

## Metaphorical Thought in George Eliot's Novels

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### Abstract

This paper will attempt to chart the usage Eliot made of metaphorical thought and language in the novels *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), *Felix Holt: The Radical* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), her last major work. The texts of Eliot's novels cited in this paper are from the Oxford and Penguin Classics series.

Metaphorical thought in this paper will include any figures of speech which compare two or more unlike things; it is not an aim of this paper to classify or categorize her use of different metaphorical rhetorical devices.

The choice of the novels to be surveyed is not an arbitrary one: *Adam Bede* was her most fully realized early work and *Daniel Deronda*, her last novel, can be seen as the culmination of her literary career. By looking at her use of metaphorical language and the employment of metaphorical thinking throughout her writing, it is hoped a better understanding of her, as an author and moral teacher, will emerge.

"...intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor...  
we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else."

George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*

"...the hum of insects, like tiniest bells on the garment of silence."

*The Mill on the Floss*

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## **1. Adam Bede**

### **1.1 Plot**

Adam Bede is a Christ-like figure, and it is no coincidence that he is a carpenter. He is in love with Hetty Sorrel, who is a beautiful but rather brainless domestic servant (Eliot mentions "Hetty's little brain" {AB 319}), in the home of her aunt and uncle, the Poysers. Hetty is aware of her power over Adam and his love for her but she falls in love with Arthur Donnithorne, a young squire, and Adam's friend.

The Poysers have another niece, Dinah Morris, who is a Methodist preacher; Adam's brother, Seth, is hopelessly in love with her. But she rejects him to work among the poor.

Arthur Donnithorne seduces Hetty and she becomes pregnant; Adam and Arthur, former friends, now fight over Hetty and Adam knocks Arthur out. Adam feels remorse for this violence; Arthur assures him he is breaking off his relationship with Hetty. Arthur leaves to join his military regiment.

Hetty stays with the Poysers and Adam proposes to her without knowing Hetty is pregnant. She thinks of drowning herself but decides to leave for a distant town to find Arthur, telling the Poysers she is going to visit Dinah. She reaches her destination but Arthur has left for Ireland with his regiment. Without money and in despair, Hetty still cannot bring herself to end her life. She gives birth and then abandons the baby, who dies; she is taken to prison where Adam tries to visit her, but she is too ashamed to see him. Hetty is found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

Dinah visits Hetty in prison and hears her confession. She asks Adam to forgive her before she dies, he does so and she is saved at the last minute by Arthur, who gallops up with her reprieve—she is instead transported. Adam and Dinah fall in love and marry.

### **1.2 Animals**

George Eliot is well-known for her references to animals in her novels; in *Adam Bede* like her other novels, the animals are mostly of the domestic type: dogs primarily but also horses, cattle, fowl and other barnyard creatures. One passage early in the book gives us a farmyard scene which emphasizes sound:

There is quite a concert of noises: the great bull-dog, chained against the stables, is thrown into furious exasperation by the unwary approach of a cock too near the mouth of his kennel, and sends forth a thundering bark, which is answered by two fox-hounds shut up in the opposite cow-house; the old top-knotted hens scratching with their chicks among the straw, set up a sympathetic croaking as the discomfited cock joins them; a sow with her brood, all very muddy as to the legs, and curled as to the tail, throws in some deep staccato notes; our friends the calves are bleating from the home croft; and, under all, a fine ear discerns the continuous hum of human voices.

(AB 72-73)

It is as if the animals have their own community and are used as a contrast to the community of men that surrounds them.

Adam's dog, Gyp, plays an important role in the novel. Eliot notes early on that while Adam is angry with his mother, his anger "did not prevent him caring as much as usual for his dog. We are apt to be kinder to the brutes that love us than to the women that love us. Is it because the brutes are dumb?" (AB 42). Adam's mother Lisbeth is notably a talker; Adam frequently makes pleas to her such as, "Now, mother, don't cry and talk so. Haven't I got enough to vex me without that?" (AB 41). So Adam sees Gyp as a companion who is mercifully silent but of high intelligence. Eliot makes Gyp's devotion to his master admirable. In one passage we see that "Gyp was evidently uneasy, for he had sat on his haunches resting his nose on his master's stretched-out leg, and dividing the time between licking the hand that hung listlessly down, and glancing with a listening air toward the door. The poor dog was hungry and restless, but would not leave his master" (AB 106). But it is his intelligence which Eliot seems at pains to note:

Hitherto Gyp had been assisting at this conversation in motionless silence, seated on his haunches, and alternately looking up in his master's face to watch its expression, and observing Dinah's movements about the kitchen. The kind smile with which Adam uttered the last words was apparently decisive with Gyp of the light in which the stranger was to be regarded, and as she turned round after putting aside her sweeping-brush, he trotted towards her, and put his muzzle against her hand in a friendly way. 'You see Gyp bids you welcome,' said Adam, 'and he's very slow to welcome strangers.' 'Poor dog!' said Dinah, patting the rough grey coat, 'I've a strange feeling about the dumb things as if they wanted to speak, and it was a trouble to 'em because they couldn't. I can't help being sorry for the dogs always, though perhaps there's no need. But they well have more in them than they know how to make us understand, for we can't say half what we feel, with all our words.

(AB 118)

So Gyp the dog is a creature who would speak if he could—he does not lack the intelligence, only the vocal apparatus. That his approval is important to Adam is clearly shown in this scene; he is a partner and certainly a friend to Adam. It is Gyp who alerts Adam to the presence of the secret lovers Arthur and Hetty by giving a loud bark "while they were bending to kiss" (AB 296). In this way, Gyp plays an important role in the novel by "telling" his master what the lovers are up to.

Second to Gyp is Vixen, the dog of the lonely old and lame schoolmaster, Bartle Massey. Vixen fills a place in Bartle's life that is difficult to describe. On the one hand because of his loneliness, he values her company; on the other, because he is less than fond of women, being a confirmed bachelor, he treats her as he might a human woman. In a sense she is his wife. The first scene in which Eliot notices her, Vixen is in the kitchen as Bartle enters:

The moment he appeared at the kitchen door with the candle in his hand, a faint whimpering began in the chimney corner, and a brown-and-tan-coloured bitch, of that wise-looking breed with short legs and long body, known to an unme-

chanical generation as turn-spits, came creeping along the floor, wagging her tail, and hesitating at every other step, as if her affections were painfully divided between the hamper in the chimney corner and the master, whom she could not leave without a greeting.

(AB 237)

Vixen is torn between her puppies and her master. She is very aware of Bartle's attention because "Vixen could not even see her master look at the them without painful excitement: she got into the hamper and got out again the next moment, and behaved with true feminine folly, though looking all the while as wise as a dwarf with a large old-fashioned head and body on the most abbreviated legs" (AB 238). Bartle's confirmed dislike of women surfaces in the next speech as Adam comments that Bartle has a family—something Adam had thought "was against the law" (AB *ibid.*) in Bartle's house:

'Law? What's the use of law when a man's once such a fool as to let a woman into his house?' said Bartle, turning away from the hamper with some bitterness. He always called Vixen a woman, and seemed to have lost all consciousness that he was using a figure of speech. 'If I'd known Vixen was a woman, I'd never have held the boys from drowning her; but when I'd got her into my hand, I was forced to take her. And now you see what she's brought me to—the sly, hypocritical wench'—Bartle spoke these last words in a rasping tone of reproach, and looked at Vixen, who poked down her head and turned up her eyes towards him with a keen sense of opprobrium—'and contrived to be brought to bed on a Sunday at church-time. I've wished again and again I'd been a bloody-minded man that I could have strangled the mother and the brats with one cord.

(AB *ibid.*)

Of course, Bartle is just the opposite of bloody-minded: he is a kind and giving man. He voluntarily teaches the workingmen of the area to read and write—not the actions of a man who might be thought cruel. In fact, Eliot refers to his pupils as if they were "three rough animals—making humble efforts to learn how they might become human. And it touched the tenderest fibers in Bartle Massey's nature, for such full-grown children as these were the only pupils for whom he had no severe epithets, and no impatient tones" (AB 235). Later in the novel, Eliot has Mrs. Poyser say of men in general that they are "mostly so tongue-tied—you're forced partly to guess what they mean, as you do wi' the dumb creaturs."

(AB 269)

The table that Bartle and Adam sit down to for their tea is spotlessly clean, "as if Vixen had been an excellent housewife in a checkered apron" (AB 239). Before they eat Bartle rises from the table saying, "I must give Vixen her supper too, confound her! though she'll do nothing with it but nourish three unnecessary babbies. That's the way with these women—they've no head-pieces to nourish, and so their food all runs either to fat or to brats" (AB 239). Bartle then launches into a diatribe against all women and ends by rapping his knife against the table so

violently that Vixen “felt it incumbent on her to jump out of the hamper and bark vaguely. Bartle reacts to this outburst with, “‘Quiet Vixen!’ snarled Bartle, turning round upon her. ‘You’re like the rest o’ the women—always putting in your word before you know why’ as Vixen ‘returned to her hamper again in humiliation—” (AB 241). Vixen Bartle treats and speaks to as he perhaps would a wife. For example, setting out on a journey, this is what he “says” to Vixen:

Now, I shall be obliged to take you with me, you good-for-nothing woman. You’d go fretting yourself to death if I left you—you know you would, and perhaps get snapped up by some tramp; and you’ll be running into bad company, I expect, putting your nose into every hole and corner where you’ve no business; but if you do anything disgraceful I’ll disown you—mind that, madam, mind that!

(AB 419)

This harsh but loving lecture is of course meant in a comic way, but it also uncovers Bartle’s character by revealing his inner feelings toward his canine companion, and by extension, all women.

Bartle and Adam’s “little talk” is important to the narrative in establishing Bartle’s character but the last word is saved for Vixen:

Well, well, Vixen, you foolish wench, what is it, what is it? I must go in must I? Ay, ay, I’m never to have a will o’ my own any more. And those pups, what do you think I’m to do with ‘em when they’re twice as big as you?—for I’m pretty sure the father was that hulking bull-terrier of Will Baker’s—wasn’t he now, eh, you sly hussey? (Here Vixen tucked her tail between her legs, and ran forward into the house. Subjects are sometimes broached which a well-bred female will ignore.) ‘But where’s the use of talking to a woman with babbies?’ continued Bartle, ‘she’s got no conscience—no conscience—it’s all run to milk.’

(AB 246)

One imagines that if Bartle Massey were ever married, he would demand that his wife fill the role of Vixen, silent but dutiful; it would be Bartle’s job to henpeck himself.

The close companionship Eliot creates between animals and certain of her characters, as the examples of Adam and Bartle show, serves to add dimension and interest to their lives on the page. The animals as characters occupy an important place in Eliot’s approach to making her human characters more real; in fact, it is possible that one of the ways she makes her characters more “alive” is through this technique of having them interact with their animals and thereby reveal more of the essential detail that animates their fictional lives.

### 1.3 Hetty

We meet Hetty for the first time in Chapter VII, “The Dairy” for this is Hetty’s particular area of responsibility in the Poyser household. Since she is a relative, she cannot be seen as a dairymaid, and therefore is not a servant but the niece of the householder. Hetty is metaphori-

cally presented through comparison with animals and, in this example, baby animals; in other words, her character is seen and given life both physically and mentally by borrowing traits from animals.

This seventeen-year-old girl possesses the

one order of beauty which seems made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women. It is a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, of babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief—a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you. Hetty Sorrel's was that sort of beauty.

(AB 84)

Using the notion of kittens, baby ducks and finally babies to describe her beauty gives us no clear picture of Hetty herself but convincingly presents her as an innocent, playful creature. Hetty's cheek "was like a rose-petal," (AB 84) she was long-lashed and dimpled; she had "white shell-like ears" (AB *ibid.*); she is a "distracting kitten-like maiden" (AB *ibid.*). Her beauty is a "springtide beauty; it was the beauty of young frisking things—the innocence of a star-browed calf" (AB *ibid.*).

As Hetty falls in love with Arthur, little scenes between the two develop their characters further: he sees her with tears in her eyes and "what else could he do but speak to her in a soft, soothing tone, as if she were a bright-eyed spaniel with a thorn in her foot?" (AB 137). He finds out why she is crying and chides her with, "You little frightened bird! little tearful rose! silly pet!" (AB *ibid.*).

