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The unexaggerated lion: Effects of metanarrative, metaphor, and narrative character on the reader's perception of realism in George Eliot's fiction

Singleton, Edgar Arthur, Ph.D.

The Ohio State University, 1992
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THE UNEXAGGERATED LION: EFFECTS OF METANARRATIVE, METAPHOR, AND NARRATIVE CHARACTER ON THE READER'S PERCEPTION OF REALISM IN GEORGE ELIOT'S FICTION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Edgar Arthur Singleton, B.A., M.M., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1992

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INTRODUCTION

In February of 1857, two years before the publication of *Adam Bede*, George Eliot expressed her views on the subject of realism in her fiction in a letter to publisher John Blackwood:

My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy. And I cannot stir a step aside from what I feel to be true in character. If anything strikes you as untrue in my delineations, I shall be very glad if you will point it out to me, that I may reconsider the matter. But alas! inconsistencies and weaknesses are not untrue (299).

Several months later, Eliot again wrote to Blackwood, claiming in this case that

Art must be either real and concrete, or ideal
and eclectic. Both are good and true in their way, but my stories are the former kind. I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are, seen through such a medium as my own nature gives me (362).

It is comments such as these, which are later mirrored in Eliot's fictional texts themselves, that lead one to label George Eliot a "realist." Eliot argued, as Daniel Cottom puts it, "that realism was the true author of her writing" (3). The realistic aspect of George Eliot's novels, however, does not play itself out with the simplicity that Eliot's comments seem at first to suggest. Her emphasis on the feeling that informs her vision of reality reminds the reader that any such vision—even if she also labels it "truth"—is subjective. Eliot seems to be aware that literary presentation of reality must be artificial in both substance and form; it must take the form of "make-believe" and be filtered through her own subjective nature. In a sense, the acceptance of this paradox is a part of implied pact between any author and reader; we agree to "suspend disbelief" during our engagement with a work of literature, though literature that we regard as "realistic" supposedly requires less of this suspension than does literature that we label as
"romantic" or "fanciful" (Eliot's "ideal and eclectic"). George Eliot, however, seems to be aware that this suspension of disbelief can never be complete, and as a result she is able to use the inherent tension between the real world and her imagined one to enhance the ability of her fiction to achieve the goals she established for it: tolerance, pity, and sympathy on the part of the reader. In merging her own self with the voices and characters of her narrators, Eliot insists that the reader remember that works of art are in effect works of magic, created from the mists of imagination and memory. The particular magic that Eliot conjures is then bound together with with ribbons of metaphor, reminders themselves of the created miracle they entwine.

Daniel Cottom goes on to claim that George Eliot's realism is the antithesis of romance:

In Eliot's conception, realism transcends romance. However, it does not do so by a simple rejection of the values or inversion of the stylistic characteristics of romance; it transcends romance as the liberal intellectual transcends society in general: by interpreting it, understanding it, and so gaining the power to patronize it (125).
The goal of this study, however, is to demonstrate that in ways George Eliot's fiction does not merely transcend romance, but rather it absorbs romance and blends its elements with those of her own vision of realism. For Eliot, realism is not the antithesis of romance; realism is instead a romantic art form that depends for its desired effect on the reader's acknowledgment of the artifice at its core. The evidence of Eliot's novels themselves is that Eliot in fact believed the best way to achieve her goal to be the building of a bridge of sympathy between the world of her fiction and the real world of the reader, and the best way to build that bridge was to allow the reader to experience the romance of her realism.

In this study, I have focused on four novels (Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda) in order to explore three methods by which George Eliot attempts to achieve her goals. The three former works were chosen as representing stages in Eliot's career (early, middle, and late novels), with Daniel Deronda serving as a special coda, both in Eliot's career and in this work.

In the first chapter, "Breaking the Illusion: Eliot's Narrators on Narrative," I bring special attention to those passages in George Eliot's novels that have been variously described as "authorial intrusion," "authorial
comment," "metanarrative," or any of a number of similar terms. I have focused most critically on those passages in which the narrators have chosen to comment specifically on the act of literary creation itself, most notably the seventeenth chapter of Adam Bede (the source of the "unexaggerated lion"). Though the sheer volume of such "intrusion" diminishes as Eliot's career progresses, the commentary never fades away completely. In addition to providing a sort of gloss on Eliot's vision of literary realism, this commentary also serves the role of reminding readers that they are in fact in the process of engaging themselves with an imaginary world, however much it might resemble their own. When Eliot explains in the text how she came to make decisions concerning the creation of her characters, it is not important that her expressed intention is to present characters as true to life as possible. She is at the same time reminding her readers that she is totally in control of an imaginative work of fiction. She is not, admittedly, presenting a world as it ought to be, but neither is she truly bringing the reader the world as it was or is. The "reality" of George Eliot's novels is the world as it might be.

In the second chapter of this study, "Beyond the Illusion: Metaphorical Reality," I attempt to demonstrate how Eliot uses the metaphorical elements in her novels as a
means of engaging the reader with the fictional world she has created. As I claim in this chapter, ...the effect of metaphor in Eliot's novels is to force the mind of the reader to move between the specifics of character and situation to the universal truths those specifics come to represent.

In other words, the metaphorical images that Eliot creates—such as the spider's web in Middlemarch, music in Adam Bede, or the rushing water in The Mill on the Floss—create a bridge between the imaginary world of the novels and the real world of the reader. Simultaneously, however, Eliot's insistence on declaring "what a thing is...by saying it is something else" (The Mill on the Floss 152) reinforces in the reader's mind the notion of the very fragility of the fictional world she has created. In creating a world that is not, Eliot declares something about the world that is, and in focusing our attention on the relationship between that which has been imagined and that which is real, Eliot purposefully reveals her own hand as the imaginative force behind the fictional world.

The third chapter of this study, "The Voice Behind the Illusion: Narrator as Character," is a study of the narrative personae with which George Eliot blends herself in her novels. The result of this blending is a series of
narrators—each distinct and different from the preceding one—that are particularly capable of engaging the intellect and sympathy of the reader. For a reader to understand fully the import of the story, that reader must also come to understand the nature of the story teller. It is not enough to claim that Eliot’s narrators inhabit a middle ground between the traditionally omniscient and more "realistic" limited narrators such as Huck Finn or Pip. The voices that brings us Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Middlemarch belong in fact to narrators who fully incorporate characteristics of each end of the narrative spectrum. I explore each of these narrators with the hope of demonstrating how once again Eliot is able to span the gulf between the imaginary and real worlds by purposefully breaking the illusion of reality that one might expect to be preserved in traditionally realistic fiction. Through asking the reader to accept a narrator who exists simultaneously on separate planes, those planes are merged. The reader is able to relate to the narrator on the very human grounds that the two share the same concerns and fears concerning morality and mortality; the reader is also able to engage intellectually with a narrator whose omniscient vision reveals more than is "realistically" possible. Eliot’s narrators are self-conscious yet other-conscious as well, and the result is a narrative able to
elicit a type of response unlike that elicited by narrators
who inhabit more clearly one world or the other.

The fourth chapter of this work, "Daniel Deronda: The
Final Chapter in a Narrative Life," is designed to
demonstrate how all three of the major narrative elements
that I have identified come into importance in this, the
last of George Eliot's novels. Though Daniel Deronda
strikes many readers and critics as new beginning for
George Eliot, a break with her past endeavors, I claim that
in this novel George Eliot engages the reader in much the
same way she does in earlier novels. Though I would not go
so far as to attempt to prove that this work represents the
ultimate in Eliot's narrative "progress," the novel is the
most mature expression in a career characterized by an
awareness that everything in the universe is to some extent
the product of that which came before. In other words,
although Daniel Deronda may not have been "caused" by
Middlemarch, it would not have taken its present form if
Middlemarch (and all of Eliot's other works) had not been
written previously.
J. Hillis Miller, in his article, "Optic and Semiotic in Middlemarch," analyzes in part the goal shared by George Eliot with other Victorian novelists: "totalization." According to Miller, Eliot desires to present a total picture of provincial society in England at the time period just before the first Reform bill of 1832. She also wants to interpret this picture totally. She wants to show what is there and to show how it works (125).

She accomplishes this goal, Miller continues, by presenting "a large group of the sort of people one would in fact have been likely to find in a provincial town in the Midlands," though "their representative or symbolic quality is not insisted upon" (126). In painting a contrast between this approach and that of Charles Dickens, however, Miller makes a secondary claim that includes a telling set of quotation marks: "Eliot is more straightforwardly 'realistic' in her
presentation" (126). What does Miller mean by "realistic"? Why does he feel compelled to qualify the term? Perhaps not surprisingly, there are few critics who do not qualify the term "realism" in this way when discussing the novels of George Eliot. The nature of the reality created within the framework of the novels and the relationship between that reality and the world outside the novels goes to the very heart of Eliot's stated intentions in creating the novels, and the complexity of that relationship transcends simplistic definitions of literary realism as merely writings that "renounce the use of far-fetched images and metaphors" (Weisstein 685). Miller's essay, along with his 1974 article, "Narrative and History," contribute to our understanding of the realistic elements in George Eliot's fiction. In this chapter I will be using these articles and others in order to help bring critical focus to the importance of those passages in the novels that might be described as metanarrative: how is our understanding of realism in Eliot's fiction altered by those passages in which Eliot's narrators "pause a little" in order to comment on the nature of the narrative itself?

It is perhaps important to begin with commentary provided by Eliot herself, for she made it her stated intention to imitate nature in her art. Miller—among other critics—cites Eliot's claim from her 1856 essay,
"The Natural History of German Life." In this passage we are presented with more than a formal mandate; the artist is bound by moral obligation as well. Artistic expression enters the realm of the "sacred":

Art is the nearest thing to life: it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life (127).

This comment of Eliot's, along with the following frequently quoted passage from her review of the third volume of Ruskin's Modern Painters, have traditionally served to establish Eliot's credentials as an "unambiguously enthusiastic 'realist'" (Levine 258). In that review, also from 1856, Eliot writes:

The truth of infinite value that [Ruskin] teaches is realism, the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality (Levine 258).
It is tempting to accept these succinct passages at face value and to judge Eliot's fiction on the basis of whether or not it lives up to the expectations they seem to establish. In many ways her novels do meet basic "realist" criteria: her characters resemble the kinds of people that inhabited the flesh and blood world of her readers, her settings resemble closely the physical surroundings known to her readers, and the events which occur in her novels are largely the kinds of events that occurred to real people every day in nineteenth-century Britain. It is almost comforting to believe that George Eliot really did serve as a reflector of what she truly believed to be the "definite, substantial reality" of her world. However, George Eliot was living and writing at a time when advances in science and technology were undermining accepted notions of the nature of reality, and especially those notions of reality based on scriptural interpretation. As a result of George Eliot's coming to question her own strongly-held religious faith, as well as of her long and fruitful relationship with G. H. Lewes, who introduced her to the world of science, these questions became especially pressing. Recent writers detail how Lewes opened up for George Eliot the world of science and all its implications for a changing concept of reality. John P. McGowan particularly notes that although "Eliot insists that the
word's link to the real must be strong and sure" (134), the beliefs of both Eliot and Lewes fit the pattern described in this century by Michel Foucault, who documents the nineteenth-century change in the relationship between reality and its visible manifestation. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that plants and animals could no longer be classified according to outer appearance but rather underlying principles. Thus the "reality" of an object is no longer outwardly visible, but based on an interpretation of outward appearance. And, as McGowan points out, "If Foucault is right, the apprehension of reality becomes problematic after 1800, since it is no longer readily accessible to sight, but can only be discovered through an act of interpretation that reads and organizes external signs in order to grasp a hidden truth" (135). McGowan claims that both Eliot and Lewes were aware that there must necessarily be a difference between the representative (language) and the represented (objects? ideas? events? reality?), and thus both focused their efforts on the nature of the representative, not the represented. The result in literature is not mimesis, but rather a "notion of realism that does not require that the representative resemble the represented, only, to use Eliot's phrase, that the representative inspire an 'analogous emotion' to that inspired by contact with the
represented" (McGowan 133-4). Thus the link between word and object is maintained, though the nature of that link is altered to include the realm of the emotions.

George Levine in *The Realistic Imagination*, makes a convincing case that those comments of Eliot's on the relationship between art and reality mentioned earlier are just one step in a life-long process of questioning the nature of material reality. He singles out Joan Williams as an example of a critic accepting the somewhat patronizing critical perspective that ultimately belittles the efforts of George Eliot and other Victorian novelists. Williams makes this claim:

...since the end of the Victorian period, although artists have increasingly attacked the idea that Reality is to be established in the world of conventional physical perception, we have come to associate mid-Victorian literature with a naive confidence that Reality consisted in the material and social world around them. There is no doubt that the mid-Victorian novel rested on the massive confidence as to what the nature of Reality actually was, and that although it could not be identified with matter itself, it certainly lay in the material world (x).
The argument made by Levine and others, however, is that Victorian artists in general—and George Eliot specifically—were filled with something much different from the "massive confidence" Williams suggests. It is true that even Levine accepts to some extent the premise that there exists some form of external reality, arguing that the author as well as the critic must work from a position of belief in that reality. He claims that realism is "a mode that depends heavily on our commonsense expectation that there are direct connections between word and thing" (9). However, Levine also gives more credit than does Williams to Victorian novelists, including George Eliot, for being part of a direct line of development to those moderns who convincingly deny reality and even narrativity itself (4). He creates a definition of literary realism that underlines the inherently revolutionary quality of realistic literature as well as its moral basis and dependence on individual perception:

Realism, as a literary method, can... be defined as a self-conscious effort, usually in the name of some moral enterprise of truth telling and extending the limits of human sympathy, to make literature appear to be describing directly not some other language but reality itself (whatever that may be taken to be); in this effort, the
writer must self-contradictorily dismiss previous conventions of representation while, in effect, establishing new ones (8).

Ultimately, Levine argues that George Eliot and other Victorian novelists were not only highly aware of the difficulties created by a changing perception of reality, but were active, even enthusiastic, participants in that change. They did not rest in the confidence of absolute morality, but rather attempted to create a new morality within a shifting framework (20).

