to his ‘equivalent centre of self’ (pp. 203, 211 (Chaps. 20, 21)), and, like the Hegelian bondsman who works on the world to rediscover his selfhood and overcome alienation — ‘*a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude*’ (para. 196) — in another reversal, defers to her husband. Casaubon resumes his power of exploitation (the Lord, Hegel has said, achieves satisfaction in the negation of the other and has ‘*the pure enjoyment of it*’ (para. 190). He initiates his success by refusing to forgive her for the quarrel, answering Dorothea’s question, ‘But do you forgive me?’ with a Shakespearean quotation (p. 210 (Chap. 21)). The cost of Dorothea’s attempts to become real to herself through bondage means the constant threat of a dematerializing world: on the return from the honeymoon the very furniture shrinks, ‘the stag in the tapestry looked more like a ghost in his ghostly blue-green world’ (p. 273 (Chap. 28)).

Using the Hegelian structure of domination as a covert tracking device for bourgeois marriage meant that Eliot could stress the enormity and cruelty of its power relations. It was some years before Mona Caird’s essays on marriage were collected in 1888, and in 1872 Eliot was ahead of her time. The dialectic plotting of this structure of struggle meant that the conflict has an inner logic: it cannot be put down to the mere ‘faintness of heart’ and loss of illusion in the young bride or to a minor impediment for the ‘irreproachable husband’ and the ‘charming young woman’ he had wed (pp. 194, 199 (Chap. 20)). Psychically, the fierceness of this conflict looks forward to the murderous instincts uncovered in psychoanalysis, and its intensity penetrates the codes of nineteenth-century marriage, when ‘to find conversation difficult and to hand a glass of water without looking’ constituted a calamity (pp. 201–02). But, as significant, the signal importance of the dialectic of domination for Eliot was twofold: it possessed a clear structural logic, and its power came from its iterability, its compulsion to repeat. The constitutive recurrence of fear (the ‘*whole being has been seized with dread*’) and the progressively intensified efforts of Casaubon to master Dorothea’s future repeat the pattern of domination and reach a level of abuse that is scarcely endurable. Keeping her up through the night to check manuscripts, Casaubon subsequently rouses her from their bed in the darkness to force a promise from her. It is a moment that looks forward to Beckett in its two isolated figures and bizarre cruelty in the dark. “What

is it?” said Dorothea, with a dread in her mind’ that Casaubon might make ‘a new yoke for her’. Sure enough, he attempts to exact from her a blind promise of obedience after his death (p. 477 (Chap. 48)).

The language of slavery, imprisonment, and fear is freely used of Dorothea. To see Will was to find that ‘a lunette opened in the wall of her prison’ but Casaubon’s tyranny brings her to an extremity of fear — ‘every energy was arrested by dread’ (pp. 361, 375 (Chap. 37)). She is engaged with ‘a perpetual struggle of energy with fear’ (p. 389 (Chap. 39)). It is the enervating psychic condition of slavery. Concurrently, though, in a series of reversals, there is a searing account of Casaubon’s failure and sense of failure, constantly reinforced by Dorothea whatever she does: ‘he shrank from pity’, an ‘uneasy susceptibility [of failure] accumulated in the consciousness of the author’ (p. 417 (Chap. 42)). The pattern of domination and submission is repeatedly reinstated: Casaubon sees that even in Dorothea’s submission she judged him — her very devotedness was a ‘penitential expiation’. He sees her silence as ‘suppressed rebellion’, intensified by the ‘irritating cautiousness’ of her ‘gentle answers’ (p. 418). It is the slave’s very submission that irks the master. And submission generates hatred. This hatred is compounded: Dorothea dares to question his economic power over Will, suggesting a redistribution of income as well as implicitly questioning his labours.

