Systems of Self-Help in the Works of George Eliot and George Meredith

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Isabella Brooks-Ward, declare that this thesis is the result of my own work. Where information has been derived from other sources, I declare that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

George Eliot and George Meredith sought to write instructive literature that would teach without teaching and that would point towards the moral without moralising. Such contradictions are also present in the self-help discourse, which negotiates an uneasy boundary between textual prescription and the encouragement of a strenuous individualism. These two novelists navigated this conflict through an attention to physiological form: as this thesis argues, both explored the idea that the body, along with its unique and unstable patterns of feeling, might convey a personalised ethical system to the individual self.

Systems of Self-Help in the Works of George Eliot and George Meredith draws on a variety of interlocking discourses in order to re-think the Victorian culture of self-help. Rather than confirming self-help ideology as inherently masculinist, class-based, and inflexible, this thesis seeks to reinvigorate it through a close engagement with texts that offer a reformative view of its practices. This is the first full-length study to consider exclusively the canonical Eliot alongside the under-studied Meredith. Such a juxtaposition is revelatory of a decided sympathy in their ideas about the nature of wisdom and how it interacts with the body. Refracting these insights through a wide variety of genres – from fiction, philosophy, poetry, the aphorism, physiology, comedy, and the critical essay, to the dietetic – each chapter offers a fresh reading not only of major works, but also of rarely encountered texts such as Eliot's poetry or Meredith's short stories. In the physiological system, Eliot and Meredith found a new form through which to mediate wisdom. This thesis seeks to develop a correspondingly adaptable mode of literary criticism that can adequately respond to the diverse ways in which these novelists engaged with self-help, working to suggest a new form for feeling.

IMPACT STATEMENT

This study, as I have been aware from its conception to its completion, speaks both to a very modern concept and to a very old one. Self-help is modern in the sense that it is most recognizably attributed to a recent industry that has been built around the concern for wellness, for self-optimization, and for the attendant valences of success that attach to it. It also looks backwards to the ancient practice latent in term such as *Askēsis*, meaning self-training in the pursuit of an individually engendered enlightenment. Meeting in the middle of these two cultures, the common conception of nineteenth-century self-help might appear almost as an aberration. The culture that Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859) helped to disseminate was an industrialized, masculinist, and decidedly unspiritual (though of course overtly Christian) version of self-improvement. As such, despite its importance to the development of our modern-day ideas of self-help, it is not well-known outside of academic circles. What my research has hoped to do is to transform these calcified notions of nineteenth-century self-help, in order to show that authors apart from Smiles engaged with the topic in aesthetically important ways. Whilst I do not envisage this study having a transformative influence on the self-help market today, I do hope that it will extend what we think of when we think of self-help.

Essentially, the question this thesis - like many others - asks is whether books can make us better. Attempting to answer this has never been the sole province of the humanities. Practitioners of philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and biology have all had a part to play in the consideration and shaping of this question, as do those readers outside of academic fields. My research demonstrates that George Eliot and George Meredith used the body, in its consummate particularity and the self-formative awareness that the feeling of this instills, in order to figure to us a personal system of ethics based on what feels good. I hope that my thesis contributes to the ongoing development of a literary criticism that is not based on fact, but rather on feeling. The point of these studies, then, and of studies like mine, is not to answer the question of whether books can improve us, but to detail an unrestrictive responsiveness to it.

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To my secondary supervisor, Linda Freedman, my thanks are due for the many times you have suggested new ways of engaging with the subject of self-help. I am grateful for the timely recommendation to read Herder, which had a formative influence on my research when writing on *Middlemarch*, whilst your comments on my thesis offered several key illuminations.

The English Faculty at UCL represents the place where I first hoped, as an undergraduate, to undertake a PhD, and so to have been able to write it there has been a privilege. Due to this history, I have innumerable debts to those who work within the faculty. I want to thank, in particular, Matthew Beaumont, for his insightful reading of an early draft of chapter 3, and John Mullan, for the love of Dickens and for his continually supportive words. All my thanks go to Eric Langley, my undergraduate tutor. It's highly doubtful I would be writing this without your teaching.

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Meredith writes about the 'mutual dependency which makes friendship a pulsating tie', however I believe that my complete dependence on my friends' kindness and attention has slightly unbalanced this claim. My love and thanks go to my cousin Hattie Brooks-Ward, Lily Wakeley, Steven Daly, Jan-Peter Westad, Kitty Camilleri, Claire Shennan, Ranald Macdonald, and many others. To Jack Barron, with whom I have shared so much of this academic experience, thank you for talking things through with me (usually at the pub).

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'In obscurity, feeling is a guide.'

George Meredith, *One of Our Conquerors*

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List of abbreviations

E	*Spinoza's Ethics*
EC	*The Essence of Christianity*
GEL	*The George Eliot Letters*
LGM	*The Letters of George Meredith*
MF	*The Mill on the Floss*
S	*Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse*

Introduction

> 'Take the present suffering as a painful letting in of light,' said Deronda […] 'I don't think you could have escaped the painful process in some form or other.'
>
> 'But it is a very cruel form,' said Gwendolen […] She was looking at nothing outside her; but her eyes were directed towards the window, away from Deronda, who, with quick comprehension, said –
>
> 'Turn your fear into a safeguard […] We are not always in a state of strong emotion, and when we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision.'[1]

How can a form be cruel, or for that matter kind? Gwendolen Harleth's objection to Daniel Deronda's affective pedagogy transforms it into something that is not just painful, but intentionally so. In doing this, she ascribes a sentience to the didactic form that somewhat mimics the material on which it practices: her living self. Meanwhile, in both protagonists' estimation, moral instruction can attain some legibility through reading the site of the body. This passage from *Daniel Deronda* (1876) bears witness to a career-long concern not only for George Eliot but also for George Meredith: writing a form of instructive literature that would teach without teaching and that would point towards the moral without moralising. Such a contradiction is present in the self-help discourse, which negotiates an uneasy boundary between textual prescription and the encouragement of a strenuous individualism. How does one put a system of this nature into words? A potential answer can be found in Deronda's reply to Gwendolen, which advocates 'defining our longing or dread', that is to say: giving form to feeling.

Deronda's advice demonstrates how there can be affective inroads into self-help that do not rely on the tradition of spiritual motivation: instead, he appropriates the form of the physiological system. The transformative feeling of fear is allied firstly to taste and moves to incorporate the other

[1] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 421-22. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

senses of hearing, touch, and sight: 'Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing'; 'try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as a faculty, like vision'. With such terms, Deronda mediates between the realms of instinctive and conscious agency. The senses that he evokes are more than similes used to describe moral cultivation. They also become ways of forging conceptions about the self, the success or accuracy of which can be attested to by feeling.[2] Gwendolen's body is thus represented as a central element in this conceptualization of self-help.

Such a moment of corporeal system-making is far from unique to *Daniel Deronda*. The nineteenth-century subject, like Gwendolen, was nervous. The science of evolution, along with the emergent field of physiological psychology, not only destabilised the view of mankind as divinely favoured above animals, but also provoked new ways through which to encounter the material self. The nervous system, for instance, had been shown to newly corresponded to systems of knowledge, suggesting that a personal ontology could now not only be theorized; it could also be felt. For Eliot and Meredith, who engaged with these new discourses, the body represented a means through which to mediate textual instruction. Latent in this lies a key distinction between legibility (how the text reads to others), and intelligibility (how it is received by the self). In their novels, physiological form interacts with textual form in order to replicate the unpredictable and personal means through which the reader comes to, and uses, self-knowledge.

What follows in this introduction is a contextualization of this influential discourse. The expansive nature of the nineteenth-century idea of self-help means that it has multiple origins, leading

[2] It is worth stating here that I make no real distinction in this thesis between the terms self-help and self-improvement/ -development/ -culture, etc. Though my use of the former predominates, as might be expected, I see no reason to make such a marked distinction given that Samuel Smiles himself used the terms interchangeably, and that the terms signified similar things under the umbrella term of self-help. Whilst seeing the validity of an argument such as that expressed by Rebecca Richardson, who states that, 'as the need for a new term would indicate, "self-help" had a distinct set of connotations that separated it from the eighteenth-century interest in "self-improvement"', I do not see the differences in such discourses as being so evident as to warrant a lengthy and (where this thesis is concerned) irrelevant justification of my conflation of the two. See Richardson, *Narrative Ambition: Victorian Self-Help and Competition* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2013). https://www.proquest.com/docview/2463712521?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar [Accessed 6th July 2021], p. 7.

to several strands incorporating philosophy, science, and sociology, amongst other things. Below, I aim to track how the idea of self-help was increasingly informed by conceptions of the body, in order to situate Eliot and Meredith within such a physiologically inflected discourse, before going on to explore, in the thesis, how they both wrote a system of ethics into their novels which consistently appealed to the system of the body.

A Work that Prospered: Smilesian Self-Help

Samuel Smiles's 1877 article 'A Work that Prospered' details the exemplary foundation of the Mechanics Institute in Woodhouse. On several occasions, Smiles had lectured at the Institute on topics that would eventually become books, including his most famous, *Self-Help: with Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (1859).[3] This work also prospered, outselling Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and Eliot's *Adam Bede*, published the same year, to sell 20,000 copies in 1859 alone.[4] Smiles highlights how the workers of Woodhouse 'learnt sympathy, and the benefits of self-help and mutual help. They learnt the value of books. They were enabled to converse with the enlightened spirits of this and of past ages, and to sit at the feet of the greatest teachers who have ever lived'.[5] Sympathy, moral teaching, and literature: these themes, which are almost always present in Victorianist studies, are also enormously important to Smiles.

For all Smiles's somewhat repetitive transformation of men into maxims, his use of the exemplary biography's form is worth considering. The glut of self-helping individuals who populate his pages serve as continuous affirmatives of his book's message. Beth Blum summarises this well in

[3] Samuel Smiles, 'A Work that Prospered', *Good Words*, 18 (December 1877): 386-92; Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-67* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 116.
[4] Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, also published in 1859, failed to make such a splash after Mudie withdrew the 300 copies that he had previously taken, citing public distaste.
[5] Smiles, 'A Work that Prospered', 392.

The Self-Help Compulsion (2020), a study which relates to modernist literature, but one that looks back to reflect that 'Smiles's emulative heuristic […] is communicated as much through the book's form as through its content'.[6] Indeed, *Self-Help* develops a structure of experience that shifts the onus of improvement onto a developing relationship between reader and text, something that is important to the concerns of this thesis.

Meredith's notebook observation that 'Dogmatism is knowledge showing its ignorance' could readily be applied to Smiles's work, yet there are moments in both Meredith's and Eliot's fiction which recall the self-help author.[7] The idea that the body, along with its unique and unstable patterns of feeling, might convey a personalised ethical system to the individual self is present in Smiles's work. When, for instance, Smiles sententiously writes that '[c]haracter is human nature in its best form. It is moral order embodied in the individual', this is more than a turn of phrase.[8]

Smiles's connection of the body to self-help is at times commonplace and at others metaphoric. We find, for example, lacklustre maxims related to the complementary exercise of the physical and the psychological, such as his assertion that '[w]ork educates the body, as study educates the mind', and he offers a wealth of examples that connect physical strength with remarkable men (262). Yet, at other points, Smiles punctuates his text with explicitly physiological language, connecting it to the practical wisdom that he intends to dispense. Having vouched for an improved 'system of education' which would combine 'physical training or physical work with intellectual culture', Smiles dwells on the double meaning of 'system':

> The success of even professional men depends in no slight degree on their physical health; and a public writer has gone as far as to say that 'the greatness of our great men is quite as much a bodily affair as a mental one.' A healthy breathing apparatus is as indispensable to the

[6] Beth Blum, *The Self-Help Compulsion: Searching for Advice in Modern Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 45.
[7] George Meredith, *The Notebooks of George Meredith*, ed. Gillian Beer and Margaret Harris (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1983), p. 43. The aphorism is crossed through, a practice of Meredith's that implies that he used it in one of his novels, though I have been unable to find it.
[8] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, ed. Peter W. Sinnema (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 314. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

> successful lawyer or politician as a well-cultured intellect. The thorough aëration of the blood by free exposure to a large breathing surface in the lungs, is necessary to maintain that full vital power on which the vigorous working of the brain in so large a measure depends. (264-265)

That Smiles takes the time to detail the precise workings of the lungs demonstrates his relation of physiological structure to the tenets of self-improvement (265). Smiles implies that a similar attention to how we breathe, exacting a compulsion to participate in just such another 'thorough aëration of the blood', might transform how we think. After all, everyone possesses a pair of lungs. The universality of the respiratory system comes to figure, on the most basic level, Smiles's concept that even the humblest of men have the properties of greatness existing, as potential, within them.

Having referred to the body's breath literally, as a way to describe the ideal physical condition for genius, Smiles uses it figuratively. Of '[m]orals and manners', for instance, he writes that '[t]he law touches us here and there, but manners are about us everywhere, pervading society like the air we breathe' (322). Literal health is translated into an ethical vitality when participating in the educational system: 'So much does the moral health depend upon the moral atmosphere that is breathed' (299). Air takes on the properties of influence, whilst breath is literally and metaphorically inspiration.

For Smiles, examples can be 'infections', or they exist in the 'minds of others like faculties and impulse'; 'tone' can possess a 'healthiness', whilst the most instructive of books have an 'inflammatory effect' (307-08). Thus, his biographies communicate a living wisdom that depends upon physical form to represent the efficiency of his advice system. Considering the 'chief use of biography', Smiles writes that

> Indeed, whoever has left behind him the record of a noble life, has bequeathed to posterity an enduring source of good, for it serves as a model for others to form themselves by in all time to come; still breathing fresh life into men, helping them to reproduce his life anew, and to illustrate his character in other forms. Hence a book containing the life of a true man is full of precious seed. It is a still living voice: it is an intellect. To use Milton's words, 'it is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life' (305-06).

Within this passage, Smiles resolves his ambivalence surrounding the efficacy of reading literature over life experience. In the biographical record, he locates a form that can grow in and with the individual. Once again, he images the practice of inspiration through the breathing body. Character, meanwhile, is made use of in the sense that it is both textual and individual. His book belongs to a genre that perpetuates the 'still living voice' of instruction. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has written of this use of Milton in his discussion of Smiles's works in *Victorian Afterlives* (2002).[9] Also quoting from the latter's *Character*, which followed *Self-Help* in 1871, Douglas-Fairhurst describes how

> Once a human voice is preserved in the stilled life of print, a good book, like a good friend, 'will never change'. However, its ink is more than embalming-fluid. When Smiles read Milton, the book formed 'a bond of union', and the same bond which allows the subject of a biography to enjoy 'a life beyond life' allows the more dispersed community of its readers to move beyond the confines of their individual lives: they 'live in him together, and he in them'.[10]

Self-Help works on the borderland between text and life; such a space is organic and dependent on the embodied self. The body performs a methodology of reading for improvement and is consequently immanent in such textual systems.

Philosophical Origins: Carlyle Helps Himself

It was not Samuel Smiles but Thomas Carlyle who introduced the term 'self-help' into the English vocabulary by way of his philosophy of clothes *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34).[11] Due to his full-hearted investment in biography and his championship of the great man theory through lectures such as those

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[9] See also Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Vladimir Trendafilov, 'The Origins of Self-Help: Samuel Smiles and the Formative Influences on an Ex-Seminal work, *The Victorian*, 3. 1 (January 2015): 1-16.

[10] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[11] The passage in question reads 'Thus from poverty does the strong educe nobler wealth; thus in the destitution of the wild desert, does our young Ishmael acquire for himself the highest of all possessions, that of Self-help', Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 88. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

published as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), Carlyle is frequently allied to Smiles in their shared preoccupation with instructive topics, which in turn aligns him with the overtly masculinist, rigorous, and dogmatic avowals of such a discourse. This perception of Carlyle, however, is only partially accurate. He was both a realist and an idealist – a believer in hero-worship as a formative influence in self-development who, as Juliette Atkinson has shown, also believed in the transformative influence of hidden lives. Echoing the philosopher of *Sartor Resartus*, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh's account of his university education, Carlyle's style was one in which '[h]istory in authentic fragments lay mingled with Fabulous chimeras, wherein also was reality; and the whole not as dead stuff, but as living pabulum, tolerably nutritive to a mind so peptic' (79). Such an application of living form to text recurs in Carlyle's works. In *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (1978), Bruce Haley has demonstrated how 'Carlyle became the chief exponent in England of [a] holistic, physio-ethical vision'.[12] In 'Characteristics' (1831), and various other essays, Carlyle uses the body not only as a figure through which to showcase the ailments of the social body, but also as a potential mediatory device to heal them.

It was Carlyle's rigorous reading of German Romantic Philosophy that aided him in fashioning this form of somatic self-help, in addition to a similar philosophy which he profoundly influenced and was influenced by: American Transcendentalism. To adapt one of Smiles's more poetic lines, both ideologies – with which Eliot and Meredith engaged – transferred something to the arguments of this thesis, 'as travellers' garments retain the odour of flowers and shrubs through which they have passed' (304). Their influence is pervasive, if diffuse.

Carlyle translated many of the German Romantics such as Goethe, Novalis, Friedrich Schiller, Jean Paul Richter, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Heavily influenced by German philosophy, these authors aimed at the uniting of aesthetic, scientific, and natural realms through a literature of and for

[12] Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 75.

the individual. This was made possible through their pioneering use of the *Bildung*, which harboured a project of self-development through education. In his excellent article that applies Fichtean idealist philosophy to *Sartor Resartus*, Kit Andrews demonstrates that for 'Carlyle, as for the post-Fichtean early German Romantics, idealist philosophy's need to ground itself in the active experience of individuals demands the sort of careful attention to the idiosyncratic quirks of a person's development that literature can best provide'.[13] As such, it influenced Carlyle's hybrid mixture of socially impelled yet individualist philosophical literature. Both Eliot and Meredith were deeply influenced by this authorial approach.

German philosophy also represented a line of thinking through which the self-helping ideal could be realised through the physical body. Eliot gestures towards Carlyle's affinity with this thought in her glowing appraisal of his works. In her capacity of reviewer for *The Leader*, Eliot provides us not only with an avowal of her respect for Carlyle, but also with a summary of what she thinks good literature should do. Having established that the 'most effective educator' is one 'who does not seek to make his pupils moral by enjoining particular courses of action, but by bringing into activity the feelings and sympathies that must issue in noble action', she states that

> On the same ground it may be said that the most effective writer is not he who announces a particular discovery, who convinces men of a particular conclusion […] but he who rouses in others the activities that must issue in discovery, who awakes men from their indifference to right and wrong, who nerves their energies to seek for the truth and live up to it at whatever cost. The influence of such a writer is dynamic. He does not teach men how to use sword and musket, but he inspires their souls with courage and sends a strong will into their muscles […] He does not, perhaps, convince you, but he strikes you, undeceives you, animates you.[14]

The experience of reading generates ethical practice. Teaching, for Eliot, goes hand in hand with literature, but only when mediated through feeling – that is, through an appeal to physical form. This

[13] Kit Andrews, 'Fichte, Carlyle and the British Literary Reception of German Idealism', *Literature Compass*, 9/11 (2012): 721-32 (724).
[14] George Eliot, 'Thomas Carlyle', *The Leader*, 6 (27 October 1855): 1034-5.

is something to which William Myers has paid ample attention in *The Teaching of George Eliot* (1984), and in particular to her 'fascination with animistic fantasy, its intricate action within the human body, and its pervasive presence in human culture'.[15] Eliot's use of the term 'dynamic' to describe her ideal writer – a term that she also famously used to describe the 'quality' of Gwendolen's 'glance' – is shown by Gillian Beer to have been laden with current scientific meaning in the nineteenth century.[16] The dynamic Carlylean aesthetic that Eliot describes images a unit of force that depends not upon fixity of form for its efficiency, but on its mobility and constant activity. The system of the body provides a striking and universally recognisable form through which such communications could be made. The nervous subject becomes central once again, with the Smilesian sounding 'energies' of exertion being proved upon the nerves rather than the reason of the reader. To be filled with a 'strong will' is a muscular event, whilst conviction is dispensable where animation has succeeded. And animation, as Eliot well knew, refers amongst other things both to 'the action of inspiring' and the 'process of imparting life' (*OED*). Inspirational texts such as those by Carlyle become life forms, and are thus easily incorporated into the individual who reads them. They become, to employ a term coined in the nineteenth-century, a muscle memory.

Eliot's admiration for Carlyle was emulated across the Atlantic by many of America's most prominent writers. A friendship was famously struck up between Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, a central proponent of philosophical Transcendentalism and various practices of self-culture, self-reliance, and self-help. Emerson evidently derived this latter term from his reading of Carlyle, which he proceeded to use in his essay 'Man the Reformer' (1841), though the sympathy that existed between their ideas on this topic preceded *Sartor Resartus*. 'Welcome ever more', writes Emerson in his famous

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[15] William Myers, *The Teaching of George Eliot* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), p. 11.
[16] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century-Fiction*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 139.

essay 'Self-Reliance' (1841), 'is the self-helping man'.[17] The term was subsequently taken up by Smiles, whose reading of the latter piece, according to R. J. Morris, 'enabled him to rebuild his philosophy' and thus encouraged him to give 'the transcendentalists his most enthusiastic welcome' yet.[18]

Stanley Cavell represents the Emersonian conception of selfhood as one that is dually constituted; Emerson continually 'speaks of our living always with an unattained but attainable self'.[19] The distance between the ideal self and the self that strives after it is a necessary space that collapses should the former be realised. As such, it is like desire: the object must forever recede from us – be felt as a lack – if we are to keep moving towards it. Cavell 'understand[s] him to mean that to have a self is always to be averse to one's attained self (in one's so far attained society); put otherwise, to conform to the self is to relinquish it'.[20] Proximity to the ideal dissolves one's conception of the singular self that keeps one isolated from the divine communality or what Emerson would refer to as 'The World-Soul'. Such is the pattern in Emersonian perfectionism that Cavell further delineates in *Cities of Words* (2004), whereby 'the human self – confined by itself, aspiring towards itself – is always becoming, as on a journey, always partially in a further state'.[21] The self is something like a story we tell ourselves in order to understand what moral recognition we are striving towards. Self-help is thus a discourse that is ideally translated into a narrative.

The Transcendentalists derived their name from Kant, and it is no wonder that German philosophy, which occasionally reads like an invitation to solipsism, gave rise to the transatlantic discourse of self-help. The equation of self-making with world-making is something that attains a

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[17] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 2: 45.
[18] R. J. Morris, 'Samuel Smiles and the Genesis of Self-Help; the Retreat to a Petit Bourgeois Utopia', *The Historical Journal*, 24.1 (March 1981): 89-109 (95).
[19] Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 8.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 26.

specific value in the writing of Emerson and his circle.[22] The two mutually constructive elements of experience – the subjective mind and the objects of nature – combine to teach the ultimate Emersonian value which was communicated throughout 'Self-Reliance'. Transcendentalism is partially summarised as the perception of a 'unity in nature and consciousness', as Emerson puts it, in which both conform to a Divine Idea.[23] Emerson extends Kant's thought in arguing that

> We first share the life by which things exist, and afterwards see them as appearances in nature, and forget that we have shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and of thought. Here are the lungs of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom, and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism.[24]

Self-help, for Emerson, comes naturally. Again, as in Smiles, we find a doctrine of inspiration being predicated on the lungs. For Emerson, the intake of breath is a form of wisdom imbibition in a mode more than figurative because of the infinitely permeable borders of the individual and nature which is signified in the exchange of air. As such, the material conditions of self and world are rendered newly numinous. The unconsciousness of breath is representative of the power of self to sustain its intake of wisdom without recourse to external consciousnesses. Such an action represents what Emerson is trying to teach us about the importance of 'self-trust', a 'primary wisdom' that he denotes as 'Intuition' in comparison to which 'all later teachings are tuitions'.[25] Breath is a similar instinct after inspiration: 'Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due'.[26] What we take in from the natural world is a confirmation of our individual power, which is to say, a life-force. Wisdom can thus both be derived from and figured by the body: 'with the exercise of self-trust, new powers shall appear; that

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[22] Other important contributors to the transcendental discourse were William Ellery Channing, whose *Self-Culture* (1838) elicited a highly favourable review from Smiles, and Margaret Fuller. George Eliot's review of the latter's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1843) prompted her only published use of the term 'self-help' in 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft', *The Leader* (October 1855): 988-89 (988).
[23] Emerson, 'Self-Reliance', p. 44.
[24] Ibid, p. 37.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

a man is the word made flesh, born to shed healing'.[27] When Emerson writes that '[g]ood and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this: the only right is what is after my *constitution*, the only wrong that is against it', therefore, he is using the fact that constitution means both a 'condition of mind', 'physical nature', and a 'decree' (*OED*, *emphasis mine*). The self, material and psychological, is a law unto itself. Such a philosophy provides a crucial background to the work undertaken by this thesis.

Characters at Blood Heat[28]: The Science of Self-Help

The science of self-help facilitates a reading of the body for self-knowledge, wisdom, and advice. As Eliot's partner George Henry Lewes acknowledged, all 'mental phenomena are directly connected with nervous structure'.[29] The connection between the mind and body, and the therapeutic practices that evolved out of it, was inherent to the emergent nineteenth-century science of physio-psychology which he and their circle practised. This line of enquiry moved conceptions of the mind away from the idea that it was a fixed entity, shielded from material conditionality by a divinely ordained separateness. Instead, the physio-psychologists inclined towards the inclusion of biological, physiological, and sociological discourses in their theories of mind. Vanessa L. Ryan demonstrates why the practice of self-help must always be interlinked with this particular science:

> One of the most significant aspects of the "new psychology" was its […] interest in developing a science of the mind that would be practical […] The goal of many physiological psychologists was to establish a "master science" that would allow analysis of the human mind, while also providing guides for thought and behaviour that could benefit medicine, education, social reform, and artistic creativity. The new science promised to identify the mechanisms for self-governance and moral action and to design ways of strengthening them as part of a programme of self-education.[30]

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[27] Ibid, p. 43.
[28] George Meredith, *Beauchamp's Career* (1875), ed. Margaret Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 6.
[29] George Henry Lewes, *The Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845) (London: John W. Parker, 1857), p. 632.
[30] Vanessa L. Ryan, *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 2-3.

With the notion that this 'master science' depended on the interpretation of the body, which could be used to suggest ways of living that went beyond individual conduct, came a reawakened imaginative interest in the idea of system.

This science of self-improvement had its origins in the faculty psychology of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers such as Thomas Reid, Lord Kames, and Dugald Stewart. Indeed, transcendentalists such as Margaret Fuller, William Ellery Channing, and Henry David Thoreau were indebted to this strand of eighteenth-century thinking for the development of their ideas of the power of the individual mind and the cultivation of an ideal self. This early form of psychology held that the mind possessed distinct faculties which were inborn and grouped hierarchically. The higher faculties were the province of reason and the will, whilst the lower faculties were constituted via the senses and bodily desire or appetite. The former had to be cultivated and the latter restrained. Howe explains that '[a]ll systems of faculty psychology are essentially teleological, since the faculties are defined in terms of their purpose […] When a person allowed certain faculties to get out of control, he was perverting the divinely intended harmony of the system'.[31] An ethical system, therefore, could be based on an internal one. Nineteenth-century psychologists gradually moved this form of systematizing from the realm of what was broadly idealism to the physiological. As Helen Small informs us, 'faculty psychology was (for all its hospitality to empiricist confirmation) a metaphysical model of mind, tending to intellectual and political conservatism'.[32] Self-regulation in the nineteenth-century, however, began increasingly to be predicated upon the body.

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[31] Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Johnathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 64.

[32] Helen Small, 'Subjectivity, Psychology, and the Imagination', *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 487-510 (p. 490).

A bridge between faculty psychology and the 'new psychology' that had begun to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century was the pseudo-scientific practice of phrenology, which held that the taxonomy of the faculties could be read through corresponding bumps on the skull. As Lucy Hartley has explored, particularly with reference to the related science of physiognomy, these practices were explicitly connected to self-help. They reveal a particularly Victorian 'preoccupation with seeing hidden patterns beneath the surface of things. Of special interest were explorations of the workings of the human mind because they provided insights into individuality and autonomy, and in particular the significance of the will'.[33] Meredith, as his manuscript notes as a publisher's reader attest, allied himself particularly with the science of physiognomy. In his notes on Professor Heinemann's *Character in the Face*, sent to him on 10 of September 1892, he writes an unusually positive assertion that it is '[c]ertainly interesting. I am generally in agreement with the views. Much is, of course, common to those who at all observe physiognomy'.[34] There is certainly something Meredith would have found persuasive in the idea that the face could display a living character. In phrenology, meanwhile, the skull provided a tactile interface that allowed one to feel for the contours of the self. In this practice, then, legibility is haptic. As such, it provides a useful model for the kind of self-help that Eliot and Meredith were most committed to communicating through their fiction. This is despite the fact that phrenologists are depicted in both Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* and Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* – both published in 1859 – as dangerous sidekicks of pedagogical fathers, both of whom wish to curtail the aesthetic abilities of their sons.