In Eliot's reflections on Hetty's beauty as Adam sees it, the young girl is prized for her "kitten-like glances and movements" because they are "just what one wants to make one's hearth a paradise" (AB 152). However, Adam never considers that there is danger in such beauty; which is natural in any man: "pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman—if you ever could, without hard head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the one supremely pretty woman who has bewitched you. No: people who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it" (AB 153). It is interesting to note that Eliot uses this particular figure, of the peach, earlier in the novel while contemplating the relationship between Arthur and Hetty: she sees the two as "young unfurrowed souls (who) roll to meet each other like two velvet peaches that touch softly and are at rest; they mingle as easily as two brooklets that ask for nothing but to entwine themselves and ripple with ever-interlacing curves in the leafiest hiding-places" (AB 132). The double metaphor used here nicely conveys the youth of the lovers and their inexperience, the tenderness and in the figure of the two brooklets, the pure naturalness and the secrecy of young love.

So while Hetty is compared favorably to kittens and baby ducks as a way of illustrating her innocence and beauty, Eliot seems to have little sympathy for other aspects of her character. Eliot notices her "vain little nature" and "her small ingenuity" (AB 198) while discussing her

relationship to Arthur. Hetty has “a little brain” she plans “small plots” and imagines “her little scenes” of happiness (AB 319); her actions are those of a “trivial little soul” (AB 340). In this negative strain, Eliot again employs the kitten metaphor: “She was like a kitten, and had the same distractingly pretty looks, that meant nothing, for everybody that came near her” (AB 208). Hetty’s nature is one which is outwardly ignorant and full of folly—which will lead to later suffering; she is a lovely thing without a soul:

—it is too painful to think she is a woman, with a woman’s destiny before her  
—a woman spinning in young ignorance a light web of folly and vain hopes  
which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned  
garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a  
life of deep human anguish.

(AB 249)

In one scene we find Adam and Hetty in an apple orchard where “the level evening sunbeams stole through the thick apple-tree boughs and rested on her round cheek and neck as if they too were in love with her” (AB 220). Her looks obviously mean something to Adam in this image, where we feel the suggestion that her cheeks partake of the rosiness of the surrounding apples because of the intoxication of love. Eliot laments the loss of our ability to remember “our early gladness” in childhood experiences of love; for though we forget these specific moments of joy it is “doubtless that joy is wrought up in our nature, as the sunlight of long-past mornings is wrought up in the soft mellowness of the apricot”; and this is contrasted to the “the first glad moment in our first love” which is a “vision which returns to us to the last, and brings with it a thrill of feeling intense and special as the recurrent sensation of a sweet odor breathed in a far-off hour of happiness” (AB 220). The metaphorical thought here, of childhood joy that becomes indistinct yet remains a part of our innermost nature and the feelings of joy in first love, which is like a sweet odor from a far-off time, intelligently capture the emotional sense of how memory transforms experience through time, yet in different ways. The home joy of childhood seems to go to the fiber of the individual in the apricot figure; while the vision of first love, which stays with us forever and “gives a more exquisite touch to tenderness” has a more intense and accessible feeling. The first image involves sight (“sunlight of long past mornings”) the second image smell (“a sweet odor”); of the two senses, smell is by far the stronger and more evocative, especially where memory is involved, while sight is the more intense; smell is less specific while sight is highly so. Eliot seems to be saying that our childhood experiences form us from the inside out and our first experience of love shapes from the outside in.

At Hetty’s anger in a later scene, Adam feels “amused pity, as if he had seen a kitten setting up its back, or a little bird with its feathers ruffled” (AB 262); “she has nothing more than her beauty to recommend her” but he is so in love that he attributes “imaginary virtues to her” as he waits “for her kind looks as a patient trembling dog waits for his master’s eye to be turned upon him” (AB 353). His love for her is not a weakness in himself or because he fails to understand her; rather, it “came out of the very strength of his nature” (AB *ibid.*). Feminine beauty is obviously a main concern for Eliot in this novel; in one of the more extended



metaphors in the novel, Eliot compares beauty and music:

Is it any weakness, pray, to be wrought on by exquisite music?—to feel its wondrous harmonies searching the subtlest windings of your soul, the delicate fibres of life where no memory can penetrate, and binding together your whole being past and present in one unspeakable vibration: melting you in one moment with all the tenderness, all the love that has been scattered through the toilsome years, concentrating in one emotion of heroic courage or resignation all the hard-learned lessons of self-renouncing sympathy, blending your present joy with past sorrow, and your present sorrow with all your past joy?—For the beauty of a lovely woman is like music: —Beauty has an expression beyond and far above the one woman's soul that it clothes, as the words of genius have a wider meaning than the thought that prompted them: it is more than a woman's love that moves us in a woman's eyes—it seems to be a faroff mighty love that comes near to us, and made speech for itself there; the rounded neck, the dimpled arm; move us by something more than their prettiness—by their close kinship with all we have known of tenderness and peace. The noblest nature sees the most of this impersonal expression in beauty (it is needless to say that there are gentlemen with whiskers dyed and undyed who see none of it whatever), and for this reason, the noblest nature is often the most blinded to the character of the one woman's soul that the beauty clothes.

(AB 353-54)

The power of music and of beauty to beguile seem to involve the same emotions. The force of music and beauty, and our response to both, comes from our own inner strength and experience. It is our response that matters. What happens within the soul touched by music or beauty is what concerns Eliot; this takes place in the “subtlest windings of your soul” within the “delicate fibres of life where no memory can penetrate” (AB 353). Also, Eliot extends the metaphor and increases its complexity by introducing the idea that the individual woman's soul that beauty clothes is like the original thought that inspires “the words of genius”—both physical beauty and the words of genius are “beyond and far above” the individual soul and solitary thought that inspired them. A woman's eyes may move us because of the love we see there but what really touches us most deeply is something that “seems to be a far-off mighty love that has come near to us, and made speech for itself there” in other words, God. This far-off love is alluded to again in another passage on Hetty's beauty: “Hetty's face had a language that transcended her feelings. There are faces which nature charges with a meaning and pathos not belonging to the single human soul that flutters beneath them, *but speaking the joys and sorrows of foregone generations—eyes that tell of deep love which doubtless has been and is somewhere, but not paired with these eyes*—just as a national language may be instinct with poetry unfelt by the lips that use it” (italics mine AB 284). This passage reinforces the notion that the soul carries with it spiritual matter distinct from the time and circumstances in which it finds its incarnation.

Hetty's life turns tragic because she rejects Adam's love, which is real, for the vain hope

that Arthur will love her, which is unreal. Her pregnancy, wanderings after Arthur, the baby's death and her imprisonment arise from her own vanity and shallowness and egoism. Eliot compares this suffering to bitter food: "The beginning of hardship is like the first taste of bitter food—it seems for a moment unbearable; yet, if there is nothing else to satisfy our hunger, we take another bite and find it possible to go on" (AB 373).

One of the many powerful scenes involving Hetty comes at the beginning of her trials in pursuit of Arthur. On the road she meets a farmer in a wagon. She is on foot, alone and with little money:

—there was something in the front of the big vehicle which encouraged her— It was only a small white-and-liver colored spaniel which sat on the front ledge of the waggon, with large timid eyes, and an incessant trembling of the body, such as you may have seen in some of these small creatures. Hetty cared little for animals, as you know, but at this moment she felt as if the helpless timid creature had some fellowship with her, and without being quite aware of the reason, she was less doubtful about speaking to the driver—.

(AB 373)

Of course, it is not the animal itself that rouses her emotions, it is her own self-pitying identification with the poor trembling creature. We can clearly see here that it is Eliot's tendency to see animals and humans as essentially equal beings, which allows such identification. We learn later from the driver that he picked up the poor dog on the road a fortnight previously; "He war lost, I b'lieve, an's been all of a tremble iver sin" (AB 374) just like Hetty. Eliot sees Hetty in her misery as "Poor wandering Hetty, with the rounded childish face, and the hard unloving despairing soul looking out of it—with the narrow heart and narrow thoughts, no room in them for any sorrows but her own, and tasting that sorrow with the more intense bitterness!" (AB 389). The remainder of Hetty's tragedy from this point onward in the novel is stark: her time in jail and in court and in seeking forgiveness from others. Her last-minute rescue by Arthur is a moment of hope, but she is then transported to Australia. Eliot's early elaborate portrayal of Hetty, by using metaphors that convey her singular beauty and innocence, makes her fate later in the novel all the more poignant and moving.

## **2. The Mill on the Floss**

### **2.1 Plot**

This novel is the story of the Tulliver family. This is the only one of the six novels treated in this paper that ends tragically, for Maggie and her brother Tom both drown in the end.

Maggie dearly loves her brother Tom and he returns her love in his way, which is often one of anger with her for her 'forgetfulness.' Tom is sent away to study, and this upsets Maggie greatly; while visiting her brother, she meets and makes friends with his schoolmate, Philip, who is the crippled son of her father's enemy, Mr. Wakem the lawyer, who represents a Mr. Pivart in a lawsuit involving Mr. Tulliver. Mr. Tulliver loses the suit and his mill on the River Floss; Wakem takes over the mill and the shock causes Mr. Tulliver to have a stroke. He recovers but swears, and makes Tom swear, eternal enmity against Wakem. Mr. Tulliver has

lost all his money but is asked to stay on in the humiliating position of manager of the mill that used to be his.

Tom gets a job and manages to pay off all his father's debts; on the way home from a party to celebrate his getting out of debt Mr. Tulliver meets Mr. Wakem on the road and attacks him with his whip—Mr. Wakem is not badly hurt but Mr. Tulliver dies the same night.

On a visit to her cousin Lucy, Maggie meets Stephen Guest, Lucy's suitor. He is increasingly attracted to Maggie; Philip is in love with her also. This love triangle sets up much of the tension in the novel. On a rowing trip on the Floss, Maggie and Stephen drift too far and are forced to spend the night on the deck of another boat, which of course destroys Maggie's reputation. Tom is furious at her behavior and shuts her out of the house, but her mother takes pity on her and they go together to stay at a friend's. When St. Ogg's is flooded, she tries to reach Tom and succeeds, but they are drowned together in the river.

## 2.2 Animals

We have seen that Eliot had animals play a somewhat important role in *Adam Bede*; in *Mill on the Floss*, animals are even more important. Gordon Haight notes that "an extraordinary number of references to animals appear: horses, donkeys, bulls, lambs, seven or eight *clearly characterized* dogs, kittens, rabbits, fowl of every sort, fish, rats, ferrets, snakes, toads, snails, spiders, bears, boars, and wolves" (MF xiii, emphasis mine).

## 2.3 Maggie, Family and Friends

Eliot spends some time describing Maggie both directly and metaphorically, though the use of figurative expressions about her is more limited than with characters such as Hetty in *Adam Bede*. In an early passage we find that "Maggie was incessantly tossing her head to keep the dark heavy locks out of her gleaming black eyes—an action which gave her very much the air of a small Shetland pony" (MF 13). She is so alert to Tom's wishes that when she hears his name she "in an instant—was on watch, with gleaming eyes, like a Skye terrier suspecting mischief, or at all events determined to fly at any one who threatened it towards Tom" (MF 16). Just a few pages later Maggie, with wet hair, is seen "shaking the water from her black locks as she ran, like a Skye terrier escaped from his bath" (MF 18). These two references to Maggie as being like a Skye terrier in the space of ten pages should quickly endear her to the reader; of course, readers who have never met or seen a Skye will be at a loss in imagining her. A more common metaphor is found toward the end of the novel when Maggie slowly looks into Stephen's loving eyes: "Something strangely powerful there was in Stephen's long gaze for it made Maggie's face turn towards it and look upward at it—slowly, like a flower at the ascending brightness" (MF 441).

She and her cousin Lucy are seen as quite different; Lucy is like a white kitten while Maggie is, in contrast, like "a rough, dark, overgrown puppy" (MF 61). Eliot manages to capture the alert and startled look on Lucy's face after a small accident by saying "she looked on mutely, like a kitten pausing from its lapping" (MF 87). Maggie's love for Lucy is strong, so much so that "she could never be cross with pretty little Lucy, any more than she could be cruel to a little white mouse" (MF 99). Lucy's sweetness extends further, she was "fond of feeding dependent creatures, and knew the private tastes of all the animals about the house,

delighting in the little rippling sounds of her canaries when their beaks were busy with fresh seed, and in the small nibbling pleasures of certain animals—.” (MF 370). The assonance of ‘rippling’ and ‘nibbling’ here adds to the charm of this description. That Lucy loves all animals is made quite clear, but Philip notices, when Maggie and Lucy are staying together that Maggie “must be better than a whole menagerie of pets to her” (MF 412). Lucy and Maggie are close confidants. After her troubles begin, she tells Lucy that she feels like a caged animal:

It is with me as I used to think it would be with the poor uneasy white bear I saw at the show. I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backwards and forwards in that narrow space, that he would keep doing it if they set him free. One gets a bad habit of being unhappy.