With reference then to Levine's definition, what could be more "self-conscious" and "self-contradictory" than the practice of allowing one's narrator to remind the reader of a novel that aspires to realism that the reader holds nothing other than the completely controlled creation of a single mind? Fiction becomes both "self-conscious" and "self-contradictory" when the narrator discourages the willing suspension of disbelief by insisting on reminding the reader of the paradox of realism: the words on the page are at best representative of a world that exists only as a projection of one person's willfully controlled perspective.

In my view, Carl Malmgren makes the ironic claim in his 1986 article, "Reading Authorial Narration: The Example of The Mill on the Floss," that Eliot limits what
he labels "metalingual commentary" because "given her ultimate purposes, Eliot does not wish to remind her readers that they are reading about an invented world" (481-2). Malmgren is right in suggesting that Eliot is concerned with the creation of a believable literary reality; however, evidence would seem to suggest that Eliot's "ultimate purpose"—the discovery of truth and the widening of the sympathies of men—is best served when her narrators do exactly what Malmgren claims they should not, especially in her early novels, where such commentary is more frequent. In other words, the truth which Eliot sought was best arrived at through the creation of "realistic" literature that was in fact consciously—perhaps boldly—artificial in many respects.

One of the most conspicuous examples of such metanarrative is the famous first chapter of Book Two of _Adam Bede_, which Miller refers to as the "locus classicus for the theory of realism in Victorian fiction" ("Two Rhetorics" 108). The title of the chapter, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," is the first clue that something out of the ordinary is occurring in this chapter. The narrator tells us that she will be stepping away from the events and people of the story and commenting on the telling itself, and the reader must at least temporarily return to a state of disbelief in those people and events.
Here we see the narrator establishing an integration of the "realistic" and the self-consciously "literary," if such a distinction can be made. She establishes the sense that the narrative is an entity completely under her control, yet simultaneously creates the impression that her only goal is the presentation of unvarnished "real life." The chapter begins with an exchange between an outraged reader and the narrator:

"This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!" I hear one of my readers exclaim. "How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice! You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things—quite as good as reading a sermon."

Certainly I could, if I held it the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking; I might select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But it happens, on the contrary, that my strongest effort is to avoid such an arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men
and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in a witness-box, narrating my experience on oath (174).

This passage has of course drawn much attention from critics, but it is perhaps most clearly understood by W. J. Harvey, who found himself in the position of defending it from earlier critics who found Eliot's narrator's omniscience overbearing and distracting:

What starts out by seeming a clumsy intrusion of the omniscient author may now be seen to have a necessary function in establishing the kind of "reality" of the story being told, the kind of assent we are asked to accord the novel. And surely, the "illusion of reality" aimed at in this kind of fiction is not that of a self-contained world, a fictional microcosm intact and autonomous as in the Jamesian mode, but a world coterminous with the "real" world, the factual macrocosm. The author bridges the two worlds; we accept her opinions about the real world (i.e., her aesthetic argument) on the same level and in
the same way as we accept the opinions of Adam Bede from within the novel (90).

On one level it would be possible to claim that the self-contradictory nature of Eliot's chapter in this case creates an impediment to our continued trust in the existence of Adam Bede's world. After all, lives—unlike stories—do not "pause a little." The narrator's claim to be a mere instrument or medium for the transmission of unvarnished reality is both directly and indirectly contradicted by her own defense. It is as if the narrator is saying, "I present you the simple truth," but she accompanies that claim with a sly wink of the eye. In claiming that she is a servant of reality, she ironically underlines the fact that she is able to present us one vision of the world rather than another because it is her prerogative to do so. She claims to present a "faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" and confesses that her particular mirror might suffer from distortion and lack of clarity, yet the image of the mirror itself is misleading: a mirror lacks the power to alter willfully the image it reflects, but Eliot's narrator, in noting that she could certainly present Mr. Irwine as a model clergyman, is claiming to be able to do just that. W. David Shaw points out the flaws in the mirror as a model for poetic expression, claiming that "a
poet's words, like his mind, are neither a mirror that reflects the world nor a mask that hides it, but what Tennyson calls a 'lucid veil'" (2).

The mirror does not serve as a direct analogy or metaphor for the mind's ability to create, but rather as an element of misdirection—"to mirror" becomes a euphemism for "to create." She claims that under different circumstances she would be able to "refashion life and character entirely after [her] own liking," but in having her characters behave in any way at all, she does exactly what she claims not to be doing. Witness the portrayal of Mr. Erwine's successor, Mr. Ryde, who would satisfy all the demands of the fictional reader and more.

As the chapter continues, the narrator extends the defense of her characters while again asserting that they exist only within the context of art. Of course the temporary acceptance of literary creations as "real" is not remarkable--this acceptance constitutes the reader's willing suspension of disbelief--but the narrator insists subtly on reminding the reader of the work's artifice even while defending its "reality":

These fellow mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people--amongst
whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity and love; it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire—for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields—on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice (175-6).

This passage not only reinforces what is natural—what is "real"—about the characters of Adam Bede, but creates a connection between that world and our own, with the narrator reminding us of her role as a bridge. As Harvey puts it,

In this chapter George Eliot speaks of life as a "mixed entangled affair," and that phrase expresses not only the nature of life within the
fictional microcosm but also the relationship of that microcosm to the real, macrocosmic world. George Eliot is not aiming at the insulation, the self-sufficiency of the Jamesian novel; no sharp boundaries between the real and fictional are to be drawn here; the edges are blurred, the omniscient author allows us an easy transition from one world to another (90).

When the narrator claims that she "would not, even if she had the choice, be the clever novelist," we are reminded that her lack of choice is not only self-imposed but in fact represents a choice in itself. The novelist chooses to limit her representation to those aspects of her readers' experience which are likely to be labeled as "real" because of their failure to match up to a physical or moral ideal. Implicit in the passage is the reminder that the reader can chill or injure "real breathing men and women"; only those men and women who remain images in a novel are safe from the readers' assaults. However, when the edges between these two worlds are blurred, there emerges the possibility of the transfer of sympathy from the fictional world to the real. This phenomenon of simultaneous consciousness of both the fictional and real worlds has been described in various ways by different critics. It is Joan Williams who makes the claim that
"reconciliation of disparate and contrasting elements of experience is the fundamental aim of Victorian novelists. This has moral and aesthetic implications—beauty and truth are attained by the same means" (x). In this passage of reconciliation, then, we discover that "moral enterprise of truth telling and extending the limits of human sympathy" as well as creating beauty is a function of presenting one version of reality carefully chosen over another.

"So I am content to tell my simple story," the narrator continues in the critical chapter of *Adam Bede*, not without irony, "without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult" (176). Here the narrator begins to reestablish the illusion that the events in the novel really took place, as if she were merely recording them, yet she continues with an analogy for her writing philosophy that once again forces the reader to consider the nature of that illusion:

The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin—the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and
you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings—much harder to say something fine about them which is not exactly the truth (176).

The narrator seems to be conducting a fiction-writing workshop, sharing the creative pencil with the reader and referring to "us" and "we," yet along with the lesson on the syllabus, she is testing the student's ability to understand the importance of perspective in seeing beyond outward appearance. On one level, the narrator continues to spell out her insistence on avoiding the false, and her point is clear: true genius must find its expression in that which is true, not in flights of fancy, no matter how virtuostic. In this case, however, the secondary lesson is in the choice of the image of the lion as the representative of truth. The hideous griffin, with talons slashing, wings outstretched, eyes bulging, and beak snapping is magnificently unreal. However, except on the most literal level, the lion is much the same. Its appearance, ferocity, and strength are the stuff of fable, and it is no less alien to the world of the Victorian reader than a griffin. The narrator expresses as ideal the portrayal of the "unexaggerated lion," yet few creatures on earth seem more fundamentally exaggerated than this king of
beasts. Its size, its strength, and royal reputation are exaggerated versions of the familiar. Far from representing a flaw in the narrator's reasoning, however, the griffin-lion analogy serves to amplify and extend the narrator's claim that "it is a hard thing to say the exact truth," precisely because so much of "the truth" is beyond our experience and knowledge. The search for the truth must contain a balance of mirror-like exactitude and imaginative vision.

G. H. Lewes once asserted in regard to the issue of literary realism:

It has been the tendency of modern writers of fiction to restrict themselves more and more to the actual and the possible.... The carefully wrought story, which details events in orderly chronological sequence; which unfolds characters according to those laws which experience teaches us to look for as well in the moral as in the material world; and which describes outward circumstances in the inexorable certainty, yielding to no magician's wand or enchanter's spell, is essentially the function of a complex state of society (Stoneman 103).
There is then extra irony in the fact that George Eliot chose the very image Lewes rejects for the opening phrases of *Adam Bede*. Eliot begins the novel with a direct address to the reader that is in fact one of those intrusive moments in which the real topic is the nature of the narrative itself:

> With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder, in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799 (17).

It is only through "magic" that the realistic vision of Burge's workshop and indeed the entire world of *Adam Bede* is revealed, and we thus begin the novel with the recognition of the complexity of the relationship between words and the real world they aspire to represent. Magic denies science, but we are left with the implicit recognition that the "truth" that Eliot seeks will be found only when magic is used and more than one perspective is brought to bear. Another name for this magic might be imagination, for it is the narrator's insistence on
reminding the reader of the imaginative nature of the novel—despite its "realistic" elements—that allows the marriage of art and reality that captures life.

Exploring the concept of imagination—including that of the author, the reader, and the characters in the novel—while important to our understanding of *Adam Bede*, becomes central to the analysis of *The Mill on the Floss*. The struggle to grasp the relationship between words and the reality they are meant to represent in *The Mill on the Floss* is focused on the imaginative flights of Maggie Tulliver. John P. McGowan also sees this novel as the end of a stage in the development of Eliot's belief system, for "the impasse reached in *The Mill on the Floss* marks the bankruptcy of a simple realism in which words denote an actual world" (144). He continues:

The novelist's response to the problems encountered in *The Mill on the Floss* is to explore the way in which the Maggies of the world create their visions of reality, and to consider how that vision might be communicated to others so that a community might act upon it. The impotence dictated by a "metaphysics of the referent," by a belief in a preexisting, unalterable reality proves intolerable (144).
The literary problem, then, is symbolized by Maggie's inability to see the fictional nature of books. Maggie does not recognize the gap between the representative and the represented, and this leads ultimately to her downfall. In like manner, according to McGowan, Eliot sees that it is no longer possible to establish confidently the relationship between fiction and reality (137). Throughout the course of the novel, however, Eliot does explore this relationship, often through her metanarrative.

Though there is no particular chapter in *The Mill on the Floss* as explicit and extended in its exploration of the narrative act as the first chapter of book Two of *Adam Bede*, the idea that one of the goals of the novel is to explore the nature of itself as well as of its characters and events is clearly prevalent in both works. In the very opening passages (the metaphorical imagery of which will be treated in the second chapter of this work), the reader is challenged to consider the nature of the reality (or illusion) on the page:

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships—laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil
bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal—are borne along to the town of St. Oggs's, which shows its aged fluted roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hills and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun (11).

We are bathed in a cascade of comfortingly sensuous detail; we sense the physical, material solidness of the river, the barges, the mill, and the town itself, only to learn that the vision is a dream, ephemeral and vanishing. In the final paragraph of the first chapter the narrator seems to wake from her dream state and emphasize her real, physical presence ("Ah, my arms are really benumbed"), only to then shift to complete omniscience, asserting her "magical" ability to make worlds appear and disappear and to know those things that can only be known to the creative, imaginative force behind the people and events of the novel.

Early in The Mill on the Floss the narrator steps back from the story to consider this relationship between "static" art and the ongoing process of life:
I have often wondered whether those early
Madonnas of Raphael, with the blond faces and
somewhat stupid expression, kept their placidity
undisturbed when their strong-limbed, strong-
willed boys got a little too old to do without
clothing. I think they must have been given to
feeble remonstrance, getting more and more
peevish as it became more and more ineffectual
(19).

If we can accept the work of Raphael as analogous to that
of the novelist, this passage is a reminder of the complex
relationship between words and the objects they are meant
to represent. When one viewer's particular perspective is
brought to bear on the painting, it becomes something far
different from what we might infer to have been the
artist's intention. The reader is reminded by the narrator
here that, just as the significance of the image on the
canvas changes with the changing perspective of the viewer,
so the reader's own perspective "creates" the reality of
the novel. In Adam Bede the narrator points out that "no
story is the same to us after a lapse of time—or rather,
we who read it are no longer the same interpreters" (498).
So it is in The Mill on the Floss: the reader must in a
sense create the meaning on the page or canvas. The
example Eliot's narrator uses in this case is particularly
fascinating and telling. Through humor and irreverence, the narrator challenges a sacred ideal for its improbability. What saves the passage from becoming mere sacrilege is the role played by sympathy, which of course must be generated on the part of the reader. The reader who takes an active role in creating the reality of the novel will— it is hoped by the narrator— find more to sympathize with in the human rather than divine elements of the "Madonna and Child," just as it will be difficult to discover the divine in the characters of the Tullivers, Dodsons, and other denizens of St. Ogg's.

Perhaps the most important intrusive role played by the narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* is the direct urging of such sympathy. The narrator simultaneously presents traditionally "realistic" elements in the novel while reinforcing her own role as controller of events, people, and to some extent reader reaction to those things. It is through the engagement of the reader's imagination that, as Barbara Hardy points out, "the aesthetic and the ethical merge in Eliot's conception of the imagination" ("Imagination" 194). And the narrator of the novel— sometimes ironically, sometimes not— encourages this merger overtly through her pleas to the reader for one response over another to given characters and situations. Often she will jump to the defense of characters with the real
intention of pointing out their weaknesses and flaws, as in this example from early in the novel:

If you blame Mr. Riley very severely for giving a recommendation on such slight grounds, I must say you are rather hard upon him. Why should an auctioneer and appraiser thirty years ago, who had as good as forgotten his free-school Latin, be expected to manifest a delicate scrupulosity which is not always exhibited by gentlemen of the learned professions, even in our present advanced stage of morality (32)?