Sensing the self through the form of the body – thus transforming the body into an interpretive site – is a core concern of this thesis. Crucially, phrenology also held that one's deficient or over-blown

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[33] Lucy Hartley, 'A Science for One or a Science for all? Physiognomy, Self-Help and the Practical Benefits of Science' in *Repositioning the Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-Century Scientific Thinking*, ed. David Clifford et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 71-82, p. 71-72.

[34] George Meredith as Publisher's Reader for Chapman and Hall. George Meredith Collection, GEN MSS 953, Box 40, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

faculties, once isolated through touch, become knowable entities that can then be worked on and either optimised or repressed. Such a view was promoted by the most prominent phrenologist, George Combe, who, as Charles Bray attests, delightedly performed his science on the cast of a head belonging to Eliot.[35] Combe wished to provide a manual for understanding the characteristics of the self, derived from material sources of knowledge. Given the fact that this guidebook was based on the sense of touch, the connection between manual forms is irresistible. Combe's is a reference book – a manual – that shows how to handle the self.

Sally Shuttleworth, whose book *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996) describes how Brontë's concern for psychological topics accords with her problematic relationship to the culture of self-help, asserts that Smiles's own discourse was 'modelled on Combean philosophy'.[36] 'In Combe's hands', she writes, 'phrenology was turned into a scientific authorization of the doctrine of self-improvement', whilst the 'motto adopted by the *Phrenological Journal*: 'Know thyself' encoded their assumption that the road to social advancement lay primarily within self-analysis and introspection'.[37] In *A System of Phrenology* (1825), Combe outlines a 'Philosophy of the Human Mind': 'it ought to throw light on the primitive powers of feeling which incite us to action, and the capacities of thinking that guide our exertions till we attain the object of our desires'.[38] The mind 'cannot act or be acted upon, but through the medium of an organic apparatus'.[39] By 'organic', Combe meant what were seen to be the distinct organs of the brain. His monumentally successful *The Constitution of Man* (1828), however, expands this definition to incorporate the living world. This work aimed at 'the improvement of education, and the regulation of individual conduct' by showing how the '[p]hysical laws of nature, affecting our physical condition, as well as regulating the whole material system of the universe' could

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[35] See *George Eliot: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. K. K. Collins (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) pp. 15-17.
[36] Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 64.
[37] Ibid.
[38] George Combe, *A System of Phrenology* (London: Longman & Co., 1825), p. i.
[39] Ibid.

also provide a moral law predicated upon 'the constitution of Man' and our bodily response to environment.[40] As in Emerson, the pun implicit in the term 'constitution' here proves the rule. Organic system constitutes ethical system, the rightness or wrongness of which is felt by the individual body.

The presence of a philosophical science in fiction is, importantly, something that Combe represents as inevitable. In the preface to *A System of Phrenology*, he explains that he has approached the 'popular reader' to provide a sort of explanatory appendix to the philosophy contained within great works of literature:

> In the pages of Shakespeare, Addison, Johnson, Tillotson and Blair, we have the lineaments of mind traced with perfect tact and exhibited with matchless beauty and effect: But these authors had no systematic object in view […] Hence, although in their compositions we find ample and admirable materials for the elucidation of a true system of philosophy of man, yet, without other aids than they supply, we cannot arrive at the fundamental principles which ought at once to unite and explain their observations.[41]

Combe represents literature's accommodation of a philosophy of science as not only unsurprising but ideal. His own text, he is saying, is a means to decode the great works he refers to. The discourse of self-help to which phrenology belongs is thus explicitly linked back to literature. Combe's phrenology is an index allowing for the reader to practise an improving heuristic. For my purposes, the most intriguing part of this passage is the fact that Combe applies the living form on which his science is predicated to the textual form of his chosen authors. In the plays of Shakespeare, for instance, 'we have the lineaments of mind traced with perfect tact'. For Combe, literature is a form of phrenology; his representation of an embodied literature is one that aims to provide a reading of the self.

Two other system-makers reinforce the idea that ethical system was becoming increasingly inseparable from the idea of the human body: Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, who were individually motivated by a scientifically inflected philosophy, particularly that of evolution. As in Combe's *Constitution* – which incidentally far outsold *The Origin of Species* in the nineteenth century –

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[40] George Combe, *The Constitution of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. viii.
[41] Ibid, pp. ix-x.

natural law and mankind's adaptations to it were shown to be markers of human progress. This synchronicity of natural systems was thus an important aspect of nineteenth-century scientific thought.

Comte's philosophical system became popular in the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain, prompted by the support lent to his works by John Stuart Mill. The summation of his years of thinking was embodied in his *System of Positive Polity, or Treatise on Sociology, instituting the Religion of Humanity* (1851-54). Akin to the presiding mottoes of Smiles and Combe, Comte's '*Know thyself, that thou mayst improve thyself*', which he recommended be writ large on the walls of his positivist temples, showcases how his works tapped into both the craze for self-improvement and the movement away from traditional forms of religious belief.[42] Comte's earlier *Course on Positive Philosophy* (1830-42) represented an ambitious synthesis of philosophical and physiological systems, in pursuit of a science of human improvement he called 'sociology'. Biology and the manner in which the human body adapts itself to its environment were particularly important. As Frederick Neuhouser outlines, 'biology, like sociology, studies the functioning and development of complex, highly organized entities' and '[j]ust as biology ascribes natural ends to living organisms, Comte's sociology assumes that the social organism has certain necessary ends that explain its historical development and define its progress'.[43] For Comte, all aspects of thought – from the empirical to the aesthetic – could be synthesised in one system of ethics. True to his term 'system', Comte demonstrated that the correct ethical action could be proved upon the individual's physical form. His practice was one of 'physical and moral amelioration' whereby certain virtues were 'calculated to improve the constitution, of brain and body alike'.[44] The fact of embodiment, therefore, became a personal as well as a social power.

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[42] Auguste Comte, *Comte's Positive Polity*, 4 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1877), 2, trans. Frederick Harrison: 265.

[43] Frederick Neuhouser, 'Conceptions of Society in Nineteenth-Century Social Thought' in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century (1790-1870)*, ed. Allen W. Wood and Songsuk Susan Hahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 651-75 (pp. 670-71).

[44] Comte, *Comte's Positive Polity*, vol. 4, trans. Richard Congreve, p. 243.

Though Herbert Spencer vehemently denied Comte's influence on what he termed his 'Synthetic Philosophy', his work evokes the Frenchman's ideas in certain ways. Spencer saw evolution as both the means through which to secure human progress and as a way of conceiving of such progress. The analogous relationship of the self to the physiological and biological was the foundation of Spencer's thought. His was a philosophy of correspondences. As Ryan explains, '[w]hile Darwin applied the idea of evolution to species change, speculating about society and culture with some reluctance, Spencer saw evolution working everywhere. He applied the idea of evolution to everything from psychology to aesthetics, society and culture, economics, and, of course, biology'.[45] For Spencer, system was not just taxonomy, it was a way of life.

The lifelong friendship that existed between Spencer and Eliot has been well documented, as has the potential to read the latter's work in correspondence with the former.[46] Although Meredith has not received the same treatment, it is clear that he read and aligned with much of Spencer's work. Often referred to as 'the poet of evolution', Meredith is directly comparable to Eliot in his representation of literature as natural history.[47] Echoing what came to be known as 'social Darwinism', passionately promoted by Spencer, Meredith outlines his theory of literature by allying it to a theory of progress:

> I think that all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us: as to my works, I know them faulty, think them of worth only when they point and aid to that end. Close knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to great civilisation. I have supposed that the novel, exposing and illustrating the natural history of man, may help us to such sustaining roadside gifts.[48]

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[45] Ryan, *Thinking Without Thinking*, p. 21.
[46] See, for instance, Nancy L. Paxton's *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolution, and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 5.
[47] For more on this, see Carolyn Williams, 'Natural Selection and Narrative Form in "The Egoist"', *Victorian Studies*, 27. 1 (Autumn 1983): 53-79.
[48] Meredith to George Pierce Baker, 22 July 1887, *Letters of George Meredith* (*LGM*), ed. C. L. Cline, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 876.

Meredith's ethics are evolutionary. He also explicitly shows how his works are a performance of these values. Knowing his novels 'faulty' proves that perfection, both human and literary, has not yet been reached. For both Meredith and Eliot, meanwhile, the human condition is a condition of text. The novel, if it is to aid the progress of civilisation, should bear witness not only to the constitution of 'our fellows', but also to the 'laws of nature' by which such characters are formed. For Meredith, if you are on the road to self-improvement, you better take a novel along for the ride.

Eliot and Meredith were writing at a time when moral philosophical systems were being written with the scientific language of physiology in mind. As the following chapters will attest, this inflection dominated the way in which they wrote about the self and the self's drive towards improvement. It also influenced the way they framed their ambivalent relationship to textual wisdom, and the way others read it for themselves.

Aestheticizing Improvement

'Self-help' is often referred to either as a commonplace or – more generatively – used as a luminous motif, but it is never claimed to be the whole, or the main subject of literary criticism. It is most commonly evoked as an example of the movement towards improving the education of the working-class, and a method through which to analyse the various 'industrial novels' of the age written by authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell or Margaret Oliphant, or to stress 'the importance of biographies to the Victorian scene of reading'.[49]

Literary critics most frequently comment on Charles Dickens's explicit, if ambivalent, relationship to Smiles and the discourse of self-help. Such topical predominance is to be expected. Dickens was not only an embodiment of the self-help narrative, having famously raised himself by his

[49] *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

own exertions from the portion of his childhood spent in Warren's Blacking Factory, but he also addressed audiences akin to those who listened to the early drafts of *Self-Help*. In the year before the publication of that work, on 3 December 1858, Dickens delivered an address at the annual meeting of the Institutional Association of Lancashire and Cheshire. Before the publication, then, of *Great Expectations* (1860-61), often billed as an anti-Smilesian narrative, and his next novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) in which Mr Boffin reads the biographies of misers ostensibly in order to improve his capacity for such a condition, Dickens was speaking approvingly of such self-helping pursuits.[50]

Dickens refers to his previous contempt for 'the old story' of earnest improvers. He represents his reformed opinion of their merits, however, as an 'education' and thus allies himself with the essential mission of the cause to which he is a convert.[51] In so doing, he re-writes a joke about the self-helping practice that we see as early as the *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), in which Sam, who is composing a 'walentine', is asked by his father 'wot's that, you're a-doin' of? Pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, Sammy?'[52] Far more seriously, Dickens remarks 'of the advantages of knowledge I have said, and shall say nothing. Of the certainty with which the man who grasps it under difficulties rises in his own respect and in usefulness to the community, I have said, and I shall say, nothing', because '[i]n the City of Manchester, in the county of Lancaster, both of them remarkable for self-taught men, that were superfluous indeed'.[53] Such a discrepancy between the levity with which he treated the subject in his novels and this new solemn admiration is contemplated by Rebecca Richardson who suggests that 'although in his politics Dickens supported the institutions of self-help,

[50] See, for instance Jerome Meckier, '*Great Expectations* and *Self-Help*: Dickens Frowns on Smiles', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 100.4 (October 2001): 537-54.
[51] Charles Dickens, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens, 1841-1870*, ed. Richard Herne Shepherd (London: Chatto and Windus, 1884), pp. 212-13.
[52]Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 432. Dickens is referring to George Lillie Craik's *Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (1830-1) which informed Smiles's similar guide to improvement.
[53] Shepherd (ed.), *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, p. 219.

in his fiction he easily turns the self-help story to his own ends'.[54] This delineation between historical fact and the aesthetic departure from a strict adherence to those facts is useful in demonstrating what critical readings of the self-help discourse in fiction can be. Indeed, the case of Dickens offers a good way of framing what this thesis does and does not do. It is perhaps telling that there has been no monograph written explicitly on Dickens and self-help, despite many of his works referring to the practice. This may be because the values with which Smilesian self-help is firmly associated are typically seen as anti-aesthetic, pedagogic, antiquated, and dry. As Blum has identified, 'Victorianists often read Smiles's book as a foil for the period's success-wary fiction' because of the emphasis placed by canonical authors such as Dickens and Eliot on 'the aesthetic merit of failure'.[55] Indeed, it is true that Eliot and Meredith did not conform to the ideals developed in *Self-Help*, but my thesis argues that they evolved an aestheticized form of improvement throughout their novels, and that this was achieved by relocating the pedagogical to the site of the feeling body. Eliot and Meredith, it argues, were very conscious of the literary culture of advice, but reformed this through interlinked ideas of physiological form.

While there has been, then, comparatively little work that solely focuses on Victorian self-help and fiction, this thesis has emerged out of a rich field of works on the nineteenth-century novel, many of which work to imagine its chief interests through the body. Authors who use self-help in productive alliance with other theoretical concerns include those who have already been mentioned in this introduction. Andrew H. Miller explores a similar if not identical idea of moral perfectionism in the nineteenth-century novel, and usefully shows how the discourse '[a]t its heart is the complex proposition that we turn from our ordinary lives, realize an ideal self, and perfect what is distinctly

[54] Rebecca Richardson, 'Bradley Headstone's Bad Example of Self-Help: Dickens and the Problem with Ambition, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 44.1 (July 2013): 267-88 (269).
[55] Blum, *The Self-Help Compulsion*, pp. 46-7.

human in us – and that we do so in response to exemplary others'.[56] Sean O'Toole occasionally and innovatively applies the self-help discourse to his overarching subject of *Habit in the English Novel* (2013).[57] Adela Pinch's *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (2010), Ryan's *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (2012), Rick Rylance's *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (2000) and Michael Davis's *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (2006) have all informed my conception of physiological-psychology in the Victorian era and novel. They also figure how unconscious or self-reflexive processes of mind were part of the moral realm of Victorian science. In his detailed analysis of Eliot's works alongside contemporary scientific thought, Rylance suggests a method of criticism through which the shared language of science and literature becomes particularly apparent. Gesturing towards these similarities in isolation, and without elaboration, does not go far enough in exposing why such authors participated in this shared discourse, or what the use of such language achieves. The following chapters are formulated along multiple lines of intersecting discourses: they incorporate philosophy, psychology, advice books, and nineteenth-century science. They also draw on less recognisable improvement tropes such as humour studies, the digestive metaphor, and the body as text. All, however, are united by a shared concern with the ways in which the physiology of improvement materialised in tandem with the literary work. As Benjamin Morgan attests, this has been a way of viewing aesthetic form since the nineteenth century, for 'art and literature were phenomena realized as dynamic interactions among nerves, muscles, stone, and ink'.[58]

Nicholas Dames's work on *The Physiology of the Novel* (2007) exemplifies this kind of criticism. Through a series of close-readings of both literary and scientific texts, he unfolds his argument that

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[56] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British* Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 3.
[57] Sean O'Toole, *Habit in the English Novel, 1850-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[58] Benjamin Morgan, *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 6.

there was 'a loosely affiliated coterie of scientists, journalists, and intellectuals who brought the experimental study of human physiology to bear upon the facts of novel-reading, as part of an attempt to theorize the force of the novel form in culture'.[59] Such a theory impacted the practice of a variety of prominent authors, among them Eliot and Meredith. This thesis is in dialogue with his work: whilst Dames proposes a science for the practice of reading, however, I propose an embodied practice for reading the self.

I have also drawn on works that consider self-help literature in a new light, such as Blum's *Self-Help Compulsion* and Cavell's work on moral perfectionism.[60] Elisha Cohn's *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (2016) actively interrogates the traditional mode of reading for schemes of improvement and self-realisation through an illuminating attention to states of 'diminished consciousness' such as reverie, trance, and sleep.[61] Cohn locates the aesthetic moment – when 'self' and 'culture' most intimately align – at the psychic pause. She represents authors such as Meredith and Eliot as including these breaks from the usually overwhelming impulse to write improvement, which are imbued with their own meaning for the individual, if unrecoverable to teleological ends. This thesis, though in sympathy with Cohn's work, recalibrates more traditional views of self-improvement as a dry and over-studied aspect of the nineteenth century by paying attention to two authors who disrupt such narratives through their appeal to the individual's feeling self. In this, it aligns with Philip Davis's study of the intuitive heuristic capacities of the readerly individual in *Reading for Life* (2020). Here, he diverges from what he terms a literature of 'instrumental answers', such as those books which promote 'simple self-help effects', whilst unfolding a presiding faith in the therapeutic capacities of text.[62] Locating within the shared experience of reading a form of development that works from within

[59] Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.
[60] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[61] Elisha Cohn, *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 3.
[62] Philip Davis, *Reading for Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 4.

communion, both of self with text and individual with the group, Davis focuses on those 'raw moments' of feeling which illuminate the 'unclear borderline area between the subjective and objective'.[63] My own research aligns with this book, not necessarily in evoking the transformative community of reading with others, but of reading with oneself. Consciously destabilizing traditional conceptions of what self-help meant to the Victorians, I hope to evolve a work that pays a like attention to 'the importance of felt experience in reading, and the value of the specific, the small and detailed, and the individual'.[64]

The problematic search for ethical form, meanwhile, is addressed by Jesse Rosenthal, whose book *Good Form* (2017) shows how 'feeling, form and the sense of right and wrong get mixed up, in the nineteenth century, in the experience of reading a novel' through moral intuitionism.[65] Rosenthal focuses on how the moral philosophy contained within the form of nineteenth-century novels developed a new mode of reading, shaping a critical practice that remains today, which allows him to bypass the idea 'that it is morally improving to read them'.[66] Such a claim, as he rightly notes, is a critical commonplace but not one that is unworthy of further attention. Whilst this thesis is allied to Rosenthal's study through a shared interest in the reading experience and an instinctive feeling towards ethical knowledge, it departs from it in its unabashed focus on the transformative effects of literature that can be located within textual moments.

Two further critical fields dominating recent literary studies, and which have gradually come to inform the writing of this thesis, are those of affect theory and the haptic. Both accord with the nineteenth-century's fascination with embodied aesthetics, ethically efficacious feelings such as sympathy, and the connection of the body to the mind. These modes of reading have also opened up

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[63] Ibid, p. 4.
[64] Ibid, p. 18.
[65] Jesse Rosenthal, *Good Form: The Ethical Experience of the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 1.
[66] Ibid, p. 6.

generative avenues for literary criticism, which are neither explicitly historicist nor decidedly antithetical to it. Such a mode is one to which this thesis adheres.

The rise of the analysis of affect in nineteenth-century literary studies has been driven by critics such as Rachel Ablow, Isobel Armstrong, Elaine Scarry, and Gesa Stedman.[67] Such a discipline, based on a feeling, is necessarily difficult to define.[68] The affective is a way of expressing the experience of reading, where the body of the reader is made, for instance, to pulse according to the rhythms of the text. Affect explores the shadowland of how we come to know elements of the text through subjective interpretation rather than objective stipulation. As Ablow puts it, by 'virtue of a renewed attention to feeling rather than knowing, a very different world of reading comes to light', involving 'autonomy as well as determination, escape from as well as assimilation to the world outside the text'.[69] Feeling becomes faculty, which was something that Victorian writers like Eliot constantly suggested. The turn towards affect has had a tremendous impact on how to conceptualise the self, which must necessarily inform studies of self-help. As Claire Colebrook summarises, 'rather than think of selves as minds who subsequently come to have feelings, selves are formed from the feelings of their bodies, and their bodies' affective responses'.[70] Self-formation is processed and perceived through embodiment which is also one with consciousness. For Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'thought is a body'.[71] For them, 'affect is integral to a body's *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its

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[67] In particular, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

[68] This task of definition is made easier, however, by *Affect and Literature*, ed. Alex Houen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[69] Rachel Ablow, 'Introduction', *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 2.

[70] Claire Colebrook, 'The Once and Future Human: Between Happiness and Extinction', in *Against Life*, ed. Alastair Hunt and Stephanie Youngblood (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016), pp. 63-86 (p. 64).

[71] 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-29 (p. 3).

composition through, the forces of encounter'.[72] As such, affect is representative of the body as a form that strives for itself.

This thesis, then, joins the growing body of work that reads phenomenologically for therapies of the self. Growing out of this philosophy and, indeed, affect theory, literary haptics have become an increasingly fertile area for contemplating nineteenth-century works. Perhaps best exemplified by the title of Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick's pioneering *Touching Feeling* (2002), this emphasis on the condition of touch in the production of knowledge about self and world has been formative in the development of this thesis. As with the dual meaning of 'manual' previously alluded to, the site of learning appears at one's fingertips. This thesis will occasionally draw on this figure when outlining what I will refer to as a feeling for the self, a mode of seeking self-aid through the senses, which circumvents (whilst not being entirely separate from) more stable methods such as the use of reason or the will.

The conference 'The Victorian Tactile Imagination', held at Birkbeck in the summer of 2013, established touch as a key critical field of nineteenth-century studies. The corresponding journal issue shows how the tactile can inform alternative readings of canonical texts and ideologies. As Heather Tilley outlines in her introduction to the issue, the haptic discourse 'deepens our understanding of the interconnections Victorians made between mind, body, and self, and the ways in which each came into being through tactile modes'.[73] Being put in touch with the self as a science of subjectivity has already been showcased in my reference to phrenology, but such a discourse expands within this critical practice so as to incorporate topics as diverse as William Cohen's 'tactile ecology' and Gillian Beer's 'dream touch'.[74] The former is also the author of an important work based on the formative encounter of the body in *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (2008). Cohen, like myself, focuses

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Heather Tilley, 'Introduction: The Victorian Tactile Imagination', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (October 2014), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.723.
[74] See William Cohen's 'Aborealities: The Tactile Ecology of Hardy's *Woodlanders*' and Gillian Beer's 'Dream Touch' in the above journal for excellent examples of how the haptic can be applied to texts in varied ways.

on the writers who 'suggest that what makes us human is the matter of our being – not some quality that transcends it'. He aims to show how a 'fundamental aspect of the human turns out to be the strangeness to itself of the fleshly matter that composes it'.[75] This thesis embraces such motile embodiment, but diverges from Cohen's study in using it as a figure to analyse how Eliot and Meredith wrote a system of ethical embodiment. The diversity of discussion that the topic of touch encourages, meanwhile, shows why such discourses are important to literary criticism. The tactile is emblematic of a universally accessible topic, but that is also an intensely personal and unquantifiable experience infinitely open to interpretation and dependent on a form of embodied cognition. This thesis considers whether other traditions of thought might be open to the same level of epistemological ambiguity; it aims to suggest that this might be the case with self-help. As the cultural historian Constance Classen asserts, '[t]ouch lies at the heart of our experience of ourselves'.[76] The idea of self-help is similarly an encounter with ourselves, one that Eliot and Meredith rendered in tactile terms. We feel for ourselves at such junctures, and that feeling is one with the body.

Such a form of criticism has recently been given new life by David Russell's discussion of 'an art of the encounter' through his *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2018).[77] His study is important to this thesis because it considers a form of self-help that does not necessarily have to be written according to rote, but is something that can be realised in the intermediary spaces between text and self. These unstable sites of knowledge production generate what Russell refers to as 'a necessary vagueness', instituting 'a tactful relational frame that would allow everybody the creative handling of their own experience'.[78] This particular Victorian culture of advice is produced, not by the author, or the actions of their characters, but by the moment of reading and

[75] William Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. xii, xvi.
[76] Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2012), p. xi.
[77] David Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 1.
[78] Ibid, p. 96.

the feeling such an experience provokes. As Russell enquires, '[o]ur lives are in our own hands; this is unavoidable. But how to handle life? Might there be an art of relating to the world, and feeling our way among others?'.[79] My 'feeling for the self' shares a clear genealogy with Russell's 'feeling our way'. The opening of his monograph revels in questioning such commonplaces with which his book begins. That one's life is in one's own hands is a familiar saying, but Russell's analysis remodels these phrases in order to make them newly inhabitable to varied patterns of interpretation. To take life's terms for granted would be to deaden them; literature and literary criticism excel at countering this. Eliot and Meredith were similarly interested in the re-interrogation of literary terms and practices. Whilst Eliot was dismissive of Walter Pater's writings, Russell's examination of the author's engagement with self-help discourse illuminates how we might read Eliot's (and indeed Meredith's) own. 'Pater's perfectionism', he writes, 'is "a life philosophy," which rejects alike the methodology of a system of imperative […] or an articulated progress towards the concept of good'.[80] By simply being, these concomitant commitments to the self simply are. Self-help is spontaneous organic growth – a 'growing good', as Eliot would have it in *Middlemarch* (1871-1872).[81] Whilst Russell's examination of tactful prose senses outwards towards social and political conditions, my engagement with bodily feeling turns inwards in order to sense self-help.

A Form for Feeling

Each of the following chapters associates facets of the self-help discourse with the works of Eliot and Meredith, comparatively and then separately. The compulsion to rise early and work hard – the best-

[79] Ibid, p. 1.
[80] Ibid, p. 112.
[81] George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 785. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

known form taken by self-help ideology – is absent from this study, which instead considers the work of the lungs when we laugh, the self-affirmative taste of an onion, or the feeling we get when a particular philosophical or aphoristic saying seems to be speaking directly to ourselves.

The first chapter interrogates the transformation of Eliot's and Meredith's novels into advice literature through an examination of Alexander Main's *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* (1872) and Mary Rebecca Foster Gilman's introduction to Meredith's *Wit and Wisdom* (1888). It is not enough to read these books as mere paratexts: through their use of the extract, they perform the process of reading for self-help. The chapter, which is concerned with reception, also pays witness to how Eliot and Meredith became increasingly associated with the figure of the sage, and analyses their highly ambivalent reactions to their new identity. The form of wisdom literature, and how wisdom is received by the individual reader, enables a reconceptualization of the anthology.

Whilst chapter one is concerned with the digestion of lengthy novels into bite-sized wisdom, chapter two considers another application of this term in 'Reader's Digest'. It sets out to detail the surprisingly strong connection between the alimentary figure and textual self-help, before showing how Eliot dwelt upon certain digestive philosophies in her work. I focus on Eliot's poem, 'The Minor Prophet' (1865), and its previously unconsidered use of alimentary images when contemplating the ideal of progress in tandem with the joys of remaining just the same. The chapter witnesses the construction of a moral dietetic and shows how taste can serve as a moral index to the self. The second section to this chapter demonstrates how dyspepsia is used by Meredith to consider his own ideas of individual progress. By juxtaposing the digestive system with the various textual moral systems of his first major novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), Meredith meditates upon what advice we should and should not take into our systems. He makes a morsel out of morality which we can take or leave, according to our tastes.

Chapter three turns to consider how Eliot returned to her literary origins as the translator of philosophical works, namely those of Spinoza and Feuerbach, in developing a physiological philosophy of improvement within her novels. The bodies of Maggie Tulliver and Romola de' Bardi are shown in translation, transforming philosophical concepts into personal ideals through feeling. Both experience a visceral need for a guiding principle or an ideal by which to live, and this chapter explores how they discover that this source of help resides within themselves. In mediating such systems of ethical instruction through the embodied forms of her characters, Eliot creates a corporeal morality that has its roots in philosophy but is facilitated through fiction. This chapter aims to show how ethical instruction must adhere to a language that winds itself about the nerves and is as adaptable as our bodies.

Whilst Maggie and Romola embody forms of moral teaching, my final chapter on Eliot considers how she comes to write a text that draws its ethical resources from the living body. It offers a new consideration of how Eliot avoids prescriptivism whilst still writing a text that aims to offer moral guidance. In arguing that she achieves this through making the conditions of text mimetic of the conditions of the individual life, this chapter tracks the physiological aesthetic she developed through her literary criticism. Before interpreting moments in *Middlemarch* and other novels that correspond to this, the chapter draws on the work of several writers who complement Eliot's authorial method: Johann Gottfried Herder, who wrote an influential aesthetic theory of the haptic in *Sculpture* (1778), the sixteenth-century Franciscan friar, Francisco de Osuna, and the nineteenth-century philologist, Friedrich Max Müller. Together, they offered Eliot a means of conceiving a physiological alphabet. A self-help text, this chapter reveals, can be written according to nerves and fibres.

The first of two chapters on Meredith, communicates how the author represents his theory of the Comic Spirit as the foundational source of self-help. By taking two moments of physical comedy from his novels, this chapter showcases the centrality of the body to Meredith's improving comic

theory. I demonstrate how aspects of these works conform to, and exceed, nineteenth-century scientific theories of humour, before exploring a fixture in Meredith's novels: his 'moral pharmacopeia'.