There are many possible moments in the movement of oppression. Where the Rosamond/Lydgate dyad is concerned, Eliot is interested in the way this movement is arrested in a reification, a mutual misprision, in which each to the other is a *thing*: ‘and the two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things’ (para. 188). Rosamond to Lydgate is ‘sweet to look at as a half-opened blush rose, and adorned with accomplishments for the refined amusement of man’ (p. 269 (Chap. 27)). Lydgate to Rosamond is a man with the aura of aristocratic connections, a man, as she tells Mrs Bulstrode ‘used to people who have a high style of living’ (p. 296 (Chap. 31)), who is ultimately made a ‘subject’, in ‘assured subjection’ according to her fantasmatic world (p. 436 (Chap. 43)). The terrible logic of double change between the Casaubons is not replicated between Lydgate and Rosamond. Instead, the fatal marriage constantly reinstates ‘consciousness in the form of thinghood’ (para. 189). It is significant that the negotiations of the marriage are all about things, from hock glasses to jewellery to Rosamond’s unilateral decision cancelling Lydgate’s resolution to move to a smaller house. *Things* are the only reality. The more fantasmatic her world the more the brute reality of things dominates the lives of the couple.

Not following the trajectory of Dorothea’s labour in bondage, Rosamond becomes a despotic slave through what Lydgate thinks of as her ‘dumb mastery’ (p. 740 (Chap. 73)). The gradual transformation of Lydgate to subjugation from an assumption of power happens because

each sees the other as object. Even at the deepest moments of Lydgate's understanding of the failure of his marriage, Rosamond is closed to him. He, not Rosamond, experiences that existential fear (the '*whole being has been seized with dread*') that characterizes oppression:

Her melancholy had become so marked that Lydgate felt a strange timidity before it, as a perpetual silent reproach, and the strong man, mastered by his keen sensibilities towards this fair fragile creature whose life he seemed somehow to have bruised, shrank from her look, and sometimes started at her approach, fear of her and fear for her rushing in only the more forcibly after it had been momentarily expelled by exasperation. (pp. 770–71 (Chap. 77))

Lydgate 'was bowing his neck under the yoke like a creature who had talons' (p. 595 (Chap. 58)): '*it is just this which holds the bondsman in bondage; it is his chain from which he could not break free in the struggle*' (para. 190). Lydgate cannot tell Rosamond about the Raffles scandal; he is reduced to silence and impotence because there is no room in the marriage for change: 'How would Rosamond take it all? Here was another weight of chain to drag' — '*it is his chain from which he could not break free*' — 'and poor Lydgate was in a bad mood for bearing her dumb mastery' (p. 740 (Chap. 73)).

Marriage is fatally dyadic: Hegel's dialectic reinforces this, but in the course of tracking the rhythms of oppression I think his own dyadic structures and their limits became apparent to Eliot. She certainly uses power relations to melodramatic effect in the final moments of Featherstone's life, when Mary, the abused domestic slave, reverses their roles and refuses to burn the will: 'I will not do it. Put up your money. I will not touch your money. I will do anything else I can to comfort you; but I will not touch your keys or your money' (p. 318 (Chap. 33)). But elsewhere Eliot deviates from binary power relations: Dorothea and Rosamond do not remain antagonists; 'the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck' (p. 797 (Chap. 81)). Mrs Bulstrode's ethics of forgiveness transcend narrow moral domination. Or the dyad is mediated through a third term. In the case of Caleb and Farebrother, families and work prohibit a dyadic life. Work, we assume, constitutes a third term for Dorothea and Will's life in London.

### Part 3

In the fore-narrative of the novel, Saint Theresa as a child sets out with her small brother, their hearts 'already beating to a national idea' (p. 1 (Prelude)). Here, on the first page of the novel, is that Hegelian 'idea' that Lewes began with in his first article. Is there any element of *Middlemarch*

that sees immediate personal relationships as part of, or related to, larger social and historical movements? How, if at all, does the novel manifest that notion of ‘development’ that Appleton specifically names as its special characteristic? Sibree, we have seen, understands the structure of historical movement as a replication of the patterns of self-duplication, a return of Spirit to itself with new understanding, what Sola has called ‘the cumulative force of a society’s thought’ (p. 3). To return to Chapter 11, the ‘subtle movement’ of ‘old provincial society’ and ‘those less marked vicissitudes which are constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse, and begetting new consciousness of interdependence’ (p. 95), prefigures the movement of the novel. Lydgate, a middle-class doctor, finds himself in close proximity to the aristocratic ‘county’ rector, Casaubon: from Will to Raffles, ‘settlers [...] came from distant counties’ (p. 95). This is the movement of modernity, despite Eliot’s slightly disingenuous parallel with the era of Herodotus. Is this the era of ‘development’, of change and conflict, that Appleton had in mind?