On one level the narrator herself is being "rather hard" on Mr. Riley, who clearly has no business whatsoever making educational recommendations, but the realistic details of Mr. Riley's life are intended to elicit a sympathetic response. Who among us has not at some point spoken out without firm knowledge of the subject at hand? The cynical tone of the comment on "our present advanced stage of morality" (implying that humankind's concept of morality is changeable and thus not absolute, as well as using the language of a doctor diagnosing "the advanced stage" of illness) clinches the narrator's point: our perspective on Mr. Riley's actions, just as our understanding of morality or indeed reality are matters of perspective. In this
changeable and changing framework, a sympathetic response is the only way of maintaining a semblance of order.

The narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* more often defends her characters (especially Maggie) with a certain passion, as in this passage that also raises the issue of perspective in understanding the world around us:

Very trivial, perhaps, this anguish seems to weather-worn mortals who have to think about Christmas bills, dead loves, and broken friendships; but it was not less bitter to Maggie—perhaps it was even more bitter—than what we are fond of calling antithetically the real troubles of mature life.... Surely if we could recall that early bitterness, and the dim guesses, the strangely perspectiveless conception of life that gave bitterness its intensity, we should not pooh-pooh the griefs of our children (74).

In this case the narrator once again serves as a bridge between two—maybe even three—worlds. By asking the reader to shift perspectives to that of the reader's own childhood, she demonstrates the importance of changing perception in understanding both the world of the novel and the world outside the novel. She creates the bridge from the sympathy she hopes to evoke for Maggie's plight, which
is, perhaps ironically, the result of Maggie's own "perspectivelessness." As the narrator engages the reader's imagination in passages such as these she actively encourages the reader to contribute to—and thus gain an awareness of—the creative act behind the realism of The Mill on the Floss. As the narrator points out, there can be no appreciation of our surroundings without the realization of shifting perspective:

Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass today might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls if it were not for the sunshine and grass in the far-off years which still live in us and transform our perception into love (48).

On one level the illusion is certainly broken—we are asked to leave the world of the novel and consider our own—yet the result is art that approaches life.

It must be considered, finally, that the last word on the nature of the narrative in The Mill on the Floss is not so much an act of intrusion on the part of the narrator, but rather an act of narrative control. I refer, of course, to the flood that brings the lives of Maggie and Tom Tulliver as well as the novel to an end. This event, viewed by many as the novel's great flaw, could be seen on the contrary as the novel's last important word on literary
realism itself. For even the most casual reader of The Mill on the Floss, the climactic flood scene comes across as contrived, unlikely, not conforming to standards of "simple" realism. It is, however, representative of what McGowan calls "the bankruptcy of simple realism" (144).

However, this bankruptcy is not an indication that the novel does not live up to realist ideals; rather, realist standards are transcended by the symbolic and metaphorical importance of the fatal reunion of Maggie and Tom. The metaphorical connection between the awesome power of the rushing waters and the power of love to dominate and determine the lives of the characters in the novel has been insisted on from the opening sentence. The narrator's dream-like introduction foreshadows the nightmare conclusion (tempered as that conclusion might be by the sense of struggle ended and life's meaning found for Maggie). Eliot can indeed be said to be embarking on the "moral enterprise of truth telling," though in this case the "moral truth" differs from the "truth" one might expect had Eliot declared herself a proponent of mere "photographic realism" (Stoneman 104).

With Middlemarch we see a decline in the sheer number of passages in which the narrator steps away from the story in order to comment directly on the nature of the narrative itself. This movement away from such narrative comment is
part of a general trend in Eliot's novels toward less and less direct narrative comment. This is not, however, to say that the issue of narrative is not central to understanding the novel's brand of truth-telling. J. Hillis Miller sees a fundamental message in the "historical" element of the narrative:

In spite of its recourse to the conventional *locus standi* of defining itself as a displaced form of history, the novel, so to speak, pulls the rug out from under itself and deprives itself of that solid ground without which, if Henry James is right, it is "nowhere." Her fiction deprives itself of its ground in history by demonstrating that ground to be a fiction too, a figure, a myth, a lie, like Dorothea's interpretation of Casaubon or Bulstrode's reading of his religious destiny ("Narrative" 467).

That the narrator is taking an approach different from the narrators of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* is evident from the very opening sentences of the Prelude. *The Mill on the Floss* begins quite literally with a dream, and the narrator of *Adam Bede* begins by summoning the powers of sorcery, both entrancing and reminding the reader of the fundamental illusionary nature of the novel. The narrator of *Middlemarch*, however, proclaims the much more
earth-bound task of undertaking the study of the passage of time by the empirical, scientific method:

Who that cares to know the history of man, and how the mysterious mixture behaves under varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa, has not smiled with some gentleness at the thought of the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the moors (3)?

George Eliot turns to history and science frequently in this novel, both as metaphorical devices and as sources of thematic material, and in the preceding passage she combines the two. On one level the application of scientific rigor to historical observation adds a sense of "reality" to the people and events of Middlemarch. As Miller points out, however, on another level Eliot is questioning the very possibility of applying scientific rigor to history, which is fundamentally unknowable. It is in one passage of narrative intrusion, in which "the story pauses a little" once again, that we come to understand more fully the importance of the mode of scientific observation for the type of realism in the novel. This passage establishes that the narrator sees herself as an
historian, but one who understands both the limitations and the controlling power of any historian's perspective:

A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago, and so to take his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to bring his armchair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a camp-stool in a parrot-house. I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven on this particular web, and not dispersed over that
tempting range of relevencies called the universe (104-5).

This passage clearly exposes the "self-contradictory" and "self-conscious" nature of the realistic literary endeavor, for as the narrator herself points out, even our perception of the passage of time is changeable, unfixed. She calls herself an historian, yet once again asserts her ability to "unravel" the lives of her characters, reminding the reader of her ultimate control of the narrative. Though the image of the spun web is used throughout the novel as an analogy for the tangled and interconnected relationships that bind the characters to one another, in this case the image also describes the narrative process itself. The narrator, like the mythical Fates before her, has "much to do in unravelling certain human lots"; in drawing the comparison, the narrator presents herself not only as an observer but also a determiner of human fate. The narrator accepts the tasks of each of the three fates: she spins the thread of life, determines its ultimate length, and snips it when life is through. As in the past, it is possible to cross the narrative bridge once again and imagine the implications of such narrative control for life outside the novel. Eliot seems to be making a case for literary realism based in nineteenth-century determinism as it is aptly described by Maurice Larkin:
No phenomenon, be it a person, a thought or an event, could have an autonomous existence that owed nothing to its antecedents and surroundings. Everything was the outcome of the interaction of pre-existing factors, which were themselves the product of earlier factors: each object or occurrence was a link in a mesh of causal chains, stretching back to "the beginning of things" (175).

Thus in Eliot's passage of metanarrative in *Middlemarch* we see exposed the philosophical framework upon which the novel and to some extent Eliot's own literary theory are based.

The progression of these three novels is in many ways like a journey through an unfamiliar city which is, however, much like one's own. The traveler recognizes a pattern to the layout of streets and buildings; the activities and appearance of the people going about their lives seem familiar in general if not specifically. Placed in certain critical intersections are markers left for just such a traveler, which take the form in the novels of passages of metanarrative such as those explored in this chapter. In some ways those markers seem a confirmation of the traveler's perceptions and experience, but they at the same time remind the traveler not to grow too confident.
There is, after all, still a need for such guideposts, and Eliot rejects through her novels that "massive confidence" in the nature of a reality that was quickly crumbling under the chisels and hammers of geology, theology, and political change. George Eliot has thus created a world that is at the same time "real" in its appearance and more than "real" in the purpose that lies behind its existence. In part that purpose is achieved by Eliot when the reader is forced to acknowledge that the worlds her narrators describe are fictions, requiring for their existence the imaginative engagement of the reader. Her narrative intrusions that bring into question the nature of narrative itself serve to force that acknowledgement.

It is no wonder, then, that critics can not write of the nature of George Eliot's novels without including the telltale quotation marks around the word "realism," for what Eliot has created is both less and more than a "photograph" of society. As Miller points out, "she wants to show what is there and show how it works" ("Optic" 125). In these three novels it is the metanarrative I have explored that provides in a sense the X-ray capability necessary to see beneath the surface, for these are the passages that create the need for the reader to become imaginatively engaged with questioning not only the reality of the novels, but perceptions of the world outside the
novel as well. Then, once the theoretical connection
between two worlds is made, Eliot's narrators become the
bridge that allows free passage between them, with the hope
all will benefit from the opening of borders, the widening
of understanding and sympathy. The illusion of reality is
broken so that the reader may become "disillusioned" in the
most positive sense of the word: readers will be freed
from those illusions that blind and hinder their
understanding of their fellow mortals.
CHAPTER II

BEYOND THE ILLUSION: METAPHORICAL REALITY

George Eliot's insistence that the reader perceive her novels as "purposeful artifice" is evident in more than just those passages of metanarrative explored in the first chapter of this study. Eliot's extensive use of metaphor is a second critical element in helping us come to understand the transcendent nature of the literary reality she creates: in part this use of metaphor extends the ties that bind characters to one another to include the narrator, the author, and ultimately the reader. After all, metaphorical expression is not so much an acknowledgement of the limitations of language as it is a means for extending the scope of language beyond the bounds of the literal. Metaphor is artifice to the extent that it is not literal, but to the extent that it binds the fictive world with that of the reader it is artifice that transcends fictive reality, connecting it with the world.
outside the novel. Eliot's metaphorical language creates meaning in the novel, and also serves to make plain the hand of its creator. The result of this connection between the "literary" and the "real" world is what has been described as "moral and aesthetic realism" (Cartwright 60): a literary world metaphorically bound to our own.

In the broadest sense, the effect of metaphor in Eliot's novels is to force the mind of the reader to move between the specifics of character and situation to the universal truths those specifics come to represent. Metaphorical language does, in the words of Mark Schorer, "strain toward symbolism" (559), and we come to recognize that through her language George Eliot has "symbolically" connected her world with ours. In part, this connection is the result of George Eliot's forcing our awareness of her presence as a bridge between the two worlds, for despite the movement in this part of our century to divorce the study of literature from the study of those who create it, this separation has never been simple or complete in any case. The connection between the imagination of the author and the fruits of that imagination must be acknowledged, as it has been by more than one critic. Slightly more than four decades ago, in his article "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy'," Mark Schorer wrote these words in reference to the novel in general and Middlemarch in particular.
Today, his words still resonate:

Metaphorical language expresses, defines, and evaluates theme, and thereby demonstrates the limits and the special poise within those limits of a given imagination (559).

Furthermore, Schorer concludes that metaphorical language reveals to us the character of any imaginative work in that, more tellingly perhaps than any other elements, it shows us what conceptions the imagination behind that work is able to entertain, how fully and how happily (560).

Though it is perhaps no longer the fashion to perceive literature as a means toward better understanding the mind and imagination of its creator, in the case of George Eliot we can never consider her writing as an entity totally separate from its source. When George Eliot uses metaphor as a means of communicating ideas, she not only reveals her particular vision and set of priorities, but by implication reveals what she believes the reader should learn from having approached her novels. This dynamic—that of the "teacher-pupil" relationship between novelist and reader—is an element that must be taken into consideration in any analysis, for, as Edwin James Kenney points out, "George Eliot's desire to speak as a moral
teacher is what, in fact,...creates the drama" (109).

Let us examine, then, how this phenomenon of "moral and aesthetic reality" is created by Eliot's use of metaphorical language. That the message of George Eliot's novels hinges on the metaphors that shape them is nothing new to anyone familiar with Eliot scholarship or even to a casual reader of her works. The power of metaphor to influence understanding becomes itself a topic of importance for Eliot's narrator in this passage from The Mill on the Floss:

Oh, 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 that we can so seldom declare what a thing is except by saying it is something else? (151-2)

In making reference to Aristotle, the narrator is of course alluding to the Poetics, a document which, with the Rhetoric, establishes the fundamental precept of connection between art, language, and life: our sense of ethics and morality is a function of the language we use to express ourselves. In other terms, actions and words are inextricable from one another. The reader of a novel can
not view that work as a thing completely removed; the words of the novel become a part of the life of the reader. Though the narrator seems to express concern over the fact that intelligent expression is virtually always couched in metaphorical terms, it is through "saying a thing by saying something else" that the language-life connection becomes evident. This point becomes clear when we consider the passage immediately preceding "Aristotle's lament":

Mr. Stelling concluded that Tom's brain being peculiarly impervious to etymology and demonstrations was peculiarly in need of being ploughed and harrowed by these patent implements; it was his favourite metaphor, that the classics and geometry constituted that culture of the mind which prepared it for the reception of any subsequent crop. I say nothing against Mr. Stelling's theory; if we are to have one regimen for all minds, his seems to me as good as any other. I only know it turned out as uncomfortably for Tom Tulliver as if he had been pried with cheese in order to remedy a gastric weakness which prevented him from digesting it. 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 someone 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 (151).

The narrator's point, then, is not that metaphor is a form of necessary evil in expression or an intrinsically weak rhetorical mode, but rather that the link between thought and metaphorical images must in some way be organic in the Coleridgean sense, or, as Karen B. Mann describes the process in *The Language That Makes George Eliot's Fiction*, the language must move "from static external forms to dynamic internal functions" (13). Mr Stelling's "favorite metaphor" is static in the sense that the metaphorical image—that of the plough preparing a field for planting—and the process it is meant to describe are related only on the most superficial of levels. Of course in these circumstances the metaphor seems to the narrator "as good as any other," because no metaphor that ignores the dynamism of the real life it is intended to illuminate
is of any value whatsoever. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between farming and learning, but that parallel exists only in two dimensions. Mr. Stelling lacks the imaginative vision necessary for the rethinking of his treasured metaphor and as a result loses sight of his goal as a teacher. The metaphor has crippled his ability to conceive of a new approach that just might allow Tom to learn something.