Returning to the theme of short-form wisdom with which this thesis began, my final chapter considers a criticism that was often launched at Meredith's novels: that their teaching was too overt at the expense of his characterisations. This chapter reverses one such criticism, that Meredith's characters were merely 'embodied aphorisms', in order to show how the author consciously allowed for this. I argue that, rather than making his characters dead, their correspondence to the form of the aphorism endows his characters with a quality of aliveness that pulses in time with the reader's reflections on their teachings. This chapter bears witness to how Meredith, in sympathy with Eliot, wanted to unfold a new style and form for the novel, intelligible to the heuristic capacities of the individual body.

A brief coda approaches the question of 'Self-Criticism', as befits a thesis on two intensely self-critical writers. I conclude with the the commonplace book, a manuscript form of self-curation in which what appeals to the individual reader as worthy of transcription is copied down into a very personal anthology. Eliot and Meredith both used commonplace books, and, this thesis concludes, their novels share a preoccupation with a form that allows one to approach the self and the text critically.

David Russell reminds us of Stanley Cavell's suggestion that the 'way to overcome theory correctly, philosophically, is to let the object or the work of your interest teach you how to consider it'.[82] I began this thesis with the aim of showing how the emergent science of physiological-psychology evolved in conjunction with the self-help discourse. I hoped to show, with recourse to the novels of Eliot and Meredith, how that was no accident and how each branch of the science – i.e. Phrenology,

[82] Quoted on p. 114 from Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness*, p. 10.

Mesmerism, Associationism, etc. – contributed to developing self-help narratives contained within literary and scientific texts. Eliot and Meredith's novels, however, refused to be wrestled into such fixed argumentative structures.

Through this process of open-minded investigation into such a vast and nebulous topic, I have found that when the ideology of improvement occurs in Eliot and Meredith's novels it is very often given a physiological emphasis. The following chapters work to maintain a stress on ethical systems as bodily system, and to understand why such a link was so strenuously insisted on by both authors. As such, it is the only work that offers a sustained focus on self-help and the body in nineteenth-century fiction. Evolving out of close-readings of possibly surprising passages, this thesis is not forensic in searching for correlative empirical or cultural evidence which might work against the ideal of non-prescriptive reading that both authors promote. Such a methodology, whilst it might not conform to a critical mode which strives (often wonderfully) to contribute an overlooked but important element or motif of literature to our knowledge, allies itself with the subject of this thesis. Self-help as a literary tradition has always depended on a privacy of interpretation specific to the individual encounter with text. A reader of Smiles's biographical works must be more inspired by one 'bust' of a great figure over another. I don't suppose he or she could precisely determine why this might be the case, other than that such a narrative aligns more readily with their sense of self, their ambitions, and what they might be prepared to sacrifice in fulfilment of them. As such, the self-help genre allies itself with a personal ethics of extraction, which can also be applied to any form of reading conducted, as Dickens would say, 'as if for life'.[83] Literary critics must perform a like lifting from the work in front of them, reading to fulfil the ambitions of their text in a mode that is similarly (if not so solipsistically) subjective. In this sense, the style and form of this work performs its subject, in that it helps itself to sentences that appeal to its aims and intentions, transforming them into textual

[83] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), p. 53.

fragments that work to further such ends. Furthermore, like the self-helping subject, this thesis intends to benefit from the exemplarity of critical works that speak to it, without entering into direct contest with them.

Eliot famously wrote to Frederick Harrison about why she refused to write an overt philosophy into her fiction:

> I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely aesthetic – if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram – it becomes the most offensive of all teaching.[84]

Her comparison of the picture to the diagram raises significant questions. They are both forms of representation – neither professes to be a portrait that is true to life – but whilst the picture is expressive of that life, the diagram merely tries to define it. This latter image is one that she repeats again from within the context of philosophy. When Deronda meets Mordecai's club, the members of which call themselves 'The Philosophers', he manifests a fear of 'seeming straight-laced, and turning himself into a sort of diagram instead of a growth which can exercise the guiding attraction of fellowship' (486). Eliot's seeking after a living form which might not only try to represent, but generate, participant emotion within the reader is expressive of this need for fellowship. As *Systems of Self-Help in the Works of George Eliot and George Meredith* shows, both novelists thought of themselves of teachers, producing texts that would be instructive guides that partially responded to the era's preoccupation with the self-help discourse. They coincide in their mutual understanding of the body as means through which to mediate this form of teaching, and in their pursuit of aesthetic forms that seem to breathe.

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[84] Eliot to Frederick Harrison, 15 August 1866, *George Eliot Letters* (*GEL*), ed. Gordon S. Haight (London: Yale University Press, 1954-1976), 7 vols., 4, p. 300.

Chapter One

Fictional Systems: The Form of *Wit and Wisdom*

> She seemed loth to go, and as if there was something that she would have said, yet did not. I have always remembered, though, the weariness she expressed of the way in which wisdom was attributed to her. "I am so tired of being set on a pedestal and expected to vent wisdom – I am only a poor woman" was the meaning of what she said if not the exact phrase, as I think it was.[85]

Georgiana Burne-Jones's recollections of George Eliot's final visit to her and her husband contain one of the novelist's most frequently quoted non-fictional phrases. In many critical studies and biographies on Eliot, her discontent about being positioned above others in the dispensation of wisdom is extracted to showcase how, in David Russell's words, 'she suffered from people wanting her to be a sage – a sort of Victorian self-help guru'.[86] Eliot's anxiety concerning the expectations of her audience is a fitting introduction to this chapter, which treats of her and Meredith's reluctant anthologization into popular 'Wit and Wisdom' guides. Precisely because of the form of these books, which seek to 'vent wisdom' through the quoting of sentences independently from their literary origin, it is conversely more important to pay attention here, not to what Eliot said, but to the context in which she is said to have said it. By the time Eliot had paid this final visit to the Burne-Joneses on 23rd April 1880, Alexander Main's *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings* (1872) had already gone through four editions, with a fifth on the way. Eliot's concern about the insatiable appetite for her moral sentences, therefore, was not unfounded. Appropriately, then, Georgiana's recollections are dominated by sayings unsaid, remembered, and paraphrased. What she cannot forget is not what Eliot said, but the way in which she said it. The author's 'weariness' is what Georgiana is trying to articulate through this memory, so that the 'exact phrase' becomes only a secondary concern in the generation of 'meaning'. Nevertheless, despite disclaiming the accuracy of her recollection of Eliot's exact sentence, Georgiana

[85] Collins (ed.), *George Eliot: Interviews and Recollections*, p. 215.
[86] David Russell, 'Introduction' to *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xi.

adds almost as an after-thought that 'I think it was'. She thus performs the kind of extraction with which this chapter is concerned. Her final assertion concerns memorialisation, accurate transcription, but also individual agency: 'I think'. Though Eliot's words depend on their context here, when critics and biographers use them, they are often lifted from Georgiana's recollection and appropriated as the author's own. Eliot's saying is thus transformed according to the conditions of the new text in which it appears. As such, the author's protestations about her sayings' significance are constantly refashioned in order to signify. The following chapter interrogates the wisdom of doing this.

In 1889, an American writer named Mary Rebecca Foster Gilman published a book on the life and writing of *Saint Theresa of Avila* for the Roberts Brothers publishing house in Boston. The text was part of a series on 'Famous Women' which included George Eliot, whose biography by Mathilde Blind was published in 1885. When Gilman came to write the saint's biography, it is perhaps no surprise that she coupled Eliot's name with that of Theresa. However, reference to the 'exquisite prelude to *Middlemarch*' which prominently features Theresa is deferred, preceded by an aspect of Eliot's life which is equated with Gilman's subject.[87] Theresa had

> One of those restless, passionate natures whose "reach" exceeds their "grasp," and often reminds us of George Eliot, who in "Romola" urges above all things else faithfulness to the marriage tie, but whose own wedded life was far from above criticism.[88]

The passage combines what I would suggest is a wilful misreading of marriage in *Romola* (1862-63) with a strange relation of the high-flown religious idealism of Theresa, together with a gossipy allusion to the fact that Eliot and Lewes never married. Gilman highlights what she sees as Eliot's diversion from the moral teaching that she sets out in her fiction, and yet this is not entirely met with criticism. Rather, in the character of Theresa, Eliot's own transgressions against social norms are mitigated through a similarity of temperament. No further mention of Eliot's life comes after this seemingly

[87] Mary Rebecca Foster Gilman, *Saint Theresa of Avila* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1889), p. 196.
[88] Ibid, p. 61.

arbitrary interjection. In Gilman's narrative, the legacy of the ideal – specifically the textual ideal – overpowers inconvenient biographical details. Crucially, context is countermanded by text.

This distillation of moral teaching, separated from its fictional context, applies to another of Gilman's publications. *The Pilgrim's Scrip: Or, Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith* (1888) collected excerpts from the novels and poems of the titular author, and followed the American version of the *Wit and Wisdom of George Eliot* (1874), adapted from Main's *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse.* Both *Wit and Wisdom*s were published by the Roberts Brothers of Boston, and both subscribed to the popular culture of textual anthology. Grounded within the tradition established by the French moralists, such as La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, the anthology of maxims, moral sayings, or epigrams is intertwined with the history of self-help. Blum lists several of what she terms 'self-help readings of modernism'.[89] These include Alain de Botton's popular *How Proust Can Change Your Life* (1997), as well as *The Heming Way* (2012), and *A Guide to Better Living through the Work and Wisdom of Virginia Woolf* (2007). For Blum, these guides not only 'unwittingly disclose a history of generic reciprocity that literary criticism has largely overlooked', but also demonstrate the 'undeterrable' desire of the modernist reader to read for advice despite modernism's apparent resistance to such systematic utility.[90] Self-help through reading the 'work and wisdom of Virginia Woolf' resonates with the nineteenth-century production of the *Wit and Wisdom* of Eliot and Meredith. Indeed, the genre that Google ascribes to the American edition of Eliotean extracts is 'Saying, Self-help book'. The authors, and their anthologization, therefore occupy a shared history of the self-help text that extends into modernity and also back to antiquity. Barbara M. Benedict, for instance, has demonstrated how, from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, 'anthologies promote[d] reading for

[89] Blum, *The Self-Help Compulsion*, p. 20.
[90] Ibid.

improvement, not for pleasure, and thus reading for moral effect or content rather than for style'.[91] For Benedict, the anthology began to 'teach not so much what to read as how to read for meaning, not beauty'.[92] Literature as a pedagogical tool was, however, precisely what the nineteenth-century authors considered here were recasting or reacting against. Improvement – one aphorism, quotation, or 'Saying' at a time – has long accompanied the reading of literature. The anthology has a sort of negative capability in that by addressing what it can and cannot do, we come to a greater understanding of the performative capacity of the novel.

Entitlement: or, whose book is it anyway?

Eliot and Meredith were both at best ambivalent about the anthologization of their novels. In Eliot's case, this ambivalence was modulated by a desire to avoid offending the compiler of the *Sayings*, together with a level of gratitude for what she referred to as 'the sort of delight which comes from seeing that another mind underlines the words one has most cared for in writing them'.[93] Eliot pays attention to a material mode of tactful reading whereby the hand traces a mutuality between reader and author in feeling out what is most meaningful. She had drawn upon this image previously in a letter to John Blackwood, who would go on to publish the *Sayings*. Of the enterprising editor, she writes that '[t]he one thing that gave me confidence was his power of putting his finger on the right passages, and giving emphasis to the right idea (in relation to the author's feeling and purpose)'.[94] Like Maggie Tulliver, who reads the wisdom of Thomas à Kempis according to where a 'quiet hand pointed', 'certain passages' being underlined with 'strong pen-and-ink', Eliot foregrounds an embodied

[91] Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 210.
[92] Ibid, p. 183.
[93] Eliot to Main, 28 December 1871, *GEL*, 5, p. 229.
[94] Eliot to John Blackwood, 29 October 1871, *GEL*, 5, p. 208.

experience of text when contemplating the accumulation of her wisdom.[95] Implicit in her further assertion that Main, in his commentary on her poem *The Spanish Gypsy*, had 'put [his] finger on the true key' when analysing quotations from the Fifth Book, is the idea that she found the relationship between author and editor touching.[96] The perception of the 'right passages', meanwhile, is a surprisingly moralistic way of looking at the book of extracts, and at the editor's ethical duty. Her letter raises the question of which passages would have been the wrong choice, and for what reasons.

For Main, this was clearly an important distinction. His acquaintance with Eliot was built from an initial letter in which he asked her how to pronounce the name 'Romola'.[97] As Main's primary occupation, it seems, was to read Eliot's novels and poems out loud on the beaches of Arbroath, this concern for correct pronunciation does not strike me as so trite an opening to what became a lasting epistolary relationship as most critics suggest. Main wanted to read Eliot correctly, which the pages of analysis of Eliot's work submitted for her approval amply demonstrate. The fact that this extended to phonetics should come as no surprise. For Main, it was important to could give voice to a character in the way that Eliot intended; mere interpretation would not suffice. This is a germinal idea that we find performed on a grand scale in the anthology he produced. When Lewes wrote to Main in support of his proposed project, he proposed the title *Thoughts and Sentences in Prose and Verse*.[98] The fact that the eventual title was *Sayings* is suggestive of this translation of print into voice. As such, it illuminates what readers such as Main, and those to whom his collection of extracts was addressed, desired from the collection of Eliot's textual wisdom. The title allows the material some distance from a sententiousness in that it speaks to an interchange between parties. The extracts refuse to be defined

[95] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* ed. Gordon Haight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 268. All further references will be to this edition, and page numbers will be given in the text.
[96] Eliot to Main, 11 September 1871, *GEL*, 5, p. 185. This image of the tactful Main was then reversed by Eliot when, after the proposed preface to the second edition was sent to her for her approval, she wrote to Blackwood on the 1st of January 1872 that she wished it had been 'touched with a more fastidious finger', *GEL*, 5, p. 227.
[97] See Eliot to Main, 3 August 1871, *GEL*, 5, p. 174.
[98] Lewes to Main, 26 September 1871, *GEL*, 5, p. 193.

as maxims, and thus try to avoid Eliot's anxiety concerning the potential of her prose to seem overtly pedagogical. As she would assert in 1878, 'my function is that of the *aesthetic*, not the doctrinal teacher'.[99] '*Sayings*' avoids this doctrinal label in that, because inherently social, it incorporates the tone of proverbs, folklore, and adages and thus a language which her characters – such as the indomitable Mrs Poyser – are so adept at speaking. This idea of textual communion is reflected by Reginald Baliol Brett, a reader of the anthology whose journal describes spending four hours 'in the society of George Eliot. She talks like the best parts of her books, the parts where she analyses without dissecting, the parts out of which compilers get her "wise, witty, and tender" sayings'.[100] Main's concern for the right pronunciation of Romola seeps into his editorship, in which the focus is on the relationship between text and reader.

Something of this is expressed in Main's second book, *The Life and Conversations of Samuel Johnson (founded chiefly on Boswell)* (1874). Again, the title figures the reader as someone who is listening in on the exemplary life. The book was a project thought up by Lewes in order, it is assumed, to distract Main from his by then embarrassing obsession with Eliot. If that was the plan, however, it failed. Main's 'Closing Reflections' seek to ally himself more closely with his identity as the editor of the *Sayings*, rather than the foregoing text. For one thing, Main removes his agency from the work: 'it hardly appears to us that *we* have told this Story of Johnson's Life; it seems rather that the story has told itself. It was fitting that *he* should be everything and we nothing – except a kind of living note of admiration'.[101] He draws upon the language of automatic writing, implying that Johnson's personality precipitates an evacuation of authorial subjectivity. Main perhaps saw this self-effacing disclaimer as a necessary safeguard against the criticism of unoriginality, largely justified by the reviews he received.

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[99] Eliot to Mrs Peter Alfred Taylor, 18 July 1878, *GEL*, 7, p. 44.
[100] Collins (ed.), *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 154.
[101] Alexander Main, *The Life and Conversations of Samuel Johnson (founded chiefly on Boswell)* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), p. 441.

There is something more interesting, however, in his idea of himself as a 'living note of admiration'. Through both of his texts, Main participated in the two most prevalent genres of Victorian self-help textual culture: the epigrammatic collection and the biography of the great man. Within this context, it is perhaps no accident that a 'note' refers to both a material and a musical sign. Main is singing Johnson's praises, but he doesn't seem to be able to do so without reference to Eliot. The epigraph he chose for his work on Johnson represents this. Taken from Eliot's long poem *The Spanish Gypsy*, it reads:

> Life itself
> May not express us all, may leave the worst
> and the best too, like tunes in mechanism
> Never awaked.

Self-expression, or the sounding of our moral or immoral attributes, might lie dormant but for an occasion to perform. Main seems to be suggesting that it is the literature of the two figures to whom he refers that allows for the sounding of his own nature.

As with the *Sayings*, Main develops the idea of the reader, writer, and editor as mutual participants in framing the text for therapeutic ends. In concluding *The Life and Conversations*, he writes that

> Communion, though but for a short while, with the spirit of this man's life, fellowship with his sufferings, sympathy with his sorrows, the sense of his virtues, and the felt presence of his genius, will surely bring a touch of healing to some wounded heart, or a word of strength to some weary brain. It has been well said, "*The first condition of human goodness is, something to love; the second, something to reverence:"* both these conditions meet, and meet grandly, in the Life of Doctor Samuel Johnson.[102]

Main must have written this with his *Sayings* in mind. His closing remarks are an apt performance of the usefulness of the extracts which he was responsible for gathering elsewhere. Most of the book's concluding line is devoted to a quotation from 'Janet's Repentance' (1857), which appears in the *Sayings*, and to which he has here rather arbitrarily tacked a final reference to his avowed subject. The

[102] Ibid.

use of the words 'fellowship' and 'sympathy', as well as 'the felt presence of his genius', all evoke Main's dedication of the *Sayings* '[t]o George Eliot in recognition of a genius as it is profound and a morality as pure as it is impassioned'. Though Eliot found such tributes embarrassing, Main's description of the self-formative reading process – in regards to both the *Life of Johnson* and the *Sayings* – would have met with her approval. The affective body can be recruited into the performance of self-improvement through its reaction to textual moments. These patterns of experience are clearly evoked in Main's 'felt presence', the 'touch of healing' and the 'word of strength' through which he renders his text as a dispensary of tangible wisdom. His editorial style, it is suggested, depends upon and encourages the conditions of tact. His readers are meant to feel with the text.

In his preface to all ten editions of the *Sayings*, Main justifies his extractions by separating the part from the whole and arguing for the value of the former. He writes that

> in addition to those grand central truths which her works, taken as a whole, can alone be said to embody, I had long observed (in common, I trust, with thousands of others) that there is to be found, on almost every page of her writings, some wise thought finely expressed, some beautiful sentiment tenderly clothed.[103]

Main conscripts the spatial form of the novel into his argument for a moral extraction. The novel is, of necessity, divided into pages and thus naturally provides the demarcation involved in the itemization of wisdom. He proceeds to contextualize the reading experience, alluding to the length of his text in the same context as the novel, and thus demonstrating their kinship in relation to the reader's attention: 'Although well aware that no one ever dreams of reading a book of extracts right through […] I am not without hopes that the Character-Classification which has been here adopted may render it quite a pleasant thing to peruse large portions of the work at a sitting' (xi). Main constructs an aesthetics of the extract that evokes his agency in the only avenue open to him: formal innovation. It

[103]Alexander Main, *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1872), p. x. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

images his anthology as an object of deliberate curation and differs from, for instance, the *Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith*, in being parcelled out by character instead of by novel.

Main claims artistic agency here in a way that he explicitly revokes in his *Life of Johnson*. It raises the question of why, in a book of extracts, Main's personality is allowed more space. In this, it becomes apparent that Main derives an agency through his certainty that these extracts will influence the reader. This is not just because they are taken from the novels of 'high moral teaching', but precisely because of the fact that they are extracted and compiled (x). Leah Price, in her authoritative study of 'the mechanics of the excerpt', notes how the habits of the anthologizer seem to be passed down through form to the reader: 'Within each source, they distinguished some passages to be read once and immediately forgotten from others to be quoted, memorized, republished, and re-read. The anthology trained readers to pace themselves through an unmanageable bulk of print by sensing when to skip and when to linger'.[104] This internalisation of a 'sense' is taken quite literally by Main, as is apparent in his concluding remarks concerning the form of his *Sayings*. Having given an explicit justification for the Character-Classification, he is apparently unable to refrain from a further comment on his editorial process. After stating what he hopes the reader will find within the anthology's pages, he retreats to his former theme, saying that a 'classification of subjects was found to be out of the question; yet, in arranging the extracts, a sort of method has been pursued, which, although it is impossible to explain it here, may probably make itself felt as the book is being read' (xi). It's an intriguing suggestion to make because, through reading the extracts from works written solely by Eliot, Main implies that the reader will come to recognise an authorial methodology on his own part. This 'method', moreover, will not 'make itself known' but 'make itself felt'. In this, Main's editorship is conflated with Eliot's authorship in that both develop an ethics precipitated by, and predicated upon, the feeling subject.

[104] Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 12, 4.

Main uses the affective extracts as a means through which to develop a system of his own. The reader, prompted by the Preface, is thus compelled to read Main into Eliot. Main's textual interventions, therefore, pose a fitting analogy for a form of textual self-fashioning and the way we read the self into texts.

Roland Barthes illuminates how one can read for the self, over the work '*for-itself*', in his essay on La Rochefoucauld's maxims.[105] He asserts that there are two ways of reading such a text:

> by citing, or straight through. In the first case, I open the book from time to time, select a *pensée*, savor its suitability, appropriate it to my own circumstance – I make this anonymous form into the very voice of my situation or of my mood; in the second case, I read the maxims in sequence, like a narrative or an essay; but then the book scarcely concerns *me*.[106]

The final clause serves a dual function. One is that the book, if read sequentially, refuses to let the personality of the reader be read into it. On another level, maybe because of this, the text fails to adequately interest him. In any case, we can deduce from Barthes that form, in the collection of maxims as in the case of extracts, is situational: it depends upon the desires and the appropriations of the reader. Some quotes are luminous and some insignificant, so that the teaching the reader derives from any text, but particularly those associated with the tradition of wisdom literature, is self-dependent. This is what makes the punctuated form of the anthology – which one can skim over, underline, or memorise – particularly useful to the self-helping subject. The editor of extracts is in some way a synecdoche for how the community of the anthology reads. It is no wonder, therefore, that Main perceived the ethical dimension of what both Benedict and Price refer to as the position of 'professional mediators'.[107] His insistence on method, and on the reader's ability to feel their way into a recognition of it, is perhaps an attempt to constitute a new type of literary medium that would display a level of sentience despite a necessary conformity to the already written. Lewes (contrary to Main's

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[105] Roland Barthes, *New Critical Essays* (1972), trans. Richard Howard (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 3.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Price, *The Anthology*, p. 11.

wishes) insisted that the edition of the *Sayings* should be 'a small one, both on account of price and portability'.[108] The focus is on accessibility, both in terms of cost and presence. It highlights the space of the pocket and the idea of the pocket-book: a space that is mimetic of memorized sentences of subjective wisdom; we carry them about with us.[109] To adopt a phrase from Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879) – written with a mind to the extract, as critics such as Price, Robert Macfarlane, and Ruth Livesey have shown – the anthology figures 'the divine gift of a memory which inspires the moments with a past, a present, and a future, and gives the sense of a corporate existence'.[110] The anthology can be seen as a series of textual moments, of which some are linked through incorporation into an organic system reified through individual experience and need. As Eliot writes, there is a 'living force of sentiment' energised by the uses to which we put fiction.[111]

Pilgrim's Progress

The companion piece to the abridged American version of Main's *Sayings* was Gilman's *The Pilgrim's Scrip: Or, Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith*. Gilman immediately registers her intention to place Meredith in the ranks of 'our honoured George Eliot and our well-worn Thackeray'.[112] The latter, indeed, seems in her imagination to already have been metamorphosed into a textual object much like a frequently consulted pocket-book. She ranks Meredith amongst the 'class of writers' who work to

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[108] Lewes to Main, 12 October 1871, *GEL*, 5, p. 201.
[109] Appropriately, appearing at the back of this edition of the *Sayings* are adverts for like useful little manuals such as *The Handy Book of Bees* (1870).
[110] In addition to Price's *The Anthology*, see Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and Ruth Livesey 'Marian Evans, George Eliot, and the Work of Sententiousness' in *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830-1910: Authorial Work Ethics,* ed. Marcus Waithe and Claire White (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 111-26.
George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, ed. Nancy Henry (London: William Pickering, 1994), p. 144. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.
[111] Ibid, p. 320.
[112] Rebecca Foster Gilman, *The Pilgrim's Scrip: Or, Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888), p. x. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

forward 'the spiritual progress of mankind', which accords with Main's insistence on Eliot's sanctification 'of the Novel by making it the vehicle of the grandest and most uncompromising moral truth' (xx, xi). Indeed, the most important link between the two books of extracts lies in their insistence on the authors as dispensers of 'high moral teaching' (*S*, x). This capacity, and the potential for the novelistic form to dilute this teaching, is used by both compilers as a justification of their projects. Gilman insists that until we apprehend Meredith's 'deep sense of his responsibility as a teacher we shall not understand either his fiction or his poetry' (xxvii). In fact, Gilman represents her text as perhaps *more* completely compliant with the form of aesthetic teaching than Meredith himself. His 'mental make-up', she writes, is compromised by a 'didactic instinct – that fatal pedagogic hand which has strangled the muse of many a poet – claims him, and forces him to descend from Mount Parnassus and take possession of the schoolmaster's chair' (xxiii). Along with Browning, with whom Meredith is often coupled, she claims that he is 'either always ready to sacrifice beauty to truth, form to fact' (xxv). In extracting what Gilman believes to be the most beautiful as well as the most accessible of Meredith's 'gems', she exhibits her desire to create a new form of wisdom literature: one that pursues, like its authorial subject, the training of her audience in order to meet the

> Two requirements which Mr. Meredith makes of his readers: first, that they shall approach his novels with intelligent and wide-awake minds; and secondly, that they shall not shrink from facing and acknowledging the sternest facts of life. Now most habitual novel readers are not intelligent; they have weakened their minds by living upon what Carlyle calls sarcastically "pap and treacle fiction"; and they are utterly unable to read any book which requires concentration of their intellectual faculties (xxviii).

The undertone of this statement is that to read Gilman's extracts is to resist being ranked alongside the unintelligent reader, whilst also being able to garner the select skills necessary to read Meredith in full. The extract, therefore, promotes a method of reading that aids in the construction of new habits. Ironically, however, this reading form expresses itself in the small bursts and fragments of text that would suit the reader unable to maintain the 'concentration of their intellectual faculties'. It figures an avowal of being a space where the minds of readers, whatever their 'mental make-up', might be

accommodated and transformed. Accordingly, Gilman's book is not merely a book of excerpts, but a learning device in its own right. However modestly she claims her collection to be simply an advertisement for Meredith, she also asserts her own claims for literary agency in a way that both reflects and exceeds Main's claims for his 'method'. It is therefore not enough to look at the *Wit and Wisdom*s as mere paratexts: there is something to be said for the study of them as books in their own right, at least in part because they perform the process of reading according to subjective selection, which is another way of saying reading for oneself.

The fact that Gilman's text was to be an American venture is something the Meredith touches on in his letter to her when reluctantly accepting her publication request. Frankly telling her that he 'could wish [she] were more worthily engaged', he proceeds to state that

> Over here I have not encouraged the collecting of extracts from my books. A gathering of 'all plums', if such they be, is not digestible. I doubt that good comes of it either to the author or the reader. Many of the excerpts can hardly be intelligible without the context. However, I would not, were it in my power, impose obstacles to Messrs. Roberts' wishes, as they have behaved well to me.[113]

Meredith seems to have in mind both his gratitude to his American readership, which he often professed to have a better understanding of his authorial mode and intentions, and the publishers to whom he owed this audience.[114] Meredith's letter, meanwhile, is as strong a dissuasion from the project as could be politely put into words. Yet, far from being discouraged by it, Gilman quotes from it as a viewpoint that her preface is manifestly resistant to (xvii). For instance, she turns Meredith's image of the sickly 'gathering of 'all plums" – a seemingly irresistible aphorism against aphorisms – into an image that supports her claim as to the usefulness of her endeavour: 'Now George Meredith offers us plenty of fruit, – an abundance of original thought – but it is often hidden under foliage so luxuriant,

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[113] George Meredith to Mary Rebecca Foster Gilman, 16 March 1888, *LGM*, 2, p. 910.