(MF 373)

This figure presents unhappiness as a habit, bred of repetition; the bear in the metaphor, a literal prisoner, deals with his captivity by pacing back and forth in circles. Maggie realizes that we too sometimes become captives, prisoners of our own habitual actions, and that we fall into unhappiness because of this. By extension, too many repeated misfortunes cause the sufferer to become inured to misery and to expect nothing else, something many Victorian writers saw as their duty to expose and explore, especially among the working poor.

Maggie’s dark eyes remind Philip Wakem of “stories about princesses being turned into animals,” her eyes were “full of unsatisfied intelligence, and unsatisfied, beseeching affection” (MF 178). This figure suggests a Greek or Roman myth. Princesses were usually turned into animals to escape a pursuer, but in Maggie’s case those eyes communicate her need to use her intelligence in a constructive way—something that was denied many Victorian women—something Eliot must have personally resented.

Another animal figure is used with Maggie’s brother Tom and his friend Bob. Tom has a dog named Yap. One day he is out with Bob who, as they walk along a river, keeps his “blue eyes fixed on the river, like an amphibious animal who foresaw occasion for darting in” (MF 48). Bob is seen as possessing this animal trait because he lives close to nature. To Tom’s embarrassment, Bob derides Yap’s rat-catching abilities, to which Yap reacts as would anyone being criticized: “Yap, feeling the withering influence of this scorn, tucked his tail in and shrank close to Tom’s leg, who felt a little hurt for him, but had not the superhuman courage to seem behindhand with Bob in contempt for a dog who made so poor a figure” (MF 49). As a small animal plunges into the river near them, Bob urges on Yap to give chase, but with little result. However, “Yap agitated his ears and wrinkled his brows, but declined to plunge, trying whether barking would not answer the purpose just as well. Ugh! You coward! Said Tom, and kicked him over, feeling humiliated as a sportsman to possess so poor-spirited an animal” (MF *ibid.*). But Yap will prove the better dog in the end. Tom and Bob get into a fight and in the struggle, as Tom is losing, Yap comes to his rescue:

But at this moment, Yap, who had been running on before, returned barking to the scene of the action, and saw a favorable opportunity for biting Bob’s bare leg not only with impunity but with honour. The pain from Yap’s teeth, instead

of surprising Bob into relaxation of his hold, gave it a fiercer tenacity, and, with a new exertion of his force, he pushed Tom backward and got uppermost. But now Yap, who could get no sufficient purchase before, set his teeth in a new place, so that Bob, harassed in this way, let go his hold of Tom, and, almost throttling Yap, flung him into the river.

(MF 51)

So Yap gets his plunge anyway, but not in pursuit; however, the distraction is enough to allow Tom to win the fight because of Yap's sacrifice. In a sense, Yap is Tom's doppelganger—they have the same type of cautious but tenacious personality and a dislike of following orders.

But Tom is metaphorically described in other ways. He is compared to an ox, for instance. In a fight with his schoolmate Philip, he is observed as an "ox—we may venture to assert on the authority of a great classic (Horace, Satires)—is not given to use his teeth as an instrument of attack; and Tom was an excellent bovine lad, who ran at questionable objects in a truly ingenuous bovine manner—" (MF 176).

In the next chapter we meet Tom and Maggie's aunts and uncles, whose personalities make much of the novel worth reading for the humor involved. For example, there are Mr. And Mrs. Pullet, who differ in stature to such an extent that "He bore about the same relation to his tall, good-looking wife, with her balloon sleeves, abundant mantle, and large be-feathered and be-ribboned bonnet, as a small fishing-smack bears to a brig with all its sails spread" (MF 56). All is not peace and jollity; family fights are common. Mr. Tulliver, Mrs. Tulliver and Mrs. Glegg, a sister, are arguing about money and the lending of it; Mr. Tulliver and Mrs. Glegg are at each other's throats when Mrs. Tulliver intervenes with "Sister, drink your wine and let me give you some almonds and raisins" to which she replies, "Bessy, I'm sorry for you," said Mrs. Glegg, very much with the feeling of a cur that seizes the opportunity of diverting his bark towards the man who carries no stick. 'It's poor work, talking o' almonds and raisins'" (MF 73). Eliot's adroit use of this image of a mean dog going for an unarmed man to represent the human tendency to verbally attack someone who is non-threatening when being menaced from another quarter, is nicely observed and emotionally true.

Mrs. Tulliver has her share of scenes in this novel, and many of them are as humorous as the following, which compares her to a gold-fish:

Mrs Tulliver had lived fourteen years with her husband, yet she retained in all the freshness of her early married life a facility of saying things which drove him in the opposite direction to the one she desired. Some minds are wonderful for keeping their bloom in this way, as a patriarchal gold-fish apparently retains to the last its youthful illusion that it can swim in a straight line beyond the encircling glass. Mrs Tulliver was an amiable fish of this kind, and, after running her head against the same resisting medium for the last fourteen years, would go at it again to-day with undulled alacrity.

(MF 75)

The metaphor of Mrs. Tulliver as a goldfish is interesting in several ways. She represents an Eliot character who is so at home in the world that all her actions and thoughts come easily and without reflection, unlike many of Eliot's other characters, such as Dorothea in *Middlemarch* and the character of Romola, to name only two. By keeping her "youthful illusion," Mrs. Tulliver remains blissfully unaware even while making her husband a fount of frustration. Mrs. Tulliver is also compared to a hen. She is seen to be "brooding" over a scheme to prevent the takeover of her husband's mill by Mr. Wakem. Mrs. Tulliver averting the takeover is like "a truly respectable and amiable hen" asking the farmer "not to wring her neck, or send her chicks to market: the result could hardly be other than much cackling and fluttering" (MF 245).

Mr. Tulliver is a more serious and tragic character. He is proud and obstinate, two traits that Eliot usually deplores, but he is one of the "small lives" she lovingly delineates. Eliot feels that these people, the salt of the earth, are really what literature should be about in morally uplifting her readers, and so he is treated in a loving but disapproving manner. Henry James has noted Eliot's strong "sense of moral responsibility," and her conviction "of the sadness and difficulty of life" (Essays 997), as being wound up in her nature. In the character of Mr. Tulliver, she gives us a picture of someone destroyed by the difficulty of life and an inability to exercise self-control, which leads to tragedy:

The pride and obstinacy of millers, and other insignificant people, whom you pass unnoticingly on the road every day, have their tragedy too; but it is of that unwept, hidden sort, that goes on from generation to generation, and leaves no record—such tragedy, perhaps, as lies in the conflicts of young souls, hungry for joy, under a lot made suddenly hard to them, under the dreariness of a home where the morning brings no promise with it, and where the unexpectant discontent of worn and disappointed parents weighs on the children like a damp, thick air, in which all the functions of life are depressed; or such tragedy as lies in the slow or sudden death that follows on a bruised passion, though it may be a death that finds only a parish funeral. There are certain animals to which tenacity of position is a law of life—they can only sustain humiliation so long as they can refuse to believe in it, and, in their own conception, predominate still.

(MF 197)

This rather lengthy quote is perhaps best considered in parts. The beginning of the passage, which is about Mr. Tulliver's "obstinacy" and the importance of "insignificant people" who lead a "hidden" life is strikingly like the ending of *Middlemarch*. Dorothea's story may not be as tragic as Mr. Tulliver's but Eliot ends *Middlemarch* with observations on how the good of the world is "dependent on unhistoric acts"; that things are well with you and me owing to "the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (M 785). Eliot's concern to cogently portray the "little man" whose life is hidden is a theme that runs through most of her novels.

The lives of insignificant people are just as meaningful as the lives of the great, though they pass unnoticed leaving no record. Eliot then gives us two examples of tragedy; the first

compares the plight of “young souls” who are “hungry for joy” whose lot is suddenly “made hard for them” in an unhappy home where the “unexpected discontent” of “worn and disappointed parents” is a burden for the children like a “damp, thick air in which all the functions of life are depressed.” The second example considers the tragedy of the “slow or sudden” death of someone with a “bruised passion” ie. a rejected lover. Though the death be humble, only ending in a parish funeral, the tragedy and death are still meaningful. Finally, she gives us a metaphor comparing “certain animals” and “certain human beings” (Mr. Tulliver), whose life depends on maintaining a position. With animals and humans “tenacity of position” and “predominance” are laws of life (MF 197). The parallelism here is nicely stated. Animals can never “flourish again, after a single wrench”; certain men can bear humiliation only so long as they can refuse to believe it and, in fancy if not in fact, predominate still.

Of course the predominance Mr. Tulliver seeks to maintain and the humiliation he suffers involve his mill and the loss of it to Mr. Wakem. The two are mortal enemies and Mr. Tulliver’s loss of control and resulting attack on Wakem precipitate Mr. Tulliver’s tragedy and death. Their feeling for each other is well portrayed in a simile which almost becomes a metaphor:

To suppose that Wakem had the same sort of inveterate hatred towards Tulliver, that Tulliver had towards him, would be like supposing that a pike and a roach can look at each other from a similar point of view. The roach necessarily abhors the mode in which the pike gets his living, and the pike is likely to think nothing further even of the most indignant roach than that he is excellent good eating; it could only be when the roach choked him that the pike could entertain a strong personal animosity.

(MF 251)

Lawyer Wakem is the predator and miller Tulliver the prey, and of course the prey hates and resents the predator, who takes little notice. This metaphor/simile humorously compares the “big fish-little fish” point of view and adds the sense that it is natural for each man to be of a different order in the scheme of things. Mr. Tulliver’s loss of the mill has a further dimension though: he notes that “when the mill changes hands, the river’s angry” (MF 263). The angry Floss later floods, causing the death by drowning of his two children, Maggie and Tom. So, in a sense, Mr. Tulliver is responsible for the deaths of his own children. Eliot perhaps sees Mr. Tulliver as a hopeless case. Religion might have saved him if he had been more spiritual and less hard-headedly egotistical. She uses the metaphor of a seed blown by the wind:

Certain seeds which are required to find a nidus for themselves under unfavorable circumstances, have been supplied by nature with an apparatus of hooks, so that they will get a hold on very unreceptive surfaces. The spiritual seed which had been scattered over Mr. Tulliver had apparently been destitute of any corresponding provision, and had slipped off to the winds again, from a total absence of hooks.

(MF 275)

Comparing a man's soul to a seed blown by the wind is a stunning insight.

The character of Bob, first seen early in the book, re-enters at a time of unhappiness for Tom and Maggie and serves to help them both. He and Tom were friendly boyhood rivals, and he now befriends Maggie, whom he idolizes. Bob's dog is a bull terrier named Mumps; he of "brindled coat and defiant aspect" (MF 281). Maggie says she doesn't have many friends who care for her, at which Bob suggests, "Hev a dog, Miss!—they're better friends nor (than) any Christian" and continues, "I can't give you Mumps, 'cause he'd break his heart to go away from me—eh, Mumps, what do you say, you riff-raff?"— '(Mumps declined to express himself more diffusely than by a single affirmative movement of his tail.)—" (MF 283). Bob notes that Mumps "minds his own business," which the dog seems to understand—"The expression on Mump's face, which seemed to be tolerating the superfluous existence of objects in general, was strongly confirmatory of this high praise" (MF 284). Maggie wonders if it is all right to pet him, and Bob answers in the affirmative. "He knows his company, Mumps does," and Bob talks to him "by the hour together" and if Bob has trouble he always tells Mumps about it—Bob has no secrets from Mumps. Bob is reluctant to marry and one reason is that Mumps "mightn't like her" (MF 314).

Mumps knows about women; he knows "which is the good-looking ladies—and's partic'lar fond of 'em when they've good shapes, Lors!" (MF 316). Bob finally does marry and when Maggie asks him if Mumps approves of his choice Bob replies, "he made up his mind to't when he see'd what a little un she was. He pretends not to see her mostly, or else to think she isn't full-growed" (MF 390). Toward the end of the novel, Bob makes a final comment about Mumps. He says the dog "is rare company" and that he "knows iverything." That "it's a fine thing to hev a dumb brute fond on you: it'll stick to you an' make no jaw" (MF 498). In Bob and Mumps we see two companions that meet almost on common ground; even though they are of a different species, they manage to communicate and bring added humor and humanity to the story.