That Eliot is not rejecting the concept of metaphor is made even more evident by J. Hillis Miller, writing in "The Two Rhetorics: George Eliot’s Beastiary":

> The escape from entanglement in the net of metaphor (another metaphor!) is not a substitution of literal language for misleading figure, but is the replacement of one metaphor by another. The second metaphor may neutralize the first or cancel out its distortions. This is a cure of metaphor by metaphor, a version of homeopathy. So George Eliot replaces the metaphor of ploughing and harrowing with a metaphor of eating. Forcing Latin grammar on Tom is like curing an inability to digest cheese with doses of cheese, or, the reader might reflect, like curing the disaster brought on by carrying the metaphorical basis in a pedagogical theory.
into practice by the application of another theoretical metaphor, replacing one kind of cheese with another kind of cheese. It is at this point that the narrator draws herself (himself?) up and makes the exclamation about how astonishing it is what a different result one gets by changing the metaphor (107).

As Miller implies, George Eliot has in this section introduced a new layer of metaphor: the image of the physician/scientist striving to overcome disease serves to represent the process by which the use of metaphor itself can lead to truth. As an example, let us continue the homeopathic metaphor in the examination of the opening phrases of The Mill on the Floss. The connection is not as far-fetched as it may seem at first glance: in this case the "disease" is artificiality—untruth—which is being "cured" by the application of carefully measured doses of literary artifice. The novel begins:

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships—laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal—
are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of the February sun (11).

This passage might on first reading seem "untrue" because of its violation in a number of particulars of John Ruskin's admonition against the pathetic fallacy, for Ruskin defines that "error" as the presentation of extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy; false appearances I say, as being entirely unconnected with any real power of character in the object, and only imputed to it by us (1331). After all, rivers and tides move and act not on the impetus of such human motivators as lateness and urgency, but rather as the result of physical realities best described by geologists, astronomers, and physicists. I would argue, however, that the narrator is not falling into the trap identified by Ruskin, but rather she is extending to the utmost level that which Ruskin would define as "ordinary, proper, and true appearance to us" (1331). As George Eliot herself wrote in reviewing the third volume of Ruskin's Modern Painters,
The truth of infinite value that he teaches is realism—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be obtained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of substantial reality. The thorough acceptance of this doctrine would remould our life (McSweeney 15).

The structure of Eliot's opening sentence in *The Mill on the Floss* establishes the connection between the words and the outside reality they attempt to capture: the sentence, like the river itself, is a progression with no clear end. The very words on the page become part of the metaphorical pattern. We can identify the parts of speech as they flow by in the text, but the sentence is ultimately a fragment, like the ever-changing slice of river that falls within our line of vision at any given time.

Within this structural framework, then, the reader is first asked to reconcile metaphorical artifice with the illusion of reality when the word "hurries" is encountered. The anthropomorphism inherent in such a word choice is intriguing. We are presented with a description that accurately captures the real physical movement of the water itself but also implies human motivation. People hurry because only humans can experience the sense of
urgency resulting from the emotion that is revealed when the image is made complete: "the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace."
The images created in this opening sentence are embued with depth and dynamism as the reader continues through the novel: the physical presence of the river dominates the lives of virtually every character, and within the framework of the novel the river takes on central symbolic importance as well. The image of the spontaneous, urgent embrace of lovers— as it is tied to the life-giving and life-taking power of the river— resonates on more than one level, encompassing aspects of theme, plot and character psychology. Thematically, the power of the river is equated with the power of love. Both control the lives of characters; both exist in the realm of beautiful, unpredictable mystery.

Witness these further—often anthropomorphic— images of the river that follow:

How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low, placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving (11-12).
In this case the river's mystery seems less threatening, though it is "dark" and "changing," and its dominant characteristic is near mesmerizing peacefulness. The unexpectedness of the final description in this passage of the river as "one who is deaf and loving," however, both deepens the mystery and enhances the truth-telling of the passage. Love has long been held to be blind to the faults of its object, but in this variation love is also incapable of hearing its lover's response. Love that is deaf, unlike love that is blind, carries on in monologue only; it affects the lives of others without being touched itself by their words. Such, for example, is the nature of the relationship between young Tom and Maggie: Maggie may be blind to Tom's faults, but Tom in his "deafness" is incapable of engaging in love's dialogue. As a result he may unwittingly crush Maggie with a mere word or a glance.

Later, in the climactic flood of the river that brings the novel and the lives of Maggie and Tom to an end, the language of love, the image of the river, and the physical reality of that river become completely entwined with one another:

Along with the sense of danger and possible rescue for those long-remembered beings at the old home, there was an undefined sense of
reconcilement with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs? Vaguely, Maggie felt this—in the strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the late impressions of hatred, cruel offense and misunderstanding, and left only the deep, underlying, unshakable memories of early union (542-3).

The surging river sweeps clean the surface of the land and provides the power to cleanse Maggie's painful memories as well. The power of the river and the power of Maggie's love are inseparable, and at this point the metaphor becomes more than just a means of "saying what a thing is by saying it is something else." Yes, the river has served symbolically and metaphorically to represent among other things the powerful role played by love in determining the course of lives, but here the effect is doubled as the river also becomes the physical mechanism by which destinies are fulfilled.

In the case of The Mill on the Floss the reader is afforded a privilege not granted to Maggie and Tom, that of surveying the aftermath of the catastrophe. Ironically, we
can see that in some ways Maggie's sense of having been at last freed from "hatred, cruel offense and misunderstanding" may not have been altogether accurate. As the narrator points out, the landscape can never truly return to its pre-flood condition:

Nature repairs her ravages—but not all. The up-torn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred; if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair (547).

Just as the land can never be restored to its pristine condition, neither could Maggie's memories of her "early union" with Tom have withstood strong scrutiny without showing that union to have resulted in as much pain as it did joy. This passage not only confirms the dynamic nature of the connection between the metaphorical image of the river and the sweeping power of love it comes to represent, but also provides a final insight into the portrait of Maggie, who remains to the end susceptible to self-deception in her intense desire to be loved. In addition, the image of the flooding river serves to transport Eliot's "moral and aesthetic realism" from the specifics of the
fictional world to the world of the reader. The great wash of the flood, as a result of the all-encompassing nature of its imagery, sweeps along the reader as well: though we can distance ourselves from the specific situations in which the characters of the novel find themselves, the experience of taking stock of our lives in light of our own mortality is universal.

In the first chapter of this study, I touched on the narrator’s use of "magical" imagery in describing her art. It is the narrator of Middlemarch who makes this comment about magic: "For effective magic is transcendent nature; and who shall measure the subtlety of those touches which convey the quality of the soul as well as the body...?" (284). The term "magic," then, might be applied to the entire opening passage of The Mill on the Floss, for the narrator’s body and soul become one as the intangible world blends with the real: a well-measured dose of literary artifice with sensory images that provide a basis in reality. The flow of the river is both real and metaphorical. The river, like the loves that dominate the characters of the novel, flows with daunting power but in a path over which it has no control. In the first sentence we feel the river’s metaphorical importance, but in the second we are made to consider its physical reality as well in the details of the daily life that surrounds it. What,
after all, could seem more real than the smell of pine-sap and cut wood, the voluptuous curves of burlap sacks packed to near bursting with seed, or the flashes of the reflected light emanating from the pure blackness of heaped coal—the oxymoronic "dark glitter"? Ultimately, these multiple significances merge when the river's physical presence and its symbolic importance become one and the same.

Just as the image of the Floss itself can be said to be the dominating metaphorical vehicle in The Mill on the Floss, a case has been made for the image of the spider's web as the dominant metaphor in Middlemarch. Its importance is such that few critics can avoid using the metaphor themselves in describing the novel. Here Kerry McSweeney describes the creation of Middlemarch:

Eliot worked hard to weave the different strands of her novel together effectively.... By the third book of Middlemarch Eliot was firmly in control of the alternating story-lines; and by the novel's climax in the seventh and eighth books she had become something of a virtuoso at interweaving the principal story lines. Particularly impressive is the way in which the circumstances of Mr. Bulstrode's disgrace are made to involve other characters and the way in
which the private lives of Dorothea and Lydgate are drawn together through the brilliant stroke of developing a connection between the beloved of one and the wife of the other (7-8).

The metaphor of entanglement in a web plays a role in another oft-quoted passage in which Eliot's narrator comments directly on the importance of metaphor, this time in *Middlemarch*. Two metaphors—one false and one true—are implicitly brought into comparison as the narrator makes her point about the role of metaphor in our perceptions and lives:

> For Mr. Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment, and that large drafts on his affections would not fail to be honoured; for we all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them (63).

The narrator in this case is doing far more than simply complaining about the muddling effects of metaphor. In fact, she is taking a stand in defense of true metaphor: metaphor that reveals rather than conceals the nature of the human condition. The implied comparison between money in savings and happiness stored away for later enjoyment is a false one. In his naivete, Casaubon
clings to the belief that the world is ordered to his liking, and—as in his scholarly pursuits—he refuses to acknowledge even the most blatant evidence that his perceptions are mistaken. The metaphor reflects the workings of Casaubon's mind, "oppressed...by the sense of moving heavily in a dim and clogging medium" (361). Like Mr. Stelling's insistence on "cultivating" Tom Tulliver's mind in the most literal fashion, Casaubon's belief that he is owed interest to be paid in happiness or pleasure is a kind of "fatal" metaphor because it fails to reveal the truth of his situation. Ironically, the valid metaphor in the passage does not involve compound interest but rather entanglement, for as has been pointed out (Miller "Optic" 99), the operative metaphor throughout Middlemarch is that of the spider's web. As Casaubon determines to marry Dorothea, one more sticky strand is added to the complex and emotionally dangerous net. Eliot's moral message to the reader thus takes the form of a warning, though not a warning against entanglement, which is inevitable in a deterministic world. The warning concerns our perceptions of the nature of that entanglement. When a metaphor serves to reveal the nature of the strands that bind us one to another, we are better able to act in a manner that serves the best interests of all. When the web is obscured, our
actions become "fatal" in the sense that they precipitate
events beyond our control and understanding.

The novel is in some ways dominated by the invisible
spider perched above the characters of Middlemarch; that
arachnid turns out to be just one of a number of species of
fauna that inhabit the novel and take on metaphorical
importance. J. Hillis Miller, in "The Two Rhetorics:
George Eliot's Beastiary," examines carefully the
metaphorical roles of the beaver, the camel, and the
shrewmouse in The Mill on the Floss, but the boundaries of
Eliot's beastiary can be extended to include Middlemarch,
for this novel as well growls and slashes and gnaws as if
it were the offspring of the griffin and lion in Chapter 17
of Adam Bede.

The "beastiary" in Middlemarch does not perhaps
create a pattern or dominating metaphor in the same
important way as does the spider and her web, but reading
Middlemarch is in many ways comparable to a walk through a
zoo, for here, encaged for our inspection if not for our
protection, is a cross-section of life both different from
and yet strangely resembling our own. The characters'
perceptions—and by implication those of the readers as
well—once again become the issue as both are asked to
contemplate those qualities in humankind that separate us
from the beasts. At an early juncture, the tone is set
When Dorothea and Celia discuss the appearance of Mr. Casaubon as if they were discussing the remarkable resemblance between the lowland gorilla and his human cousins:

When the two girls were in the drawing-room alone, Celia said—

"How very ugly Mr. Casaubon is!"

"Celia! He is one of the most distinguished-looking men I ever saw. He is remarkably like the portrait of Locke. He has the same deep eye-sockets."

"Had Locke those two white moles with hairs on them?"

"Oh, I daresay! when people of a certain sort looked at him," said Dorothea, walking away a little.

"Mr. Casaubon is so sallow."

"All the better. I suppose you admire a man with the complexion of a cochon de lait."

"Dodo!" exclaimed Celia, looking after her in surprise. "I never heard you make such a comparison before."

"Why should I make it before the occasion came? It is a good comparison: the match is perfect."
Miss Brooke was clearly forgetting herself, and Celia thought so.

"I wonder how you show temper, Dorothea."

"It is painful in you, Celia, that you will look at human beings as if they were merely animals with a toilette, and never see the great soul in a man's face."

"Has Mr. Casaubon a great soul?" (15).

Celia, in her innocence, has asked a pivotal question for the novel. Mr. Casaubon's "great soul" is, after all, a projection of Dorothea's based on his outer appearance. Not only has Dorothea erred in the same manner as those who attribute human emotions to animals whose behavior resembles our own, she has "acted fatally" on the strength of a false metaphor parallel to that which blinds Casaubon. Just as he believes himself to have accumulated a "compound interest" of happiness as a result of his having denied himself pleasure, so Dorothea believes that he has accumulated a "compound interest" of inner wisdom based on her perception of his less than fortunate outer appearance. In a fundamental way, however, Mr. Casaubon is an "animal with a toilette." Despite his pretensions, he responds on a nearly instinctual level to perceived threats with threats of his own. The faulty metaphors by which he perceives and judges his experience prevent him from
exercising the sympathy and compassion which define humanity according to George Eliot.

Soon, the very real Maltese puppy becomes for Dorothea a symbol of all that is wrong with the life of uselessness that she fears and detests:

"It is painful for me to see these creatures that are bred merely as pets," said Dorothea, whose opinion was forming itself that very moment (as opinions will) under the heat of irritation.

"Oh, why?" said Sir James, as they walked forward.

"I believe all the petting that is given them does not make them happy. They are too helpless: their lives are too frail. A weasel or a mouse that gets its own living is more interesting. I like to think that the animal about us have souls something like our own, and either carry on their own little affairs or can be companions to us like Monk here. Those creatures are parasitic" (22).

On one level this exchange serves to illuminate an aspect of Dorothea's character and thought process: she is using the small dog as an excuse for venting her frustration at Sir James and all others who would attempt to usurp her right to define her own priorities in life.
Perhaps more importantly, however, we are left to ponder an important implied parallel between the animal and human worlds. When a person's life becomes parasitic, can that person be said to have achieved full human potential? Dorothea desires the independence of the mouse and the weasel, and she fears that Sir James could take this independence from her. Ironically, it is Casaubon who ultimately strips away her freedom.