[114] According to William Morton Fullerton, Meredith was all but unknown in America until 'the first uniform one volume edition [of *Diana of the Crossways*] appeared from Roberts Brothers in Boston and the triumphal progress began', 'Some Notes in Regard to George Meredith in America', in *George Meredith: Some Characteristics* by Richard Le Gallienne (London: The Bodley Head, 1905), pp. 85-91 (89).

that only after considerable effort do we come at it' (xxxii). The implication is that Gilman sees herself as responsible for the gathering of the plums which would otherwise be indigestible because practically unobtainable. Chapter two will engage in greater detail with the digestion metaphor; for now, it is worth noting that the image of the fruit is a common way of referring to an anthology. As Benedict writes, '[p]rinters and booksellers almost always represent the early literary miscellany or anthology as a feast, a collation of fruits gathered in one banquet to suit a variety of tastes'.[115] It makes sense, therefore, that Meredith would use the image of the plum in order to describe the proposed collection of extracts. Whilst, however, a feast of several fruits might refer to the production of taste, for Meredith his sole anthologization is unpalatable because undifferentiated.

Undeterred, Gilman quotes from the same letter as an introduction to her short biography of Meredith. She writes that 'despite Mr. Meredith's own modest plea, "that the best of me is in my books," there are a large number of his admirers and friends who crave a less distant and more personal acquaintance with him' (x). Importantly, Meredith's disavowal of the importance of his personality that is not latent in his novels implies that the authorial self is at stake in the anthology. Perhaps because of this, Meredith's letters continue to dwell on the conflation of the anthology with the self. In C. L. Cline's collection, the next letter after this correspondence with Gilman is addressed to a Miss Clifford, to whom he writes that 'you in reading an author's works will find, if they are worth anything, the flower of him there. And if you come to writing yourself, determine that your pages shall contain the flower of you'.[116] Meredith would have known that the word anthology comes from the Greek word anthología, meaning the gathering of flowers. In a letter to Alice Meynell, for instance, he thanks her for sending a copy of her anthology, which figures 'a gathering of our mind's flowers'.[117]

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[115] Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader*, p. 9.
[116] George Meredith to Miss Clifford, 19 March 1888, *LGM*, 2, pp. 910-11.
[117] George Meredith to Alice Meynell, 6 December 1897, *LGM*, 3, p. 1284. Meredith wasn't entirely original in his description of the anthology, seeing as it was entitled *The Flower of the Mind* (1897).

Taken together, the letters make a good case for the fact that Meredith was thinking about his forthcoming anthologization, and that he deliberately connected it to the authorial duty to write oneself into one's text. His imagery of fruit and flowers, which would only be more symbolic a list of anthological images if the sheaf of wheat were added to it, demonstrates his connection of the self to the books of extracts. In fact, Meredith goes one further than this in his punning advice as to 'writing yourself'. One's books, he maintains, must contain the 'flower' of oneself. Meredith trades, therefore, in a subjectivity by extraction. As such, Gilman's efforts to elide the moments in his novels when she finds Meredith in danger of 'descending from Mount Parnassus' appear particularly misguided. Her author would have objected to his flowers being pulled up by the roots.

Regardless of this, Gilman frequently draws upon the image of the anthología in her preface. She describes, for instance, the 'seed-thoughts' that are 'scattered so extravagantly through the pages of "Beauchamp's Career" (xliv). This image of the potential for the extract to flower into something larger in other minds than the author's is a useful way of conceiving the self-help tradition to which her anthology corresponds. Indeed, George Lillie Craik refers to his revised edition of *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (1865) as 'only a sort of *florilegium*, so to speak, or selection of the examples and histories belonging to our subject which are likely to prove the most attractive and stimulating'.[118] The extract serves both as authorial disclaimer and self-help mechanism. Meredith himself likens the reader of the anthology to a curious bird – hunting, perhaps, for seed-thoughts that might flower – in a letter to Lady Ulrica Duncombe. He expresses his wish that he 'could have sent the Selections from the Greek Anthology […] because the book is just the one to have suited Ulrica's hop, skip, and peck along the lines, with now and then a recurrence to some favoured passage'.[119] Meredith may have been resistant to his presence within these sorts of texts, but his scorn was not unmixed, evidenced by how

[118] George Lillie Craik, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865), p. 2.
[119] George Meredith to Lady Ulrica Duncombe, 14 April 1904, *LGM*, 3, p. 1494.

he used the devices associated with them in order to build a picture of the authorial and readerly self, in addition to the compulsion to perform the diffusion of knowledge. As Matthew Sussman has written, Meredith 'reveals two inclinations: first, toward the intellectual pith of wisdom genres such as proverbs, which juxtapose statements in an elliptical or analogical relationship, requiring the reader to reflect upon them more carefully in order to apprehend their full import; and second, toward the imaginative freedom of continuous figuration, which flies away from compression in its rapid reimagining of an image or a concept'.[120] Meredith saw the possibilities of epigrammatic sentences, whilst shirking the sententiousness with which they were so readily associated.

Gilman, meanwhile, consistently suggests that she is doing something new with the anthological form. Amongst her most intriguing assertions is that some of Meredith's anthologized sentences have actually gone to seed. Despite still including passages from Meredith's *The Tragic Comedians* (1881), she describes their non-conformity to the aphoristic form thus: 'His wit and wisdom in this story are like the delicate spring wild-flowers, beautiful amid their natural surroundings, but losing all strength and fragrance in the process of transplanting' (xlvi). Given the form of her book, this disavowal of the success of some extractions from the novels sounds an unusual line of honesty. Yet this is hardly surprising, given that Gilman seems not to care for the success of the parts of the book, so long as it is effective as a whole – an unusual way to look at an anthology, both as an editor and a reader. Such an impression is further entrenched through her representation of Meredith's novels as almost being made for the processes of extraction. She describes how Meredith provides:

> a number of short, brilliant sayings which have been skilfully hammered out of truth and experience. The parts of these sentences are like crystals, the particles grouping themselves together as if in obedience to an inner law. It is these sayings which stand out in our memories, when we lay down George Meredith's novels; and it is these sayings which we have tried the *experiment* of excerpting (xvi-xvii, *emphasis mine*).

[120] Mathew Sussman, *Stylistic Virtue and the Victorian Novel*: *Form, Ethics, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 148.

The scientific language employed here – the 'particles grouping themselves together' in response to 'an inner law' – conjures the image of chemical extraction – of salt crystals, for instance. The extraction of salt is rendered from the reduction of the surroundings which dilute it – much like the too-luxuriant foliage of Gilman's previous description. In such a transformation of form, Gilman is referring directly to her textual 'experiment'. The allusion to salt crystals is not arbitrary, given that 'Attic salt' is used to describe a literary style which the *OED* defines as a 'refined, delicate, poignant wit', and is thus compatible with an aphoristic style.[121] In this figure, then, Gilman's experiment is one of refinement. In order to extract the best from Meredith's prose, you need to have chemistry.

This is, however, only one way of reading Gilman's image of Meredith's individuated sentences, by which she conjures the figure of the 'necklace of rich gems' which she later uses to describe his aphorisms (xxxi). Like the images of the fruit and flowers with which her preface is scattered, this description allies her work once again to the tradition of the anthology from which she is suggesting a departure. Through evoking the aphoristic jewel, Gilman allies her anthology with generic precedents, set by collections marketed under the auspices of being 'Gems of Wisdom'. The link between the intaglio and the epigram is apt in the context of self-help discourse, as both claimed to offer protection from life's ills. In Eliot's *Romola*, for instance, both the gemstone and the impression upon it 'are of virtue to make the wearer fortunate'.[122] But it is not just this provenance of the gemstone that Gilman is drawing upon; she is also gesturing to the distinctive style of Meredith's 'sayings' as *lapidary*. In this she is in agreement with Andrew Hui, who states that the aphorist 'composes scattered yet lapidary lines of intuition'.[123] The term comes from the skilled etching of

[121] In 1880, a London publisher had brought out a 'wit and wisdom' anthology entitled *Attic salt: or, epigrammatic sayings, healthful, humourous and wise, in prose and verse: collected from the works of Mortimer Collins by Frank Kerslake* (London: B. Robson, 1880).
[122] George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. Andrew Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 43. All future references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.
[123] Andrew Hui, 'Aphorism', *New Literary History*, 50:3 (Summer 2019): 417-21 (417).

precious stones, but in modern day criticism is more often used to describe a literary style: hard, self-contained, beautiful, and clear-cut sentences that exist for themselves and can thus retain their shape upon being extracted from their context. Its application to the styles of both Eliot and Meredith is appropriate, and one doesn't have to look far within the criticism of both authors to find its currency.[124] Sussman for instance, isolating a technique that Meredith took from his first work of fiction, *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856), refers to Meredith's 'bejeweled prose style in which "difficult" ornaments like simile and metaphor could play a double role, focusing the mind with analytic precision but pricking the imagination into further flights of fancy'.[125] Such a reading gives colour to a sentence on Meredith's style in which J. M. Barrie, a follower and close friend of Meredith's, details how '[p]hrase-making is Mr. Meredith's passion. His books are as over-dressed as fingers hidden in rings'.[126] His phrases are valuable and portable, though they certainly might impede the speedy turning of a page.

Meredith himself self-consciously refers to the art of maxim-making as a dubious literary style, with specific reference to the lapidary. In his opening to *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), Meredith considers the witty 'utterances' of the eponymous heroine, with a caution that 'admirers should beware of holding' her 'maxims and aphorisms' 'up to the withering glare of print':

> she herself, quoting an obscure maximmonger, says of these lapidary sentences, that they have merely 'the value of chalk-eggs, which lure the thinker to sit,' and tempt the vacuous to strain for the like, one might add; besides flattering the world to imagine itself richer than it is in eggs that are golden.[127]

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[124] Jan-Melissa Schramm, for instance, comments upon how Eliot's novels are 'punctuated by epigraphs and lapidary generalizations' which suggest 'the value of the proverbial distillation of wisdom' in 'George Eliot and the Law', *A Companion to George Eliot* ed. Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), pp. 309-23 (310). For an early reviewer of Meredith's, by contrast, this lapidary style was seen to detract from the success of his first novel *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856). The reviewer writes in exasperation at the fact that Meredith 'weighs us down with the precious stones which he heaps on us whenever he has got any common object of nature to describe', see *George Meredith: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 54.

[125] Sussman, *Stylistic Virtue*, p. 150.

[126] J. M. Barrie, 'Mr. George Meredith's Novels', *The Contemporary Review*, 54 (October 1888): 575-86 (575).

[127] Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1885), vol. I, p. 13. All further references will be to this edition and volume and page numbers will be given in the text. Gilman perhaps wisely chose to exclude this particular maxim against maxims from her collection.

The value of the gemlike sentences resolves itself into the worthless in Diana's depiction of the sterile and yet alluring egg. Appearances aren't everything in the mongering of maxims – they may not have any of the substance we expect from them and this is only made more apparent when exposed to print. Such a viewpoint is complicated, however, as Meredith's narrator is apparently compelled to add to the existing maxim a sentence of his own. Thus, he quotes Diana quoting the maximmonger, but adds the latter half of the sentence without the distancing device of the quotation mark. Meredith thus dramatizes the aphorism at the moment of adaptation, and gestures towards the organically unfolding tendencies of the saying. Wisdom is extracted and refashioned in an apparent run of the tongue. The treatment of this form of epigrammatic pronouncement is thus decidedly ambivalent: it is presented both as a mark of unoriginality and an irresistible, aleatoric, and adaptable form. Another layer of interest is added when we discover that Meredith is indeed the very maximmonger whom Diana is quoting. In what Beer and Harris refer to as his 'Blue "Patent" Notebook', Meredith writes that '[p]roverbs are chalk-eggs, from which nothing is hatched, but which tempt the hen to sit'.[128] This is another maxim against maxims – one that disclaims the ability to produce meaning whilst inevitably, though perhaps negatively, teaching something. Meredith's in-joke, initially only accessible through archival scholarship, places the reader in a bind from which the only escape is a new consideration of the form of short-hand wisdom. He encourages us to only count those eggs that might be hatched.

Gilman, however, manifestly refutes the sterility of aphoristic collections such as her own by suggesting an agency latent in the text itself, which has its own methodology and its own aims, as well as a capacity to shape the reading habits of the reader. She asserts that 'the object of this little volume is to lead readers to pursue a totally different method of criticism […] With this end in view, we have chosen and collected aphorisms, long and short, witty epigrams, idiomatic phrases […] and to present

[128] *The Notebooks of George Meredith*, p. 62.

the public with only what will be intelligible and attractive at first reading (xlix). Gilman's interrogation of her own critical methods leads her to lay claim to and promote a 'totally different method of criticism'. Rather than being simply critical of the texts as whole entities, the anthology represents a space in which to practice a higher form of criticism. The distinction is clearly one of importance for Gilman, and demonstrates that she sees her anthology not merely as a collection of aphorisms but as a vehicle through which the minds of the readers might be exercised and trained. In pursuit of this, she deliberately draws attention to the material make-up of her text – to the 'collected aphorisms', 'witty epigrams', and 'idiomatic phrases' – and thus to the quality of continuous extraction that she imposes upon the Meredithian work. By doing this, she reaffirms her agency in the creation of a new text, and yet leaves the reader to project their own analysis onto this gathering. The project is an aesthetic one, marked by the curation of passages that will be 'intelligible and attractive at *first reading*'. Gilman is continuously aware of the shadowy fact of the source book, to which the reader must return if suitably encouraged by her own more ephemeral book. But it is *The Wit and Wisdom*'s transitional nature that gives it its power. It is a preparatory text that trades in mental growth of the reader. The book thus performs in short-hand what the Meredithian novel attempts, and thus dramatizes the usefulness of its bite-sized form.

Finally, it is worth dwelling on Gilman's choice to preface *The Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith* with the alternative title of *The Pilgrim's Scrip*. The fact that she does so is both fascinating and strange, as it blurs the lines between a fictional book of maxims and a real one, so as to make those generic boundaries indistinct. *The Pilgrim's Scrip* is the title of a book of aphorisms written by Sir Austin Feverel in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Throughout, Meredith demonstrates his concern with the idea of wisdom literature, as well as its uses and ill-uses. The inclusion of an aphorist's book in another book – written by an aphorist – demonstrates the reflexivity with which Meredith approached his authorship (an example of which we have already seen in his chalk-eggs). Gilman's use, therefore, of this title for

a collection of extracts that takes in not only *The Ordeal* but also the majority of Meredith's works is both problematic and intriguing as it lends yet another aspect to what constitutes the fictional text, and opens up the question as to whether those passages which seek to lend advice or instruction to the reader can still be considered purely fictional. The anxiety that Meredith felt concerning this last question in particular is expressed in a letter to Alice Meynell, concerning the privately printed edition of *The Pilgrim's Scrip, by Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel, Collected from 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' by George Meredith* (1903). Though this was a text of extracts limited to the book from which it took its title, Meredith's words on the matter might also be taken as a reference to the earlier anthology:

> It is hard on me that the Scrip should be laid to my charge. These aphorisms came in the run of the pen, as dramatizings of the mind of the System-maker. I would not have owned to half a dozen of them. Sir Austin Feverel built a system, quite unaware, on the unforgiveness of his wife. So, though it was a pretty system, it fell.[129]

Such ugly aphorisms as 'I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man' and 'The Dog returneth to his vomit: the Liar must eat his Lie', are worthy of this disavowal (10, 93).[130] Meredith's relationship to Sir Austin's aphorisms, however, is more complex than he suggests. Many of the aphorisms found in the *Scrip* were written at diverse points in time in 'The Maroon Notebook'. This profoundly complicates the line between fictional character and authorial voice, especially given Gilman's conflation of the *Scrip's* author with Meredith *in propria persona*. If we add to this the fact that, according to Beer, Meredith 'assign[ed] sayings to "Sir A. Fev." after the novel was published', all stable notions of authorial wisdom are distorted within an echo chamber of origin. No system of signification is reliably established, which Meredith undoubtedly would have approved of.

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[129] Meredith to Alice Meynell, 10 February 1903, *LGM*, 3, p. 1478. The text was printed by Meynell's American friend, Dr. Blair Thaw, to whom Meredith refers as 'the millionaire'. See *The Pilgrim's Scrip, by Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel, Collected from 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel' by George Meredith* (New York: Scott-Thaw Company, 1903).

[130] This objection to the collection is somewhat complicated by a letter from Meredith, written before the publication of Gilman's text in 1882. Meredith writes to an unidentified male correspondent that 'If you insist upon thinking that the verses among my prose works named by you are of any value to your collection, you are at liberty to print them. I should be of the opinion that better might be found in a novel of mine called *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*'. 19 October 1882, *LGM*, 2, p. 676.

The Meynell letter is also expressive of an anxiety surrounding the lack of contextualization of the aphorisms in books such as Gilman's. With his underlining of the fact that the aphorist's System fails because of 'the unforgiveness of his wife', Meredith insists upon an ethics of context that is deleted in the anthology. In this, he is akin to Eliot who, in a letter to Blackwood protesting Main's second preface, writes that

> unless my readers are more moved towards the ends I seek by my works as wholes than by an assemblage of extracts, my writings are a mistake […] Unless I am condemned by my own principles, my books are not properly separable into 'direct' and 'indirect' teaching. My chief doubt as to the desirability of the 'Sayings' has always turned on the possibility that the volume might encourage such a view of my writings.[131]

Eliot and Meredith shared a distaste for the exposure of their works to system-makers such as Main and Gilman.

Meredith, meanwhile, is interesting on this subject because he publicly articulated this concern in one of his first novels, far before anyone had tried to append the title of moral teacher to him. *The Pilgrim's Scrip* becomes a synecdoche for texts that aim to prescribe a system of improvement, in showing them to be implausible and sometimes (as is borne out through the plot of *The Ordeal*) actually inhibitive to development. Revealed in his letter to Meynell are the authorial stakes to which Meredith subscribed in the development of his methodology. Meredith does not fully reject all of the aphorisms contained within the *Scrip*; what he more strenuously objects to is his association with the activity of the System-maker. Aphorisms, for Meredith, must be exempt from the imposition of System. They are therefore of no use when compiled in a tutelary book and certainly of none when extracted into an anthology. Why, therefore, did Gilman choose to use what for Meredith is such a manifestly

[131] Eliot to John Blackwood, 12 November 1873, *GEL*, V, p. 459. It seems, from a subsequent letter sent to Main by Blackwood on 13 November 1873, that the former had stumbled into a tone similar to Gilman's in suggesting that 'the teaching of her, the most condensed and unsermonising of Writers, could be best and most easily approached from a Volume of Extracts such as yours' which, Blackwood allows, was surely unintended, *GEL*, 5, p. 460. Note the distinction between pedagogical and non-pedagogical forms of *condensation* that Blackwood (inspired by Eliot) alludes to.

negative title for her own text? A simple answer is articulated in the contemporary critical essays published on Meredith by his acquaintance Richard Le Gallienne. In an essay entitled 'The Pilgrim's Scrip', Le Gallienne comments on how '[a]n American lady has so applied it to a very charming collection of Meredithian "wit and wisdom"'.[132] For Le Gallienne, the aptness of such a title lies in its synecdochical function. It 'may well stand for all those considerable riches, making, perhaps, the bulk of Mr. Meredith's wealth, which exist in the form of aphoristic gold pieces, and sentences readily negotiable as quotation, throughout his novels'.[133]

Gilman was bold, therefore, in her choice of title; it presented a useful way of grouping all Meredith's sayings together under one title. Such a device was, however, unnecessary. *Wit and Wisdom* would surely have done just as well without it, as we have seen from the Eliot edition. It is tempting, therefore, to speculate upon a more sophisticated reasoning behind Gilman's choice. At the very least, one might propose a way of reading the title that would mitigate Meredith's disapproval of it. According to Umberto Eco, '[a] title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them', and that is what the application of *The Pilgrim's Scrip* does to the addressee of Gilman's book, in spite of its conspicuous origin.[134] It transcends its form as mere quotation to represent something in its own right. Depriving the title of its initial context, and making it stand for something bigger than its referent, endows it with a significance that supersedes the original intentions of its author. In such a way, it performs the anthology's raison d'être. As an extract in itself, the title is representative of the system of signification that books of quotation participate in. It is meaningful both according to its original text, and to the interpretations it compels in the epitextual reader. Because of this, Gilman's

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[132] Le Gallienne, *George Meredith*, p. 69. Le Gallienne had some personal reasons for mourning, in light of Gilman's edition, 'the lack of an international copyright'. In 1891, he received a letter from Meredith denying him his consent to compile an anthology of Meredith's work. The author wrote, somewhat consolingly, that '[i]t is an old apology for unhappy refusals, but true, that I would concede to you what for no other, if my objection were not invincible'. *LGM*, 22 December 1891, 2, p. 1054.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p. 3.

appropriation of *The Pilgrim's Scrip* corresponds to what I term a technique of applied fiction. This is fiction that is taken by editors, such as those discussed here, for an explicitly ethical purpose. For both Main and Gilman, the cohesive de-contextualisation of their quotes was not only an inevitable part of their projects, but necessary to them. It allowed those extracts that they deemed to be most valuable to stand alone, following a pattern of signification created by the editor, but made morally resonant by how they appealed to the reader. In the anthology's insistence on a form of curation, whereby the reader selects the passages most pertinent to their own lives, lies a micro-performance of the experience of reading fiction. This situational method of reading is often materially present in copies that have been underlined, earmarked, or otherwise annotated. Less tangibly, the personal ethic that anthologies provide is a mnemonic one. 'Memorable sayings' is a common title used in this genre, as extracts were etched in the reader's mind by re-reading and memorisation. In this shaping of a living system, individualised through unique engagement, the form of the anthology complies, albeit only in this aspect, with the literary methodologies of Eliot and Meredith.

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This discussion of these books of extracts has suggested that the works by Blackwood's so-called 'gusher' and of the moralistically minded Gilman should not be too readily dismissed. Analysing the uses and misuses to which Eliot's and Meredith's wisdom was put by extraneous publications re-focuses attention on what makes the novel form a more satisfactory means of mediation, and demands the acknowledgement of a philosophy of form through which both novelists shaped their authorial impact. The following chapter will consider how both authors use the extract in their texts, and for what purpose, and it will do so by considering the near ubiquitous imaging of the anthology with forms of digestion, eating, and therefore physiological as well as mental sustainment. As such, the chapter seeks to offer a useful way through which to conceive of the embodiment of wisdom literature.

Chapter Two

Reader's Digest

> I think, when I give a white bait dinner I will invite no one but my second self, and we will agree not to talk audibly.[135]

In his 'Comments on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola', Gerard Manley Hopkins considers his

> selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor […] Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own.[136]

In order to represent the otherwise unspeakable concept of his selfhood, Hopkins enlists the senses of the body of which his self-taste both is and is not a part. His palate is accustomed to distinguishing between ale and alum, but it is also attuned to finer distinctions in taste, such as those between '*I* and *me*'. The savour of selfbeing lies in this quality of distinction, which feeds back to the self a unifying conception of its 'distinctiveness'. Though his feeling for himself is like 'nothing else in nature', the system of insufficient yet poetically resonant correlatives that Hopkins draws upon revels in the plenitude of language, whilst conveying a sense of awe for a selfbeing that there are nevertheless not words enough to describe. Importantly, Hopkins derives a perfectionist narrative from the salt of his self. As he writes, 'to be determined and distinctive is a perfection, either self-bestowed or bestowed

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[135] George Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 90.
[136] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 145-146.

from without'.[137] This chapter considers how taste and self-help interact in similar ways in the works of Eliot and Meredith, with specific reference to the process of digestion.

Reading for self-development as a form of digestion that is both figurative and literal is a well-established trope. The taking in to one's system of ideas that then become part of the body is a process that lends itself particularly well to the alimentary metaphor. The form of the anthology, like the commonplace book to which is it formally akin, was a means of training the mind via the selection and memorisation of particular extracts. As Francis Goyet makes clear in an entry on the 'Commonplace' in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, the term that best expresses these intentional and personalised texts is that of digestion. Of the 'dual ambition' to 'train one's memory, and develop one's judgement', 'the verb "to digest", and the noun "digest" is still used to convey this idea in English'. Such a word 'has to do with the body, but also with the mind. The mind will retain better what is has digested better'.[138] Latent, moreover, in the fact that the verb 'discuss' means both to investigate something and to consume food and drink, is the idea that a very material condition of the body can be related to processes of the mind. This chapter proposes that Eliot and Meredith contributed to a reformative practice of text through making such connections.

The nourishment of both body and mind, represented through the image of literary and alimentary digestion, has its clearest origins in Seneca's eighty-fourth letter to Lucilius. When referring to '[t]he writer's craft', Seneca foregrounds the body as a means through which to communicate advice, specifically suggesting that one should not read or write exclusively, but alternate between the two practices. Doing either uninterruptedly 'will deaden and exhaust our powers' or 'weaken and dilute them'.[139] Instead, '[o]ne must do both by turns, tempering one with the other, so that whatever is

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[137] Ibid, 148.
[138] Francis Goyet, 'Commonplace', *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Steven Rendall et. al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 154-59 (157).
[139] Seneca, *Letters on Ethics to Lucilius*, trans. and ed. Margaret Graver and A. A. Long (London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 284.

collected through reading may be assimilated into the body by writing'.[140] Here, the body is more than a figure or metaphor for the incorporation of knowledge: it is also a literal way of ascertaining whether you have overdone it and of testing one's intellectual powers. As such, Seneca's letter has clear implications for this thesis. In furthering his ideas of textual extraction and production as bodily consumption and regeneration, Seneca draws upon the example of the bees who collect pollen and divide it into cells, transforming what they have gathered into a production completely their own, yet indebted to the original materials for its constitution. Reading should not merely be a passive collection of material, but an active and personal sifting. A correlative human analogy lies, for Seneca, in the digestive tract:

> The nutriments we have taken are burdensome for just so long as they retain their own character and swim as solids in the stomach; but when they have changed from what they were, then at last they are added to our strength, passing into our bloodstream. Let us accomplish the same with these things that nourish the talent, not permitting the things we have consumed to remain whole, but making them part of ourselves. Let us digest them; otherwise they will pass into the memory, not into the talent.[141]

In representing the act of wisdom compilation as a form of incorporation and digestion, Seneca is making use of the etymology of the word which, taken from the Latin *digesta*, meant 'matter methodologically arranged'. By re-focusing his reader's attention on physical form, meanwhile, Seneca shows the act of reading to be radically individual and modelled upon the organic and feeling body. Embodied within each of us is the physiological instinct of what will be nourishing and what we should reject from our systems. Such a process provides an ideal model for the relationship of self to text and the formative capacities of that relationship. Our bodily systems can shape our moral systems, whilst physiological form structures the act of reading for self-help.

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid, p. 285.

As Manon Mathias and Alison M. Moor – the editors of an illuminating collection of essays on 'Gut Feeling' – have shown, the literal application of digestive health to the self's moral condition is pervasive in both ancient and modern literature. They stress, meanwhile, that the concern with such physiological ethics intensified in the nineteenth century as 'a critical mass of doctors, psychiatrists, novelists, artists, ethnographers, politicians, and religious leaders all began to consider that digestive function principally influenced both emotion and cognition, often dynamically engaging with such ideas across wide disciplinary divides'.[142] In *Self-Help*, Smiles is representative of this literal application of the good gut to the great man, whilst his easily extractable and imitable exemplar figures offer a connection to the improving technique argued for by Seneca. He writes, for instance, of how

> Practical success in life depends more upon physical health than is generally imagined. Hodson, of Hodson's Horse, writing home to a friend in England, said, 'I believe, if I get on well in India, it will be owing physically speaking, to a sound digestion.' The capacity for continuous working in any calling must necessarily depend in a great measure upon this; and hence the necessity for attending to health even as a means of intellectual labour (263).

Chapter two, taking this peculiar aspect of the self-help discourse as its focus, explores how the alimentary metaphor can offer a surprising aesthetic of improvement. Both Eliot and Meredith used digestion to interrogate and complicate ideas of ethical system.

Light Bulb Moment: Eliot's Onion

The notebook that Eliot kept whilst writing *Daniel Deronda* includes an entry on the 'Education of German Jews'. Eliot notes down how at 'the Feast of Weeks, the little one was brought at daybreak into the Synagogue or to the Teacher's house':

> The Teacher took him on his arm, & showed him a tablet of parchment or wood on which the Hebrew alphabet, each 4 letters combined in a word, together with Deut. 33, 4 & Lev. 1, 1 & the words 'Die Lehre sei meine Beschäftigung' were inscribed. The alphabet & the texts

[142] Manon Mathias and Alison M. Moor (eds.), 'The Gut Feelings of Medical Culture' in *Gut Feeling and Digestive Health in Nineteenth-Century Literature, History and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 1-15 (1).