The character of Philip Wakem is a touching one because he is a hunchback with the heart and skills of a poet. Eliot has a special place in her heart for those who are deformed or in some other way made different by nature. Henry James' famous quote when asked to describe George Eliot was that she was "magnificently ugly—deliciously hideous" perhaps supplies the reason for such tenderness toward those who are less than attractive physically. In referring to Philip she has this to say:

Ugly and deformed people have great need of unusual virtues, because they are likely to be extremely uncomfortable without them: but the theory that unusual virtues spring by a direct consequence out of personal disadvantages, as animals get thicker wool in severe climates, is perhaps a little overstrained. The temptations of beauty are much dwelt upon, but I fancy they only bear the same relation to those of ugliness, as the temptation to excess at a feast, where the delights are varied for eye and ear as well as palate, bears to the temptations that assail the desperation of hunger.

(MF 331)



Eliot seems to be saying in this metaphor that those who are disadvantaged in life by their physical appearance, such as Eliot herself was, have need of other graces, but these mental, psychological and spiritual advantages are not developed because of the physical disadvantages of the owner. Beauty bears the same relation to ugliness as the temptations of a plentiful feast bear to the temptations of desperate hunger. This metaphor is rather obscure and any number of interpretations can be imposed—in fact this is one of the dangers of trying to analyze metaphor. However, a valid perspective on this might be that Eliot seems to be saying that beauty and ugliness exist on different levels: it is inappropriate to compare them, just as it is a mistake to compare a diner at a feast with someone dying of hunger as both being diners, ie. the diner tempted at a feast by a varied menu and with suitable background music and sumptuous furnishings is in a different world than a starving man.

The town of St. Ogg's, where most of the action in this novel takes place, is also a subject for Eliot's metaphorical thought. Eliot describes the town thus:

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, that 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 115-16)

The description of St. Ogg's goes on for a further two paragraphs but what is noteworthy here is the comparison of the town to an "outgrowth" of nature. Its age in human terms is conveyed by the mention of the Roman legions and the Viking invaders; but Eliot goes further by offering images much older in time, images of constructions made for thousands of years by ants and bower-birds. And yet there is also the notion of impermanence in these natural constructions, which are brief in duration and yet paradoxically ageless.

One of the most extended metaphorical descriptions concerns the reverend Mr. Stelling, Tom's schoolmaster, who is ambitious to make his mark in the world. Eliot tells us that teaching came naturally to him, so much so that "he set about it with that uniformity of method and independence of circumstances which distinguish the actions of animals understood to be under the immediate teaching of nature" (MF 138). Eliot selects the beaver as an example, and alludes to the writings of the naturalist Mr. Broderip who kept a beaver in his London flat where the animal "busied himself as earnestly in constructing a dam, in a room up three pair of stairs in London, as if he had been laying his foundation in a stream or lake in upper Canada" (MF *ibid.*). Mr Stelling believes in traditional values—the excellence of religion, the authority of Aristotle, Great Britain as a bulwark of Protestantism—he believed in these things as "a Swiss hotel keeper believes in the beauty of the scenery around him, and in the pleasure it gives to artistic visitors. And in the same way Mr. Stelling believed in this method of education—" (MF *ibid.*). His conclusion is that "Tom's brain, being peculiarly impervious to etymology and demonstrations, was peculiarly in need of being plowed and harrowed by these patient instru-

ments: it was his favourite metaphor, that the classics and geometry constituted that culture of the mind which prepared it for any subsequent crop" (MF *ibid.*). But in the end, Mr. Stelling's teaching turns out "uncomfortably" for Tom: it was as if "he had been plied with cheese in order to remedy a gastric weakness which prevented him from digesting it" (MF 139-40). These various metaphors are followed finally with this reflection:

It is astonishing what a different result one gets by changing the metaphor! Once call the brain an intellectual stomach, and one's ingenious conception of the classics and geometry as ploughs and harrows seems to settle nothing. But then it is open to some one else to follow great authorities, and call the mind a sheet of white paper or a mirror, in which case one's knowledge of the digestive process becomes quite irrelevant. It was doubtless an ingenious idea to call the camel the ship of the desert, but it would hardly lead one far in training that useful beast. O Aristotle! if you had had the advantage of being "the freshest modern" instead of the greatest ancient, would you not have mingled your praise of metaphorical speech, as a sign of high intelligence, with a lamentation that intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor—.

(MF 140)

Aristotle was of course the first thinker to make any claims about the value and use of metaphor, saying "it is the token of genius" (PEPP 761). George Eliot, in her second major novel showed that she possessed this sign of genius.

### **3. Silas Marner**

#### **3.1 Plot**

At just under 200 pages, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* is George Eliot's shortest novel. The novel is set in the early 19th century. Prior to coming to Raveloe, Silas had worked in a northern industrial town where he had been falsely accused of theft and had become outcast. He flees and takes refuge at Raveloe, where he has worked for the last fifteen years. Silas has an affliction, like many of Eliot's characters, and his is that he is periodically struck by catalepsy and goes into trances, unaware of what is going on around him; this affliction has opened him to the charge of theft in the north, for while he was in a trance, his supposed friend actually steals the money in question and blames Silas. So much for friendship.

He now leads a solitary life at Raveloe, hoarding his money and weaving morning to night to make even more money, and thus being seen by the community as a miser. Stories circulate about his hoard of gold coins. Unknown to Silas, Dunstan Cass, the good-for-nothing son of a local squire steals his hoard of gold. Distressed, Silas goes to the local public house to seek help and finds friendship and a welcome into the community instead.

On a winter night, the unacknowledged wife of Dunstan's elder brother, Godfrey, tries to walk with her child to the Cass household to confront him about their secret marriage. She is an opium addict and passes out in the snow near the roadside. Her 2-year-old child wanders into Silas' house through an open door while he is in another trance. Silas keeps the child and names her Eppie. Godfrey marries a beauty named Nancy but they have no children. Silas and his

daughter become accepted members of the community. Sixteen years later the quarry near the Marner house is drained and the skeleton of Dunstan Cass is discovered grasping the stolen money. The shock of the discovery causes Godfrey to confess to Nancy the secret marriage and true identity of Eppie. They offer to adopt Eppie but she prefers to stay with Silas. Silas and Eppie return to the northern town where he was disgraced to prove his innocence but the town has disappeared. Eppie marries the son of a close family friend and this fairy tale ends happily ever after.

### 3.2 Silas and Eppie

Silas Marner has suffered greatly through the falseness of a supposed friend and so retreats to Raveloe and lives alone, weaving in his lonely cottage. His life is simple in its daily humdrum tasks, and Eliot sees him as living a life reduced to “the unquestioning activities of a spinning insect” (SM 17). This metaphor is apt in that like an insect, he is engaged in weaving or “spinning” for his livelihood and also because his activities are so monotonous and predictable that his life is at a rather primitive level. He has been reduced to an “insect-like existence into which his nature has shrunk” (SM 18). This image of an altered life is summed up as a loss of the past, from which “his life had shrunk away, like a rivulet that has sunk far down from the grassy fringe of its old breadth into a little shivering thread, that cuts a groove for itself in the barren sand” (SM 22). Marner’s life has come to this: living alone near the gravel pits, hence the image of a life cutting a groove in barren sand, reduced from one that had formerly flowed on over grassy fields.

The tragedy of the theft of his money renders him open to further misery. Before he lost his gold, his life had been pitiful enough, it might seem. However, it had been an “eager life” which was filled with “immediate purpose” which “fenced him in from the wide, cheerless unknown”; it had been a “clinging” life—though it was only centered on gold, still it satisfied his needs. Now his support had been snatched away and “Marner’s thoughts could no longer move in their old round, and were baffled by a blank like that which meets a plodding ant when the earth has broken away on its homeward path” for he no longer had his gold but only an empty space in his life. He now is in deeper misery because “in the evening (there is)—no phantasm of delight to still the poor soul’s craving” (SM 76).

However, after he adopts Eppie his life changes dramatically. Before, he had isolated himself from life in Raveloe, but now he has changed because of Eppie:

—For fifteen years, he had stood aloof as from a strange thing, wherewith he could have no communion: as some man who has a precious plant to which he would give a nurturing home in a new soil, thinks of the rain, and the sunshine, and all influences, in relation to his nursling, and asks for all knowledge that will help him to satisfy the wants of the searching roots, or to guard leaf and bud from invading harm.

(SM 131)

Eppie is his savior. She has led him away from his narrow and selfish life into the light of a new day. She appears out of the cold and snow, and walks in through his open door like “a

little starved robin" (SM 121) which of course is a harbinger of spring and in this situation she represents the advent of spring in Marner's wintry life.

In order to show that their domestic life together is attended by happiness and comfort, Eliot again chooses animals to convey a message of domestic bliss. As they are returning from church one Sunday, they are observed by a friendly donkey. He was a "meek donkey, not scornfully critical of human trivialities, but thankful to share in them, if possible, by getting his nose scratched; and Eppie did not fail to gratify him with her usual notice, though it was attended with the inconvenience of his following them, painfully, up to the very door of their home" (SM 140). But the donkey is scared away by the sound of a bark inside. This "sharp bark was the sign of an excited welcome that was awaiting them from a knowing brown terrier, who, after dancing at their legs in an excited manner, rushed with a worrying noise at a tortoise-shell kitten under the loom, and then rushed back with his sharp bark again, as much as to say, "I have done my duty by this feeble creature, you perceive" (SM 141). Eliot notes the "presence of this happy animal life" in their household.

This fairy tale is dominated by increasing happiness for Silas and Eppie. Silas gets a family and the trust of the community and Eppie has a father who loves and cares for her. Of all Eliot's novels it is perhaps the most profound in that it concerns the rebirth of a man lost to the world and to himself.

#### **4. Romola**

##### **4.1 Plot**

This novel is set in 1492 Florence where the Medici have just lost power. Many historical figures are presented: Savonarola, Leonardo da Vinci and Machiavelli, among others. The heroine Romola de' Bardi lives with her father Bardo, a scholar, whom she helps with his writings. She has a brother Dino who is a monk and a follower of Savonarola. When Tito, a young, handsome and talented Greek appears, she falls in love with and marries him. But Tito has gone through a mock marriage with Tessa, a milkmaid, by whom he has two children. Tito is treacherous because he has betrayed his foster-father Baldassarre by stealing his gems and leaving him to die in a prison. Upon Bardo's death Tito sells his library and jewels without Romola's knowledge; she sees what a scoundrel he is and leaves Florence disguised as a nun, but Savonarola convinces her to return.

Romola learns about Tito's relationship with Tessa and also of what he has done to his foster-father, Baldassarre. She pleads with Savonarola to spare the life of her godfather Bernardo, but he is executed for his Medici leanings. She then leaves Florence in what seems an empty and enchanted boat and finds herself in a plague-stricken village where she is taken for the Virgin Mary; she tends the sick and dying and when she can do no more, returns to Florence. She sets up house with Tessa and the children and her cousin. Savonarola is burned at the stake. Baldassarre has his revenge on Tito—they both perish in a fight to the death.

##### **4.2 Romola**

Romola is carefully described in the novel. Her hair "was of a reddish-gold colour, enriched by a small unbroken ripple, such as may be seen in the sunset clouds on grandest autumnal evenings" (R 46). She had "small ears" and "long white hand(s)" (ibid.) Her cheeks were

“without any tinge of the rose” and she has “refinement of brow and nostril” with a “full though firm mouth” and a “grand line of her neck and shoulders” (ibid.). She has hazel eyes.

Romola has a “queenly step” and a “tall finely-wrought frame” (R 47). An old woman says, “she has that way of walking, like a procession” (R 131). Eliot notes her “majesty” and the “boy-like frankness of her look and smile” (R 91).

Inner and outer characteristics seem merged in “this woman, whose beauty it was hardly possible to think of as anything but the necessary consequence of her noble nature” (R 125). She is an ideal Renaissance woman; she sits with a certain grandeur, speaks with gravity, smiles with modesty, and has the bearing of a queen—“she seemed to unfold like a strong white lily” when shown admiration or homage by admirers (R 182). She is like a “tall lily” (R 190). Romola herself says, “beauty is part of the finished language which goodness speaks” (R 184).