The character who holds the power to return Dorothea's independence to her—at least to some degree—is Will Ladislaw. In Will's case, we are once again asked to consider the animal world as a means of coming to a clearer understanding of the human. Gilbert and Gubar point out that Will is early on linked (ironically, by Casaubon himself) with a mythical beast of great power and beauty:

While critics like Henry James have castigated Will Ladislaw as a lady's man, Will is Eliot's radically anti-patriarchal attempt to create an image of masculinity attractive to women. Early associated with the winged horse Pegasus (chap. 9), who was created from the blood of Medusa's decapitated head and presented by Minerva to the Muses, Will is thus mythically linked with female power and female inspiration (528-9).
The beastiary grows yet again as Eliot demonstrates that Will has the "great soul" that elevates him to the level of the truly human. In his rending confrontation with Rosamond, whom he believes to have ruined forever his chance to achieve happiness with Dorothea, Will also confronts the power of the beast within him. His rage against Rosamond creates a painful—but true—moment of epiphany for Rosamond as she understands the magnitude of her self-deception, and proves without question his love for Dorothea:

It would have been safer for Will in the first instance to have taken up his hat and gone away; but he had felt no impulse to do this; on the contrary, he had a horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond with his anger. It seemed impossible to bear the fatality she had drawn down on him without venting his fury as it would be to a panther to bear the javelin-wound without springing and biting....

He began to move with the restlessness of a wild animal that sees his prey but cannot reach it....

Will stopped as if he had found himself grasping something that must not be thrown and shattered. He found another vent for his rage by
snatching up Rosamond's words again, as if they were reptiles to be throttled and flung off (570).

Dogs, mice, weasels, horses, panthers, and reptiles: all are a part of the layers of imagery and metaphor that create meaning in Middlemarch. Eliot makes the moral point that people's humanity can be measured by the extent to which their actions distinguish them from the beastiary, and the reader is drawn into the moral and aesthetic debate. The very act of reading a novel requires the distinguishing human characteristic of rational thought, and to the extent that the reader appreciates an imaginative literary construct—in this case the metaphorical comparison between human and animal behavior—the reader's sympathies and humanity are extended.

In order to understand more completely the role of metaphor in creating Eliot's special version of reality, however, we must step back and examine the novel in which virtually all of the important seeds of that reality are planted, Adam Bede. In addition to the chapter, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," which treats the complex relationship between author, narrator, artifice, and reality which is here under discussion, we also see in this chapter the first strand in a metaphorical web like the one
that will later so devastatingly entangle the characters of Middlemarch. Adam's faulty perceptions serve as the anchor for those early threads; after having seen and rejected clear evidence that Hetty was not interested in him, Adam is strangely relieved: "And so Adam went to bed comforted, having woven for himself an ingenious web of probabilities—the surest screen a wise man can place between himself and the truth" (278). Despite the entangled lives and loves of the characters of Adam Bede, however, the metaphor that resonates most clearly through the novel is that of music. Adam Bede is a novel of sound; the characters live in a world of alternating harmony, discord, and sometimes sheer deafening cacaphony.

Beryl Gray, in her 1989 book, George Eliot and Music, traces the importance of music not only in the life of Eliot herself, but in The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda. She sees musical activity in the novels as especially important as it reveals something about character, as in Middlemarch, where "music and musical allusion morally codify and stratify the fictive world, and reveal the capacity for sympathy in each principal character" (79). She mentions Adam Bede in passing, but it is in fact in this novel that music first comes to the forefront as a critical thematic and metaphorical element. Often we are introduced to a place
or character not only by a visual impression but by that place or character's intrinsic musical qualities. Mr. Joshua Rann, for example, becomes known to us principally by his "resounding bass undertone, like the tuning of a violoncello" (30); when the narrator takes us to visit the Hall Farm for the first time ("for imagination is a licensed trespasser"), the impression we have is one of manic counterpoint:

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-knitted 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 (79-80).
The novel is supported throughout by the background music of the plain Methodist hymn and ends with the sound of "Marriage Bells."

It becomes evident, however, during the course of the novel, that Eliot does more with music than merely add an aural element to other sensory images as a means of creating literary realism. The power of the attraction that Adam feels for Hetty—an attraction that in one way or another affects every other element of the novel—is described in primarily musical terms. Like the river in The Mill on the Floss, music becomes the central metaphor for the emotions over which we have little or no control, but which determine our fate:

I think the deep love he had for that sweet, rounded, blossom-like, dark-eyed Hetty, of whose inward self he was really very ignorant, came out of the very strength of his nature and not out of inconsistent weakness. Is it weakness, pray, to be wrought by exquisite music? To feel its wondrous harmonies searching the subtiest 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 tenderness, all the love that has been
scattered through the toilsome years, concentrating in one emotion of heroic courage or resignation all the hard-learnt lessons of self-renouncing sympathy, blending your present joy with past sorrow and your present sorrow with all your past joy? If not, then neither is it a weakness to be so wrought upon by the exquisite curves of a woman's cheek and neck and arms, by the liquid depths of her beseeching eyes, or the sweet childish pout of her lips. For the beauty of a lovely woman is like music: what can one say more (338-9)?

The music that rings through Adam Bede indeed raises questions that go to the heart of meaning in the novel. Are the characters masters of their own destinies, or are they instead mesmerized by the metaphorical music of life? If one must, indeed, love the beauty of Hetty, then can any thought or action taken in the context of that love be said to have originated in free will? Or are the twists and turns of life determined by powers over which we have little or no control? The intermingling lines of life's fugue work as effectively as the strands of the spider's web in binding people to their destinies. We respond, like those entranced by the music of Dinah Morris' voice as she
preaches outdoors, to vibrations that emanate from some other source:

Hitherto the traveller had been chained to the spot against his will by the charm of Dinah's mellow treble tones, which had a variety of modulation like that of a fine musical instrument touched with the unconscious skill of musical instinct. The simple things she said seemed like novelties, as melody strikes us with a new feeling when we hear it sung by the pure voice of a boyish chorister; the depth of conviction with which she spoke seemed in itself an evidence for the truth of her message (37).

Perhaps it would be possible to analyze *Adam Bede* from some quasi-musical perspective, searching for elements of theme, variations, development, and recapitulation of theme leading ultimately to resolution in the comforting coda, but this approach would be to miss the point of the metaphor. Music might at first seem an unlikely vehicle for revealing truth about the nature of human life and activity: it is abstract, and its production is often self-consciously artificial; except in the most specialized cases music can not "resemble" nature. In the nineteenth century music was perhaps the "vaguest" of arts, yet the realist George Eliot finds music to "search the subtlest
windings of your soul, the delicate fibres of life where no memory can penetrate." Why does the music of Dinah's voice create the conviction of truth, and why is it the music of Hetty's beauty that disables Adam's critical faculties? The answer to all these questions—direct and implied—lies in the resemblance between the properties of musical expression and the observed effects of the emotional forces that direct and determine the course of our lives. Music becomes the perfect vehicle for symbolizing the irresistible sweep of powerful emotion because of its very vagueness. It affects all within its range, yet acts on each in a different manner according to that person's temperament and experience. In addition, the "music of life" is unavoidable. We can not close out the music of the farm, the music of Dinah's voice, or the music of Hetty's beauty. We must hear it, and we are left only to measure the resulting changes in ourselves.

When George Eliot's narrator in The Mill on the Floss laments that Aristotle's praise of metaphor would be tempered had he only known that in subsequent times intelligent expression would rarely be couched in any other terms, she lets us know that she is aware of the Poetics. In that work, Aristotle states:
It is a great thing, indeed, to make proper use of the poetical forms, as also of compounds and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars (255).

George Eliot's use of metaphor in these novels, however, goes beyond merely finding similarity in dissimilars as a descriptive tool. In creating both large over-arching metaphorical patterns and incisive focused comparisons on the sentence level, Eliot expands in yet another way the power of literature to be "real." Her novels metaphorically bridge the gap between the fictive world and the world of the reader by inviting--virtually demanding--the imaginative participation of the reader in the creation of the novels' ultimate effect. In a sense, the reader is forced to see the reading of a novel itself as a metaphor for active participation in life, for each results in undeniable and irrevocable changes. The reader's reaction to every subsequent event in life will to some extent be colored by earlier participation in the novel's recreation. Through literary "artifice," then,
the novels complete the cycle of creation, change, and recreation within the lives of their readers.
CHAPTER III

THE VOICE BEHIND THE ILLUSION: NARRATOR AS CHARACTER

The blending of the traditionally realistic elements and the boldly artificial that we have come to see as characteristic of George Eliot's novels through her use of metanarrative and metaphor becomes even more evident when we extend our study to include the nature of the narrative "characters" who relate the events and actions of the novels. George Eliot's narrators are not detached voices, but neither are they subjective and limited narrators, such as the governess in Henry James' The Turn of the Screw or Mark Twain's Huck Finn. They also differ distinctly from one another. There is, however, a tie that binds Eliot's narrators to one another: they each exist as identifiable entities whose personal characteristics and individual differences alter the nature of the relationship between reader and the narrated events. In other words, our understanding of the story is a function of our
understanding of the story teller.

An analysis of this phenomenon might begin with an example from an Eliot work in many ways outside the main stream of her literary efforts. On preliminary examination, George Eliot's novella of the supernatural, "The Lifted Veil," seems to differ from the novels we have examined thus far in this study in a number of important ways. The first and foremost of these differences is the nature of the narrative voice, for the speaker in the novella is in fact the work's central character, a man haunted by the blight of clairvoyance, which he finds nearly incompatible with sanity. Here he describes the nature of his peculiar vision as it reveals the motivation behind the words and actions of others:

...the rational talk, the graceful attentions, the wittily-turned phrases, and the kindly deeds, which used to make the web of their characters, were seen as if thrust asunder by a microscopic vision, that showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap (Eliot "The Lifted Veil" 19-20).
Despite the seeming formal gulf between "The Lifted Veil" and the other novels upon which we have focused our attention, I choose this work and this passage for its ability to illuminate a narrative paradox that pervades the works of George Eliot. Though the narrator's vision is "omniscient" in that it reveals much about the forces operating behind the words and actions of others, his assessment of that underlying motivation also reveals something about the narrator himself: another person given the same information may not have achieved the same singular state of bitterness and cynicism that this narrator demonstrates toward his fellows. The narrator of "The Lifted Veil" is a person who has, as the result of serious illness, been conferred with the ability to read the thoughts of those around him as well as to see the future, yet the narrator's humanity requires that his vision be filtered before it is passed on to us. He is human, frail, and decidedly mortal. It is telling that he can foresee the exact circumstances surrounding his own approaching and inevitable death, and as a part of that final scene he sees himself reaching futilely for the bell cord to summon help that he knows will never arrive. His vision allows him to see objectively, yet his humanity refuses to let him accept the inevitable.

Elements of the magical extend from the narrative in
this work to Eliot's successive novels, as the narrators of
Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Middlemarch are
gifted with a vision somewhat like that of the narrator in
"The Lifted Veil." The narrators of the later novels can
not, of course, foresee the future, yet all are privy to
the innermost thoughts of other characters within the
works. In each case, however, the narrators also
demonstrate human characteristics sufficient to make them
identifiable as separate, human entities. As a result, the
reader must in these novels consider the filter through
which the narrative passes as much as that filter must be
accounted for in "The Lifted Veil." Though these narrators
may not take on roles as central to their novels' action as
does the narrator of "The Lifted Veil," they do indeed
become "characters" in the novels, and often seem as
preoccupied with their own mortality as is the narrator of
"The Lifted Veil." Though actual interaction between the
narrators and other characters in these works is rare (and
perhaps limited to a single interview between the narrator
and Adam Bede that takes place many years after the main
action of the novel), each narrator speaks as if he or she
were a member of the community that serves as the focus in
each novel. That the narrators exist in two worlds--that
of the detached story teller and that of the characters
within the novels--provides them and the novels with a
distinctly Eliot-style brand of realism, different from works whose narrators are more clearly inhabitants of one world or the other. The reader is forced, then, to accept a narrator who exhibits human tendencies and yet possesses the decidedly more than human ability to know the workings of the minds of others, even to the extent of knowing what the characters themselves can neither understand nor acknowledge. Of Lydgate, for example, the narrator is able to relate those facts of childhood and education that Lydgate himself might choose to reveal, yet the narrator of Middlemarch possesses the ability to delve beneath surfaces and see that which Lydgate himself does not know about himself:

Lydgate's conceit was of an arrogant sort, never simpering, never impertinent, but massive in its claims and benevolently contemptuous.... Lydgate's spots of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which, in spite of noble intention and sympathy, were half of them such as are found in ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardor, did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other
country surgeons. He did not mean to think of
furniture at the present; but whenever he did so,
it was to be feared that neither biology nor
schemes of reform would lift him above the
vulgarity of feeling that there would be an
incompatibility in his furniture not being of the
best (111-2).

Once we accept the premise of the narrators' dual
abilities, then narrative comment and "intrusion" must be
viewed not as a break in the line of development in the
novels, but rather as an integral element in that
development. One strong version of this argument is
presented by Edwin James Kenney, who claims that "the
narrator's voice as it reveals its own interior struggle is
always more immediate to us than the struggle of any
fictional character in George Eliot's novels" (61), adding
that "George Eliot's intentional desire to speak as a moral
teacher is what, in fact, causes her inner struggle and
creates the drama" (109). Though Kenney may err to the
extent that he is not in these passages making a clear
distinction between George Eliot and the narrators she
creates to tell her stories, his point— that it is not
possible or even desirable to separate the narrator's voice
from the fiction itself—is accurate. Eliot's novels make
us aware that the measure of realism in literature need not
be based on the premise that the narrative must proceed from a severely limited perspective. Though Henry James would perhaps lament Eliot's destruction of the illusion of reality by the creation of narrators as complex as those in the novels under study, Jerome David Cartwright points out in his discussion of George Eliot as an "aesthetic teacher" that readers need not maintain continuously their suspension of disbelief in order to participate fully in the reading experience.