> are repeated to the child backwards & forwards, whereupon the letters are smeared with honey for him to lick off them. Then there is a sweet cake inscribed with texts & an Egg covered with 8 verses from the 119 Psalm. These all are read to the child; & there is a cabbalistic conjuration of the spirit that protects against forgetfulness; whereupon the cake & egg are shared among the little scholars present. After this solemnization of the entrance into school the child was taken to the water as a symbol of the Divine doctrine, the source of all knowledge.[143]

This entry is a striking example of how one sometimes needs to eat one's words in order to learn a lesson. The words are imbibed into the body, and thus into an embodied form of knowledge, via the mediatory introduction of the honey. Such a form of extraction necessarily resonates with Seneca's metaphor for the imbibition and digestion according to the honeybee. Not only this, but the teacher must also undergo such a transformation into fodder for the young minds he aims to instruct. The words shown to the student read '[t]he lesson is my occupation'. Subjectivity is held in subjection to text. The subsequent consuming of the Hebrew 'alphabet & texts' swallows up the teacher, so that his teachings can become part of the living knowledge of the student.

Such a teacher is Eliot's Mordecai. He teaches first his landlord's son, Jacob, and latterly Deronda a combination of Hebraic language, prayers, and his own verses in the hopes that his words might be transferred into a stronger physical home and thus live when his own body fails: 'his passionate desire had concentrated itself in the yearning for some young ear into which he could pour his mind as a testament […] who would be a blooming human life, ready to incorporate all that was worthiest in an existence whose visible, palpable part was burning itself fast away' (440-441). The lessons are thus a literal and metaphysical act of incorporation, like the eating of the cake and egg which are also texts. Mordecai obliges Jacob to participate in the 'fascinating game of imitating unintelligible words' because of a conviction that "'the boy will get them engraved within him," thought Mordecai; "it is a way of printing'" (444). The link between Mordecai's teachings and Eliot's

[143] George Eliot, *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, ed. Jane Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University University, 1996), pp. 108-9.

notebook entry is further strengthened by the fact that, upon Jacob and his teacher's first appearance in the novel, they are shown in the act of sharing a 'piece of sweet-cake' (369). We might consider Eliot's description of this 'strange printing' as a methodology of displaced self-anthologization (444). Jacob represents an opportunity for a form of textual storage, which is also the constitution of a new soul according to Mordecai's mystical conception. Crucially, Mordecai does not anticipate relinquishing his role as teacher when reduced only to the living text surviving in Jacob's bloodstream. Unbowed by his student's reduction of his prized verse to 'gabble', he comforts himself that '[m]y words may rule him some day. Their meaning may flash out on him' (444). As such, Eliot draws upon the long history of books of extracts and memorizing for self-improvement, however unconscious on the part of Jacob. His internalisation of textual extracts, in Mordecai's imagining, transforms itself into moral instinct. The centrality of the body in this, and the passage from the notebook, shows how closely Eliot linked physical to textual form. From consumption to the consumptive, Eliot's interest in the digestive metaphor demonstrates her presiding concern with how we internalise textual wisdom, and how the body can be read as a lesson.

In her last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot's philosophical narrator describes himself in the act of 'Looking Inward'. In posing the question, whether he 'can give any true account of [his] own' character, he attempts to assure himself that his self-knowledge surpasses that of even his most 'intimate friends, to whom I have never breathed those items of my inward experience which have chiefly shaped my life' (3). Crucially, the 'inward experience' on which he grounds his subjective formation turns out to be as much about an 'accident in the Alps, causing [him] the nervous shock which has ever since notably diminished [his] digestive powers' as his 'favourite ideas' and 'tenets' (3). Before she began to write fiction, Eliot had already discovered a philosophy of the corporeal basis for knowledge and how this might conform to a system of ethics. This extended from her translation of the philosophy of Spinoza and Feuerbach, both of whom expressed a moral dietetic in their works.

'*Hatred*', Spinoza proposes, *'can never be good*'.[144] Harbouring such negative affect within the self is necessarily more painful than pleasurable, whilst '[t]he more pleasure we feel, the more progress do we make towards perfection' (260). Having stated this in all its deceptive simplicity, the philosopher proceeds to recommend to the individual an active participation in moments of pleasure through the image of consumption:

> It is, I say, the part of a wise man to refresh and recreate himself with moderate and agreeable food and drink, as also with the perfume and beauty of plants, with dress, music, athletic sports, theatre […] For the human body is composed of many parts, differing in nature, which continually require new and various aliment, in order that the whole body may be equally capable of everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently that the mind may also be equally capable of understanding many things at once. Hence this course of life best agrees both with our principles and with common practices. (260)

When considering how the nourishment of the body is connected to that of the mind, Eliot's choice of the word 'recreate' is noteworthy. Whilst Edwin Curley's translation reads 'restore', Eliot's chosen term not only means to refresh but also to enjoy oneself.[145] A third meaning, appropriately, carries with it the idea of self-creation. As such, it conveys the sense that we are empowered to re-constitute ourselves through our dietary and moral choices. Spinoza is transparent in his connection of corporeality with aesthetics: the beauty of plants or dress, of music and theatre are all 'aliment[s]'. As Julie R. Klein has summarised, this passage suggests that '[t]he more the body is capable of undergoing, the more the mind can know'.[146] Physical strength, such as that promoted by a good diet, equates to the optimum capacity of the brain.

Encoded within our eating habits, then, is a moral language that registers through and beyond the physical. In the *Ethics*, appetite is something that is worth studying at its most basic level because it features on the scale of human complexity as an initial indication of why man acts and feels. Spinoza

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[144] George Eliot, *Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Clare Carlisle (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 259. All further references will be to this edition unless otherwise stated and page numbers will be given in the text.
[145] Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 140.
[146] Julie R. Klein, 'Nature's Metabolism: On Eating in Derrida, Agamben, and Spinoza', *Research in Phenomenology,* 33 (2003), pp. 186-217 (195).

writes that '[t]his effort, when it is referred to the mind alone, is called *will*; but when it is referred at once to the mind and the body it is called *appetite*. Hence *appetite* is nothing else than the essence of man, from which the actions which tend to its preservation necessarily follow' (171). Whilst appetite here means individuating desire, it can also be related to its more literal meaning. Self-hunger figures striving through a system that promotes human *conatus* as the fundamental tenet of the moral life. Furthermore, the etymology of 'diet' means a 'mode of life' (*OED*) and is thus compatible with Spinoza's conception of a 'mode', which he defines on page one of the *Ethics*: 'By *mode* I understand the affections of substance, or that which exists in something else [*in alio est*], through which it is [also] conceived' (73). One's diet sustains life and is simultaneously propagated by that life, being consequentially endowed with a meaning that surpasses its materiality. As such, it provides a fitting analogy of the idea of the system, which is both moral and curiously corporeal.

The connection between philosophy and the language of nutrition is something that Eliot draws upon in a letter to Sara Hennell. In writing dismissively about a book on 'Recent Philosophy', Eliot remarks that despite the author's one or two accurate ideas about Comte, it is

> much better to read a man's own writing than to read what others say about him […] As Goethe said long ago about Spinoza, "Ich zog immer vor von dem Menschen zu erfahren *wie er dachte* alls von einem anderen zu hö *wie er hätte denken sollen*." However, I am not fond of expressing criticism or disapprobation. The difficulty is to digest and live upon any valuable truth one's self.[147]

Eliot's use of the word 'digest' in connection to philosophy is striking. She moves from an explicit repudiation of David Masson's book, which advertises itself as a 'Review with Criticisms' of recent philosophy – i.e. a digest of philosophical material – to a concern for a similar, though crucially self-produced compilation.[148] Her conflation of this rather Senecan philosophical collection of 'valuable truth' with something to 'live upon' is food for thought. Forming something to live by (or on) is a

[147] 'I have always preferred to learn from the man how he thinks rather than learning from others how he should have thought'. Eliot to Sara Hennell, 28 October, 1865, *GEL*, 4, p. 207.
[148] David Masson, *Recent Philosophy: A Review with Criticisms* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1865).

process of extraction and digestion, dependent on 'one's self'. In this figuration of philosophical subjectivity, she resonates with Feuerbach who enlarges on the theme of personalised wisdom systems in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and who quoted from F. W. J. von Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom* (1809), that '[a]ll consciousness is concentration, is a gathering together, a collecting of oneself'.[149] Schelling captures the individual in the creation of their own consciousness via a form mimicking that of textual extraction: a psychological anthology of self-curation. As Kate Thomas writes, then, '[i]ngestion is not as significant as digestion. Digestion, made up of selection and elimination, is the interpretive act'.[150] It contributes to the formation, as well as the understanding, of the embodied self and is inherently linked to the literary.

Whilst the idiomatic phrase 'food for thought' entered the nineteenth-century vocabulary via Robert Southey's *A Tale of Paraguay* (1825), it was Feuerbach who coined the phrase '[m]an is what he eats', now an (albeit unfortunate) mainstay of the language of self-help.[151] In expanding upon this, Feuerbach offered the most explicit connection between moral action and the alimentary, given that he connected the acts of ingestion with the religion of humanity to which he and his translator conformed. It is therefore interesting to note that when Eliot writes her famous letter to Sara Hennell, in which she states that 'with the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree', she expresses her mode of translation according to an alimentary metaphor. Specifically addressing a portion of the appendix, which she has submitted for Hennell's approval, she asserts 'I have written it very rapidly and have translated it quite literally so you have the *raw* Feuerbach – not any of my cooking'.[152] Such a figure offers another way of encountering Feuerbachian philosophy in her novels, which has gone through a certain amount of processing – perhaps to make it more digestible.

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[149] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (London: John Chapman, 1854), p. 89.
[150] Kate Thomas, 'Matthew Arnold's Diet', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44:1 (March 2017): 1-18 (3).
[151] Ludwig Feuerbach, 'Das Geheimnis des Opfers oder Der Mensch ist, was er iß', qtd. in Melvin Cherno 'Feuerbach's "Man is what He Eats": A Rectification', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24:3 (July-September 1963): 397-406 (397).
[152] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 29 April 1854, *GEL*, 2, 153.

As can be seen from the *Ethics*, Spinoza used the ordinary acts of eating and drinking as proof of the self's essential striving 'to persevere in its existence'.[153] For Spinoza, the strength of this philosophical argument lay in its confirmation through the most basic human actions: 'Hence this course of life best agrees both with our *principles* and with *common practices*'. Principles and practice, here, are allied within the human body. Feuerbach concurred. In a sentence that reacts against what he deems to be abstract systems (he wrongly includes Spinoza in the proponents of these), Feuerbach pronounces that '[p]ersonality, individuality, [and] consciousness' would be 'unsubstantial abstraction' without Nature. 'But Nature […] is nothing without corporeality. The body alone is that negativing, limiting, concentrating, circumscribing force, without which no personality is conceivable'.[154] There is no consciousness without the body, and nature without consciousness is an empty concept, hence why the two are codeterminant. What sustains the body also sustains the ethical agency of the individual, which is why he concludes the entire work with a remarkable argument for seeing the spiritual in the alimentary. Having explained how '[w]ater plays a part not only in dietetics, but also in moral and mental discipline' (in a way reminiscent of the leading of the young Jewish students to 'water as a symbol of the Divine doctrine'), he goes on to write about how the nourishing effects of food and drink incline man to worship the two interdependent godheads of Feuerbach's new religion: the man who produces such things as bread and wine, and the natural world to which bread and wine is 'flesh' and 'blood'.[155] If some should find this new embodied system of ethics laughable, particularly in his application of a language of dietetics to morality, he asks them to reflect that:

> Hunger and thirst destroy not only the physical but also the mental and moral powers of man; they rob him of his humanity—of understanding, of consciousness. Oh! if thou shouldst ever experience such want, how wouldst thou bless and praise the natural qualities of bread and wine, which restore to thee thy humanity, thy intellect! It needs only that the ordinary course of things be interrupted in order to vindicate to common things an uncommon significance,

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153 Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 169.
154 Eliot (trans.), *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 90.
155 Ibid, p. 272.

> *to life*, *as such*, *a religious import*. Therefore let bread be sacred for us, let wine be sacred, and also let water be sacred! Amen.[156]

Feuerbach's kinship to Spinoza's philosophy is particularly pronounced here, with the two feeding into Eliot's development of a corporeal morality. The wants of the physical system, Feuerbach insists, have a moral capacity in that they teach something that goes beyond mere material gratification. Novalis, taking this somewhat further (also in a distant echo of Spinoza), writes that all 'enjoyment, appropriation and assimilation is an eating; or rather, eating is nothing other than appropriation. All spiritual enjoyment can therefore be expressed as eating […] To substitute the body for the spirit is a genuine trope'.[157]

Feuerbach ends his *Essence of Christianity* with a 'Concluding Application'. True to form, the term 'Application' stipulates for a practical ethics to be enacted by the secular reader, whilst also bearing reference to the term's theological use as 'the action of bringing the benefits of redemption to bear on the heart of the believer' (*OED*). Feuerbach uses the language of consumption to encourage a praxis of self-development by grounding it in the mysterious fact of the body:

> But what then is force and strength which is merely such, if not corporeal force and strength? Dost thou know any power which stands at thy command, in distinction from the power of kindness and reason, besides muscular power? […] Is not the mystery of Nature the mystery of corporeality? Is not the system of a "living realism" the system of the organised body? Is there, in general, any force, the opposite of intelligence, than the force of flesh and blood?[158]

It is impossible to conceive of oneself as a subject without reference to the body, and the power of the body comes from a metabolisation of food which translates into the moral apparatus of the individual. As he writes elsewhere, '[f]ood becomes blood; blood becomes heart and brain, food for thoughts and feelings'.[159] Whilst chiming with Seneca's 'bloodstream', this has a decidedly Meredithian

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[156] Ibid, p. 274.
[157] Novalis, quoted. in David Farrell Krell, 'All You Can't Eat: Derrida's Course, "Rhetorique Du Cannibalisme" (1990-1991)', *Research in Phenomenology*, 36 (January 2006): 130-80 (143).
[158] Eliot (trans.), *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 89-90.
[159] Feuerbach, quoted. in Cherno, 'Feuerbach's "Man is what He Eats", (401).

ring to it. Consequently, Feuerbach's 'living realism' has implications for this study. He is using the term here in order to separate his material ethics from those abstract systems that privilege the metaphysical mind over being in the physical world. It is tempting, however, to apply it to the kind of psychological, fleshly realism that Eliot and Meredith develop throughout their novels. Take, for instance, Rosamond's belated confession to Dorothea that Will Ladislaw was not making love to her, but confessing his love for Dorothea. This comes as a surprise, even to herself, as she feels 'urged by a mysterious necessity to free herself from something that oppressed her as if it were blood-guiltiness'.[160] Eliot is playing on the specific legal term 'blood-guilt' in order to demonstrate how Rosamond is compelled to perform a right action through something akin to a feeling in the blood; her body (however fleetingly) is a law to her. It resembles a moral 'system of the organised body' which bypasses intellectual rationalisation and yet contributes to it.

Eliot's most explicit conflation of the appetitive with moral constitution lies, however, not in her novels but in her poetry. Given that Eliot's verse was meant to articulate 'what she regarded as the absolutely vital relationship between poetic form and philosophical reflection', this is not surprising.[161] In the same year that Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell about philosophical digestion, she was exploring the fact that a system of personal ethics is very often something that we dine out on. Diet is a question of taste, the aesthetics and philosophy of which Eliot considers in the poems 'A Minor Prophet' (1865) and 'A College Breakfast-Party' (1874). The former, on which this chapter will focus, begins with a jesting portrait of the speaker's eccentric friend and ends with a serious contemplation of the cost of progress according to a perfectionist ideology. Such a confusingly mixed tone is difficult to navigate, which is an appropriate reflection of the struggle to understand the ideas of the poem's initial subject. The speaker introduces his 'friend, a vegetarian seer, / By name of Elias Baptist

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[160] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 786.
[161] Kimberly J. Stern, 'The Poetics of Criticism: Philosophical Discourse and George Eliot's "A College Breakfast Party'', *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies*, 60/61 (September 2011): 91-106 (93).

Butterworth / A harmless, bland, disinterested man'.[162] On each line, Elias is described in terms that allude to this defining diet. His forenames are calculated to link him with prophetic characters from the Old and New Testament, whilst the stolid, English-sounding name of 'Butterworth' immediately re-grounds him in the ordinary contemporary. The surname goes further in announcing one of Eliot's themes in the poem: a foodstuff becomes inseparable from a wider concern about one's moral condition. On the third line, Eliot's speaker curbs our expectations of this 'seer', which may have been heightened by his full name, by pronouncing him to be 'bland' – that is, without taste.

Despite this seeming dismissal of him, Elias stands for certain principles raised in works that Eliot admired. It is this that keeps the portrait of him from descending into mere satire, despite the pseudo-scientific references to a vegetarian humanity's increased access to the 'thought-atmosphere' surrounding them. He is noted to have transformed the 'ancestral zeal' of his puritan ancestors, through 'Transatlantic air and modern thought', into a more secular vision for the perfection of future man (31). Elias does so through using diet as the first principle on which his new belief in this progress of humanity is founded, and is thus somewhat akin to Feuerbach and (more obliquely) Spinoza. Moreover, the reference to his transatlanticism recalls two founders of the transcendentalist philosophy and eschewers of meat: Ralph Waldo Emerson and (more committedly) Henry David Thoreau. Eliot had met Emerson in 1848. The idealism expressed in the transcendental philosophy, whereby the mind is the foremost power in an individual's world-making, is compatible with Elias's prophecy that future man will 'have a lobe anterior strong enough / To think away the sand-storms' even of the Sahara desert (to which some of Elias's imagined commercial workers have retreated into gentlemanly retirement) (33). Like Elias, the transcendentalists departed from their Calvinist heritage in order to propose a new faith that privileged individualism, intuition, and nature over traditional

[162] George Eliot, *Collected Poems* (London: Skoob Books, 1989), p. 31. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

forms of worship. Eliot therefore conflates the vegetarian diet with what I would argue is an allusion to a burgeoning American discourse of self-help, to which, as the introduction has noted, transcendentalism had largely contributed. Eliot writes:

> And when all Earth is vegetarian –
> When, lacking butchers, quadrupeds die out,
> And less Thought-atmosphere is reabsorbed
> By nerves of insects parasitical,
> Those higher truths, seized now by higher minds
> But not expressed (the insects hindering)
> Will either flash out into eloquence,
> Or better still, be comprehensible
> By rappings simply, without need of roots (32)

The speaker's impatience with such blatant mysticism is manifest, particularly in the sarcastic anticipation of a 'higher truth's' delivery through occult 'rappings', without a foundational cause for them. Emerson, for one, is explicit in his contempt for such manifestations of the occult. In a journal entry from 1855 in which he lists the year's 'new professions', he contemptuously heaps together 'the sorcerer, rapper, mesmerist, medium', in between 'the lecturer' and the 'daguerreotypist'.[163] Later, in his essay on 'Worship' published in *The Conduct of Life* (1860), he critiques the several mutilations of the Christian faith, which in America had evolved into 'the maundering of Mormons, the squalor of Mesmerism, the deliration of rappings, the rat and mouse revelation, thumps in table-drawers, and black art'.[164] Despite this, Emerson was partially responsible for inspiring the transatlantic pseudo-science of 'New Thought', which sounds similar, in essence, to Elias's 'Thought-atmosphere'. This was, as Blum describes it, a 'mind-healing movement that flourished between 1875 and 1920', which 'argued for the universal divinity and spiritual power of all thought', and aimed 'to promote the individual's power to achieve health and prosperity through affirmative visualization'.[165] This self-

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[163] *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. E. W. Emerson and W. E. Forbes, 10 vols (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909-1914), vol. III, p. 29.
[164] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), p. 182.
[165] Blum, *The Self-Help Compulsion*, p. 16.

helping psychology had its roots in practices of Animal Magnetism and Mesmerism popularised at the beginning of the nineteenth century and still popular in the scientific circles of Eliot's day. Indeed, the idea that animals and the insects that live upon them serve as detrimental conductors of the 'Thought-atmosphere' might be seen as a punning reference to Animal Magnetism. New Thought, meanwhile, was also directly linked to Emerson's transcendental philosophy. Slightly later, in 1902, William James reflected on its spiritual and philosophical heritage:

> One of the doctrinal sources of Mind-cure is the four Gospels; another is Emersonianism or New England transcendentalism; another is Berkeleyan idealism; another is spiritism, with its messages of "law" and "progress" and "development"; another the optimistic popular science evolutionism […] But the most characteristic feature of the mind-cure movement is an inspiration much more direct. The leaders in this faith have had an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes[166]

In short, James represents the New Thought (or Mind-cure) movement as the inevitable outcome of the most striking discourses to have emerged from the nineteenth century. His strange conflation of 'spiritism' with what we might usually understand to be the fundamental tenets of a Smilesian or evolutionary creed – i.e. those of 'law', 'progress' and 'development' – resonates with Eliot's similar dissonant fusion of the mundane with the metaphysical. Such a mixture of tones hints at why, whilst being sceptical of much of what Elias expresses 'in his seer's mantle', Eliot's speaker does not seem to mark his pronouncements with the contempt which we might expect (35). The reference to the 'wide Atlantic […] Throbbing respondent to the far-off orbs' with which the poem concludes also signals Eliot's sympathy with many of the Transcendentalists' views (40). Eliot, having met Emerson, referred to him as 'the first *man* I have ever seen'.[167] This may account for why she refuses to satirise Elias, but instead uses his absurd system in order to suggest something about the perfectionist ideal that often goes unnoticed by the proponents of such doctrines of self-help.

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[166] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), pp. 94-5.
[167] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 14 July 1848, *GEL*, 1, pp. 270-271.

The fact that she renders Elias's moral system in alimentary terms is particularly telling. His ethics depend not on the human mind but on the body. Elias – a name that contains both Eliot and alias – posits an uneasy human exceptionalism, for if all animals unsuited to the vegetarian diet will die out, this fate might be shared by some humans who are similarly pre-disposed to favour one of flesh. Perhaps bearing this in mind, Elias claims that 'dogs will all be moral, / With longer alimentary canals / Suited to diet vegetarian' (34). The idea is humorous, but underlying it is a theme that we see time and again in Eliot's fiction: the body serves the individual as an index of moral principle. The dog's body, analogous to our own, conditions the moral state. We see this line of thinking as Elias, or perhaps the speaker, imagines the dying off of those creatures who do not adapt:

> All these rude products will have disappeared
> Along with every faulty human type.
> By dint of diet vegetarian
> All will be harmony of hue and line,
> Bodies and minds all perfect, limbs well-turned,
> And talk quite free from aught erroneous (34)

Taking the idea of 'you are what you eat' to a new level, Eliot represents these superfluous animals (human or otherwise) as being both products of their diet, as well as disposable items because of it. Meanwhile, the categorisation of the faulty human as a 'type' draws attention to the ready circumscription of biological life within the circumference of didactic prose. This is only enhanced by the casual alliteration of 'By dint of diet'. The solution to human imperfection trips too easily off the tongue, but is also something that requires spitting out. It is not possible, as Eliot's speaker goes on to state, to dismiss an imperfect race through doctrine alone, though he readily admits (this time in a voice clearly distinct from Elias's) 'that every change upon this earth / Is bought with sacrifice' (35). Eliot's speaker does not contest the fact that the human race is interminably progressing – according to the Spencerian or Darwinian model – and that this must mean that it is continuously perfecting itself. Instead, the speaker allies himself with Elias in accepting that such an evolution must necessarily be effected through both bodily and mental development. Human progress, for Eliot, is physiological:

improvement expresses itself on the site of the body, with 'limbs well-turned'. The last portion of the poem, however, hints at the poem's real theme – which Eliot covers in prose ranging from her early 'Notes on Form in Art' (1868) to her final work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* – that language, and indeed life without error, would not be free but incalculably limited. As in Spinoza, form cannot be perceived without the limiting presence of difference. Perfection cannot be envisioned without imperfection.

'Your belief - / In essence what is it but simply Taste?' So questions Osiric, one of the most outspoken members of the philosophising group that make up 'A College Breakfast Party'. Eliot's choice of the vegetarian diet in order to pass judgement on a speculative philosophy of self-improvement is important. Striving is performed not only through the very ordinary processes of bodily consumption, but by displacing the usual reliance on metaphysical systems in favour of a material one. Self-discipline is thus not simply a tasteless feature of Smilesian rhetoric, but something that can be materially felt by the individual and controlled by the mouthful. For Eliot and Lewes, vegetarianism also represented a diet that was linked to poetic taste. It is thus a diet that explicitly connects a discourse of self-help, and concurrent societal improvement, to a literary tradition. Lewes's *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859-60) – in a short section in which vegetarianism is ultimately dismissed – contains a brief autobiographical statement in which he describes how '[m]any years ago, I was myself a convert to this doctrine, seduced by the example and enthusiasm of Shelley'.[168] Timothy Morton's monograph on *Shelley and the Revolution of Taste* (1995) demonstrates how Eliot's imaging of individual and societal improvement through the consuming body was already present in the works of the Romantic poet. From Shelley's pamphlet *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813) to his wider poetical works, Morton details how his 'imagining of the consuming self interpellates a discourse of diet' within his texts in order to highlight the position of the human body as an 'interface between

[168] George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols., 1 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859), p. 173.

society and natural environment'.[169] Elias could easily be seen as caricature of Shelley, who famously claimed that '[i]t is impossible, had Buonaparte descended from a race of vegetable feeders, that he could have had either the inclination or the power to ascend the throne of the Bourbons'.[170] This idea is pursued in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in which the 'monster's' developing sense of morality is reflected in a vegetarian choice of diet: 'I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment'.[171] Eliot, in this poem, therefore joins a long tradition of linking the vegetarian diet to a system of ethics that is too far-reaching to do anything but gesture towards it in this thesis. Suffice to say that the body has long provided a radical site on which the position of humanity towards nature and progress can be reconstituted and improved.

Eliot's poem, supported by these literary antecedents, registers a qualified assent to the ideology expressed by such revolutionary texts. And yet, as if in reaction to this radical tradition of the prophetic poet (remembering the poem's title), Eliot's speaker makes an abrupt descent from the sublime heights of the Romantic:

> My yearnings fail
> To reach that high apocalyptic mount
> Which shows in bird's-eye view a perfect world,
> Or enter warmly into other joys
> Than those of a faulty, struggling human kind. (35)

Perhaps it is a tongue-in-cheek gesture towards such engaging imperfection that 'yearning' means not just an intense desire after something but also rennet (the stomach of a calf), and the braying of a dog when it has found its prey (*OED*). Language, in this imperfect world, cannot yet separate itself from meat. It is, however, still not incompatible with feeling. Those faulty joys that the speaker so readily engages with are human in kind, but also speak to humankind in a collectivised sense. The terms

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[169] Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution of Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 81, 2.
[170] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Vindication of a Natural Diet* in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E. B. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vol. 1, p. 83.
[171] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (London: Norton, 2012), p. 103.

through which we imagine the social body are predicated on this imperfection. For Eliot's speaker, akin in this to Silas Marner, it is '[t]he twists and cracks in our poor earthenware / That touch me to more conscious fellowship' (35).

Henry James, in his review of the collection of poems in which 'A Minor Prophet' appeared, suggests that Eliot's conclusion is that '[h]uman improvement […] is something both larger and smaller than the vegetarian bliss, and consists less in a realized perfection than in the sublime dissatisfaction of generous souls with the shortcomings of the actual'.[172] James is correct in stating that this poem is explicitly about the discourse of human improvement, and that the question of vegetarianism is only one lens that Eliot applies to the question. Where his criticism becomes a little lazy, however, is in his theory of the poem's depiction of 'the shortcomings of the actual'. This is because it is the acceptance of the actual that makes the imperfect life worth living: a happy dwelling within the unprophesied present that carries with it a pungent smell of onions. The representative of this contented and ordinary individual is Colin Clout (whom some critics erroneously take to be the identity of the unnamed speaker). Through Colin, Eliot pursues her conflation of diet with theories of perfectionism:

> So poor Colin Clout,
> To whom raw onion gives prospective zest,
> Consoling hours of dampest wintry work,
> Could hardly fancy any regal joys
> Quite unimpregnate with the onion's scent
> Perhaps his highest hopes are not all clear
> Of waftings from that energetic bulb:
> 'Tis well that onion is not heresy.
> Speaking in parable, I am Colin Clout.
> A clinging flavour penetrates my life –
> My onion is imperfectness (36)

[172] Henry James, 'The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems by George Eliot', *The North American Review*, 119: 245 (October 1874): 484-89 (487).