After Romola’s work to save the village people from the plague, they begin addressing her as “Madonna, Romola” (R 356). She struggles throughout her story to “keep alive that flame of unselfish emotion by which a life of sadness might still be a life of active love” (R 367). Her life has given her an “affinity for sadness which inevitably made her unjust towards merriment. That subtle result of culture which we call Taste was subdued by the need for a deeper motive; just as the nicer demands of the palate are annihilated by urgent hunger” (R 399). While doing her good works, she is seen by one bystander as “going about like a sunbeam amongst the rags that line our corners” (R 372). When Romola comes to the aid of Tessa, the woman Tito has wronged, Tessa feels that it is the Madonna, with a “soft, wonderful voice” and a “heavenly face” (R 407). This lady is lovely, powerful and gentle, just like the real Madonna. In one particularly impressive scene, a youth sees her and “the long lines of her thick grey garment giving a gliding character to her rapid walk, her hair rolling backward and illuminated on the left side by the sun-rays, the little olive baby on her right arm now looking out with jet-black eyes, she might well startle that youth of fifteen, accustomed to swing the censer in the presence of a Madonna less fair and marvellous—” (R 522). In his imagination he has seen the “Holy Mother” who was “as tall as the cypresses” and who had “a light about her head”. Her experience helping the sick was “like a new Baptism to Romola” (R 527).

Romola moves from relative seclusion with her father in the beginning of the novel through a process of sometimes painful self-discovery that leads her to find happiness in helping others who are in pain and misery and in this sense, Eliot has her become a Renaissance Madonna, who saves herself through helping others.

#### **4.3 Tito**

The Greek Tito Melema is Eliot’s conception of unrestrained egotism, and as such he can be seen as the negative force in this novel. He comes as a stranger to Florence and quickly becomes accepted because of his good looks and winning personality. A local painter sees him and asks him to pose for an historical painting of Simon deceiving Priam by convincing the king to allow the Trojan Horse into Troy. Asked to explain to others present why Tito will make a good model for the traitor, the painter’s response is:

A perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on—lips that will lie with a dimpled smile—eyes of such agate-like brightness and depth that

no infamy can dull them—cheeks that will rise from a murder and not look haggard. I say not this young man is a traitor: I mean, he has a face that would make him the more perfect traitor if he had the heart of one—.

(R 41)

But the painter's choice is a good one because Tito is the epitome of a traitor. Tito later demonstrates what a perfect traitor he is, who in one way or another manages to betray no less than four of the main characters, not including himself. Tito is not a conscious and purposeful villain, he is rather a character who, in seeking for his own personal pleasure, finds it necessary to sacrifice others. One of the initial metaphors for Tito sees him as a snake with a lithe sleekness about him which seems "marvellously fitted for slipping easily into any nest he fixes his mind on" (R 72). Physically he is most beautiful. He is a "lovely boy" who has "ineffable good humor" in "the curves of (his) mouth" (R 96). However, the "strong, unmistakable expression in his whole air and person was a negative one, and it was perfectly veracious; it declared the absence of any uneasy claim, and restless vanity, and it made the admiration that followed him—a thoroughly willing tribute" (R 98). When he seduces Tessa, Eliot notes that "Tito's nature was all gentleness" (R 101) and the "softness of his nature required that all sorrow should be hidden from him" (R 107). One of his main faults is his "unconquerable aversion to anything unpleasant" (R 105) so that this becomes the center of his moral weakness and therefore his evil.

That Tito has betrayed his adopted father there is no question; his rationalizations for his base conduct are clever and powerful, so powerful that his "thought showed itself as active as a virulent acid, eating its way through all the tissues of sentiment" (R 112). Though they marry, he and Romola are direct opposites; her life is "an image of that loving, pitying devotedness, that patient endurance of irksome tasks, from which he had shrunk—" (R 113). Perhaps he seeks from Romola something he can never find alone for "Romola's deep calm happiness encompassed Tito like the rich but quiet evening light which dissipates all unrest" (R 117).

But perhaps one of the most damning passages about Tito comes in a dream sequence related to Romola by her dying brother, a monk. He sees her in a dream being married to "a man whose face was a blank" (R 152). Her brother tells her that "the priest who married you had the face of death; and the graves opened, and the dead in their shrouds rose and followed you like a bridal train" (R 152). The bridal party comes to a place of desolation where the faceless man releases her hand and goes away, and as he does so, her brother sees his face and it is "the face of the Great Tempter" (R 153)—the devil has led her to destruction in the dream.

Tito has already tempted poor Tessa and caused her much misery—but her youthful needs are to him as "the far-off cry of some little suffering animal buried in the thicket, to a merry cavalcade in the sunny plain" (R 189). His true nature is recognized finally by Romola with scorn as she understands "that thing called pleasure which made men base—that dexterous contrivance for selfish ease, that shrinking from endurance and strain, when others were bowing beneath burthens too heavy for them, which now made one image with her husband" (R 304). He "would have been capable of treading the breath from a smiling child for the sake of his own safety" (R 333). Tito's betrayal of those who love him or depend on him is the worst of evils because Romola grasps the importance of "the sanctity attached to all close relations,

and, therefore, pre-eminently to the closest, was but the expression in outward law of the result towards which all human goodness and nobleness must spontaneously tend; that the light abandonment of ties, whether inherited or voluntary, because they had ceased to be pleasant, was the uprooting of social and personal virtue" (R 442). But Tino's falsehoods and betrayals have left their mark on him, falsehood's twin, which is fear, had become an "undying habit" (R 513) with him. In the end his fears are realized and he dies of drowning, but not before the one he has most wronged, his adopted father, has the satisfaction of watching Tito's life drain away.

#### 4.4 Tessa

Tessa bears some resemblance to Hetty in *Mill on the Floss* in that both are simple, pretty, vain, and ultimately victims of men. Tessa feels that Tito is a moral man because he is "so beautiful—like the people going into Paradise—they are all good" (R 102). Her father-in-law, on the contrary, is "wicked; he is very ugly" (R 103). Tessa is perhaps Tito's easiest victim because she is so child-like. She sits "quiet as a dove on its nest" (R 105) in her happiness with Tito; as he lies sleeping she blissfully watches him, and Eliot compares her to a small fish:

It takes very little water to make a perfect pond for a tiny fish, where it will find its world and paradise all in one, and never have a presentiment of the dry bank. The fretted summer shade, and stillness, and the gentle breathing of some loved life near—it would be paradise to us all, if eager thought, the strong angel with implacable brow, had not long since closed the gates.

(R 106)

Tito sees Tessa as "a small fieldflower" and feels a real hunger for her "ignorant lovingness" because her "little soul was an inviting refuge" (R 287-88). She rests her hand on his knee and looks up at him like "one of Fra Lippo Lippi's round-cheeked adoring angels" (R 289).

Later, Romola rescues Tessa from a bad situation with some youths. Tessa is confused and miserable when suddenly "a gentle hand was laid on her arm, and a soft, wonderful voice, as if the Holy Madonna were speaking, said, 'Do not be afraid; no one shall harm you'" (R 407). Tessa has the sense that "loving protection was near her" (ibid.). Romola is her final benefactor after Tito drowns. Romola tells her, "I am come to take care of you always" and "God has sent me to you again" (R 534).

In the Epilogue, Romola tells the child Lillo, Tito's and Tessa's son, about a man she once knew who "made everyone fond of him, for he was young, and clever, and beautiful and his manners to all were gentle and kind. I believe, when I first knew him, he never thought of doing anything cruel or base. But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds—such as make men infamous. He denied his father, and left him to misery; he betrayed every trust that was reposed in him, that he might keep himself safe and get rich and prosperous. Yet calamity overtook him" (R 548). Of course, the child Lillo does not know that Romola is speaking of her husband and his father but Eliot's message is clear to the reader: the weakness that causes the choice of what is comfortable and expedient at the sacrifice of duty and a moral sense leads to destruction; Romola's triumph over obstacles through duty and

service to others is contrasted with Tito's avoidance of duty and his resulting treachery toward others which leads to his destruction.

## **5. Felix Holt: The Radical**

### **5.1 Plot**

This novel is set in the year 1832 just after the Great Reform Bill. Harold Transome returns home and shocks his mother by announcing he will stand as a Radical MP in the coming election; Felix Holt also returns home and announces to his mother that he refuses to sell quack medicines, his father's former business. He intends, rather, to live and work among the poor. As the campaign progresses, Felix finds out that bribery has taken place and makes a speech against it. However, a riot brews and Felix tries to avert further trouble by leading the rioters away from the town, but a constable is accidentally killed and Felix is blamed because he is mistakenly thought to be the leader of the riot. He is found guilty, but Esther Lyon, a minister's daughter, pleads for him with some influential people and he is released a year later. He marries Esther and they live together with her father, Rufus Lyon.

### **5.2 Mrs. Transome's Trials**

Mrs. Transome is one of Eliot's most disappointed characters; her life is presented as a series of frustrations and blocked goals. Early in the novel Eliot tells us that "nothing had come just as she had wished" in her life or in her hopes for her son. She had expected "possession of this child would give unity to her life" and make the coming years glad. However,

The mother's early raptures lasted but a short time, and even while they lasted there had grown up in the midst of them a hungry desire, like a black and poisonous plant feeding in the sunlight, —the desire that her first, rickety, ugly imbecile child should die, and leave room for her darling, of whom she could be proud. Such desires make life a hideous lottery, where every day may turn up a blank; where men and women who have the softest beds and the most delicate eating, who have a very large share of that sky and earth which some are born to have no more of than the fraction to be got in a crowded entry, yet grow haggard, fevered and restless, like those who watch in other lotteries. Day after day, year after year, had yielded blanks; new cares had come, bringing other desires for results quite beyond her grasp, which must also be watched for in the lottery; and all the while the round-limbed pet had been growing into a strong youth, who liked many things better than his mother's caresses, and who had a much keener consciousness of his independent existence than of his relation to her: the lizard's egg, that white rounded passive prettiness, had become a brown, darting, determined lizard. The mother's love is at first an absorbing delight, blunting all other sensibilities; it is an expansion of the animal existence; it enlarges the imagined range for self to move in; but in after years it can only continue to be joy on the same terms as other long-lived love— that is, by much suppression of self, and power of living in the experience of another.

(FH 23)



The type of disappointment she feels in her son sets the tone for much of her experience in the novel; she becomes one of the most interesting characters in *Felix Holt*. She feels her son's independence and self-willed nature are like "the unmanageable strength of a great bird which has alighted near her, and allowed to stroke its wing for a moment because food lay near her" (FH 26).

Mrs. Tansome has other trials to be borne and gotten through. Time is the enemy and her particular place in time is to her disadvantage because "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 30). At one point she describes herself to Esther thusly: "A fidgety old woman like me is as unpleasant to see as a rook with its wing broken" (FH 432). Eliot sees Mrs. Tansome's "keen sensibility and dread, which lay screened behind all her petty habits and narrow notions" as "some small quivering thing with eyes and throbbing heart may lie crouching behind withered rubbish" (FH 31). Not a pretty metaphor at all; the reader soon becomes aware of just how much Mrs. Tansome has been hurt and rejected by her son and others she has trusted and placed her hopes in. When her son confronts her about who his father is, "she seemed as if age were striking her with a sudden wand—as if her trembling face were getting haggard before him" (FH 458). This is clearly a character who suffers.

### 5.3 Little Mr. Lyon

Eliot presents Rufus Lyon very affectionately and it is clear that she invests him with many values she prized. For example, he is a minister and as such is accustomed to self-renunciation for the sake of others, but he devotes himself for a three-year period to a dying French woman (and her baby whom he adopts after the woman's death) he has fallen in love with; and his love is of an ideal type: "a first love of a fresh young heart full of wonder and worship" (FH 85). Eliot sees his care for the mother and child as "a period of such self-suppression and life in another such as few men know" (FH 89). He feels guilt over his attachment to her as a man but devotes himself none the less; this guilt affects him strongly and Eliot comments that "In a mind of any nobleness, a lapse into transgression against an object still regarded as supreme (his ministry) issues in a new and purer devotedness, chastised by humility and watched over by a passionate regret" (FH 167). His care for her is a "more thorough renunciation than he had ever known in the time of his complete devotion to his ministerial career" (ibid.). The paradox at the center of this relationship is that "he knew he had fallen" but "the satisfaction he had was the satisfaction of his tenderness—which meant untiring work, untiring patience, untiring wakefulness even to the dumb signs of feeling in a creature whom he alone cared for" (ibid.). The adopted child, Esther, of course becomes the new object of his devotion after her mother dies.

Eliot puts some of the most interesting and arresting speeches into Mr. Lyon's mouth. For instance, he warns Felix about the dangers of pride and scorn by saying, "The temptations that most beset those who have great natural gifts, and are wise after the flesh, are pride and scorn, more particularly towards those weak things of the world which have been chosen to confound the things that are mighty. The scornful nostril and high head gather not the odours that lie on the track of truth. The mind that is too ready at contempt and reprobation is as a clenched fist

that can give blows, but is shut up from receiving and holding ought (aught) that is precious—though it were heaven-sent manna” (FH 66). The metaphor of the clenched fist well captures the debilitating nature that pride has on the mind, rendering it unable to learn and feel because it is shut up within itself.