‘Fastidious gentlemen stood for boroughs’, the narrator notes (p. 95): Brooke’s abortive political career could be seen through the larger movements of mind that preoccupy both Sibree and Appleton. Concerned with slavery and the negro question (p. 459 (Chap. 50)), but, as a neglectful landlord, unconcerned with the Reform Act or the ‘Riniform’, of which he is reminded by the fury of his tenant farmer, Dagley (p. 396 (Chap. 39)), and seemingly impervious to the squalor in which his tenants live, Brooke has no conception of that ‘interdependence’ of the social body which Chapter 11 proposes as the social idea of the time. Yet in the mockery he suffers at the hustings, the liberal idea of democracy (‘liberal cognition’, as Elaine Hadley has called it) is also travestied by the crowd.<sup>43</sup> An effigy of Brooke, himself as other, his remarks doubled as soon as he utters them, appears as he begins to speak. It is in a sense a parody of recognition, a send-up of the double change of self and beholder. The country yokel has only to repeat Brooke’s words to effect a reversal of the one-sided relation between landowner and tenant. This is theatre rather than change. The Hegelian bondsman can only produce the resistance of violent carnival. But this may be a prerequisite of change or ‘development’. It is a primitive resistance to Brooke’s assumption of privilege, a first, mutinous stirring of the sense of injustice.

But there is another element in the novel that is often ignored — Dorothea’s politics. It is a politics of interdependence that emerges directly from her sense of the dysfunctional imbalance of power in her society. It is a Hegelian politics in this sense and resonates with the larger, reforming movements of mind in the nineteenth century. It is easy to occlude

<sup>43</sup> Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 9.

Dorothea's views. They are universally belittled by all the characters. Casaubon thinks of Dorothea's 'affectionate ardour' and 'Quixotic enthusiasm' as a problem, but we should view this with caution, coming from him (p. 421 (Chap. 42)). That everyone else in the county circle of gentry and aristocrats agrees with him about this — all they do agree with him about — should alert us.

In her passionate desire to see the poor well housed — surely not a quixotic ambition — Dorothea sees the class privilege of the rich as an abuse: 'I think we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords — all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see round us' (p. 31 (Chap. 3)). She has read 'Loudon's book', that is, John Claudius Loudon's avowedly radical and reforming work on building cottages for the poor. He was a prolific writer. Eliot is deliberately vague about the title of the 'book': the most relevant volume is actually a work of 1835, *The Encyclopædia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture*, which would of course be an anachronism.<sup>44</sup> In this work Loudon makes exhaustive plans of existing building complexes for the poor and designs others. It is easy to see why Dorothea would have been gripped by them, pursuing as they do plans in detail from window frames to privies to mirrors. But Eliot was correct in essence: by the early 1830s Loudon was well known for his reforming zeal. Dorothea is responding to early radical and utilitarian thought here. Though she abandoned cottage design after her marriage, she does not cease to rebuke Brooke for his neglect of tenants. She attacks his meanness, reproaching him for leaving Kit Downes — with a wife and seven children — to inhabit one sitting room and one bedroom 'hardly larger than this table', the table in Brooke's aristocratic space. The Dagleys 'live in the back kitchen and leave the other rooms to the rats' (p. 389 (Chap. 39)). Located though the poor are in the squalor of the rural scene, Dorothea's passion is nevertheless an anticipation of Engels on city housing in Manchester ten years or so later.<sup>45</sup>

Just as no one takes this seriously, Casaubon cannot accept her deeply uncomfortable, revolutionary thoughts on primogeniture and entailment: she questions, with 'independent clearness [...] why eldest sons had superior rights' (p. 371 (Chap. 37)). 'What are we doing with our money?', she asks — not a rhetorical question (p. 372). She has fairness in mind — to redistribute their income to Will's benefit. Her politics requires

<sup>44</sup> The editor of *Middlemarch* cites an earlier work, Loudon's *Observations on Laying Out Farms* (1812) (p. 840). More relevant, however, is Loudon's *Encyclopædia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture* (London: Longman, 1835). Typical, for instance, is a six-room labourer's cottage, or a complex in Shooter's Hill, Kent, constructed by the Labourer's Friend Society (pp. 236, 237). Loudon was known as a reforming radical.