The earthenware jug and Colin *Clout* originate from the same source, grounded in the soil from which springs Eliot's nostalgia-tinged picture of the present day. Colin's consolatory meal is likewise grown in the earth and is thus 'not heresy' to the vegetarian cause. Eliot does not make such clumsy distinctions between the ideal of future progress and the imperfect present by radically altering the dietary conditions to which the representatives of both subscribe. Instead, from within a vegetable context, she juxtaposes cerebral system (Elias's) with affective and physiological stimulation (Colin's), in order to represent the ontological merits of both. With the description of Colin's savouring of his raw onion, Eliot develops what Denise Gigante, in her chapter on taste in Wordsworth's poetry, usefully terms a 'symbolic economy of consumption'.[173] The unworldly dietary conditions of Elias's recommendation, so mystical in their operations as to be distinctly unpalatable, find an abrupt obstacle in Colin's onion which, for all its simplicity, is a 'clinging flavour' familiar to all. Colin's diet thus figures the social body, within which both speaker and reader are united by mutual, visceral taste. Eliot's 'parable', like Feuerbach's alternative prayer, is one that helps to render the commonplace life not only palatable but numinous. Colin Clout resolutely pitches himself against the abstract self-help narratives of the nineteenth century. As if to emphasise this, Eliot brings in another 'plodding citizen' who, having cheered the 'world-hero' of Carlylean descent, thinks with greater 'pleasure that there is just one bun / left in his pocket, that may serve to tempt / The wide-eyed lad, whose weight is all too much / for that young mother's arms' (38). With this, he lapses into a reverie about his own happy childhood, 'with bread and cheese so nice all through the year' (38). Great man narratives are all very well, Eliot tells us, but it is to the comforts of our own satiate bodies that we look for self-support and moral teaching.

Elias's vision of the ideal vegetarian world is ridiculous, but the same cannot be said for the representation of the perfectionist discourse as a whole. As the speaker confesses:

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[173] Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 77.

> I am Colin still: my prejudice
> Is for the flavour of my daily food.
> Not that I doubt the world is growing still […]
> I too rest in faith
> That man's perfection is the crowning flower,
> Toward which the urgent sap in life's great tree
> Is pressing (37)

Eliot makes clear in her letters that each poem 'represents an idea which I care for strongly and wish to propagate as far as I can'.[174] Of the surprisingly few commenters on this poem, Herbert F. Tucker and Charles LaPorte come to similar conclusions as to what the 'idea' behind 'A Minor Prophet' is. For the former, this is a poem in which 'we see Eliot experimenting poetically with how to represent in verse prophecy's fallible, vulnerable openness to futurity', whilst LaPorte states that her 'goal in the domestic prophesies of "A Minor Prophet" is to venerate prophecy even as she de-mystifies it and qualifies it by admitting positive human knowledge only of ourselves and of our past'.[175] These arguments are undoubtedly valid; however, they do not sufficiently cater for Eliot's dialectic form when treating of 'man's perfection', or her use of the alimentary in figuring the movement towards or away from it. In this poem, the idea of diet represents a fundamentally human choice. Our taste speaks to the formation of our individual selves, and conforms to the Lockean notion of identity as sensational rather than wholly cognitive – grounding the feeling of our being within the natural world. Elias's vegetarianism, Colin's onion, and the tempting bun, exemplify the luxury of this choice, open solely to the human race, which is a form of self-cultivation. Yes, the poem says, progress – and thus human improvement – is inevitable. Checking these strides into self-neutering uniformity, however, is the feeding body whose survival is predicated on the fulfilment of taste. Diet gives form to a feeling for the self as well as providing a language through which to articulate individuality; after all, who can

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[174] Eliot to John Blackwood, 6 March 1874, *GEL*, 6, p. 26.
[175] Herbert F. Tucker, 'Quantity and Quality: The Strange Case of George Eliot, Minor Poet', *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies*, 60/61 (September 2011): 17-30 (25); Charles LaPorte, 'George Eliot, the Poetess as Prophet', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31:1 (March 2003): 159-79 (174).

forget Casaubon's 'small hungry shivering self'?[176] All four personalities in 'A Minor Prophet', unlike the malnourished scholar, have a creed that is given form through food. Sometimes something to live by really is something we live upon, whereby personal taste details to the self a personal belief system. To quote the Priest in 'A College Breakfast-Party' – a poem that consistently draws upon metaphors of appetite to debate alternative doctrines as to the moral life – 'What [is] more positive than appetite?' (164). This is a clear echo of Spinoza's definition of 'every tendency of human nature which we signify by the name of appetite' (209). Though the Priest is promoting an instinctive obedience to the will and teachings of a higher power, his words still speak to the tone of this earlier poem: 'Take inclination, taste – why, that is you, / No rule above you' (165). Identity is an onion.

[176] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 263.

Tracts: Stuffing Richard Feverel

Meredith's prose is a bit of a mouthful. This is something that critics have long acknowledged: in an article addressing the influence of Meredith on James Joyce, for instance, Donald Fanger notes that both writers were prey to 'a kind of stylistic indigestion'.[177] W. E. Henley, writing in 1879, proclaimed that 'to read Mr. Meredith straight off is to have an indigestion of epigram', in an echo of Thomas Macaulay's objection to reading Seneca: 'There is hardly a sentence which might not be quoted; but to read him straightforward is like dining on nothing but anchovy sauce'.[178] Such a pervasive coupling of gluttony with aphoristic style – remembering Meredith's 'gathering of all plums' – is particularly apt given this chapter's concern with the reader's digest. Indeed, Leah Price has demonstrated how the plum pudding 'became a stock image' in describing sententious literature, especially in reference to Eliot's novels.[179] She refers us, for example, to a review of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) in which the *Saturday Review*'s critic found that '[a]lmost every sentence seems finished into an epigram or an aphorism. The pudding is often too profuse in plums – too scanty in connective dough'.[180] V. S. Pritchett, meanwhile, notes a humorous link between the Meredith's material and certain unfortunate mimetic materialities:

> Meredith is the only English novelist of the nineteenth century to see that rich England was over-fed and gluttonous to the point of stupor. (It is a comic reflection that Meredith was a gourmet, who was eaten up by dyspepsia and driven for a time to live on vegetable juices, an illness he shared with his master, Carlyle. It may be that there is a connection between high-fed language and a disordered stomach.)[181]

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[177] Donald Fanger, 'Joyce and Meredith: A Question of Influence and Tradition', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 6.2 (Summer 1960): 125-30 (130).
[178] W. E. Henley, 'Literature', *Athenaeum*, 2714 (November 1 1879): 555. Thomas Babington Macaulay to T. Ellis, 30 May 1836, *The Life and Works of Lord Macaulay* (London: Longmans, Green, 1904-1914), IX, p. 452.
[179] Price, *The Anthology*, p. 147.
[180] Ibid.
[181] V. S. Pritchett, *George Meredith and English Comedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 36.

Meredithian style and the digestive metaphor, then, seem almost inseparable from the literary criticism of his novels. J. M Barrie's pronouncement, for instance, that his 'pages' are 'new sensations to the jaded palate' conscripts the tastes of the reader into this gourmandising economy.[182] The following section addresses how Meredith co-opted these terms to fashion a uniquely textual digestive system. In so doing, Meredith refers to the metaphorical and literal capacities of the body in order to figure how not to use wisdom literature.

Fig. 1: *'Indigestion' by the cartoonist George Cruikshank, 1825.* On the table of the unfortunate gentleman can be seen a plum pudding, an image reflected by the moon which has taken on its characteristics. In a humorous Christmas letter to Augustus Jessop, Meredith refers to 'being ridden all night by a plum-pudding-headed hag', 23 December 1862, *LGM*, 1, p. 182.

[182] Barrie, 'Mr. George Meredith's Novels' (577).

The almost inconsumable glut of much of Meredith's prose style is something that he was aware of and, at times, revelled in. The French critic and biographer Constantin Photiadès, who visited Meredith in Dorking in 1908, claimed that Meredith referred to his later works as 'a strong dose of the most indigestible material', of which *One of Our Conquerors* (1891) was the worst offender.[183] That he should combine the image of his prose with the alimentary and the medicinal 'dose' is apt. Both Eliot and Meredith cited dyspepsia as an impediment to the efficacy of their authorship.[184] It is therefore unsurprising that such alimentary metaphors are linked, in their works, with physical as well as moral health. Such an idea is present in Eliot's gleeful letter to Sara Hennell, in which she records how she has 'just been reading that Milton suffered from indigestion and flatulence – quite an affecting fact to me'.[185] Meredith, meanwhile, had another reason for equating eating with instructive authorship. Fascinated as he was with digestion and the application of certain homeopathic remedies to systems struggling to maintain it, he became useful to his first wife and his father-in-law, who were engaged in revising a well-known cookbook: William Kitchiner's *The Cook's Oracle* (1817). Although Mary Ellen abandoned the project in the early 1850s, the manuscript survives in the New York Public Library and reveals the presence of all three hands in its composition. Kathryn Hughes describes this source text as one that is '*sui generis*, a crotchety and unique creation which emerged not from a particular strand in British cooking or publishing history, but out of the determined fancies of one man'.[186] A host who would force his dinner guests to practice what his culinary manuals preached, Kitchiner was a character who could easily have stepped out of a Meredith novel. A patchwork of

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[183] Constantin Photiadès, *George Meredith: His Life, Genius and Teaching*, trans. A. Price (London: Constable and Company, 1913), p. 9. Indeed, Price's translation weakens this alimentary metaphor by exchanging 'cuisine' for 'material'. The original reads: 'Vers la soixantaine, après qu'un chétif héritage m'eut assuré l'indépendance pécuniaire, il me plut de servir à ces messieurs une forte dose de ma cuisine la plus indigeste', Constantin Photiadès, *George Meredith: Sa Vie – Son Imagination – Son Art – Sa Doctrine* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1910), p. 10.

[184] Meredith further links his literary style to digestive themes in a letter to George Stevenson on 21 April 1887: 'Latterly I have been forced to discontinue prose, owing to evil digestion and nerves. Verse does not tax me so heavily', *LGM*, 2, p. 858.

[185] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 21 July 1855, *GEL*, 2, p. 211.

[186] Kathryn Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs Beeton* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), p. 213.

quotations, taken indiscriminately from medical and literary sources, Kitchiner's major text focuses on the health of the body as being inexorable from that of the mind. The cookery book unusually also attains an aphoristic quality, whereby the wisdom of Kitchiner's writing is literally bite-sized.

Kitchiner's attempts to create the 'rational Epicure' in his readership, in other words not the materialistic and over-indulgent individuals usually meant by the term, but a system of thought bound to the body, would have appealed to Meredith.[187] In this cookbook, which is more of a philosophical treatise than simply a collection of recipes, Kitchiner prided himself on scrupulously studying and illuminating a system largely ignored by philosophy. Kitchiner plies what he refers to time and again as his 'Art' through his representation of the body and mind as interdependent. Self-help becomes corporeal as well as psychological within his alimentary aesthetic. As he writes, '[t]he Stomach is the Grand Organ of the human system, upon the state of which, all the powers and feelings of the Individual depend'.[188] Kitchiner explicitly connects the digestive system with the nervous system, and those with the mental health and affections of the individual. Though his absolute faith in such a governing organ is excessive – a result of what was undoubtedly a passion project for the author – Meredith's connection to the book provides a useful lens through which to approach his own system of corporeal morality. In further elucidation of this, we can do no better than look to a novel in which Kitchiner's work appears, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Resonating with the fragments of advice found in *The Cook's Oracle*, and especially the one quoted above, Adrian Feverel recites from his uncle's book of maxims, *The Pilgrim's Scrip*: 'He says again, if you remember, that our own Age is travelling back to darkness through dyspepsia. He lays the seat of wisdom in the centre of our system'.[189] This quotation

[187] William Kitchiner, *The Cook's Oracle* (London: A. Constable & Co., 1822), p. xi. I am referring to the edition that the Merediths would most likely have been working from.
[188] Ibid, p. 1.
[189] George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 342. All further references will be to this edition. This text reproduces the first edition of the novel, from which Meredith diverted in his several (and arguably less successful) revisions of it.

provides an insight into one of the major concerns of the novel, in which the form of wisdom literature, and the idea of a system to which such texts adhere, is represented and challenged through the figure of the digestive system. Meredith continuously draws upon alimentary metaphors as a means of promoting a living system, shaped through the individual interpretative act, rather than one based on textual instruction. As he writes in *Diana of the Crossways*, explicitly linking literary with gastronomical taste, 'be wary of the disrelish of brainstuff. You must feed on something. Matter that is not nourishing to brains can help to constitute nothing but the bodies which are pitched on rubbish heaps' (I, 25). Complementing Meredith's assertion that 'Brainstuff is not lean stuff; the brainstuff of fiction is internal history', *The Ordeal* is a novel of tracts, literary and digestive, the understanding of which are crucial to the reader's proper digestion of the work's teaching (25).

Although Meredith's sayings have faded from contemporary culture, one of them has experienced a revival, and has found itself emblazoned on anything from knife-holders to coasters: 'Kissing don't last: Cookery do!' (273). That even one such aphorism should be reborn as kitsch is surprising, and would have been particularly so to Meredith. Its unlikely survival, however, unwittingly speaks to one of the essential themes of the book: true wisdom comes not from theoretical doctrine but from lived experience, whilst much can be communicated through the culinary. What has lasted is a saying that appeals to the commonplace rather than to a high morality, and one that appeals to deductive rather than inductive teaching. Furthermore, this is not one of the painstakingly coined maxims found in the book's main tutelary text, 'THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP', but rather a throwaway line issued by a bustling housekeeper. Akin to the vastly popular reception of Mrs Poyser's 'homely wit', whose epigrammatic 'style runs into proverbs' in Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), Mrs Berry's homespun wisdom attains an unlikely afterlife as a household good.[190]

[190] [E. S. Dallas], 'Adam Bede', *The Times* (12 April 1859): 5.

Domestic felicity is predicated upon the stomach, a basic concern that swells to romantic proportions. This piece of wisdom's commercial success is somewhat anticipated by the narrator, who deems the 'Aphorism [to be] worthy of the PILGRIM'S SCRIP', a judgement that simultaneously serves to foreground this text as an (albeit dubious) method of judging the standard of other people's aphorisms (273). As we have seen in the previous chapter, this categorisation of wisdom is nothing if not problematic, given that the advice offered in this tutelary book is distinctly unsavoury. Its author, Sir Austin Feverel, is also a fitting foil to 'the old black-satin bunch' Mrs Berry, the owner of a boarding house and the woman responsible for the marriage of his son, the wealthy eponymous hero, to Lucy Desborough, the niece of a farmer (299). As the marriage contravenes the wishes of the relatives of both parties, Mrs Berry is to bear the brunt of the blame for the elopement. Blissfully ignorant of this at the time of the marriage, however, she rushes to the carriage of the bridal pair with a present for Lucy, who receives 'a much-used, dog-leaved, steamy, greasy, book […] It was Dr Kitchener on Domestic Cookery!' (299). Though we could dwell on the obvious misspelling of the name of the investigative gourmand, it is more worthwhile to note the inclusion of a real manual in a book laced with fictional texts of the same genre. These include Sir Austin's book of aphorisms, in addition to his 'Manuscript Proposal for a New System of Education of our British Youth' (an experimental treatise to which he disastrously subjects his only son), and 'the secret book in [Sir Austin's] own handwriting, composed for Richard's Marriage Guide: containing Advice and Directions to a Young Husband' (227). The emphasis on the manuscript condition of the latter two texts gestures not only to the organic way through which such a system is shaped, based as both are on a living human being, but also to their resounding failure to get into print. Sir Austin's theoretical systems are fatally undermined by Richard's elopement, the one proving false, and the latter unnecessary. A later chapter will examine the idea of wisdom literature and the living system in more detail. For now, I want to consider the very prominent position that Dr Kitchiner's subject matter takes in the novel, so much so that Mrs

Berry's dog-eared cookery book becomes emblematic of both the will to instruct and the impossibility of imposing a system upon individuals.

Mrs Berry relies upon her skill as a cook to attract the absent Mr Berry back into the marital fold, and yet he remains lost for the majority of the novel and is only discovered by accident. Meanwhile, Lucy, though later pictured 'with her fingers among the leaves of Dr Kitchener', is forced into a year's separation from her husband which ultimately results in her death and his ruin (346). The symbolic resonances that attach themselves to this manual, which passes to Lucy from the hands of Mrs Berry much as her wedding ring came to her, serves to reiterate the pattern with which textual systems in this novel attempt to initiate human destiny, but end up as witnesses to a fall away from the values they attempt to install within the individual.[191] In serving as an omen for the break-up of young marriages, Kitchiner's text rebuts Mrs Berry's aphorism to which the narrator had given unqualified assent (thus further destabilising THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP as a paragon of wisdom). Though Lucy, as her uncle attests, has been able to 'make puddens and pies' from an early age, and though she is the chief participant in a chapter entitled the 'Conquest of an Epicure', when she meets Adrian, one of Richard's gluttonous uncles, she nevertheless falls victim to another false aphorism, ironically that accidentally coined by Mrs Berry (82, 336). Neither kissing nor cookery lasts long for poor Lucy. This structure is repeated several times in *The Ordeal*. An aphorism is written (either by the pilgrim or the narrator), left to stand unchallenged by the characters who correspond to it for a time, only to ultimately be contradicted by those who seemed to conform to it. Such a structure finds a parallel in the alimentary process. Something is produced, internalised, digested, and eventually expelled as waste. '[T]he culinary Doctor['s]' (354) presence in the narrative, along with the values he stands for (domestic and scientific), is therefore not just for added detail. His dietary tract is explicitly moral as well as

[191] Richard, having lost the ring he intends to give Lucy, forcibly removes Mrs Berry's own wedding band to use in the ceremony.

gastronomical. Bodily health, supposedly ensured by Kitchiner's methods, was inextricably bound up with self-improvement. That Meredith juxtaposes this non-fictional resource with those tutelary texts of his own creation makes the connection between self-help guides and the living body explicit. In a text that is constantly undoing its own aphoristic pretexts, and which does so with an Epicure's relish, the phrase 'to eat one's words' comes very much to the fore. What Meredith questions through his first serious novel is whether such systems of advice can ever be stomached by the individual.

Meredith's family project to study and update Kitchiner's work would have thrown the novelist upon the analysis of the doctor's terms, from which he could have drawn a pun of which his novel (and indeed this thesis) makes use. A theoretical system might be figured, formed, and fatally undermined by the human bodily system.[192] Kitchiner's *Cook's Oracle*, along with its companion piece *The Art of Invigorating and Prolonging Life* (1822), are clearly systems – that is, a guide suggesting a methodology of good living linked by a core set of theoretical and practical principles. Many nineteenth-century cookbooks bore the term 'system' in their title, and Kitchiner asserts his systematic authorship in an addition to the 1827 edition of the *Oracle*, which promises 'A Complete System of Cookery for Catholic Families'.[193] Crucially, Kitchiner's system of cookery is based entirely upon and prescribed by physiological reactions. He passionately engages to show how cookery can be the 'means of *ameliorating Life, and supporting a healthy Existence*'.[194] Meredith takes this desire to improve mankind, the humorous aspect of trying to do so through digestion, the surprising literariness of such a project, and the tempting intersection between systems theoretical and physical, in order to create the discordant masterpiece that is *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.

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[192] This was very much emblematized by Kitchiner himself, who despite his recipes for long life died at the comparatively young age of 51.
[193] This also might serve as an emblem for Lucy's unlucky destiny, seeing as her Catholicism also works against her in securing the assent of Richard's family to their marriage.
[194] Kitchiner, *The Cook's Oracle*, p.vii.

There are three main themes that co-exist within the term 'system': Sir Austin's system for the education of his son, the several digestive systems of that unfortunate son's relatives, and sexual appetite. Two-thirds of the way through the novel, the failure of the first, a hazard to the second, and a confirmation of the third arrives in the form of a piece of Richard's wedding-cake, cooked by Mrs Berry – no doubt according to recipe No. 56 on page 490 of the *Oracle*. It is at this point that Meredith chooses to draw unambiguous attention to the central pun of the novel which, given the fact of its prominence, is described in highly uncomplimentary terms. The bringer of the cake is Richard's uncle, Adrian, described throughout the novel as 'an Epicurean'. Having brought the cake to the home of Richard's aunt, without citing the occasion for which it was produced, a conversation breaks out:

> Much of the conversation adverted to Richard. Mrs Doria asked him if he had seen the youth, or heard of him.
>
> "Seen him? no! Heard of him? yes!" said Adrian. "I have heard of him. I heard that he was sublimely happy, and had eaten such a breakfast that dinner was impossible; claret and cold chicken, cake and —"
>
> "Cake at breakfast!" they all interjected now.
>
> "What an extraordinary taste!"
>
> "You know he is educated on a system."
>
> One fast young male Forey allied the system and the cake in a miserable pun. Adrian, a hater of puns, looked at him, and held the table silent, as if he were going to speak; but he said nothing and the young gentleman vanished from the conversation in a blush, extinguished by his own spark (316-317).

The allying of Richard's 'extraordinary taste' with his similarly abnormal education is to make the pun linking the digestive system with that of Sir Austin's design explicit already. The fact that the two have been linked throughout the novel, and that the reader can hardly fail to acknowledge their cohesion now, seems to encourage Meredith to play with and thwart our expectations – or the ability to be impressed with ourselves for making such a connection. This is because, when we see the fast young Forey attempt to put such a joke into words, it is not just Adrian that objects; the narrator himself refers to it as a 'miserable pun'. Such an interjection, rare at this point of the book, discomforts hermeneutic complacency. The reader (or in this case, the critic) falters over it, and yet the fact remains

that, even after this ridicule of the connection, the two systems remain bound together. Meredith's consummate narratorial ambivalence is in place here to ask a question of readerly systems. The critical structures of meaning that we build up whilst reading a novel may be undermined by a single line. In such a way, this part of the novel threatens the easy digestion of its themes. Because of this, it is interesting to note that, of the two critics who directly approach the subject of the digestive system in this novel, John R. Reed excludes this passage completely, whilst Michael Sprinkler merely footnotes it without discussion.[195] The exclusion is understandable, but it is important to ask why Meredith so clearly draws attention to the patterns of signification within his text, only seemingly to diminish them with reference to a pun. One way of reading such an inclusion is that it performs what Meredith intends to promote throughout his novel of systems. Whilst theoretical ideas might remain watertight in the abstract, when practised in reality (as demonstrated by young Forey) they might readily be destabilised or even become objects of ridicule. Meredith is not simply gently mocking the reader; his joke is really against his own authorship, and any stable structure of meaning that he might have been writing to impose. In this sense, the pun is intended.

The Ordeal is Meredith's most explicit engagement with the self-help genre, of which he was clearly both suspicious of and interested in. In order to navigate this, he wrote a novel containing multiple manuals and challenged their instruction throughout, both directly and indirectly. Like George Eliot, Meredith uses the reactive, organic, and unpredictable feeling body in order to provide a figure for the kind of moral instruction he really did want to deliver: one of evolution, which changes

[195] See John. R. Reed, 'Systemic Irregularity: Meredith's Ordeal', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 7.1 (January 1971): 61-72, and Michael Sprinkler 'The Hoax that Joke Bilked', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 10.1 (Fall 1976): 133-45 (138). Reed's article offers a useful summary of how the digestive metaphor is used throughout the novel. He argues that '[t]hroughout *The Ordeal* abuses of systems, whether digestive or intellectual, occasion disorders that lead to suffering. But Meredith utilizes the digestive metaphor for both systems in order to make clear that the only unquestionable system is nature's, which teaches painlessly when it is correctly perceived and heeded', pp. 61-2.

with the individual encounter with the text. It is for this reason, I would argue, that he combined a dietary discourse with a systematic one.

The connection between wisdom literature and physicality is evident almost from the outset. Sir Austin's system is largely one against the hazards that he believes women might put forward to detract from man's potential, which he refers to as the Apple-Disease. He hopes that 'by advancing [Richard] to a certain moral fortitude ere the Apple-Disease was spontaneously developed, there would be seen something approaching to a perfect Man, as the Baronet trusted to make this one Son of his, after a *receipt* of his own' (17, *emphasis mine*). The fall of man was contained within two mouthfuls, and Meredith's text serves to make even this biblical account of humanity's entry into sin a joke about dyspepsia. What Adam and Eve ate simply didn't agree with them. Furthermore, Sir Austin's education of his son according to a 'receipt', like a leaf out of Kitchiner's cookery book, establishes eating as a moral figure long before we are introduced to Richard's gourmandising relatives. One of them is undoubtedly Meredith's ironic portrait of his authorial self, given that Hippias Feverel would certainly share his title of 'the Dyspeptic One'.[196]

> Hippias Feverel was once thought to be the genius of the family. It was his ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach; and, as one is not altogether fit for the Battle of Life who is engaged in a perpetual contention with his dinner, Hippias forsook his prospects at the Bar, and, in the embraces of dyspepsia, compiled his ponderous work on the Fairy Mythology of Europe. (30)

'Uncle Hippy's' digestive system becomes a character in its own right throughout the novel. As such, it is the cause of much of the humour as well as at least one of its crises. His awakened desire to visit a doctor in London for his health, for instance, leads to his nephew's reconnection with Lucy and their subsequent marriage. Prior to this, Sir Austin had kept Hippias at the family estate of Raynham

[196] In a letter dated 25 September 1853 to Meredith's first wife Mary Ellen (daughter of Thomas Love Peacock), Thomas Jefferson Hogg refers to Meredith as 'the Dyspeptic One', a character that he retains throughout the correspondence. See Nicholas A. Joukovsky, 'The Hoggs and the Peacocks: Some Later Correspondence', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 52 (2003): 166-194 (185).

so as to make him into a living example against the sins of over-indulgence for his son. In addition to being, therefore, an embodied aphorism (of the kind that will be explored in the last chapter of this thesis), Hippias serves other purposes. One, perhaps, is a rather alarming warning against writing such a thesis. Glass of wine in hand, he tells Adrian of what he believes to be the origin of his dyspepsia: "'It's this literary work! […] I don't know what else it can be. You have no idea how anxious I feel. I have frightful dreams. I'm perpetually anxious'" (171). His remark, however, serves more than a humorous purpose. As the functionality of Hippias's body is constantly undermining his authorship, delaying indefinitely the completion of his Casaubon-like academic study of Fairy Mythology of Europe, he becomes emblematic of the inability of written texts to remain free from the affections or reactions of the individual body. One corpus feeds into another in a metaphor that undermines the theory of an impersonal system. Meredith presented this to his friend Samuel Lucas as a guiding idea in the novel. In a surprisingly forthright avowal of novelistic intent, he explains how:

> On re-reading portions, I can't but say there is dullness in the book here and there: dullness and weakness. My fingers start to tear out those passages, nevertheless the main design and moral purpose I hold to. I have certainly made it too subtle, for none have perceived it […] The 'System', you see, had its origin not so much in love for his son, as in wrath at his wife, and so carries its own Nemesis […] The moral is that no System of the sort succeeds with human nature, unless the originator has conceived it purely independent of human passion.[197]

Ironically, the very kind of personalised systematizing that Meredith criticises Sir Austin for is present in his own reactions to his novel. Though informed by the seemingly unemotional concern for the novel's 'dullness', there is the sense that Meredith's work conforms to the structure of a system – a text with a 'main design and moral purpose' – which he describes as prompting him to materially alter it in a passion: '[M]y fingers start to tear out those passages', surely the literary equivalent of tearing out one's hair. Such a crisis in authorship, allied to the struggles of Hippias and the passions of Sir

[197] Meredith to Samuel Lucas, 7 July 1859, *LGM*, 1, pp. 39-40.

Austin, is just one occasion of the manifest overlap between reality and fiction in this novel. This overt reflexivity, peculiar to Meredith, finds a fitting image in the dyspeptic Hippias, who expresses his tenuous hope of some recovery from the throws of indigestion thus: "'My mind doesn't seem to haunt itself, now'" (229). Pathologised self-interest, represented here as a symptom of dyspepsia, resonates with the evident compulsion Meredith feels to write his story into the novel, perhaps in the hope of digesting it. Not only does his famous dyspepsia get written up, but more importantly details of his private life correspond to key events in the text. It is extremely ironic that, whilst Sir Austin's System is shown to fail due to it being written in a passion, Meredith's own novel cannot have been free from a like authorial stimulus. Again, the affective body, which is both a pattern for systems and their ruin, is thrust to the centre of the stage.