In one of the most-quoted passages in the book, Mr. Lyon cautions Felix again to be simple and straightforward:

Hush, hush, my young friend, play not with paradoxes. That caustic which you handle in order to scorch others, may happen to sear your own fingers and make them dead to the quality of things. ‘Tis difficult enough to see our own way and keep our torch steady in this dim labyrinth: to whirl the torch and dazzle the eyes of our fellow-seekers is a poor daring, and may end in total darkness.

(FH 150)

This warning against sarcasm and paradox contains a metaphor of some power: of life as a dark winding cave, of thought and speech as a lighted torch with which to show the way, of verbal acrobatics as a danger leading to confusion and disorientation.

Though Mr. Lyon is full of wisdom, most people either laugh at him for his eccentricities or fail to notice him at all, since he is a dissenting preacher. There is a nice simile summing up Mrs. Transome’s reaction, or lack of it, to him. “Mrs. Transome hardly noticed Mr. Lyon, not from studied haughtiness, but from sheer mental inability to consider him—as a person ignorant of natural history is unable to consider a fresh-water polype otherwise than a sort of animated weed, certainly not fit for table” (FH 364). This type of figure is common in Eliot’s metaphorical thought and usage: it is based on her knowledge of and enthusiasm for biology and the life sciences; a pastime she shared with her husband George Lewes.

Mr. Lyon, like many of Eliot’s clergymen, is a good man if somewhat put upon by the world; he is the steady center in a novel of many eventful changes.

#### 5.4 Miscellaneous

A few of Eliot’s metaphors are not easily grouped or classified as being about, or referent to, certain characters or places; however, they are still worth citing, and therefore are included here.

When Harold comes into his inheritance, he observes about his property that a “park without fine timber is no better than a beauty without teeth and hair” (FH 21) which conveys his proprietary interest and possessiveness.

The nobleman of the area, Sir Maximus, is compared to an aging dinosaur; his estate is large and his dependents many; it is observed that “a man of Sir Maximus’s rank is like those antediluvian animals whom the system of things condemned to carry such a huge bulk that they really could not inspect their bodily appurtenance, and had no conception of their own tails: their parasites doubtless had a merry time of it, and often did extremely well when the high-bred saurian himself was ill at ease” (FH 98). This seems a variant of “when the cat is away, the mice will play” but the difference here is that Sir Maximus, while physically present, is abstracted from noticing because of his cares and pre-occupations (his huge bulk).

One of what Eliot referred to as “mottoes” or chapter epigraphs, metaphorically satirizes the nature of crowds:

Oh, sir, 'twas that mixture of spite and over-fed merriment which passes for humor with the vulgar. In their fun they have much resemblance to a turkey-cock. It has a cruel beak, and a silly iteration of ugly sounds, it spreads its tail in self-glorification, but shows you the wrong side of that ornament—liking admiration, but knowing not what is admirable. (FH 142)

This observation on crowds is one of a number concerning city life. Eliot understands life in “the metropolis, where narrow space had the same sort of effect on men as on thickly-planted trees” (FH 205).

Though this novel does not yield the wealth of metaphors and similes to be found in a novel like *Middlemarch*, it still contains many interesting examples and insights not found elsewhere in Eliot's oeuvre.

## 6. Middlemarch

### 6.1 Plot

This is Eliot's most accomplished and justly famous novel; in length it is memorable too at nearly 800 pages. As the subtitle, “A Study of Provincial Life,” suggests, it is concerned with the lives of the residents of a Midlands town. The narrative can be seen as having four parts: the first involves the moneyed and idealistic Dorothea Brooke, who marries the much older clergyman and scholar Edward Casaubon; this marriage is clearly a mistake and Dorothea is released at the death of her husband; she then falls in love with Casaubon's cousin, Will Ladislaw, whom she finally marries. The second story follows the life of Tertius Lydgate, an idealistic doctor who marries Rosamond Vincy, the pretty but selfish daughter of a local manufacturer; his problems are his wife, who strains his limited budget and his mounting debt; Fred Vincy, Rosamond's brother, falls in love with and marries Mary Garth, who is his childhood sweetheart; her father, Caleb is one of the admirable characters in the novel and her other suitor, the Rev. Camden Farebrother, renounces his own interest in Mary in favor of Fred; the fourth story involves the banker Bulstrode and his shameful past; he is being blackmailed by a man named Raffles whose death he brings about during the latter's illness; he eventually leaves town because of the shame. There are many more characters, like Mrs. Cadwallader, who provides much of the humor in the novel.

### 6.2 Dorothea

To her sister Celia, she is simply “Dodo”; to her husband Mr. Casaubon, she is “My dear”; to others she is at first Miss Brooke, then Mrs. Casaubon. All her “passion was transfused through a mind struggling towards an ideal life” (M 41), a life she strives through this novel to make real. Her quest is perhaps quixotic because she realizes that “no one...thought as she did about life and its best objects” (M 46).

When Dorothea first learns that Mr. Casaubon is coming to dinner, her sister Celia notices that “something like the reflection of a white sunlit wing had passed across her features, ending

in one of her rare blushes" (M 43). But the idealism with which she enters into the marriage soon fades and she is left with the stark reality of the mismatch. Still, idealism seems to be an inborn trait with her rather than an acquired intellectual leaning; just as inborn seems her trust. "No nature could be less suspicious than hers: when she was a child she believed in the gratitude of wasps and the honorable susceptibility of sparrows, and was proportionately indignant when their baseness was made manifest" (M 201). One facet of Dorothea's goodness is clearly revealed while discussing belief with Will Ladislaw. She feels it unjust that she has so much more material wealth than others, but she is comforted by her belief

That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't know quite what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.  
(M 367)

Quite a few of Dorothea's pronouncements are of this order. Such things as, "I believe that people are almost always better than their neighbors think they are" (M 691) and "what do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?" (ibid.) are typical of her. Like many of Eliot's heroines, Dorothea represents good—her effect on others is seen by Eliot as one where "The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us; we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character" (M 717). Like Romola before her (who was compared to the Madonna), Dorothea is seen by the doctor Lydgate as having "a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary" (M 723). The final summation on Dorothea comes in a simile on the very last page of *Middlemarch* and it is rightly renowned:

Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

(M 785)

This quotation can fairly be seen as embodying Eliot's philosophy throughout her novels. Dorothea's being has an effect for the good on all around her, and people like her who have lived a worthy life are responsible for the diminution of evil and the promotion of the good that others in the world enjoy. This brings to mind another of Eliot's famous sayings, found in a letter to Charles Bray, "If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally." Just as her heroines and heroes seek to improve the lives of those with whom they come in contact, so Eliot seeks to morally improve the lives of her readers.

### 6.3 Mr. Casaubon

The basic metaphor for this character is death. He is a man of the church and a scholar,

researching his great work, *The Key to All Mythologies*. He is a “dried bookworm towards fifty” (M 21). Early in the novel he is described as having “iron-grey hair” and “deep eye-sockets” with a “pale complexion”; his research, he admits, causes him to “live too much with the dead. My mind is somewhat like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to reconstruct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and confusing changes” (M 16). Eliot supplies a striking image of Mr. Casaubon’s soul, which was “sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying” (M 262). Mr. Casaubon’s chosen role of scholar saddens Eliot:

For my part I am very sorry for him. It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted.

(M 263)

Dorothea’s sister, Celia, sees Casaubon as an irritation and an eyesore, exclaiming to Dorothea, “How very ugly Mr. Casaubon is!” (M 19); Celia notices that he has “two white moles with hairs on them” and he is “sallow,” and most irritating to her, he noisily eats his soup at dinner: “Really, Dodo, can’t you hear how he scrapes his spoon? And he always blinks before he speaks” (M 45). The two sisters react differently to Casaubon because Dorothea sees (or hopes to see) his soul and spirit, while her sister sees only his physical appearance; this dichotomy in perception runs through all Eliot’s works: the need to understand the nature of and relationship between physical appearance and spirit or soul. In this novel, the difference is that “Miss Brooke was certainly very naive, with all her alleged cleverness. Celia, whose mind had never been thought too powerful, saw the emptiness of other people’s pretensions much more easily” (M 59). This is because, though Celia is “innocent-looking,” she is “knowing and worldly-wise” compared to Dorothea; “so much subtler is a human mind than the outside tissues which make a sort of blazonry or clock-face for it” (M 9).

Casaubon’s smile is like “pale wintry sunshine” (M 24). Another character feels he “is no better than a mummy” (M 54). Yet another thinks he could never have been “much more than the shadow of a man” (M 63). Casaubon even “looks like a death’s head skinned over” (M 84). He is always “buried” in books; his books and papers are “mummies” too; his home becomes a “virtual tomb” to her. He seeks to keep “his cold grasp” (M 463) on Dorothea.

What haunts Mr. Casaubon’s life, what is left of it, is the morbid consciousness that others did not give him the place which he had not demonstrably merited—a perpetual suspicious conjecture that the views entertained of him were not to his advantage—a melancholy absence of passion in his efforts at achievement, and a passionate resistance to the confession that he had achieved nothing.

(M 391)

Mr. Casaubon is one of the most important negative characters in any of Eliot's novels. As death nears, we find him walking among "dark yew-trees (which) gave him a mute companionship in melancholy, and the little shadows of bird or leaf that fledged across the isles of sunlight, stole along in silence as in the presence of a sorrow" (M 397). Now for the first time he finds himself "looking into the eyes of death" (M 398). Casaubon feels the truth of a commonplace, the truth that we all must die:

—which is as different from what we call knowing it, as the vision of waters upon the earth is different from the delirious vision of the water which cannot be had to soothe the burning tongue. When the commonplace 'We must all die' transforms itself suddenly into the acute consciousness 'I must die—and soon' then death grapples us, and his fingers are cruel; afterwards, he may come to fold us in his arms as our mother did, and our last moment of dim earthly discerning may be like the first. To Mr Casaubon now, it was as if he suddenly found himself on the dark river-bank and heard the splash of the oncoming oar, not discerning the forms, but expecting the summons. In such an hour the mind does not change its lifelong bias, but carries it onward in imagination to the other side of death, gazing backward—perhaps with the divine calm of beneficence, perhaps with the petty anxieties of self-assertion.

(ibid.)

Dorothea, as his wife, offers sympathy and love, which he rejects even at this hour in his life. She attempts to comfort him; she passes her "pliant arm" though his "rigid" one and as she does so the reader realizes the basic opposition between their two natures: hers young and willing to bend, his fossilized and resistant to her love. She feels despair: "There was something horrible to Dorothea in the sensation which this unresponsive hardness inflicted on her. That is a strong word, but not too strong: it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, the earth bears no harvest of sweetness—calling their denial knowledge" (M 399). After this penultimate scene, he goes to his library and shuts himself in "alone with his sorrow" (ibid.), which is how he dies soon after.

#### 6.4 Celia

Dorothea's sister is most amusing; she says amusing things, has amusing likes and dislikes and constantly needs to be amused by others. A typical response from Dorothea to one of Celia's observations is, "Oh, Kitty, you are a wonderful creature!" (M 32). Celia has fears; for instance, about Mr. Casaubon's effect on Dorothea: "'—I was afraid you would be getting so learned', said Celia, regarding Mr. Casaubon's learning as a kind of damp which might in due time saturate a neighboring body" (M 261); perhaps one of the first instances in literature of learning being seen as a physical phenomenon. Celia further observes that Dorothea "is fond of melancholy things and ugly people" (M 306). Unlike Dorothea, Celia has common sense.

Celia also has distinct dislikes; as mentioned earlier, Mr. Casaubon is one of them. At dinner, he tries to be friendly, "smiling and bending his head towards Celia, who immediately

dropped backward a little, because she could not bear Mr Casaubon to blink at her” (M 71). On the other hand, later she “was surprised to find that Mr Casaubon could say something quite amusing” (M 76), so perhaps Celia has learned to tolerate him as a brother-in-law.