One need not read far into *Adam Bede* before beginning to form a portrait of its narrator far more complex than that of a mere narrative persona with vaguely identifiable human characteristics. As the novel progresses, we see that the impression of narrator's omniscience is made to coexist with a flesh and blood human being with particular knowledge, experience, sensations, beliefs, doubts, and reasons for becoming the narrator of *Adam Bede*. In other words, we come to know the narrator's anima, and in so doing our perception of the novel itself is altered. The narrator is not merely in possession of certain objective information which is passed on directly to the reader, but rather the speaker takes that information, interprets its importance, and then passes that interpretation on to us.
In the process, the narrator teaches us about who he—in the case of *Adam Bede*—is.

First, however, we can establish certain "facts" concerning the narrator. In her dissertation, "The Emergent Persona," Susan Calovini explores at length the issue of gender and narrative in George Eliot's novels, and she provides ample evidence for the masculine nature of Eliot's narrator in *Adam Bede*. The narrator seems at points determined to establish this masculine identity (and perhaps maintain the "George Eliot" pseudonym for Maryanne Evans at this early point in her career), such as when he claims that "we are apt to be kinder to the brutes that love us than to the women that love us" (52). Barbara Hardy is convinced of the narrator's masculine character ([*Novels* 155]), and it seems likely that Eliot intended that impression.

We learn several other facts concerning the life experience of the narrator of *Adam Bede*. He is looking back not only on the lives of the characters, but on his own life as well, which is approaching an end. His recollection is of events to which he was adult witness some sixty years earlier, which places him near the eighty year mark. Indeed, in those eighty years the narrator has seen and read much. The intellectual person can be defined to some extent as the product of his reading, and in this
case we know that not only has he read Milton and the Bible but also studied science and theology. He is familiar as well with the popular press of her day, and it is the narrator himself who makes the connection between this array of reading and the message of sympathy at the heart of the novel:

[Seth and Dinah] believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions; they drew lots, and sought for Divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard; having a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures, which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators; and it is impossible for me to represent their diction as correct, or their instruction as liberal. Still—if I have read religious history aright—faith, hope, and charity have not always been found in a direct ratio with a sensibility to the three concords, and it is possible—thank Heaven!—to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings...
Considering these things, we can hardly think Dinah and Seth beneath our sympathy, accustomed as we may be to weep over the loftier sorrows of heroines in satin boots and crinoline, and of heroes riding fiery horses, themselves ridden by still more fiery passions (47-8).

We learn from the beginning of Adam Bede that its narrator is a person for whom the passage of life's events is inseparable from the art we create in conjunction with those events. He reveals something about his own character when, for example, he contends that the sound of the hammers and planes in Jonathan Burge's workshop is "singing" (18), "the concert of the tools" (19). The narrator's perception of events is one in which natural occurrences are intertwined with artistic expression, in this case musical. Musical expression is more than a critical metaphor in the novel; the connection between musical and other forms of artistic expression and the more prosaic aspects of life is a fundamental part of the narrator's personal belief system. For the narrator, the voice of Mr. Joshua Rann is "like the tuning of a violoncello" (30); Dinah's voice charms with "meiow treble tones, which had a variety of modulation like that of a fine instrument touched with the unconscious skill of musical instinct" (37); the greatest virtue in Mr. Irwine
is the fact that he "harmonized extremely well with that peaceful landscape" (77).

It is not just musical expression but also literary expression that the narrator finds to be linked to the lives that literature portrays. One of the basic assumptions of the first chapter of this study is that the narrators of George Eliot's novels are also concerned with exploring the nature of story telling itself. Just as musical expression blurs the distinction between the artistic and the "real," the narrator is a person who believes that the distinction between the living of life and the telling of that life is also blurred. The narrator of *Adam Bede* begins by drawing a connection between the Egyptian sorcerer's magic and the work of the story teller. Just as the sorcerer "reveals far-reaching visions," so the narrator will use a drop of ink to "show you the roomy workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder, in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799" (17). The narrator's character is in some ways the sum of the beliefs that he holds, and in this case the narrator believes the art of story telling--narrative--to be capable of reproducing the effect of magic: language transcends the boundaries of the page to stimulate all five senses.
That the narrator believes in the co-mingling of language with every other element of living becomes evident in the opening portrait of characters and scene. Even while reproducing with seeming pinpoint accuracy the tone and sound of the workmen's words, the narrator emphasizes that more than anything it is the men's words that define and identify who they are, a point that Adam, Seth and their coworkers unconsciously make themselves:

Seth looked a little conscious, and began to be slower in his preparations for going, but Mum Taft broke silence, and said, "Aye, aye, Adam lad, ye talk like a young un. When y' are six-an'-forty like me, istid o' six-an'-twenty, ye wanna be so flush o' working' for nought."

"Nonsense," said Adam, still wrathful; "what's age got to do with it, I wonder? Ye arena getting stiff yet, I reckon. I hate to see a man's arms drop down as if he was shot, before the clock's fairly struck, just as if he'd never had a bit o' pride and delight in 's work. The grindstone 'ull go on turning a bit after you loose it."

"Bodderation, Adam!" exclaimed Wiry Ben; "Iave a chap aloon, will 'ee? Ye war afinding faut wi' preachers a while ago--y' are fond enough o'
preachin' yoursen. Ye may like work better nor play, but I like play better nor work; that'll 'commodate ye--it laves ye th' more to do."

With this exit speech, which he considered effective, Wiry Ben shouldered his basket and left the workshop, quickly followed by Mum Taft and Sandy Jim. Seth lingered, and looked wistfully at Adam, as if he expected him to say something.

"Shalt go home before thee go'st to the preaching?" Adam asked, looking up (23).

The narrator in this passage reveals something of his own perspective on the world, and thus his character. By his choices we come to know him, and here he has chosen a particular moment for the introduction of his most important characters, and this brief confrontation is one in which people are defined by their use of language: like Mum Taft, who sees differences in age as a function of speech ("ye talk like a young un"), and even Wiry Ben, whose basis for criticizing Adam is above all rhetorical, the narrator's perspective is revealed by his interpretation of Seth's countenance, in which he sees a desire for Adam to re-establish stability through speech. For Adam to regain the upper hand, the narrator believes he must say something. Fortunately, he does, and in the
process creates a bridge for Seth between the disharmony of the workshop and the more tranquil world he craves.

Ultimately, however, it is the famous and fascinating seventeenth chapter of *Adam Bede* that must be at the heart of any question concerning the nature of the narrator's "character." The chapter presents the narrator's theory of literary realism and purpose, and in revealing purpose, the narrator reveals something of himself as well. His human complexity is revealed even in the opening paragraph, for example, when the narrator strikes a tone that is at once ironically self-deprecating and declarative of his unwavering devotion to the loftiest of ideals:

Certainly I could [alter the character of the Rector of Broxton], if I held it the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking; I might select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But it happens, on the contrary, that my strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless
defective; the outlines will sometimes be
disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but
I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as
I can what that reflection is, as if I were in
the witness-box, narrating my experience under
oath (174).

Even in declaring allegiance to the ideal of truth
telling in all situations, the narrator's ironic inflection
in describing his "own admirable opinions" and his
admission that "the mirror is doubtless defective" reveal
an awareness of life as a process which may never be
complete. We can and must search for truth even when that
truth proves too elusive for our powers of perception.
That his own life—and that of his readers—is primarily a
process of learning becomes clear as the chapter continues
and the narrator takes on the role of teacher and
journalist. The narrator wants to understand what has not
been clear, thus the "interview" with Adam Bede some years
after the fact in order to ascertain his views on the
relative merits of the clergy in question. He wants to
teach readers to see the world as does the artist striving
for realism in the hope that sympathy will be bred of such
realism:
In this world there are so many of these common coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore, let Art remind us of them; therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things—men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them (177).

The narrator of *Adam Bede* is thus truly an "aesthetic teacher" and a moral one as well. He does not merely tell the reader that the extension of sympathy to those less-than-perfect people in a less-than-perfect world is an admirable goal, but becomes himself the object lesson in sympathetic response. We come to admire and sympathize with the narrator without his telling us that to do so is a good thing. The narrator hopes to enable the reader to grow morally through recounting the lives and loves of Adam, Seth, Hetty, and Dinah, but the goal of moral growth rests on the backbone of the reader's sympathetic response to the narrator and her act of story telling. As we come
to appreciate the speaker, so we appreciate the message he bears.

Interestingly, the reader's sense of the narrator as a real person grows stronger in *The Mill on the Floss*, despite the fact that, as Susan Calovini points out, "George Eliot was not as eager to inscribe a gendered narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* as she was in her earlier works" (205). Calovini goes on to claim that it was Eliot's intention to create a narrator as free from specific masculine or feminine traits as possible (209), and this intention on Eliot's part is perhaps in fitting with the novel's overall greater emphasis on the symbolic. For the sake of convenience, however, the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* shall be referred to as "she."

Unlike in *Adam Bede*, where the message of sympathy is largely communicated through narrative example, in *The Mill on the Floss* the narrator often appeals directly to the reader for a desired response to the other characters in the novel. Note, however, the narrator's willingness to reveal the mark of her own past experience as well as to include herself among the transgressors in this passage in defense of Maggie:
We have all of us sobbed so piteously, standing with tiny bare legs above our little socks, when we lost sight of our mother or nurse in some strange place; but we can no longer recall the poignancy of that moment and weep over it as we do over the remembered sufferings of five or ten years ago.... Surely, if we could recall that early bitterness and the dim guesses, the strange perspectiveless conception of life that gave the bitterness its intensity, we should not poon-pooh the griefs of our children (74).

The narrator's own experience thus becomes the basis for the reader's identification with both the narrator and Maggie Tulliver. In this passage, for example, the narrator encourages the reader to share in her sense of remembered experience, since it is the memory of that experience that affects our emotions most strongly. In presenting her own experience as well as addressing the issue of experience itself, she causes the reader to consider his or her own life in relation to that of characters in the novel:

There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only
an extension of our own personality; we accepted and loved it as we accepted our own sense of existence and our own limbs.... One's delight in an elderberry bush overhanging the confused leafage of a hedgerow bank, as a more gladdening sight than the finest cistus or fuschia spreading itself on the softest undulating turf, is an entirely unjustifiable preference to a nursery-gardener or to any of those severely regulated minds who are free from the weakness of any attachment that does not rest on a demonstrable superiority of qualities. And there is no better reason for preferring the elderberry bush than that it stirs an early memory, that it is no novelty in my life, speaking to me merely through my present sensibilities to form and colour, but the long companion of my existence that wove itself into my joys when joys were vivid (164).

As in *Adam Bede*, we come to know the narrative character as she reveals something about her experience, her knowledge, and her desires. Her knowledge of art and art history—as well as her belief once again in the connection between the artistic and the "real"—is revealed when she compares the mildness and sweetness of Mrs. Tulliver with the early Madonnas of Raphael in a passage
cited earlier in this study (19). When the narrator speaks in general of the common folk who are the subjects of her narrative, she includes herself:

> It is easy enough to spoil the lives of our neighbors without taking so much trouble; we can do it by lazy acquiescence and lazy omission, by trivial falsities for which we hardly know a reason, by small frauds neutralized by small extravagances, by maladroit flatteries and clumsily conceived insinuations. We live from hand to mouth, most of us, with a small family of immediate desires; we do little else than snatch a morsel to satisfy the hungry brood, rarely thinking of seed-corn or the next year's crop (31).

As a result of the acuteness of the narrator's psychological observations, the identification that takes place between narrator and reader is nearly complete. There is evidence, in fact, that the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* is as concerned with premonitions of her own mortality as must be all flesh and blood readers of novels. The parenthetical comment in the following passage is as revealing of the narrator's concerns as it is of Bessy Tulliver's fashion sense:
Mr. Tulliver was speaking to his wife, a blond comely woman in a fan-shaped cap. (I am afraid to think how long it is since fan-shaped caps were worn—they must be so near coming in again. At that time, when Mrs. Tulliver was nearly forty, they were new at St. Ogg's, and considered sweet things) (14).

It is possible to imagine, then, that the focus of the narrator's concern is not entirely the demise or return of the fan-shaped cap, but rather the end of her own experience of life, a fact that is emphasized by her otherwise irrelevant mention of Mrs. Tulliver's age.

Perhaps in no other George Eliot novel does the narrator establish so distinct a personal presence so early in the narrative as does the narrator of The Mill on the Floss. We learn much about the narrator as a person in the opening chapter, sharing in her perceptions, her memories, even her physical sensations. As she describes the scene, the narrator includes her own reaction to it:

As I look at the full stream, the vivid grass, the delicate bright-green powder softening the outline of the great trunks and branches that gleam from under the bare purple boughs, I am in love with moistness, and envy the white ducks that are dipping their heads far into the water
here among the withes, unmindful of the awkward appearance they make in the drier world above....

Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill, as it looked one February afternoon many years ago. Before I dozed off I was going to tell you what Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver were talking about as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of (12-13).

The opening passages of The Mill on the Floss are ultimately about the narrator herself as much as they are about the scene she describes, for it is through this scene and her relationship to it that we come to understand who the narrator is. The narrator longs to become a part of the natural and pastoral wonders she encounters, and she sees in their beauty a blurring of the line between events and our perception of those events:

The rush of the water and the booming of the mill bring a dreamy deafness which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond (12).
And as it turns out, her perceptions are a dream after all, for the scene she has described is part of a dream-memory of an "afternoon many years ago." Through the narrator, then, the connection is once again established between the artificial and the real, as we come to understand that the scene we have experienced through her eyes is both a memory (emphasizing the realistic), and a dream (emphasizing the imaginative). The issue of perception, and especially the shifting nature of perception, are central to this narrator's system of belief. She seems particularly fascinated with the shift in perception wrought by the passage of time. How, in other words, is character altered when perception becomes the memory of perception? Once again, the narrator turns to her own experience in order to explore this question and connect the reader with the world of the Tullivers:

Life did not change for Tom and Maggie, and yet they were wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it—if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass.... These familiar
flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-blade grass today might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us and transform our perception into love (48).