Sir Austin's wife, in a biographical echo of Meredith's own marriage, leaves him for a sub-par poet to whom he had previously served as benefactor.[198] Also in an echo of Meredith's life, the offending woman is refused the right to see her son. The desire to punish not only his wife but the sex as a whole inspires Sir Austin to write the influence of women out of his System. His personal hatred of his wife, however, becomes a theoretical misogyny that fatally undermines the effectiveness of his educational programme, and leaves his once promising son mentally weakened and unfit for the world. As Lady Blandish candidly writes at the end of the novel, 'Richard will never be what he promised' (492). The System is too fraught with its author's personality to reliably curate that of another. As Hippias's debilitating dyspepsia overruns his Fairy Mythology, so does Sir Austin's consuming hatred poison his text. Yet the concept of affective authorship, and the too overt intrusion of the author into the text, is a device used by Meredith to demonstrate how all such instructive systems must be in some way modified by the person writing them. In such a way, Meredith

[198] Mary Ellen left Meredith for the painter Henry Wallis. Wallis' famous painting, *The Death of Chatterton*, shows the pallid, small, and distinctly vulnerable looking figure lying recumbent on a bed, the fragments of his unappreciated literary works close to his head. The model for the painting was Meredith himself.

encourages a hermeneutic suspicion in the reader which is an education that eludes the prescriptive text. Indigestion is figured as an inability to process personal trauma, which obliquely suggests that such literary works are latent waste products. Faced with the legible indigestion of the authorial characters of Hippias, Sir Austin, and Meredith himself, it becomes apparent that the novel should be read according to this dietary vocabulary. What the reader chooses to incorporate into their own systems should be chosen carefully, for energy and self-help, according to appetite or taste. The reader's digest, encouraged obliquely through the novel, combines the ideas of self-control, interpretation, and nourishment in order to encourage individualistic self-help that comes through the experience of consumption rather than through dogmatic intervention or force-feeding.

The use of the body as a figure for this form of mediated instruction is particularly manifest in the novel's treatment of Sir Austin, who is the mouthpiece of an aphorism that Meredith had partially written and then deleted in one of his own notebooks: 'Health is the Body's Virtue: Truth, the Soul's: Valour springs but from the union of these twain' (36).[199] Though Sir Austin believes his System to be a product of his own imaginative commitment to modern educational principles, it is actually based upon the organic figure of his son. This biological structure of his wisdom literature is something that is acknowledged by Sir Austin when discussing Richard's cynicism. The baronet applies an alimentary metaphor in order to explain what he refers to as Richard's 'undirected hunger':

> At this period an insatiate appetite is accompanied by a fastidious palate. Nothing but the quintessences of existence, and those exhaustless supplies, will satisfy this craving, which is not to be satisfied! Hence his bitterness. Life can furnish no food fitting for him. The strength and purity of his energies have reached to almost divine height, and roam through the Inane […] 'Tis a sign, this sourness, that he is subject to none of the empiricisms that are afloat. Now to keep him clear of them! (118)

The reader knows that Richard is in this state of despondency because his father has made him burn his poetry and thus destroy not only his ambitions to become a writer but also the one avenue for

[199] *The Notebooks of George Meredith*, p. 42.

passionate expression available to him. Unmoved by the part he has played in removing this one source of nourishment from his son's existence, Sir Austin welcomes his son's insatiable 'cravings' and hunger as markers of the success of his system, neatly conflating the physical as well as the mental health that he wishes to ensure through its practice. Importantly, Sir Austin reads his son's character according to a dietary metaphor, and thus performs another of the novel's strange reflexivities. As we have seen, Meredith has continuously and markedly used a dietary figure for Sir Austin's system of education. That the creator of the system participates in this form of hermeneutic tailoring, using the metaphorical language of the novelist in order to support his own text, demonstrates how prone we are to read ontologies through the body. Not only does Sir Austin conscript Richard's tastes into his educational tract, but he also alludes to the fact that his son might not be the most palatable person for being subjected to it: 'Hence his bitterness' and 'sourness'. Meredith is being as explicit as possible here about Sir Austin's system being a bad diet.

It is fitting, then, that when Sir Austin faces the weaknesses of his System, the moral anguish he feels registers itself in bodily terms. The narrator, in describing the anger the Systematizer feels towards his rebellious son, steps in to provide an aphorism against the actions of the aphorist:

> Excellent and sane, I think, is the outburst of wrath to men, when it stops short of slaughter. For who that locks it up to eat it solitary, can say that it is consumed? Sir Austin had as weak a digestion for wrath, as poor Hippias for a green duckling. Instead of eating it, it ate him. (331)

This passage clearly marks the intersect between the alimentary and the moral that Meredith promotes throughout his novel as a figure for the systems that he wishes to interrogate. To consume is to physically destroy something, which Sir Austin apparently has no appetite for, but which is necessary for his mental as well as physical well-being. As critics such as Hisao Ishizuka have shown, the most prominent cause of neurasthenic trouble in the nineteenth century was related to the ill-functioning

digestive system.[200] What rendered the condition so debilitating was that it was seen to affect the mental health of the patient at least as much as, if not more than, their physical health. It became, therefore, a way of talking about mental health disorders such as depression or anxiety before the establishment of a new vocabulary for them gained currency. In a text notable for its stark treatment of depression, like that of Richard's during 'The Magnetic Age' of the System, the obvious connection of the body to the mind is important.[201] The healthy digestion of wrath is also seen to be a transformative power that would benefit the self. Such a theme is similar to that expressed by Friedrich Nietzsche (another dyspeptic), who used the image of the stomach and its digestive processes in order to analyse mankind's capacity for self-transformation. As his philosophy concerns the body as an interpretative device, through which moral decisions are modulated, it is not surprising that he aligns with Meredith in his use of the alimentary figure. In *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche argues for the capacity to forget things that disappoint us, thus allowing space for the development of more important capacities such as self-transformation and the construction of individual morality. The person unable to forget (similar in this to Sir Austin and his wrath) is likened to a dyspeptic.[202] Nietzsche writes that:

> A strong and well-constituted human being digests his experiences (including deeds and misdeeds) as he digests his meals, even when he has hard lumps to swallow. If he 'cannot cope' with an experience, this sort of indigestion is as much physiological as any other – and often, in fact, just one of the consequences of that other.[203]

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[200] Hisao Ishizuka, 'Carlyle's Nervous Dyspepsia: Nervousness, Indigestion and the Experience of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Neurology and Modernity: A Cultural History of Nervous Systems, 1800-1950*, ed. Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[201] See page 117 for an instance of this.
[202] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 36.
[203] Ibid, p. 97.

Despite Meredith's cutting reference to Nietzsche as 'a wrong-headed madman of morbid tendencies', they are allied in their philosophical deployment of the alimentary in order to image systematic failure.[204]

So present has Meredith made the condition of indigestion to the reader, through Hippias and others, that when he later describes how Sir Austin's 'indigestion of wrath had made him a moral dyspepsy' (358) he is drawing upon more than mere metaphor. As the French gastronomic philosopher Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin would write in *The Physiology of Taste* (1825), '[d]igestion is of all the bodily operations the one which has the greatest influence on the moral state of the individual'.[205] Meredith concurs, creating a shared ethical vocabulary that unites attitudes of the mind to the feeling of the body. This aesthetic of embodiment teaches something – here, the importance of forgetting one's wrath against another – through appealing to the knowledge we have of our own bodies. Meredith thus places physical sense at the core of this interpretative project, and instructs through the biological system rather than according to doctrine. As Adrian laughingly tells Hippias, warning him off an over-reliance on the prescriptions of his doctors, '[t]hey prescribe from dogmas and don't count on the system' (171). Meredith, by contrast, places the bodily system at the centre of his text about the ethics of the unprescribed.

Taste for Eliot and Meredith, as it was for Hopkins, is a reliable self-test. For these authors, the body's digestive physiological reactions should not be trivialised as mere by-products of human appetite because, as the formers of individual taste, they share in the formation of subjectivity. The idea of a corporeal system through which to seek advice and aid was, as I have demonstrated, imbedded in the culture of the Victorian period. That something so material as food should come to

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[204] Quoted in Ana Perejo Vadillo, "This hot-house of decadent chronicle': Michael Field, Nietzsche and the Dance of Modern Poetic Drama', *Women: a cultural review*, 26.3 (2015): 195-220 (205).
[205] Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste: Or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, trans. M. F. K. Fisher (New York: Counterpoint, 1999), p. 204.

represent something so immaterial as wisdom is a surprising indication of this. Taste and text unite to provide ways of reading for the self. The following chapters extend this figure of the textual body and demonstrate how it can be read for a moral system.

Chapter Three

Feeling for the Self: Embodying Philosophy in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola*

feeling's a sort o'
knowledge.[206]

'We had meant to say something of the moral qualities especially demanded in the translator – the patience, the rigid fidelity, and the sense of responsibility in interpreting another man's mind. But we have gossiped on the subject long enough'.[207] This is how the literary critic and future novelist Marian Evans concluded her 1855 article on 'Translations and Translators'. In keeping with the general tone of the article, Evans's closing words exhibit a mixture of thoughtfulness and flippancy. The moral weight accorded to the 'fidelity' which the translator must maintain is counterweighted by the abrupt refusal to conform to it. Instead, the hint at the psychological complexities involved with translation, in their necessary interpretation of 'another man's mind', is curtailed by her representation of this theme as gossip. The dismissive reference to idle chit-chat may not be as curious an ending as it might initially seem. Gossip is synonymous with hearsay – with an immediate transformation of the words of another into one's own verbal construction. It embodies the (at times) aleatoric collision between different registers of meaning, and constitutes a language formulated from potentially fictional resources. In allying the moral theorising of translation to the language of gossip, Evans prompts her readers to exercise their capacity for hearsay – forcing them to engage with the 'responsibility' of 'interpreting another man's mind' (in this case her own). To read is to translate. This preoccupation with problems of originality, the responsibilities that both writer and reader bear to one another, and

[206] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 457. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.
[207] George Eliot, 'Translations and Translators', *Leader*, vol. VI (20 October 1855): pp. 1014-15 (1015).

the constructive impulse latent in the capacity of interpretation, are ideas that Evans would come to consider throughout her fiction-writing career, which began just a year after this article was written.[208]

Eliot was ideally qualified to produce an article so expressive of the anxieties with which the translator is burdened. Having published the first English translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* in 1846, she went on to work on a now lost manuscript of Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* from 1849, and completed a manuscript translation of the latter's *Ethics* in 1856. But for the unfortunate misunderstanding initiated between a potential publisher and Eliot's partner, George Henry Lewes, the latter would also have been the first of its kind in the English language. Fortunately, Lewes's slightly bullish energy did not obstruct the publication, in 1854, of Eliot's last translation and the only one to bear her name on the front cover: Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola* offer a particularly close engagement with the subjectivism of Feuerbach and with the emotional passage to perfectionism detailed by Spinoza. Through projecting what might be called the conduct literature of the afore-mentioned philosophers onto a fictional site, Eliot offers her readers a non-prescriptive and emotive guide to self-improvement. This chapter argues that the bodies of Maggie Tulliver and Romola de' Bardi literally and metaphorically begin to incorporate these philosophical practices. As we have already seen, both philosophers explicitly foregrounded the body as a way through which to encounter the moral training they proposed. Philip Davis appropriately describes Eliot's translation in terms of transfusion 'into a working element within the mind that developed out of the literal translator'.[209] Indeed, his portrait of Eliot as 'a passionate intellectual' to whom 'seemingly abstract thoughts could make themselves felt in their own right',

[208] Speaking of problems of originality, Susan Hill also opens her investigation into how being Feuerbach's translator influenced the way Eliot wrote her novels with this quote, which we fortunately put to largely different uses. See 'Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65.3 (Autumn 1997): 635-53.
[209] Philip Davis, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 114.

whereby '[i]deas could have a presence, a near-physical being of their own', has implications for the following chapter, and for this thesis as a whole.[210]

In 1843, Mary Ann Evans wrote to her friend and sometime literary advisor Sara Hennell, detailing the physiology of an idea. This idea, whether spiritual, philosophical or societal, burrows somewhere beneath the skin and, if forcibly removed, maims both body and mind:

> We find that the intellectual errors which we once fancied were a mere incrustation have grown into the living body and that we cannot in the majority of causes [*sic*], wrench them away without destroying vitality. We begin to find that with individuals, as with nations, the only safe revolution is one arising out of the wants which their *own progress* has generated. It is the quackery of infidelity to suppose that it has a nostrum for all mankind.[211]

When referring to the human form, Eliot usually places the stress on its quality of aliveness. She emphasises the *living* body in places where the latter word would have sufficed. As we will see, the resulting distinction this confers is philosophical. The typographical error 'causes', which her husband and biographer J. W. Cross corrects to 'cases', is interesting in that a word for individual predicaments is substituted for a generalised application of the reason behind them.[212] Evans's explicit rejection of a universal guide to personal progress is therefore undermined by her own *lapsus* which ultimately reinforces her idea of the inoperable nature of terminal 'intellectual errors'. It demonstrates the unremitting search for a structure of causation where no such thing is necessary or even desirable. In this letter, then, though in essence describing the change in her sensibilities brought about by her loss of faith, Evans expands upon her more general doubts over the possibility of finding a universally efficient means through which to secure the improvement of humanity. The search for a nostrum is nonsensical if not guided by self-reflection or, as she puts it, the pivotal '*truth of feeling*'.[213] In this philosophy of progress, '[i]ntellectual errors' become physiological motivations and corporeal

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[210] Ibid, p. 52.
[211] George Eliot to Sara Hennell, 19 October 1843, *GEL*, 1, p. 162.
[212] J. W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals*, vol. I (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), p. 88.
[213] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 9 October 1843, *GEL*, 1, p. 162.

reactivity operates at the level of ideas, a negative capability that Eliot saw the positive side of. The value of subjectivity, of feeling as knowledge in contributing to the ownership of 'progress', is a radical idea when compared to the more familiar nineteenth-century conception of 'improvement'. Yet it is a concept that Eliot continually supported. As she wrote in her 1851 review of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, '[o]ur civilisation, and, yet more, our religion, are an anomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifactions from distant ages, with the living ideas, the offspring of a true process of development'.[214] The structure of this sentence, however, is more complex than we might at first perceive, the density of the clauses linking certain subjects to others in a syntactically ambiguous manner. Petrifaction is deliberately collocated '*with* the living ideas' that Eliot only latterly associates with 'development', as if to draw attention to the fact that certain ideologies – now 'lifeless barbarisms' – were once organic systems which sustained life. Furthermore, Eliot's 'living ideas' are genealogically distanced from the progress she is vouching for by being its 'offspring'. There is therefore an implicit form that mediates between past and present systems. Structured according to calcification, but living in the flesh, the human body provides the site on which the ideologies of the long past and the visceral present align. In her fiction and non-fiction, the body is consistently the point of departure for her reformative ethic. As she continues, '[w]e are in bondage to terms and conceptions which, having had their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality'.[215] A new language must therefore be shaped according to our living forms: a structure of meaning as infinitely adaptable as our bodies. For formative ideas to become tangible, Eliot suggests, they have to be vital – that is, 'essential to life' (*OED*).

Self-knowledge as something you can *feel* your way towards is inherent in the philosophy of Spinoza and Feuerbach. As Cristina Richieri Griffin writes of the latter, 'Feuerbach's sympathetic

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[214] George Eliot, *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 269.
[215] Ibid.

ethos remains deeply rooted in human physiology; even at its most expansive and epistemologically vast points, Feuerbachian fellow feeling never shirks a dogged attention to the senses'.[216] This is also the case in Spinoza's texts, particularly in *Ethics*, where the ideas and motivations of an ethical individual have a manifest physicality. He justifies, for instance, his original philosophy of 'the affections of the body' by demonstrating how 'the mind and body are one and the same thing' and that consequently 'the order of the actions and passions of the body is simultaneous in nature with the order of the actions and passions of the mind'.[217] In providing what Claire Carlisle describes as a 'genuinely therapeutic analysis of the human emotions', Spinoza appeals to the experimental site of the human frame for the sounding of his philosophy.[218] The problem of avoiding the articulation of a universal 'nostrum', whilst attempting to effect instruction for the reader is thus present here as well as in Eliot's fiction, where she attempts to instigate a 'widening [of] psychology' through the enlargement of the 'ethics of art', thus equating the development of consciousness with the aesthetic and moral capabilities of fiction.[219] Eliot, I suggest, mediates the philosophies of Spinoza and Feuerbach through the physiological philosophy of self-help that she develops in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola*.

Much has been written on Eliot's engagement with the two philosophers. This has been increasingly the case due the influence of U. C. Knoepflmacher's call in 1964 for a dualistic approach to Eliot's fiction, which would embrace the simultaneity of her philosophical and artistic creativity. Rosemary Ashton, for instance, writes of Eliot's commitment to 'the German idea' and how it affected her fictional conception of self-knowledge. Hina Nazar has built on this to suggest how the 'Continental Eliot' formulated notions of agency and intersubjectivity through her reading of

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[216] Cristina Richieri Griffin, 'George Eliot's Feuerbach: Senses, Sympathy, Omniscience, And Secularism', *ELH*, vol. 84, no. 2, (2017): 475–502 (479).
[217] Eliot, *Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Claire Carlisle, pp. 163, 165.
[218] Ibid, p. 6.
[219] Eliot to John Blackwood, 9 July 1860, *GEL*, 3, p. 318.

Feuerbach and Spinoza amongst other authors connected to the Hegelian tradition. Articles such Nazar's, however, which explicitly combine the ideologies of both Spinoza and Feuerbach, are scarce.[220] It is more common for criticism of Eliot's fiction to isolate one strand of philosophical thought, whereas this chapter argues that Eliot combines the two philosophical ideologies to support her idea of the moral body.

Both Isobel Armstrong, in 'George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions' (2016), and Elizabeth Ermarth, in 'Conception of Sympathy' (1985), demonstrate how Eliot explored Spinoza's doctrine of the affects in order to construct an authorial demand for an emotional 'assent' to sympathy. Whilst Armstrong and Ermarth appeal to the power of affect in Eliot's fiction to constitute sympathy through identification or re-identification with the self, this chapter focuses on the embodied self as a means through which to construct a guide to self-improvement.[221] The body is a means of translating philosophy, with fiction being an ideal medium through which to incorporate both. Eliot clearly articulates her concept of instructive authorship in *Leaves from a Note-book* (1885):

> To lay down in the shape of practical moral rules courses of conduct only to be made real by the rarest states of motive and disposition, tends not to elevate but to degrade the general standard, by turning that rare attainment from an object of admiration into an impossible prescription, against which the average nature first rebels and then flings out in ridicule. It is for art to present images of a lovelier order than the actual, gently winning the affections, and so determining taste.[222]

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[220] Book-length studies on this topic are likewise rare. A monograph on Spinoza's philosophy in relation to Eliot's fiction, written by Dorothy Atkins, is undoubtedly informative, but focuses narrowly on a single novel: *Adam Bede* (1859).

[221] See: Isobel Armstrong, 'George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions', and Hina Nazar's 'The Continental Eliot', both in *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), pp. 294-309, pp. 413-428; Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Dorothy Atkins, *George Eliot and Spinoza* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1978); Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, 'George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 40.1 (June, 1985): 23-42; Moira Gatens, *Spinoza's Hard Path to Freedom* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 2011); U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism', *Victorian Studies*, 7.3 (March, 1964): 306-9.

[222] George Eliot, *Works of George Eliot, Impressions of Theophrastus Such and Essays and leaves from a note-book*, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1901), p. 442.

Works of conduct literature or practical ethics defer self-improvement because they appeal to impossible exemplars within an over-prescriptive medium. As Eliot writes in *The Mill on the Floss*, 'the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy'.[223] Once again, recalling the previous chapter, she refers her alternative to force-fed dogma to the gentle determinations of an individual's 'taste'. Through looking at her engagement with and translation of certain philosophies that treat of the embodied self, this chapter configures a sense of her eventual representation of self-help as achievable through a practical ethics of feeling.

Sensation – Feeling – the great Soul of the world[224]: Helpful Translations

Though Feuerbach despised the trait, and Spinoza avoided the term, both authors can be seen to reconfigure an ethics of egoism. Spinoza characterises the compulsion to self-aid as one of 'self-esteem', whilst for Feuerbach self-help manifests itself in the form of ardent 'self-love'. Both, then, conform to the Spinozan definition of self-esteem that Eliot's friend, the philosopher Charles Bray, presented as 'the individualizing faculty', seeing as 'it is owing to its instinctive promptings that everything is judged of with reference to *self*'.[225] The tendency of the mind to be 'self-regarding', to use Bray's term, might be seen as the keystone to both philosophical texts as they subscribe to a reformative ethics that takes into account human perfectibility, the dual-consciousness, and the compulsion towards strenuous action in the pursuit of joy. To feel ourselves imperfect precipitates an exchange with self, thereby enacting a dialogic reformation of that self.

Both philosophers participate in what Eliot's close friend Herbert Spencer declares to be 'the ethical truth, recognized in unethical thought, that egoism comes before altruism […] Unless each

[223] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 461.
[224] Charles Bray, *The Philosophy of Necessity* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1863), p. 116.
[225] Ibid, p. 161.

duly cares for himself, his care for all others is ended in death, and if each thus dies there remain no others to be cared for'.[226] Spencer applied this not only to his theory of mind, but also to that of evolutionary development – thus justifying the study of self as scientifically, and perhaps hereditarily, necessary. Resonating with this idea of the evolutionary condition of mankind, Spinoza's doctrine is one in which the individual works on himself, so that he can achieve the active freedom necessary to live at liberty in society. For Spinoza, who aligns in this respect with Feuerbach, self-development is always a progression towards ideal participation in collectiveness, and yet this is precipitated by the acceptance of an essential individualism. Such a realisation is a fundamental part of Spinoza's key and perhaps most famous propositions found in his *Ethics*:[227]

> Prop. VI. Everything, as far as in it lies, strives to persevere in its existence.
>
> Prop. VII. The effort by which every thing strives to persevere in existing, is nothing but the actual essence of that thing.
>
> Prop. VIII. The effort by which each thing strives to persevere in existing, involves no finite time, but an indefinite time. (169-170)

Spinoza's is an ethics of humane motivations, a theology in which mind and body participate jointly in the strenuous pursuit of joy for the similar thing. The other, whilst being crucially distinct because it produces a dialogic distance between active bodies, is familiarised through the recognisability of its aims and pleasures. What is truly alien – the mean, the evil, the complacent – is just an exercise in counterpoint, breeding a desire in the individual to exist in harmony with the world from a consciousness of disunion. Spinoza states that '[e]very one exists by the highest right of nature, and consequently it is by the highest right of nature that every one does what follows from the necessity of his nature' (253). As Isobel Armstrong neatly points out, 'Eliot grasped that these statements belong to an account of a network of inter-related and interactive emotional conditions that spread from the

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[226] Herbert Spencer, *The Data of Ethics* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), p. 187.
[227] In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach writes that '[h]e who has no need of participating has no feeling', p. 277.

self and other to the other's other and beyond'.[228] Through the index of feeling, the individual self is enabled to attain to a personally correct moral striving. This depends on a refined receptivity which can be improved as man's mind becomes increasingly aware of its working towards perfection. Such a thought is implicit in Spinoza's assertion that 'since the mind […] through the ideas of the affections of the body is necessarily conscious of itself, it is therefore […] conscious of this effort' (171). This feeling for the self, a gathering of self-knowledge through reasonable and imaginative apprehension of affect, is something that Eliot undoubtedly drew on to inform her fiction. The self-reflection necessary to Spinoza's idea of individual striving is something which Eliot treats throughout her fiction. It was also highly influential in the construction of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*.

Eliot began translating Feuerbach in 1853, and wrote to Sara Hennell in 1854 that '[w]ith the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree'.[229] The presence of the term 'essence' in both works is no accident, but whilst for Spinoza everything that exists is a modal incorporation in the plastic ur-essence that is God, in Feuerbach essence is a form of subjectivity through which we distinguish ourselves from the 'essence of nature' and, indeed, from the essence of Christianity. Hina Nazar usefully identifies how Feuerbach saw 'Christianity as a program of self-alienating projection, as a kind of self-help gone awry'.[230] Feuerbach's offer of a 'solution of the enigma of Christian religion' is contrastingly an anthropological study of 'the truth and divinity of human nature' (v, viii). It treats of how the self may become consecrated to the self, through an objectification of human attributes made divine through externalisation, thus promoting a naturally realizable drive toward self-improvement. What I mean by this is that sources of feeling, usually subjective, which are locatable within the individual body are projected onto the larger screen of the human species. Particularity is consequentially deified

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[228] Armstrong, 'George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions', p. 299.
[229] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 29 April 1854, *GEL*, II, p.153. Interestingly, given what has been said about her ideas of translation, she goes on to state that despite this unequivocal assent to his ideas, she would 'of course' want 'to alter the phraseology considerably'.
[230] Nazar, 'The Continental Eliot', p. 417.

through generality as self-generated ideas are converted into externally anticipated ideals. The knowledge of good and evil is quantifiable only through recourse to the self, to sensation and feeling; they can no longer be meaningful as religious abstractions. The compulsion to be good, Feuerbach states, is imaginatively objectified in the idea of a deity, but that deity is made up of man's hot-blooded compulsion to be good. Morality in this system is a process of self-realization. In participating in this form of retrogressive, retroaccessive action, man simultaneously validates himself and the Godhead. To quote Ashton, 'Feuerbach, with erratic brilliance, gives the fullest statement to the idea that religion is a dream in which man can fulfil his needs and assuage his feelings of imperfection and limitation'.[231] So, in attempting to provide man with a new source of faith – faith in himself – Feuerbach transforms the theology of assuagement in abstraction into one of empowerment for the concrete self. He writes: '[w]hen man makes his moral improvement an aim to himself, he has divine resolutions, divine projects' (29). This is, in its purest form, an articulation of the redemptive quality of self-help through self-knowledge. Efficient reflexivity incorporated into the idea of the dual-mind is something to which Eliot frequently responds, and it is clear that she maintained an idea of the Feuerbachian 'twofold life' to the end of her fiction-writing career. In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), for instance, she refers to 'the ideal self, the God within, holding the mirror and the scourge for our own pettiness as well as our neighbours' (13). The figure of God offers a reflective means by which we can view and therefore aid ourselves and others. Feuerbach wrote of his 'empirical or historico-philosophical analysis' of theology as being no more 'than a close translation' (v). Through her first two major heroines, Eliot engages with this idea of translation as reconfiguration, a re-situation of abstract suprahuman ideas into a lexicon of embodied humanity in order to construct a language for self-assistance.

[231] Ashton, *The German Idea*, p.159.

The Sharpest Inward Cry for Help: Conversions in *The Mill on the Floss*

The Mill on the Floss follows the progression of Maggie and her brother Tom from childhood to early adulthood, via the latter's punishing schooling, economic upheaval, and several meetings of 'The Family Council' (191). For Pauline Nestor, whilst 'Tom Tulliver is the figure who most clearly resembles the Spinozan ideal of self-mastery', his sister 'is the very antithesis of an Spinozan ideal, repeatedly failing to retrain or regulate her passions'.[232] And yet the 'Spinozan ideal' is hard to quantify, because his practical ethics is one of transitions to a lesser or a greater perfection which opens a dialectic through which man conceives of his progress towards self-redemption: 'I say transition, for pleasure is not that perfection itself. If we were born with that perfection to which we pass, we would experience no emotion of pleasure in its possession; and this appears more clearly from the contrary emotion of pain' (209). Personality, in Spinoza, is almost always in a state of flux: 'we live in continual change, and according as we are changed for better or worse we are called happy or unhappy' (312). The mind is dominated by an affective psychology that only a constant stream of 'adequate ideas' can control (171). Spinoza's doctrine of self-help is therefore one of adaptability – but Tom is consistently pitched against this idea of characterological adaptation. The reader is introduced to him as one whose 'generic' physiognomy conceals nature's 'most rigid, inflexible purposes', numbering him amongst 'some of her most unmodifiable characters' (31). Tom features throughout the text more as a Smilesian exemplar for the self-helping man as, buoyed by his confidence in 'his own brave self-reliance', he successfully navigates the world of business. It is therefore the character of Maggie that yields the most productive readings of character formation in the light of Spinozan and Feuerbachian philosophy.

[232] Pauline Nestor, *George Eliot* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 12, pp. 58-9.