### 6.5 Mrs. Cadwallader

Mrs. Cadwallader is a lady who “pleaded poverty, pared down prices, and cut jokes in the most companionable manner, though with a turn of the tongue that let you know who she was” (M 48). Married to the local rector, she supplies much of the humor in the book. She makes people wince. Her husband, in contrast, is no human whirlpool, he is calm and good-natured, with “that solid imperturbable ease and good-humor which is infectious, and like great grassy hills in the sunshine, quiets even an irritated egoism, and makes it rather ashamed of itself” (M 62-63). He is therefore a fine match for his wife with her ceaseless activity and busyness. But sharp observation and humor are also her traits. From Celia, she learns of Dorothea’s upcoming marriage to Mr. Casaubon. The following ensues:

‘Oh, Mrs Cadwallader, I don’t think it can be nice to marry a man with a great soul.’ Well, my dear, take warning. You know the look of one now; when the next comes and wants to marry you, don’t you accept him’

(M 51)

Because she is married to a poor clergyman, she is obliged to “pray to heaven for my salad oil” (M 52). Such throw-away lines appear throughout the novel; however, the metaphor that fixes Mrs. Cadwallader for all time is one that is justly famous and deserves a full quote:

Now, why on earth should Mrs. Cadwallader have been at all busy about Miss Brooke’s marriage; and why, when one match that she liked to think she had a hand in was frustrated, should she have straightway contrived the preliminaries of another? Was there any ingenious plot, and hide-and-seek course of action, which might be detected by a careful telescopic watch? Not at all; a telescope might have swept the parishes of Tipton and Freshitt, the whole area visited by Mrs. Cadwallader in her phaeton, without witnessing any interview that could excite suspicion, or any scene from which she did not return with the same unperturbed keenness of eye and same high natural colour. In fact, if that convenient vehicle had existed in the days of the Seven Sages, one of them would doubtless have remarked, that you can know little of women by following them about in their pony phaetons. Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; *for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. In this way, metaphorically speaking, a strong lens applied to Mrs Cadwallader’s match-making will show a play of minute causes producing what*

*may be called thought and speech vortices to bring her the sort of food she needed.*

(italics mine; M 55)

So Mrs. Cadwallader uses her intellectual and verbal talents to control, or at least to influence, events around her. But to compare her to a paramecium is perhaps as startling today as it was 150 years ago. It seems clear that this passage was inspired by her studies with Lewes in biology. However, the inspiration lies in the comparison of the function of the tiny hairlets of the microscopic animal with the “thought and speech” vortices of Mrs. C. The “food” she needs is obviously to be overseer of life in Middlemarch. The ceaseless movement of the paramecium fits the activities of the excellent lady herself. The news that she gathers is usually reproduced in “an excellent pickle of epigrams” (M *ibid.*). While her mind is as “active as phosphorus” (M 56), she is the “diplomatist of Tipton and Freshitt” (*ibid.*).

## 6.6 Mary Garth

Mary Garth’s “reigning virtue” is “honesty” and “truth-telling fairness” (M 105). Her physical appearance is much like Eliot’s own; she “was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low; and it would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues” (M 104). At this point, Eliot digresses to the philosophical observation that “plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as beauty; it is apt either to feign amiability, or, not feigning it, to show all the repulsiveness of discontent —” (*ibid.*).

She tends the dying man of the story, Mr. Featherstone, “an aged creature whose life is not visibly anything but a remnant of vices” who on his deathbed “looked at her like an aged hyena” (M 295). Though only twenty-two, she early realizes that things in life “were not likely to be arranged for her peculiar satisfaction” (M 295). She takes life “very much as a comedy in which she had a proud, nay, a generous resolution not to act the mean or treacherous part. Mary might have become cynical if she had not had parents whom she honored, and a well of affectionate gratitude within her, which was all the fuller because she had learned to make no unreasonable claims” (*ibid.*). She has a great deal of wisdom for one so young; she likes her own thoughts. At another point in the novel, Eliot pauses to observe Mary again:

If you want to know more particularly how Mary looked, ten to one you will see a face like hers in the crowded street tomorrow, if you are there on the watch: she will not be among those daughters of Zion who are haughty, and walk with stretched-out necks and haughty eyes, mincing as they go. Let all that pass, and fix your eyes on some small plump brownish person of firm but quiet carriage, who looks about her, but does not suppose that anybody is looking at her. If she has a broad face and square brow, well-marked eyebrows and curly dark hair, a certain expression of amusement in her glance which her mouth keeps the secret of, and for the rest features entirely insignificant—take that ordinary but not disagreeable person for a portrait of Mary Garth. If you made her smile, she would show you perfect little teeth; if you made her angry, she would not raise



her voice, but would probably say one of the bitterest things you have ever tasted the flavour of; if you did her a kindness, she would never forget it.

(M 382)

Mary is an admirable character; her father, Caleb, is even more to be admired.

### 6.7 Caleb Garth

Perhaps one of the most admirable characters in any of Eliot's works, Mary's father Caleb is the locus of many of Eliot's highest moral pronouncements. Caleb "was one of those men who are rigid to themselves and indulgent to others" (M 218). The narrator notes that "his virtual divinities were good practical schemes, accurate work, and the faithful completion of undertakings: his prince of darkness was a slack workman" (M 236). This last, the slack workman, is ironic because his favorite, Fred Vincy, is just such a character. Caleb had "a reverential soul with a strong practical intelligence" (*ibid.*), much like Eliot herself. All of the characteristics listed above, practical schemes, accurate work, faithful completion of undertakings, a reverential soul and a strong practical intelligence, are cardinal characteristics of the authoress herself.

Another indication that Eliot favors this character is that she uses an animal metaphor/simile to describe him; when Mary kisses him, "the expression of his large brows soften (ed) as the expression of a great beautiful dog softens when it is caressed" (M 241). His strong sense of personal honor even extends to others; he declines to recognize or become involved with the private affairs of others: "But Caleb was peculiar: certain human tendencies which are commonly strong were almost absent from his mind; and one of these was curiosity about personal affairs. Especially if there was anything discreditable to be found out concerning another man, Caleb preferred not to know it" (M 491).

When Caleb speaks to a group of irate workmen it is with a sense of physical fearlessness but with some mental reservation. He begins with "Why, my lads, how's this?—taking as usual to brief phrases, which seemed pregnant to himself, because he had many thoughts lying under them, like the abundant roots of a plant that just manages to peep above the water" (M 525). One of Caleb's deeper thoughts is expressed for the benefit of his favorite, Fred Vincy. He expresses it "with the air of a man who felt himself to be saying something deeply religious":

'You must be sure of two things: you must love your work, and not be always looking over the edge of it, wanting your play to begin. And the other is, you must not be ashamed of your work, and think it more honorable to you to be doing something else. You must have a pride in your own work and in learning to do it well, and not be always saying, There's this and there's that—if I had this or that to do, I might make something of it. No matter what a man is—I wouldn't give twopence for him, here Caleb's mouth looked bitter, and he snapped his fingers—'whether he was the prime minister or the rick-thatcher, if he didn't do well what he undertook to do.'

(M 527-28)

Here he has much in common with Adam Bede, another of Eliot's admirable moral creations. This speech sets up one of the most insightful comments characterizing Mr. Garth, namely that "The young ones have always a claim on the old to help them forward" (M 529). Caleb is truly a man who lives by his principles, and his principles usually center on helping others in need. He is never absolute in his judgments except "on someone else's behalf" (ibid.). The one on whose side he stands is truly in need of help; Fred Vincy is surrounded by detractors and it appears Caleb is his only supporter:

The lad is good at bottom, and clever enough to do, if he's put in the right way; and he loves and honours my daughter beyond anything, and she has given him a sort of promise according to what he turns out. *I say that young man's soul is in my hand; and I'll do the best I can for him, so help me God! It's my duty, Susan.*

(Italics mine M 531)

This is one of the most moving moments in the entire novel; though coming from the lips of a minor character, the nobility of this sentiment, that the young have a claim on the old and that the old have a duty to the young, is a very old truth often overlooked because of its supposed self-evidence. It is expressive of the high moral tone to be found in all of Eliot's novels. Caleb's "ardent generosity" makes him an Eliot hero.

## 7. Daniel Deronda

### 7.1 Plot

This novel has two narrative strands: one is the story of Gwendolen Harleth, who is beautiful, spirited and spoiled—a woman who marries badly; the other is Daniel's discovery of his identity and his purpose in life. The opening scene finds Gwendolen gambling in a German resort while being observed by Daniel. She is called home to England because of family financial problems.

Daniel has been raised by his guardian, Sir Hugo Malinger, but knows nothing of his real family, though he thinks he may be Sir Hugo's son. Seeking a goal in life, he gives up his studies to travel. On the bank of the Thames, he sees a beautiful young woman, Mirah, about to drown herself; he prevents her and finds her lodgings with friends. Through Mirah, he becomes interested in Judaism and meets a Jewish pawnbroker, Ezra Cohen, and his lodger, Mordecai, a scholar and visionary who is dying of consumption. Daniel becomes his disciple and realizes Mordecai is Mirah's lost brother, and so unites the brother and sister.

Gwendolen is suffering in her marriage to the aristocratic Grandcourt and sees Daniel as her savior and guide. A critical scene takes place in Genoa, where Gwendolen and Grandcourt are on a sailing trip, and Grandcourt drowns. Daniel, for his part, meets his real mother in this city and she reveals on her deathbed that he is Jewish. After Grandcourt drowns in the sailing accident, Gwendolen seeks comfort with Daniel but he is in love with Mirah and cannot offer her what she seeks. Daniel marries Mirah and decides his vocation is to help the Jewish people. He receives a letter from Gwendolen telling him she is a better person for having known him. He decides to travel to the east with Mirah and Mordecai but the scholar dies before they set

out.

## 7.2 Gwendolen

The opening scene of this novel is famous for the way in which Eliot describes the vice of gambling and how she places the beautiful Gwen amongst the seemingly less-than-human denizens of the gambling hall. Eliot describes the gamblers in some interesting ways. One man is “a slight metamorphosis of a vulture” (DD 4); a woman is prematurely old “withered after short bloom like her artificial flowers; a respectable London tradesman is fine in appearance, and does not suffer from “gambling-fever”—he can leave it when he begins to lose—for the “vice in gambling lay in losing at it” (ibid.); there is a man with the air of a “worn-out libertine” who plays with “fierce yet tottering impulsiveness” (DD 5). Each player differs from every other, but one commonality unites them all: there was “a certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask—as if they had all eaten of some root that for the time compelled the brains of each to the same monotony of action” (ibid.). Daniel notices the “dull, gas-poisoned absorption” (ibid.) of the players when he finally and lastly notices the beautiful Gwen.

Eliot describes Gwendolen as a “Nereid” or sea-nymph, dressed in green with silver ornaments; one onlooker sees her as “a sort of serpent” and it is clear that Eliot is making a moral comment on Gwendolen. Another bystander is of the opinion that “Woman was tempted by a serpent: why not man?” because Gwen has a “sort of Lamia beauty” (ibid.), again a reference to serpents. Her walk is even serpent-like, as we see her “usual floating movement, every line in her figure and drapery falling in gentle curves attractive to all eyes except those which discerned in them too close a resemblance to the serpent, and objected to the revival of serpent-worship” (DD 13). This otherness is set in relief when Eliot compares Gwen with her handsome suitor, Rex; though he is handsome, there was “nothing corresponding to the undefinable stinging quality—as it were a trace of demon ancestry—which made some beholders hesitate in their admiration of Gwendolen” (DD 55). The demon in her causes her to be dismayed by Rex and his honest love for her. “The perception that poor Rex wanted to be tender made her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger” (DD 66). This simile shows her emotional fear of closeness as an almost physical withdrawal.

Gwendolen’s attitude about women other than herself actually sheds some light on her own more dangerous character. In talking to Grandcourt, she expresses the opinion that women are “brought up like flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous” (DD 113). Hell hath no fury like a woman bored.

Her egoism, which in Eliot’s world is a grave sin, is apparent from the beginning of this tale. Sitting in front of her looking glass that evening, “her face gathered a complacency gradual as the cheerfulness of the morning—(she) leaned forward and kissed the cold glass—” (DD 13). This act places her.

Gwendolen shares with other egoists “a determination to have what is pleasant, with a total fearlessness in making themselves disagreeable or dangerous when they did not get it” (DD 33). Because of her beauty and self-regard, she “had a keen sense of absurdity in others” (DD 35). But this sense leads her to make stupid mistakes. She underestimates Mrs. Arrowpoint, for

instance:

But self-confidence is apt to address itself to an imaginary dullness in others; as people who are well-off speak in a cajoling tone to the poor, and those who are in the prime of life raise their voice and talk artificially to seniors, hastily conceiving them to be deaf and rather imbecile.

(DD 35)

Like certain other of the beautiful self-centered women in Eliot's novels, Gwendolen dislikes ugliness, saying at one point, "I can't bear having ugly people so near me" (DD 96); when asked whom she means by "ugly people" she replies, "Oh, plenty" (ibid.). At another point Eliot comments that Gwendolen "was subject to physical antipathies" (DD 101) very much like Celia in *Middlemarch*. A good example of Eliot's ability to convey psychological truth appears in a comment concerning the dichotomy of ugliness and beauty: "ugliness having naturally the air of involuntary exposure, and beauty, of display" (DD 360).