<sup>45</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* was published in Germany in 1845, in England in 1892.



hard economic choices: 'I have always had too much of everything', she tells Will (p. 366).

The most difficult aspect of Dorothea's radicalism is her thoughts about the aesthetic, but these are still predicated on interdependence. She objects to the 'simpering pictures' in her own drawing room which have no social meaning (p. 389 (Chap. 39)). To Will in Rome her social feeling prompts her to deprecate art. She speaks of 'things which are more wanted in the world than pictures' and is uneasy about the inaccessibility of art to many but a small elite (p. 207 (Chap. 21)). It is a rigorous puritanism, but it comes from an essentially democratic refusal of exclusion. Drawn to Will for many reasons, she is glad, she says, that he 'think[s] about the rest of the world' (p. 542 (Chap. 54)). Instinctively radical, it is no wonder that she marries a reforming MP. Dorothea's politics are the only ones we hear details about in the novel. Will, the political reformer, speaks out on myth and poetry rather than reform: of course, we know that he edits a newspaper, the *Trumpet*, for the prospective 'Independent' MP Brooke, but we do not know the content of his journalism except in the most general terms. It is not necessary to credit Eliot herself with Dorothea's ideas: Victorian thinkers are often like the Duck/Rabbit; one way of looking at them produces a radical image, another a reactionary one.<sup>46</sup> But that Eliot intended us to register Dorothea's radical ideas is certain.

To many, the suspect meliorism to which Dorothea is consigned — the anonymous 'unhistoric acts' by which the 'growing good of the world' accumulates, is an equivocal ending at best and seems to undo any radical reading (p. 838 (Finale)). Eliot abandoned the polemical interpellation of the first edition, a direct assault on *Middlemarch* mores, so that we are left with a very general conclusion (p. 852, n. 282). Dorothea's influence, she says, was 'incalculably diffusive', a word that to some suggests dispersal, dissolution (p. 838). Another problem is a seeming commitment to an idea of ever-growing ethical progress, the 'growing good of the world'. This meliorism is strange when so much of provincial Middlemarch, from Brooke to Vincy, from Dagley to Mrs Waule, has been shown to be retrograde or else downright criminal, from the petty deceits of the horse dealer Bambridge to Bulstrode. Nor does Eliot commit herself to meliorism in the body of the novel itself. Diffusion, however, is a scientific metaphor that registers the movement of a fluid from an area of high concentration

<sup>46</sup> What we do know is that Eliot continued to take an active interest in intellectual developments around German thought in England well after the publication of her last novel. In her letters there is a passage from Edith Simcox's autobiography that records notes on a discussion with Eliot concerning 'the rising school in Oxford which follows Green & Caird to think English Philosophy nowhere, Kant and Hegel on the right track, but they themselves in some unexplained way, many leagues in advance even of them' (Edith Simcox, 'Autobiography, 6–13 February 1878', in *Eliot Letters*, ed. by Haight, IX, 216–18 (p. 217)).

to an area of lower concentration, and, with its action of interpenetration and expansion, returns us to that ‘mysterious mixture’ with which the novel begins (p. 1). Its cardinal principle is ‘movement’, the word used in Chapter 11 for the mobility and ‘interdependence’ of the social world. And perhaps the adjective ‘growing’ in that problematic phrase, ‘the growing good of the world’, should be seen, not in terms of aggregation but more literally and biologically as simply that which grows, that which is alive, like a plant. Indeed, her proof originally had for ‘growing good’, ‘growing life’.<sup>47</sup> We cannot hear the grass growing outside the world of human cognition, but we can see manifestations of goodness and we can see the grace of moments of moral growth, in Fred Vincy, for example, and even in Rosamond. The Caleb Garths and the Farebrothers do not intervene in history, but their living goodness is indisputable and influential. Dorothea’s ethical beauty is not ‘widely visible’, history ignores it, but it nevertheless is visible, living, consonant with the growth of love. Meeting again, Will and Dorothea ‘each looked at the other as if they had been two flowers which had opened then and there’ (p. 363 (Chap. 37)).

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<sup>47</sup> See Jerome Beatty, ‘The Text of the Novel: A Study of the Proof’, in *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel*, ed. by Barbara Hardy (London: Athlone Press, 1967), pp. 38–62 (p. 61).