Love, then, for the narrator, is the result of perception recalled, and the power of the narrator’s own remembered past becomes in many ways the defining element of her character.

In the following passage, we see a near complete linkage between the narrator’s personal recollections, the issue of Tom Tulliver’s faulty perception, and the appeal for a sympathetic response on the part of the reader. Readers are being asked, in part, to "love" Tom as a result of recalling their own moments of past faulty perception, as does the speaker:
Again [Maggie] had a scene of remonstrance with Tom, all the more severe in proportion to the greater strength of her present position. But Tom, like other immovable things, seemed only the more rigidly fixed under that attempt to shake him. Poor Tom! He judged by what he had been able to see, and the judgment was painful enough to himself. He thought he had the demonstration of facts observed through years by his own eyes, which gave no warning of their imperfection, that Maggie's nature was utterly untrustworthy and too strongly marked with evil tendencies to be safely treated with leniency; he would act on that demonstration at any cost, but the thought of it made his days bitter to him. Tom, like every one of us, was imprisoned within the limits of his own nature, and his education had simply glided over him, leaving a slight deposit of polish; if you are inclined to be severe on his severity, remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision (523).

And it is indeed the narrator whose "wider vision" allows us to see Tom—as well as the rest of the characters of The Mill on the Floss—in an understanding light when our first impulse is to condemn.
In many ways *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* can be seen as preparations for the central work of George Eliot's career, *Middlemarch*. The acuity of the novelist's psychological and sociological vision achieves its finest point in this novel, after having undergone the focusing process in earlier life and work. The narrative presence is complex, and represents, as Susan Calovini points out, "the attempt at full liberation from gender" (255). Calovini goes on to describe the narrator of *Middlemarch* in these terms:

[The narrator is] a chameleon narrator who can demonstrate knowledge of masculine or feminine experience and adopt gendered voices when occasions warrant without suggesting a lapse in consistency. This freedom obtained through gender neutrality is particularly suited to *Middlemarch*: it complements both the widely sympathetic ethos projected by the narrator and the narrative project of representing the perspectives of multiple characters (255).
In this novel, it is less common for the narrator to refer directly to personal history, sensation, or experiences; the vision of the narrator of *Middlemarch* is as all-seeing as in previous novels, yet the character behind that vision is further distanced from the reader.

This is not to say, however, that a particular narrative presence is not felt in the novel, for clues upon which to base a portrait of the narrator are intricately woven into the text. In some ways the finished portrait will remind the reader of the narrative presences that have come before, as it will also remind the reader of George Eliot herself. In *Middlemarch*, however, we find a narrator who is the tool of a novelist who has hit her stride, who will be difficult—to paraphrase the words of Virginia Woolf in reference to Jane Austen—to catch in the act of being great. We come to know less about the physical and emotional life of this narrator; we come to understand more fully, however, the relationship the narrator sees between the language used and novel that results. The narrator of *Middlemarch* is scientist of life and language—a rhetorician—who steps back in order to observe and record both the lives of the characters and the language that creates them. In the process the narrator extends the themes that dominate *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. In *Middlemarch* it is in part the force of the personality
of the narrator that guides the reader to consider what is important in the novel: the inherent responsibility in human relationships and the self-deception that prohibits most of us from living up to that responsibility.

There are, however, certain traits and characteristics that can be established independently and used to describe the character behind the voice of Middlemarch. In Chapter 1 we see demonstrated the narrator's fundamental acceptance of human variety, a trait not particularly shared by other characters in the novel. By means of introduction to Dorothea and her uncle, we are asked to compare and accept the differences between the two:

In Mr Brooke the hereditary strain of Puritan energy was clearly in abeyance; but in the niece Dorothea it glowed alike through faults and virtues, turning sometimes to impatience of her uncle's talk or his way of "letting things be" on his estate, and making her long all the more for the time when she would be of age and have some command of money for generous schemes (6).

This tolerance on the narrator's part, however, should not be taken as blindness to fault or foible, as becomes clear in the narrator's summing up of the mental powers of Sir James. The source of the sentiments
expressed in this passage is somewhat ambiguous, for they seem to mirror those of Dorothea herself. Ascribed entirely to the narrator, however, the passage seems to emanate from a feminine—almost feminist—source:

Sir James had no idea that he should ever like to put down the predominance of this handsome girl, in whose cleverness he delighted. Why not? A man's mind—what there is of it—has always the advantage of being masculine,—as the smallest birch-tree is of a higher kind than the most soaring palm,—and even his ignorance is of a sounder quality. Sir James might not have originated this estimate; but a kind Providence furnishes the limpest personality with a little gum or starch in the form of tradition (16).

It is at the crucial fifteenth chapter, however, that the narrator reveals most fully the interests central to the telling of the story and the truth. It is here that we see why the narrator's presence is limited: there is simply too much to do in observing and presenting the entangled world of Middlemarch:

I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular
web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe (105).

Though the narrator clearly includes self among the "tempting range of relevancies" to avoid, it is in this chapter that personal recollection on the narrator's part is used as a means of concentrating light on a particular web, in this case the web that Lydgate is beginning to weave for himself. As a means of describing Lydgate's beginnings in medicine, the narrator recalls a sense of falling in love with the world of knowledge:

Most of us who turn to any subject with love remember some morning or evening hour when we got on a high stool to reach down an untried volume, or sat with parted lips listening to a new talker, or for very lack of books began to listen to the voices within, as the first traceable beginning of our love (106).

Ironically, just one page further on the narrator once again uses personal experience—and again includes himself or herself among the guilty—in describing the death of that youthful passion:

For in the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocations in a daily course determined for them much in the same way as the tie of their cravats, there is always a good
number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of their coming to be shaped after the average and fit to be packed by the gross, is hardly ever told in their consciousness; for perhaps their ardour in the generous unpaid toil cooled as imperceptibly as the ardour of other youthful loves, till one day their earlier self walked in like a ghost in its old home and made the new furniture ghastly. Nothing in the world more subtle than the process of their gradual change! In the beginning they inhaled it unknowingly: you and I may have sent some of our breath towards infecting them, when we uttered our conforming falsities or drew our silly conclusions: or perhaps it came with the vibrations from a woman's glance (107).

The lesson intended by this moral and aesthetic teacher, then, begins to take form, as does our portrait of the narrator. In the narrator's view, an ideal world is one in which the passion for being truthful to oneself has not been compromised by the desire to conform. It is not altogether possible, however, to form a judgment of the other characters in the novel based on the extent to which they diverge from this ideal, for the narrator has pointed out how powerless we are to avoid the entanglements that
drive us to conformity. The narrator's vision serves rather as a standard that we can use in coming to understand and—once again—sympathize with our fellow mortals. After all, Dorothea's obsession with her own goodness and generosity is as blinding to her as Lydgate's love for Rosamond is to him. Though Casaubon's desire to possess Dorothea is detestable, the reader is not allowed to believe that Casaubon is simply evil; rather, we see the tangled web which has diverted Casaubon from being able to see his life objectively. In the narrator's world there is more tragedy than perfidy in the fact that Casaubon has the power to act out his vindictiveness, both in life and after it through his last will and testament. From our introduction to Casaubon, the narrator warns against pre-judgment:

But at present this caution against a too hasty judgment interests me more in relation to Mr Casaubon than to his young cousin. If to Dorothea Mr Casaubon had been the mere occasion which had set alight the fine inflammable material of her youthful illusions, does it follow that he was fairly represented in the minds of those less impassioned personages who have hitherto delivered their judgment concerning him?...; for all of us, grave or light, get our
thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them (62-3).

Thus the heart of the narrator's belief is revealed:
Through twists, turns, and multi-layered entanglements, our lives are not only described but also defined by the language we use during their course. Though the narrator strives for purity of vision by taking on the mantle of a scientist who views the rest of Middlemarch through a literary microscope, through the very act of describing that world the narrator becomes a part of that miniscule landscape. As a result, the scientist's responsibility to understand the subjects grows, and in transferring that understanding to the reader, so the reader too gains "the responsibility of tolerance [that] lies with those who have the wider vision" (MF 523).

Wayne Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction, argues that even Henry James would agree that realism in the novel is not destroyed when the reader is reminded that the work in question was written by a human being, and that so long as it was clear that this human being could not modify the facts of the story to suit his purposes, he could even comment quite freely on his story and his methods (58).
What George Eliot has done through the creation of these narrators is to allow herself the very freedom about which Booth--and James--speak. The narrators of Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Middlemarch are not George Eliot. Though the beliefs that they reveal and profess may mirror those of Eliot in many respects, the narrators' status as character within the novels demands that they in some ways diverge from George Eliot the human being. The extent of that divergence can be measured in some ways, but in others one can only speculate as to the nature of George Eliot's surprise when she applied her own microscope to the characters she created to serve as her eyes and her voice.
CHAPTER IV

DANIEL DERONDA: THE FINAL CHAPTER IN A NARRATIVE LIFE

In his introduction to George Eliot's final novel, Daniel Deronda, Irving Howe writes of George Eliot following the pattern of other great novelists of the nineteenth century who seem compelled to branch out in new directions toward the ends of their careers. He cites Jane Austen and Charles Dickens as examples of authors who, like George Eliot, felt the need to explore the unknown despite the risk of late failure. Of the author of Middlemarch, he writes:

George Eliot, seldom regarded as an innovator in the art of fiction, brushes past the serene equilibrium and symmetrical ironies of Middlemarch in order to test new perceptions in her final novel, Daniel Deronda. What moves these writers is some inner need to go beyond the known and the finished, to undertake work that will probably turn out to be only partly fulfilled. With George Eliot, it is a movement
into ways of writing about the world that partly anticipate the modernism of twentieth-century fiction (vii).

The "modernism" that Howe sees in Daniel Deronda springs mostly from its element of social criticism, but also in part from the "novelistic technique" Eliot applies in allowing us access to Gwendolen Harleth's psyche but denying us that same direct access to that of her husband, Henleigh Grandcourt. Howe believes that Eliot anticipates "supposedly more sophisticated writers like James and Conrad" (xviii) through her narrator:

It is Eliot who speaks, her voice that we hear, but she is so close, both in sympathy and irony, to Gwendolen that we can easily suppose we are "in" Gwendolen's consciousness. We come to know Gwendolen as a history of reflection and confusion; we are privy to the evasions of her self, the maneuvers of her will. Grandcourt, however, is done from a distance, through the pressure of his behavior on those near him (xviii).

In many ways, Daniel Deronda is a departure from those Eliot novels that have been treated so far in this dissertation, especially in its introduction of the "Jewish element," so roundly maligned by F. R. Leavis in The Great
Tradition (80). However, it is precisely because of the ground traveled in earlier work that Eliot is able to take a new road in *Daniel Deronda*. The novel is not a complete departure from the past because it continues to explore many of the literary issues that are the focus in in earlier works; it can be viewed as the logical extension of that which came before. *Daniel Deronda* may achieve its "modernness" through the sophistication of narrative presentation cited by Howe, but in many ways the equally "modern" issues of the relationships between literary art, reality, and narrative character are just as pertinent for George Eliot as they have always been. In fact, it is in *Daniel Deronda* that we find Eliot's boldest conclusions concerning language, art, passion, and reality, for it is in this novel that the construction of language itself becomes a central metaphor for the living and understanding of life.

Howe is perhaps saying more than he knows in pronouncing that "it is Eliot who speaks, her voice that we hear," for at last the way has been cleared for a narrator who represents George Eliot in ways that the voices of previous novels had not. The character of the narrator in *Daniel Deronda* allows herself the luxury of becoming a more pure storyteller, ironically freed from some of the sense of mission that compelled the "moral teachers" of previous
novels. Though Daniel Deronda is unquestionably a novel with a mission, its narrator leaves that mission to other characters, especially Deronda himself. She is less outwardly concerned with "lecturing" the reader, preferring instead to allow the other characters of the novel to impress the reader with the novel's social message of racial tolerance and the need for a Jewish homeland. The irony of the narrator's freedom, then, stems from her relationship to the character of Daniel Deronda, whose zeal frees the narrator from zealotry.

Daniel Deronda also contains far less "authorial comment" within the text itself, though it is in these passages that the heart of Eliot's literary message comes to life. Each chapter of Daniel Deronda begins with an epigraph, and these epigraphs serve to connect the novel with the world of the reader in the same way that Eliot's extensive metanarrative served in previous novels. The opening chapter is introduced by an original epigraph that could be said to capture in miniature much of what one should have learned about the relationship between art and the world it represents from reading Eliot's previous novels:

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a
beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has alway been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off in media res. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out (3).

Though one can not rightfully ascribe an epigraph to the voice of the narrator, it is clear that as in previous novels Eliot can not help reminding her readers that what they have before them is a story—a make-believe. She acknowledges the fundamental artificiality of beginning a story at any given point, since in a deterministic world no state of events or being can exist independent of those events which precede it, but in that acknowledgment she underlines one lifelong message of her work: it is only
through means of artifice that literature—or science or poetry for that matter—can reveal something true about the world that is not make-believe.

From this platform, then, we dive "in media res" into the soon to collide worlds of Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth. Our first impressions in the novel are not filtered through the consciousness of a narrative presence. Unlike in previous novels, in which the reader is eased into the main stream of the work via a narrative framework that also introduces important thematic and metaphorical elements, in the case of Daniel Deronda we are thrown instantly into the wondering mind of Deronda himself as he gazes for the first time at Gwendolen Harleth, who is busy at the gambling tables:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (3)

This directness—both of the subject matter and its presentation—sets the narrative tone for a novel in which
the narrator's focus is less on herself and her task than it is on her characters and the forces that determine their intermingled lives.