In contrast to the opening chapter, where her beauty is seen as serpent-like, in a later chapter she is compared to a flower; she "looked lovely and vigorous as a tall, newly-opened lily" and she moved about "like a wood-nymph" under the beech trees (DD 124).

Gwendolen declares more than once "men were hateful. Yes, men were hateful" (DD 195) but she makes an exception and marries Grandcourt, declaring to her mamma, "We shall match each other. I should hate a man who went down on his knees, and came fawning on me. He is really not disgusting" (DD 264). By marrying a man she does not love but who can ensure her and her family a comfortable life, Gwendolen is following her darker impulses. In her nature "there was a combination of proud reserve with rashness, of perilously-poised terror with defiance, which might alternately flatter and disappoint control. She had a native love of homage, and belief in her own power; but no cold artifice for the sake of enslaving. And the poor thing's belief in her power, with her other dreams before marriage, had often to be thrust aside now like the toys of a sick child, which it looks at with dull eyes, and has no heart to play with, however it may try" (DD 354). Her distaste for her husband builds, so that further along we find:

'Whenever you like,' said Grandcourt, pushing away his plate, and leaning back in his chair while he looked at her with his most lizard-like expression, and played with the ears of the tiny spaniel on his lap (Gwendolen had taken a dislike to the dogs because they fawned on him). —as she turned her eyes away from his, and lifting a prawn before her, looked at the boiled ingenuousness of its eyes as preferable to the lizard's.

(DD 502)

Her loathing for her husband in seeing him as lizard-like is horribly contrasted with her growing regard and love for Deronda. In the penultimate chapters, she becomes more isolated from Grandcourt, so that on his yacht she feels that "quarreling with Grandcourt was impossible: she might as well have made angry remarks to a dangerous serpent ornamentally coiled

in her cabin without invitation" (DD 575).

She realizes though that Deronda is falling in love with Mirah. A painful reflection follows, she had "the penetrating sense that Deronda and his life were no more like her husband's conception than the morning in the horizon was like the morning mixed with street gas" (DD 506). Grandcourt speaks with "the coldest possible sneer in his low voice, which in poor Gwendolen's ear was diabolical" (ibid.). She feels that her attempts at explanation of her beliefs and reasons were "suffocated and shrivelled up under her husband's breath" (DD 507). Her revulsion for Grandcourt allows the following observation of human nature from Eliot: "The beings closest to us, whether in love or hate, are often virtually our interpreters of the world, and some feather-headed gentleman or lady whom in passing we regret to take as legal tender for a human being may be acting as a melancholy theory of life in the minds of those who live with them—like a piece of yellow and wavy glass that distorts and makes colour an affliction. Their trivial sentences, their petty standards, their low suspicions, their loveless ennui, may be making somebody else's life no better than a promenade through a pantheon of ugly idols" (DD 575-76). Her coldness towards Grandcourt is like a "glacier after sunset" (DD 581).

With Deronda, Gwendolen comes to understand that her egoism is what is making her unhappy. Deronda advises her to "look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action—something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot" (DD 383). She realizes that Deronda is right. "I am selfish. I have never thought much of any one's feelings, except my mother's. I have not been fond of people" (DD 387). Deronda realizes that in her confusion, Gwendolen needs something beyond herself, "The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities" (ibid.). However, Gwendolen is not just "one of the narrow-brained women who through life regard all their own selfish demands as rights, and every claim upon themselves as an injury. She had a root of conscience in her, and the process of purgatory had begun for her on the green earth: she knew that she had been wrong" (DD 573). Of course, this recognition and a determination to change will save Gwendolen, but not before further suffering. However, her "remorse was the precious sign of a recoverable nature" (DD 579). She confesses to Deronda that before her change in attitude and feeling she "felt a hatred in me that was always working like an evil spirit—contriving things" (DD 591). Gwendolen's transformation, like a serpent shedding its old skin, is made clear in her feelings on returning to her mother's house after Grandcourt's death:

All that brief experience of a quiet home which had once seemed a dullness to be fled from, now came back to her as a restful escape, a station where she found the breath of morning and the unrepublishing voice of birds, after following a lure through a long Satanic masquerade, which she had entered on with an intoxicated belief in its disguises, and had seen the end of in shrieking fear lest she herself had become one of the evil spirits who were dropping their human mummery and hissing around her with serpent tongues.

(DD 652)

Gwendolen has begun her return to a purposeful life, a life with meaning and motive. At her mother's house she "was experiencing some of that peaceful melancholy which comes from the renunciation of demands for self, and from taking the ordinary good of existence, and especially kindness, even from a dog, as a gift above expectation. Does one who has been all but lost in a pit of darkness complain of the sweet air of the daylight?" (DD 682). In a parting letter she tells Deronda that she remembers his words and will try to "live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born—if it ever comes true, it will be because you have helped me—it shall be better with me because I have known you" (DD 695). Gwendolen has found what she needs through overcoming her selfishness and self-centeredness, she has learned with Deronda's help what is truly important in life.

### 7.3 Deronda

Deronda is almost saintly in his feelings and behavior. Grandcourt at one point says to Gwendolen, "I suppose you take Deronda for a saint" (DD 503). Hans Meyrick even accuses his mother of "taking Mr Deronda's name in vain" (DD 623). He displays no "moral stupidity" such as many other of Eliot's characters do; on the contrary, he displays a "tolerance towards error" in others. He becomes a true hero by saving Mirah from drowning. She says to him, "If you had not come, I should have been dead now" (DD 163). On Gwendolen, he has just as profound an effect, for though he does not save her bodily, he does save her soul. To her his large dark eyes, for example, expressed "a special interest in every one on whom he fixed them, and might easily help to bring on him those claims which ardently sympathetic people are often creating in the minds of those who need help. In mendicant fashion, we make the goodness of others a reason for exorbitant demands on them" (DD 280). It is clear that the most important of Deronda's characteristics is his sensibility—his empathy, which was "enlarged by his early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (DD 436).

Daniel finds his vocation after meeting Mordecai and learning from him, among other things, the importance of his Jewishness. He is possessed with the idea of "restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national centre, such as the English have, though they too are scattered over the face of the globe" (DD 688).

In a sense, Deronda is a savior: first he saves Mirah physically, then Gwendolen spiritually and finally we see him at the end of the novel, setting out to save the Jewish people.

### 8. Conclusion

George Eliot's novels have appealed to readers over the years for a number of reasons—too many to outline here. However, there are elements in her work that seem to be more powerful than others. One such is her morality. She may not be unique among English novelists for this because others have held the same moral attitudes, both before her time and after. However, she may have been the first to notice that most human beings are born morally stupid (M 198). It is only through life experience that we learn to become morally good. In this sense, life can be seen as a moral training-ground and in our time here we should strive to gradually approach, through life's lessons in suffering and joy, a higher state of moral rectitude. This said, it should be remembered that Eliot gives us characters at all levels of moral development.

Some, like her heroes and heroines are already in a fairly advanced moral state: characters like Adam Bede, Daniel Deronda, Dorothea Brooke, Camden Fairbrother, Rufus Lyon, Romola, and Caleb and Mary Garth are of this type. They all share Eliot's ideals in the sphere of moral conduct and many of them embody the traits that the authoress herself not only prized but actually possessed. Readers sense the goodness in George Eliot herself. How does one convey goodness on the printed page? Conscious effort and novelistic artifice are no good here. Goodness, like truth, comes through in the smallest details, in the little hints and the naturalness of the feelings portrayed, sometimes unconsciously.

Other of her characters are less admirable. There are those that seem really evil, like Tino in *Romola*. However, it is questionable whether Tino is inherently evil. Eliot almost always presents her characters with a moral choice, and their choice determines their fate. Tino is weak and shirks his duty; he is selfish and egotistical; he is beautiful. These traits influence his decisions and determine his actions—he decides to abandon his adopted father to pirates and to steal his jewels, not because he is bad but because he is weak and he rationalizes his actions, however despicable. He is an example of “erring humanity.” Hetty in *Adam Bede* abandons her baby to the elements, lets it “go to sleep” in a hollow tree. But we feel she is driven to it by her circumstances. This choice is made under a different type of duress than Tino feels. Hetty's choice is not made out of self-interest or laziness; she is almost out of her mind with grief and worry, so her action is not seen as a moral transgression but rather as an inevitable result of her victimization by a society that values the interests of men over those of women.

John Rignall notes the influence of Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, on Eliot's moral values and feels she saw the “principal moral challenge of human life to lie in the subordination of egoism to altruism. Her insistence on the supreme value of sympathy for others and the curtailment of personal desire—.” (ORC 269). This ideal is reached by only a few of her characters (Romola, Dorothea, Daniel Deronda) while the others are rather mixed in their moral natures; those like Gwendolen, Celia, Mr. Casaubon and Hetty have glaring faults, usually egotism and selfishness, but they also have other traits that redeem them. There are no real “lost causes” in Eliot's work.

Eliot's use of metaphorical thought is selective; not all her human, animal or inanimate characters (including villages, rivers and hills) are treated metaphorically. Those she selects for such treatment are of course the subject of this paper. The reasons behind her metaphorical treatment of some characters and not others are somewhat difficult to determine. The character of Gwendolen Harleth, for example, undergoes a clear development through *Daniel Deronda*. She is metaphorically treated as a creature of snakelike menace early in the novel and as she comes closer to a fuller moral life, she is depicted in metaphors that are more positive and healthy—a nymph, a flower.

It appears that Eliot uses metaphor where she wishes to help us to see a character or state of existence in a hyper-real way; she adds new dimensions of meaning through the use of metaphor. It is best to see her use of metaphoric language and thought as existing in levels of complexity: some are quite simple and straightforward: “The perception that poor Rex wanted to be tender made her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger” (DD 66); others are more abstract and complex. One example, presented in reference to Rex and Gwendolen, concerns youth, love and goodness; Rex is a good man and this communicates itself

in a situation in which they find themselves on a beautiful spring morning. This leads Eliot to ponder goodness and how it can be crushed by circumstance:

Goodness is a large, often prospective word; like harvest, which at one stage when we talk of it lies all underground, with an indeterminate future: is the germ prospering in the darkness? At another, it has put forth delicate green blades, and by-and-by the trembling blossoms are ready to be dashed off by an hour of rough wind and rain. Each stage has its particular blight, and may have the healthy life choked out of it by a particular action of the foul land which rears or neighbors it, or by damage brought from foulness afar.

(DD 56)

Here Eliot uses a more complex metaphor comparing the abstract concept of goodness to the concrete instance of seed-planting and harvest, of weather and the harshness of nature. The reader, in processing this, construes goodness as a potential, a hope for the future that may at any stage be blighted by foulness near or far, just as crops are subject to damage by natural forces. The metaphor is offered in connection to a particular character, Rex, but can be seen as going beyond him to apply to the human condition. Such abstract and universal metaphors are an outgrowth of Eliot's interest in philosophy.

Other of her metaphors are jocular. They flesh-out a character but also create an intimacy between the author and reader:

Grandcourt after all was formidable—a handsome lizard of a hitherto unknown species, not of the lively, darting kind. But Gwendolen knew hardly anything about lizards, and ignorance gives one a large range of probabilities. This splendid specimen was probably gentle, suitable as a boudoir pet: what may not a lizard be, if you know nothing to the contrary?

(DD 115)

Gwendolen doesn't know much about Grandcourt at this stage of the novel. She will soon discover that he is more threatening than he seems at first. Grandcourt is not the sort of reptile that makes a good "boudoir pet" for he is cold and calculating like a proper snake.

Perhaps in the end, metaphorical thought in Eliot's novels is best seen as an added richness in the text. Many fine novelists have never used metaphor or when they have, used it sparingly. It is almost a baroque feature. Some modern novelists have avoided it as an unnecessary clutter that detracts from the onward movement of the story. Hemingway comes to mind. However, in avoiding metaphor, a novelist loses one of his greatest tools, because the human mind operates by comparing one thing with another. Eliot knew this from her studies in philosophy and psychology and used it effectively in constructing metaphors that enrich each of her novels. In some instances, the figures of speech she used are mainly background features that add little to the plot or the characterization; however, the majority of her similes, metaphors and other figures serve to deepen and broaden characterization, enrich the settings of each novel and greatly aid in the visualization and comprehension of her created characters and their worlds.



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