It is not until the ninth chapter of the novel that the narrator speaks directly of the work itself for the first time, in a comment that on the surface seems intended to reinforce "realistic" elements:

Some readers of this history will doubtless regard it as incredible that people should construct matrimonial prospects on the mere report that a bachelor of good fortune and possibilities was coming within reach, and will reject the statement as a mere outflow of gaiety; they will aver that neither they nor their first cousins have minds so unbridled; and that in fact this is not human nature, which would know that such speculations might turn out to be fallacious, and would therefore not entertain them. But, let it be observed, nothing is here narrated of human nature generally: the history in its present stage concerns only a few people in a corner of Wessex--whose reputation, however, was unimpeached, and who, I am in the proud position of being able to state, were all on visiting terms with persons of rank (79).
This passage is similar to the passage that opens the first chapter of Book Two of *Adam Bede* in several respects, and could in fact be viewed as a distillation of that pivotal chapter. The narrator uses the rhetorical ploy of responding to the objections put forth by an imaginary reader in each case, and in each passage that reader's objections concern the nature of the characters the narrator presents. In the former, the reader wonders why the narrator has not presented a character of more outwardly solid moral fiber; in the latter, the reader questions whether the narrator's characters are acting in accordance with the reader's notion of "human nature." In both cases the narrator's response is the same: she attempts to present people as they exist and not as one might wish them to be.

In all cases, however, the narrator wants the reader to understand that the complexity of the human situation renders her job nearly impossible. The characters themselves understand little of one another upon first acquaintance, and no single presentation can render them understandable to the reader:

Attempts at description are stupid: who can all at once describe a human being? even when he is presented to us we only begin that knowledge of his appearance which must be completed by
innumerable impressions under differing circumstances. We recognise the alphabet; we are not sure of the language (97).

This passage is remarkable and valuable to our understanding of Eliot's concept of realism in two ways. First, it reminds of the incomplete nature of messages conveyed to our brains by our five senses. We can never "know" that which we sense until we have experienced that object (or person) in a variety of circumstances, each different and yet equally "real." Second--and most critically--the narrator uses the nature of language itself as a metaphor for the human experience of coming to understand the world. Randomly experienced sensations, seemingly unrelated to one another, are the alphabet. To come to understand that each and every one of those experiences of the world is in some way related to every other experience is to make sense of that alphabet, to create the words, sentences, and syntax of life. That the alphabet and language of life are complicated becomes more than apparent as the passage continues and Gwendolen considers her initial impressions of Grandcourt, none of which are enough to allow her to see his true and horrifying nature:
The prospect of marrying Grandcourt really seemed more attractive to her than she had believed beforehand that any marriage could be: the dignities, the luxuries, the power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do, which had now come close to her, and within her choice to secure or lose, took hold of her nature as if it had been the strong odour of what she had only imagined and longed for before. And Grandcourt himself? He seemed as little of a flaw in his fortunes as a love and husband could possibly be.... Gwendolen conceived that after marriage she would most probably be able to manage him thoroughly (121).

After all, as the Eliot's narrator later reminds the reader, "...the grand meanings of faces as well as of written words may lie chiefly in the impressions of those who look on them" (166). Grandcourt's manners and appearance were so new to Gwendolen that she had not yet learned to interpret them. The narrator has both Gwendolen and her mother in mind when she compares them to spectators at an opera presented in a foreign tongue: "What hymning of cancerous vices may we not languish over as sublimest art in the safe remoteness of a strange language and artificial phrase!" (138)
Yet even Gwendolen hesitates, revealing the latent sensitivity which Deronda detects in her, as well as the difficulty with which we come to understand the language of life. She is not completely like those in the novel for whom "innumerable impressions under differing circumstances" are a waste of time. Her uncle, Mr. Gascoigne, for example, possessed a firm mind, grasping its first judgments tenaciously and acting on them promptly, whence counter-judgments were no more for him than shadows fleeting across the solid ground to which he adjusted himself (124).

Gwendolen seems to be dimly aware, at least, that such solid ground is an illusion. It is perhaps a turning point in her development and mastery of the language of life when, later in the novel, she is able to see that the world exists differently when viewed through the eyes of another:

A figure appearing under the portico brought a rush of new and less selfish feeling in Gwendolen, and when springing from the carriage she saw the dear and beautiful face with with fresh lines of sadness in it, she threw her arms round her mother's neck, and for the moment felt all sorrows only in relation to her mother's feeling about them (205).
Unfortunately, this perception and budding ability to extend sympathy is not enough at this point to save Gwendolen. She is forced by circumstances to gamble that her reading of Grandcourt has been fundamentally correct.

As the narrator of Daniel Deronda makes clear, reading the language of life is more than a matter of learning a metaphorical set of rules of grammar:

No formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistake in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about. And since unemotional intellect may carry us into a mathematical dreamland where nothing is but what is not, perhaps an emotional intellect may have absorbed into its passionate vision of possibilities some truth of what will be—the more comprehensive massive life feeding theory with new material, as the sensibility of the artist seizes combinations which science explains and justifies (467-8).

Truth is revealed through imagination, not mathematics and science. It is, for example, young Jacob's imaginative sensibility that provides for him a glimpse of life's meaning through pure sound of the Hebrew language:

None readier than Jacob at this fascinating game of imitating unintelligible words; and if
not opposing diversion occurred, he would sometimes carry on his share in it as long as the teacher's breath would last out.... Jacob's sense of power was increasing and his time enlivened by a store of magical articulation with which he made the baby crow, or drove the large cat into a dark corner, or promised himself to frighten any incidental Christian of his own years (432).

As Gwendolen comes to realize, it is passion and emotion, not analysis, that embue thought with the power to make one understand and ultimately control one's destiny:

The thought that is bound up with our passion is as penetrative as air—everything is porous to it; bows, smiles, conversation, repartee, are mere honeycombs where such thought rushes freely, not always with a taste of honey (548).

In a moment that is both awful and liberating, then, the passionate vision that Gwendolen has harbored since coming to realize her hatred for her husband becomes reality in the waters of Italy, for here her vision of Grandcourt's face—dead and forever beneath the water—becomes more than ephemeral. Deronda listens as she hesitantly describes the scene:

"It was all like a writing of fire within me."
Getting wicked was misery—being shut out for ever from knowing what you—what better lives were. That had always been coming back to me in the midst of bad thoughts—it came back to me then—but yet with a despair—a feeling that it was no use—evil wishes were too strong. I remember then letting go the tiller and saying "God help me!" But then I was forced to take it again and go on; and the evil longings, the evil prayers came again and blotted everything else dim, till, in the midst of them—I don't know how it was—he was turning the sail—there was a gust—he was struck—I know nothing—I only know that I saw my wish outside me" (635).

At the greatest and most terrible moment in Gwendolen's life the "writing of fire within"—the passionate language of life—becomes irrevocably real. The boundary between imagination and reality is erased.

The narrator of Daniel Deronda—in keeping with the guiding principle that the use of language in central to the ordering of reality—is faced with a task not presented to the narrators of previous Eliot novels, for never has there appeared a character whom the narrator has felt to be as undeserving of sympathy as Henleigh Grandcourt. In
previous cases, even when the narrator has revealed the flaws and weaknesses of character that George Eliot believes to be at the heart of her realism, the tone has been one of sympathy and understanding. The narrator generally asks the reader not only to view the flaws in a character but also to grasp the circumstances that determined those flaws. The reader is asked to go through a process like the one which Adam Bede must undergo in order to transform anguish and condemnation into sympathy and love:

Let us...be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy—the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love. Not that this transformation of pain into sympathy had completely taken place in Adam yet. There was still a remnant of pain, and this he felt would subsist as long as her pain was not a memory, but an existing thing, which he must think of as renewed with the light of every new morning (460).

It is as if through Adam's process of transformation, we are asked to sympathize with—and ultimately to forgive—Hetty. In Daniel Deronda, however, we are presented with a
character who must be perceived as unforgivable. Through the language—and lack of it—used to bring Grandcourt to the reader, the narrator establishes a relationship between narrator, character, and reader that resembles in form but not in substance the many other such narrative triangles that fill Eliot's novels. The difference in this case is clearly captured by Richard Freadman:

Indeed, here more than in any other novel George Eliot sees her doctrine of sympathy through to its unwelcome but undeniable conclusion. Sympathy, she sees, must entail preparedness to condemn. In Daniel Deronda, as in no other work, George Eliot admits disapproval, denunciation, outrage as proper strategic recourses of narrative report. Nowhere does she vilify a character through nuance and psychological notation as she vilifies Grandcourt; in no other novel does she let silence—the withdrawal of an assumed trust in narrative solicitude—so conclusively signal the limits of ethical acceptability (51).

The key to understanding Eliot's disapproval of Henleigh Grandcourt is to be discovered not so much in direct narrative denunciation (though such denunciation exists); instead, we learn about Grandcourt through the narrator's
inability to penetrate his hardened shell. In reference to Gwendolen, by contrast, the narrator can invite us into the inner reaches of the psyche:

But now enter into the soul of this young creature as she found herself, with the blue Mediterranean dividing her from the world, on the tiny plank-island of a yacht, the domain of the husband to whom...she had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he had throttled them into silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would, without remonstrance (611).

The true measure of his monstrousness, however, lies in the fact that we can never "enter the soul" of Henleigh Grandcourt. In this passage, the narrator reveals the opaqueness of Grandcourt's inner self:

Grandcourt's passions were of the intermittent, flickering kind: never flaming out strongly.... [A man like Grandcourt] may be obstinate or persistent at the same low rate, and may even show sudden impulses which have a false air of daemonic strength because they seem inexplicable, though perhaps their secret lies merely in the want of regulated channels for the soul to move in--good and sufficient ducts of habit without
which our nature easily turns to a mere ooze and mud, and any pressure yields nothing but a spurt or a puddle (139-40).

Unlike others whose characters or actions are flawed, Grandcourt does not act out of misguided passion. He is without passion, unable to read "the writing of fire within." His only motivation for action is his desire to maintain "mastery" over people and situations, and the result is monstrous because his lack of passionate vision will not even allow him to understand the damage he is capable of inflicting.

Thus George Eliot does "test new perceptions" (Howe, vii) in *Daniel Deronda*, for she has finally created a character for whom no attempt at sympathy is even possible. In Grandcourt, she has presented a man who is in effect soulless and thus untouchable by the "doctrine of sympathy" (Freadman 51), and as a result must create a narrative strategy that takes into account the previously unimaginable. Both narrator and reader must respond to this character in a fashion unprecedented in Eliot's fiction, as Grandcourt comes to represent one of the primary "forces" that influence and determine the lives of others. He drives people to act, yet he can not truly be acted upon. He can be inconvenienced but not hurt; he can lash out in anger when his mastery is questioned, but he
can not feel jealousy. Perhaps only in *Daniel Deronda* is the narrative framework established in which a character such as Grandcourt can be accommodated, since in this novel there exists a narrative perspective grounded in passion as much as it is in sympathy. It is the power of Gwendolen's passionate vision—no matter how flawed or unscientific—that finally allows her to modify the forces that had determined her life to that point.
CONCLUSION

The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin—the longer the claws, the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings—much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth (Eliot, *Adam Bede* 176).

The "unexaggerated lion" from *Adam Bede,* from the chapter "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," has become for me a symbol of desire expressed by George Eliot in her life and career as a novelist to write that which was true. More than this, however, the image of the lion expresses something about the nature of George Eliot's
particular vision of the truth: for writing to be truthful it must not exaggerate the writer's experience of his or her own world, yet neither should writing deny the passion and imagination inherent in the creation of art. The lion, for all of its realness, is also the embodiment of strength, beauty, and even danger. It is a marvel, and no one can react to the presence of such power without emotion. Through this passion, "the writing of fire within," the writing of truth attains its ultimate goal, that of touching and changing in some way the reader who comes in contact with it.

It has not been my aim in this study to prove that Eliot achieved this goal at every turn, but instead I have attempted to demonstrate several methods by which she sought to present her vision of the truth, none of which could be said to buttress consistently a view of her work as purely "realistic." Through the use of narrative commentary on the process of literary creation, patterns of metaphor that draw attention to the blurring of boundaries between imagination and reality, and the development of narrative personae that blend author and character, George Eliot has demonstrated her belief that art is singularly able to present truth because of the passionate and imaginative vision at its core. In the process of studying Eliot's methods, we learn that George Eliot's vision of the
truth is not limited to a vision of scientific fact. Truth is found in the accurate expression of emotion; through self-consciously imaginative use of language truth becomes real.

In February of 1873, George Eliot wrote these words in reference to reviews of Middlemarch:

What one's soul thirsts for is the word which is the reflection of one's own aim and delight in writing—the word which shows that what one meant has been perfectly seized, that the emotion which stirred one in writing is repeated in the mind of the reader.... It is precisely my ideal—to make matter and form an inseparable truthfulness ("To Charles Ritter" 374).

George Eliot worked throughout her career to take the matter of truth and the form of the novel and bind them together inseparably. However, in the process of writing Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda neither her perception of the nature of truth nor the form of her novels remained unchanged. She was aware of the shifting nature of our perceptions of the world, writing in 1866 that "looking back at my past, it seems to me so full of errors and failures.... I am much changed in both body and mind" ("To Mrs. John Cash" 437). Each of these novels represents the attempt to capture with
accuracy the world as she perceived it at the time of
writing, and the shifting relationship between narrator and
the written work from novel to novel reflects changes in
that perception.

Such shifting perceptions caused George Eliot to
strive to constantly re-create the relationship between
herself, her narrators, her readers, and her writing in a
way that could stir emotion and sympathy. Through her
narrators, she variously took on the roles of mirror,
sorcerer, scientist, and sage. In the work that stands at
the heart of her career, Middlemarch, she creates a
narrator whose very complexity is central to the effect she
intended, for, as Susan Calovini points out, "The
multifacetedness of the narrator is integral...to creating
George Eliot's finest example of 'engaging' discourse in
the fullest sense of the term" (251). The ability of this
narrator to engage the reader, however, is not limited by
the fact that such storytelling is self-consciously
"literary." In fact, Middlemarch and to varying degrees
all other works of George Eliot's fiction are celebrations
of the ability to establish lines of communication that are
able to transfer as exactly as possible emotion from one
person to another. This celebration is neither more nor
less complex than is necessary to convey George Eliot's
vision of truth to a waiting world. We marvel at the
"unexaggerated lion" for its adherence to subtle shadings of light and shadow, its detail, its very complexity.
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