Throughout the novel, Maggie is pitched as the opposite of Tom in her possession of 'an active imagination' supplemented with 'overmastering impulse' (101). With her 'crushing sense of misery', to which she is all too often subjected, she takes on the form of Spinoza's perfectible subject who makes space for improvement through her capacity to feel pain (35). Her body becomes a testing-site for Spinoza and Feuerbach's applicability to the commonplace life. The combative sides of Maggie's nature are consistently referred to through reference to physiological form – to her 'keen susceptibility' and the 'breathing-space[s]' within 'her passionate nature' (242). Rightly identified by Simone de Beauvoir as a character 'torn between others and herself', Maggie becomes a nineteenth-century embodiment of the radical and repressed woman, denied a place in conventional society because of her incompatibility with it.[233]

Ultimately a selfless, self-critical, and thoughtful character, Maggie is not without self-love or self-esteem in either the Feuerbachian or the Spinozan sense. She engages in thoughts of 'self-flattery' whilst being 'by no means made up of unalloyed devotedness, but put forth large claims for herself where she loved strongly' (266, 190). Aware early on of her 'entire want of prudence and self-command', Maggie is

> thirsty for all knowledge […] with a blind, unconscious yearning from something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it. (218)

In other words, Maggie craves a kind of reflexive manual to explain existence and to give her a psychological sense of purpose which manifests itself in bodily terms. This form of epistemological nostalgia is only heightened once her father's economic downfall has produced 'a still, sad monotony, which [throws] her more than ever on her inward self' (256). Combining the literary genres of self-help already referred to in this thesis – such as the 'Great Man' narratives of Smiles and Carlyle, and

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[233] Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Trans. James Kirkup (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 140.

the book of extracts to which Eliot would offer her 'wit and wisdom' – Maggie feels that 'if she had been taught 'real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew,' she thought she should have held the secrets of life; if she had only books, that she might learn for herself what wise men knew!' (265). Though I have as yet been unable to identify the quoted sentence's origin, if indeed origin there be, it is still a curiosity that is worthy of remark because it performs reading for self-help. Maggie's yearning for bookish wisdom is expressed through an extract from just such a book, which acts as a half-remembered saying. This is appropriate enough, given its lack of attribution in a paragraph particularly laced with named authors and texts. The absence of books of wisdom is emphasised. Furthermore, Maggie's consciousness is expressive of how such textual systems are translated and reincorporated into individual systems of knowledge, the reiterated 'that she might learn for herself what great men knew' being an echo of the original quote. Through such moments as this, Eliot stages the uses self-improving people make of books, but also the moments when such 'effectual wisdom' fails to fill the gap (266).

Maggie's quest for 'masculine knowledge' is interrupted by her alighting on an 'old, clumsy book' in which she reads the passages that have been underlined by 'some hand, now forever quiet' (266, 268). Again, this is a performance of the form of wisdom extraction whose material consequences I have explored in the previous chapters. In what turns out to be a spiritual handbook, *The Imitation of Christ*, composed in Latin in the 1420s by Thomas à Kempis, Maggie reads sentences such as: 'Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world' and assertions that the 'inclination to thyself' must be destroyed. This is effectively a medieval self-help book, involving chapters such as 'The consideration of one's self' and the catchy 'Considering the secret judgements of God, lest we be puffed up with our good works'.[234] Considering the literal and metaphorical meaning of the term 'inspiration', with which the introduction has already been

[234] Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Dublin: M'Glashan and Gill, 1873), p. xiv-xv.

concerned, it is important that after reading these sentences 'Maggie drew a long breath' as she gratefully subscribes to this promise of personal instruction (269). The kind of self-help she reads for, however, is more Smilesian in its strictures than that promoted through the Spinozan and Feuerbachian philosophies discussed here. The former correctly articulates the textual encounter that Maggie is experiencing: 'Sometimes a book containing a noble exemplar of life, taken up at random, merely with the object of reading it as a pastime, has been known to call forth energies whose existence had not before been suspected' (307). Feuerbach, indeed, writes that 'example has magical, *i.e.*, sense-affecting powers', but the dry, spiritual pages that pay no heed to 'the help of outward things' advertise themselves as erroneous sources of wisdom (141). Crucially, Maggie is reading, Casaubon-like, for 'some key that would enable her to understand, and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart' (265). For her, the search for a literary therapeutics must correspond to a physiological salve for a heavy heart. Spinoza's system, which aimed to offer just such an enlightening system according to the affections of the body *and* mind, would have been ideal. Once again, her lack of books comes back to haunt her.

Contrary to the philosophies of Feuerbach and Spinoza, where the pursuit of personal joy is a prescription, Kempis's work is one that includes 'self-humiliation', which gratifies Maggie's own desire for something 'that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves' (269, 271). In a chapter entitled 'Of Inordinate Affections', Kempis states that '[t]he man that is not yet perfectly dead to himself, is soon tempted and overcome with small and trifling things […] There is no peace therefore in the heart of a carnal man'.[235] In this text, the imitation of Christ requires a self-immolation in which the material body is sacrificed for the improvement of the spiritual self. Conversion is a transubstantiation and so the act of reading becomes self-translation. The reader in possession of an Eliotean aesthetic, however, is meant to view this as a

[235] Ibid, p. 17.

form of scriptural self-harm. Kempis explicitly reverses Spinoza's call to follow and utilise the affections in order to secure the necessary striving for self-perseverance. The latter explicitly states that 'man does not know himself except though affections of his body and their ideas' and therefore would have dismissed out of hand the theory that man could be 'perfectly dead to himself' (*E*, 93). The reasonable and the corporeal are indivisible in the human mind and must be accorded the same respect if the self is to be perfectible. As Feuerbach writes, '[n]o man is sufficient for the law which moral perfection sets before us; but for that reason, neither is the law sufficient for man' (46). Thus, Kempis's call for carnal diminishment finds philosophical comparison and is accordingly undermined. Further to this, Maggie displays a nature that is incompatible with the theology she attempts to commit to. Crucially, she knows 'nothing of doctrines or systems', which renders her epistemologically isolated and thus ultimately dependent on this one didactic form of textual guidance (270). Her desire for joy, however, is described in manifestly corporeal terms. She has a 'thirsty', 'hungry nature' which serves to make 'every affection, every delight' that she had once had feel like 'an aching nerve to her' (355, 265).[236] Maggie reiteratively reads in the hope of finding physiological resolution as well as moral guidance. Throughout *Ethics*, *Essence*, and *The Mill on the Floss*, the two are indivisible, which is why *The Imitation of Christ* is not an adequate guide.[237]

Through Maggie's eyes, we see how Kempis finally commands the reader to '[f]orsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace' (268-69). The mystic creates, through this sentence, a pronominal multiplicity that echoes the rhythmic structures of evangelical prayer. The

[236] Maggie's 'hungry' nature was only latterly inserted into the text by Eliot. The manuscript proof of the first edition reveals that Eliot had originally referred to it as being 'benign' which radically alters our conception of Maggie's agency. *The Mill on the Floss*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons), undated manuscript, container 8, Harry Ransom Center, Austin, p. 43.

[237] Having said this, *De Imitatione Christi* was a text that clearly occupied Eliot throughout her life. Towards the end of it, and on their wedding day, Eliot presented John Walter Cross with a copy to celebrate the occasion. The copy, held at the Beinecke archives, contains Cross's inscription 'JWC from MAC 6 May 1880' on the front page. What the gift emblematizes, given the distinct usages to which Eliot puts the text, is a matter for reflection. See George Eliot and George Henry Lewes Collection, GEN MSS 953, Box 56, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

opening pair of four syllable clauses build momentum towards a rapid assent to an ontology of self-absenteeism. Kempis's 'thou' is somehow to be distinguished from 'thyself' as personal referent, seeing as to claim kinship with the former means (in his system) that we must surrender the latter. The linguistic difference stages the problem of self-ownership when it comes to a relationship with God. 'Thyself', a contraction of 'thee self' to mean 'thy own or very self', implies the custodial right of the individual over the individual, whereas the monosyllabic 'thou' constitutes a more impersonal form of address, resonating with the prescriptive negations of the biblical command: 'thou shall not' (*OED*). The self is rendered an object rather than a subject, calling into question whether this form of self-help guide, or any other for that matter, can truly change the self without eroding that same self.

This scripture represents, for Maggie, 'a secret of life that would that would enable her to renounce all other secrets' (269). Yet, how could the dubiously self-helpy-sounding 'secret of life' enable Maggie to renounce 'all other secrets'? Do these refer to her own secret thoughts and actions, or to other belief systems that also aim to supply the place of the 'supreme Teacher' (269)? Eliot does not want us, the reader, to become complicit in easy interpretation – mere second-hand readers. Instead, potentially influenced by the ideas expressed in her article on translation and hearsay, she avoids co-opting Kempis's philosophy by copying it into her novel almost verbatim. Omitting the epigraphs with which she laces her later novels, this lengthy inclusion of another's work within her novels is a unique textual intervention. The sheer length of the passage, occupying almost two pages, would have been enough to make it remarkable. Eliot is therefore calling our attention to the way in which we read, interpret, or indeed translate instructive literature. She alludes to the psychological demands the reader makes of the work and vice versa through the curious materiality of the quiet hand which 'had made at certain passages strong pen-and-ink marks, long since browned by time' (268). This detail is important because the browned ink implies that when Eliot refers to the 'strong' underlining of the text, it comprehends the personality of the previous reader/annotator rather than

his textual interventions (268). As such, it is an analogy of how a text can imagine or form a personality, but also signals the undermining of Maggie's agency from the outset. Maggie, when reading the text, is not free, but is compelled to move 'from one brown mark to another, where the quiet hand seemed to point, hardly conscious that she was reading' (268-69). Agency is dispelled, contradicting the text's promise of self-control that Maggie so desperately anticipates. The guiding hand may also be taken as a metaphor for the felt control of the author over the evolution of the reader, and is expressive of Eliot's anxiety surrounding her own position as 'supreme Teacher'. Richard Challoner's 1737 translation of Kempis's text is transferred, by Eliot, to a fictional site. This serves to complicate the registers of meaning usually ascribed to self-improvement texts, and troubles the boundary between what constitutes aesthetic as opposed to instructive literature. It hints, therefore, at what Eliot deemed to be the right way to read philosophical translations, especially those aimed at the moral improvement of the reader. Writing to Charles Bray, while she was working on her translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus* in 1849, Eliot asserted that

> What is wanted in English is not a translation of Spinoza's works, but a true estimate of his life and system. After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English, one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, [which] is to study his books, then shut them, and give an analysis.

Here, then, she considers two types of translation. The first is the 'faithful' rendition of another's words into an impersonal and uniform second language. The second is an interpretation of another's mind, whereby the process of translation effects a reconstitution of the ideology through personal analysis. This second type of translation may be an exercise in hearsay, of prose adapted from a now redundant source. The renditions of ideologies such as those of Spinoza and Feuerbach, analysed through incorporation into fictions such as *The Mill on the Floss*, may be at times opaque, unstable, and inconsistent, but such readerly translations contribute to an understanding of the philosophical works that surpasses a mere grasp of a linguistic register. Such readings are improving, in that they work upon the 'living body' of the individual reader instead of an ideal audience.

Whilst this text of 'effectual wisdom' is significantly different to the far less evangelical texts of *Ethics* and *Essence*, its project is not wholly dissimilar to that of the latter. In Feuerbach, faith in God is a necessary vehicle through which to engage imaginatively with the construct of man's divinity. Maggie's Christianity leads to a greater knowledge of self, through which she eventually commits to a more secularised form of self-improvement. As Feuerbach states, this is not at first apparent to the religious believer, for 'Man first of all sees his nature as if *out of* himself, before he finds himself' (13). Externalisation of the ideal self, as a God-figure, produces an attainable exemplarity because it finds in its individuality a 'finite mirror of the infinite' (*EC*, nt., p. 154). In *The Mill on the Floss*, this self-absenting action forms part of Maggie's '*ekstasis* or outside standing-ground', with a spiritually narcotic influence similar to the alcoholic's gin (271). But what this also means is that Maggie is beside herself, engaged as Philip Wakem perceives 'in a narrow, self-delusive fanaticism' whereby she is 'starving into dullness all the highest powers of [her] nature' (303).[238] This 'stupefaction' in the light of an unforgiving God is what Feuerbach asserts we must refute if we are to improve morally. For

> The conception of the morally perfect being, is no merely theoretical, inert conception, but a practical one, calling me to action, to imitation, throwing me into strife, into disunion with myself; for while it proclaims to me what I ought to be, it also tells me to my face, without any flattery, what I am not. And religion renders this disunion all the more painful, all the more terrible, that it sets man's own nature before him as a separate nature, and moreover as a personal being, who hates and curses sinners, and excludes them from his grace, the source of all salvation and happiness.' (46)

Maggie's self-contemplation, through a religious lens, is an attempt to stabilise some sort of subjectivity in reaction to her apparent inability to control her emotions or affects. Yet this 'disunion' of self is particularly dangerous, according to Feuerbach and indeed Spinoza, in that the abasing encouragement of the Christian faith induces Maggie to perform an act of 'self-humiliation'

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[238] Interestingly, in a corrected proof manuscript of *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot adapts the original sentence so as to draw attention to the ability of certain belief systems to contribute to an abasing self-absenteeism. The proof reads: 'Some have an emphatic belief in alcohol, and seek their ~~ecstasies~~ [ekstasis] or ~~higher~~ [outside] standing-ground in gin'. *The Mill on the Floss* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons), undated manuscript, container 8, Harry Ransom Center, Austin, p. 189.

incompatible with the project of self-striving endorsed by these philosophers (*MF*, 269). Their mouthpiece, Philip, maintains that in refusing to pursue her education because of her perceived commitment to submission as divine duty, she is 'committing [a] long suicide', which is in accordance with Spinoza's statement that 'those who destroy themselves are weak-minded beings, who are entirely vanquished by external causes repugnant to their nature' (240). Maggie conforms to the type of egoism depicted in *The Essence of Christianity*, in that her idea of religiously informed self-denial is actually a form of self-worship. As Eliot writes

> From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity (271).

The self asserts itself most strongly during this 'renunciation' of it, showing the contradictory impulses latent in Christian ideals of self-sacrifice. As such, it enacts the kind of doubleness present in Feuerbach's idea of religion as externalised subjectivity. God is man's systolically 'relinquished self', which is then sanctified by the imagination and diastolically received back into the self as a reformed nature. Self and God are performative aspects of the same individual: 'Man first of all sees his nature as if *out of* himself, before he finds it in himself' (*EC*, 13). Individuality, contrary to its meaning of 'non-divisible', is therefore, in Eliot and Feuerbach, constitutionally two-fold.

Read in this light, the call for aid must always be directed inwards towards the two-fold self, rather than outwards towards a redundant God-figure. In such a way, subjectivity, the feeling we have for our own self, becomes self-constitutive, reflexively driving moral improvement. The tension in the novel between self-help and salvation finds explicit expression during an illicit meeting between Maggie and Philip in the Red Deeps. Contradicting Maggie's claim that she will 'have help given' her from religious sources in order to cope with domestic trials, Philip offers a Spinozan reading of self-preservation, detailing the necessity of an active pursuance of joy in a world in which God cannot interfere:

> No, you will not, Maggie: no one has strength given to do what is unnatural. It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite. (305)

Here, the repression of one's affects poses an evolutionary threat. Philip's anticipation of Maggie's self-stilted nature being torn apart by 'a savage appetite' represents a natural world in which she will not be able to survive. Maggie risks succumbing to her predatory inner nature's 'savage appetite'. Philip thus stages self-assertion as a physiological necessity in which Maggie's true self must assert itself to avoid being devoured.

Nevertheless, Maggie's personalised religion is finally used in the concluding chapters of *The Mill on the Floss* as an example of the utility of Feuerbach's sense of the re-internalised godhead. Following a plaintive letter from her difficultly surrendered lover Stephen Guest, she is tempted to reply to it with a summons to him to come back to her:

> But close upon that decisive act, her mind recoiled; and the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness, came upon her like a pang of conscious degradation […] She sat quite still […] without active force enough even for the mental act of prayer: only waiting for the light that would surely come again. It came with the memories that no passion could long quench: the long past came back to her, and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve. (476-77)

Here, consciousness posits a hierarchy of absent selves whereby Maggie's felt temporal disunion between her present and her past subjectivity enacts a physiological stimulus toward self-control. Memories of a momentarily admirable selfhood, imbued with 'strength and clearness', stimulate a 'pang' that ricochets through her consciousness and forms an affective channel through which the 'fountains' of 'faithfulness and resolve' may once again flow. As Eliot writes in 'A Minor Prophet', in a passage that evokes this 'expanding stream/ Of thought, and feeling, fed by all the past': 'Our finest hope is finest memory'.[239] In Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, meanwhile, the quality of sin is only measurable through recourse to the self, whatever timeframe that self occupies. Feuerbach writes that

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[239] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 39.

'I can perceive sin as sin, only when I perceive it to be a contradiction of myself with myself', which renders the conceptions of sin as the absence of the divine and abstract attribute 'goodness' obsolete (27-8). In Feuerbach and Eliot's complementary ethical systems, the concept of self is the predominant measure of good. As Eliot makes clear through her description of Maggie's striving for self-control, the figure of God is subordinate to the principles of feeling with which the 'long past' has endowed her. For Feuerbach, '[w]e can affirm nothing without affirming ourselves', and Maggie's dependence on memory and the habit that this instils of 'faithfulness and resolve' is consistent with that self-affirmation (5). It is through accessing this retroactive personality, and the emotions that it generates within Maggie's body, that she finally finds a refuge from 'self-despair' (477). In this, she participates in Feuerbach's religion of humanity because, through feeling for her self and grounding her resolve in past affection, she has acquired the self-knowledge necessary for self-assistance.

Romola's Necessary Idealization

In a novel that Barbara Hardy stated was 'more interesting to analyse than simply to read', the reader might be excused for paying more attention to its philosophical implications rather than its characterological developments.[240] Yet, in Eliot's aesthetic project, the two schemas are indivisible. In order to pay attention to the complex array of ideas that the author dwells on in this novel, we have to focus on the characters whose very bodies begin to manifest the philosophical systems that they both sustain and resist with their actions and feelings. Eliot confirmed this idea in a letter to Frederic Harrison written four years after the publication of *Romola*. In response to Harrison's request that she write something more positively philosophical (and, indeed, positivist), Eliot explained that the novel

[240] Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 1959), p. 175.

emerged from a desire to 'lay hold on the emotions as human experience'.[241] In Eliot's aesthetic, philosophy is physiological. Likewise, fiction, if it is to be of any use in the world, has to attach itself to the reality created by the feeling subject's 'experience'. She writes:

> I took unspeakable pains in preparing to write Romola—neglecting nothing I could find that would help me to what I may call the "Idiom" of Florence, in the largest sense one could stretch the word to. And there I was only trying to give *some* out of the normal relations. I felt that the necessary idealization could only be attained by adopting the clothing of the past. And again, it is my way, (rather too much so perhaps) to < teach > urge the human sanctities through tragedy—through pity and terror as well as admiration and delights.[242]

Here we see a performance of the activity she promoted throughout her fiction: concern for the progress of individual morality, be it our own or that of others, should resolve itself even into the most basic of stimuli: it should play on our nerves. This visceral evocation of the 'human sanctities' even through 'terror' suggests the belief that fiction must stimulate a bodily reaction as well as an intellectual one to be effective. This idea can be traced not just throughout her fiction but also through the philosophy assimilated into it.

Eliot offers Harrison a surprisingly detailed review of her novelistic ambitions. If we remember, however, that this is a letter in which she sets out to defend her chosen medium against what Harrison deems to be the more instructive discipline of philosophy, the elaboration of her theme is understandable. At stake, however, is how this is to be interpreted. What, for instance, does Eliot mean by 'normal relations' or 'necessary idealization'? The rendering of the past is heightened; it is overly charged with a responsibility that it never owned before being translated onto the 'idiomatic' landscape of Eliot's intentional writing. Eliot uses her fiction to mediate certain practical ideas relevant to the improvement of her readers. Yet she demonstrates her usual reluctance to offer this through prescription. Her embarrassment at the thought of this is perceptible through the deletion of the literary goal to '<teach>' for the more personal and impulsive sounding 'urge'. The partially legible

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[241] Eliot to Frederick Harrison, 15 August 1866, *GEL*, 4, p. 301.
[242] Ibid.

correction signifies a refusal to utterly abandon a directly pedagogical form of prose and obliges the reader to read this in tandem with the emotive structure of the plea. Though Eliot presents one authorial activity – to 'urge' – as holding sway over the other – to 'teach' – the format of the sentence performs an incomplete erasure.[243] The intersection between instruction and affective compulsion is in this sense underlined – the uneasy relationship between philosophy and literature shows its hand.

The study of this letter suggests that it may be fruitful to read Eliot's concept of 'a necessary idealization' in a different register from that which a glancing reference to it might establish. A justification of this may be found in the opening lines of Eliot's 'Notes on Form in Art', in which she remarks that '[a]bstract words and phrases which have an excellent genealogy are apt to live a little too much on their reputation and even sink into dangerous imposters that should be made to show how they get their living'.[244] The phrase draws on notions of aesthetic necessity and to whom that necessity applies. The concept of the ideal in Eliot is not a fixity for the individual but a fluidity. Within the context of aesthetic theory, the sentence resonates with Coleridge's famous definition of the primary and secondary imagination whereby the latter 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify'.[245] Eliot's determination to show, if only partially, the 'normal relations' of a condition of mankind supports her right to idealize and to unify for the purposes of imaginative expansion. In Coleridge's thought, this is not only an aesthetic condition but a philosophical one, which facilitates both self-knowledge and a grasp of the relation that self bears to the world. For Eliot, to get an idea in one's mind is distinctly physiological. To repeat an earlier part of the letter to Harrison, this notion of the

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[243] Interestingly, Haight seizes upon the privilege of the editor to perform his own erasure in his *Selections from George Eliot's Letters* (London: Yale University Press, 1985). Only the word 'urge' remains in this edition, demonstrating the ease with which authorial inconsistency can be glossed over by a readership. See page 318.

[244] George Eliot, 'Notes on Form in Art', *Selected Essays*, ed. A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 231-36, p. 231.

[245] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria.* ed. J. Shawcross, vol. I. (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 202.

idea is present in Eliot's confirmation that she has undergone 'again and again the severe effort of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit'.[246] Her description of novel-writing is deliberately provocative, detailing a belief that the text might come to stand in for the figure of Christ. As such, she can be seen to expand Feuerbach's religion of humanity in order to incorporate the written word into it. Given this, the aesthetic construction of an idea might well supply the place of an ideal, creating for the individual a complex and affective ideology secured through a particular and tactile hermeneutics. Ideas, if they are active, must be felt in the body. Through this, they can shape a belief system to rival traditional forms of faith.

In suggesting a source for this re-conceptualisation of idealization, one might look towards Frederic Harrison's own philosophical preoccupation with the works of Auguste Comte. The above letter is, after all, a response to Harrison's inquiry into her feelings regarding Comte's system of Positive Philosophy. She might therefore be remembering Comte's call for the transformative capabilities of art most comprehensively expressed in his penultimate work *System of Positive Polity* (1852), a part of which Harrison eventually translated in 1875. Comte represents art as a means through which to exercise 'our highest feelings, which alone are capable of habitual expression'.[247] Aesthetic expression of the 'religion of humanity', by constantly securing the attention of the person exposed to it, will train their emotions in order to enact self-help through self-culture. It is for this reason that he offers a definition of art as 'an ideal representation of Fact; its purpose being to cultivate our sense of perfection'.[248] For Comte, idealization in art is about the capacity for mankind to develop towards a higher standard of character through an affective reaction to the ideals placed before them. In pursuit of this, he refers to the cultivation of a 'sense' quite literally. Comte writes:

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[246] Eliot to Frederick Harrison, 15 August 1866, *GEL*, IV, p. 300.
[247] Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, trans. Frederic Harrison (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1875), II, p. 61.
[248] Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, vol. I, trans. John Henry Bridges, p. 227.

> Of all the phenomena which relate to man, human affections are the most modifiable, and therefore the most susceptible of *idealisation*. Their higher complexity leading, in accordance with the positivist law, to greater imperfection, there is also wider scope for improvement. Now the act of expression, however imperfect, reacts powerfully upon these functions, which from their nature are always seeking some external vent. (*emphasis mine*)[249]

Art's capacity to idealize extends not only to its subject matter but to the people who react to it. It is therefore on the expansive plane of feeling that improvement can either be staged or dissolved. Idealization can figure wrong or painful impressions because 'fact' is sustained by the capacity to be good, evil, or morally neutral. Aesthetic idealization merely crystalizes modes of experience so that the onlooker may determine a feeling response within themselves. Improving feeling is generated, therefore, through the artist's (here, Comte specifies the poet's) ability to lend articulation to varying emotive realms of experience. It is for this reason that aesthetic works are necessary to the progress of the individual and the species. Comte's ideas of expression accord, therefore, with Isobel Armstrong's concise assertion that 'affect seeps from the very form of language, but not by accident' because '[a]ffect is not an independent force outside utterance'.[250] 'The act of expression' instead provides a medium through which human reactivity can be formalised and thus turned into an active force for the self-helping subject. Comte and Eliot believed in this capacity of language to render physical – as in, felt in the senses – the ideas with which their texts are imbued. This is a hitherto neglected reading of Eliot's conceptualisation of the word 'idealisation'; the idea permeates the body through aesthetic utterance and can be an affective force for compelling ethical change: a word made flesh.

The problematic necessity of idealization to the self-helping subject is most clearly seen in the character of Eliot's heroine Romola de' Bardi. Eliot acknowledges, in a letter to Sara Hennell, Romola's accidentally becoming a site on which to practise ideology:

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[249] Ibid, pp. 227-28.

[250] Isobel Armstrong, 'Towards a Perlocutionary Poetics?', *Nineteenth-Century Radical Traditions*, ed. Joseph Bristow and Josephine McDonagh (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 187-211 (188, 204).

> You are right in saying that Romola is ideal—I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made. My own books scourge me […] The various *strands* of thought I had to work out forced me into a more ideal treatment of Romola than I had foreseen at the outset.[251]

Sometimes a necessary idealization can deplete character, even when aiming at exemplarity. Navigating multiple instances of patriarchal repression, first through the intractable dependence of her blind and tactless father, then from her once beloved husband Tito, Romola conditions herself to inhabit several successive idealizations. These in turn demonstrate a sense of self that is constantly in flux and therefore unmanageable. Her character is introduced to us as one that sustains a 'proud self-dependence' (59). This resource, however, is continually tested throughout the troubled domestic situations that Romola encounters and is maintained only through a fluctuating generation of multiple subjectivities. Julia Straub has commented on 'the inescapable pattern of idealization and disenchantment' as a condition to which Romola, in her various guises of 'visible Madonna' or Dantean Beatrice figure, subscribes.[252] Whilst Straub argues that these several idealisations make manifest the inescapable patriarchal and social impositions to which not only renaissance but modern women have to submit, I am more interested in exploring Romola's location of shifting ideals within her own consciousness and the self-generative capacity this initiates. Tito enters into Romola's 'young but wintry life' as the manifestation of an idea of 'some known joy' (59). The experience is one of embodiment as the Greek scholar's presence and affection arrives 'like the dawn of a new sense to her' (64). Though this might counteract the perception of Romola's avowed self-dependence, Eliot goes on to describe Romola's burgeoning love for Tito in terms of a moment of heightened individualism. She describes how

> a girl of eighteen imagines the feelings behind the face that has moved her with its sympathetic youth, as easily as primitive people imagined the humours of the gods in fair weather: what is she to believe in, if not in this vision woven from within? (68)

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[251] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 23 August 1863, *GEL*, 4, pp. 103-4.
[252] Julia Straub, 'George Eliot's *Romola* and its Shattered Ideals', *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, 4.1 (Spring 2008): n.p.

Romola can hardly discover what her lover's true feelings are, characterised as they are mainly by self-love underscored by shame, and yet this is not the point of the statement. Tito is an ideal constituted through self-reflection. His 'sympathetic youth' is akin to Romola's own, and thus he becomes a mirroring device that reflects her own feelings and desires. Her imagination is here the idealizing faculty of Coleridge's description, which both intensifies self-knowledge and heightens her felt connection to the outside world. There is a reference to the fetishistic gods of the primitive people detailed in Comte's philosophy, which he describes as the foundation to the development of more humanistic affections. Thus, Romola creates an ideal figure out of her love for Tito which little depends on the character himself. He is her first necessary idealisation, which breeds within her a self-sustaining faith, perpetuated in a Feuerbachian sense 'from within'.

This is necessary to Romola's self-development in that she has been brought up without a real sense of the ideal which is necessary to a perfectionist philosophy. Her father, the narrator notes, as 'one of the few frank pagans of his time, had brought her up with a silent ignoring of any claims the Church could have to regulate the belief and action of beings with a cultivated reason' (155). It is for this reason that both father and daughter so strongly object to the Christian conversion of Romola's brother, Dino. Yet the latter insists, in his final meeting with his sister, that his Christian perfectionist ideology is still present 'even in pagan philosophy: that it is a bliss within the reach of man to die to mortal needs, and live in the life of God as the Unseen Perfectness' (159). These 'sickly fancies' are ultimately rejected by Romola, although the comparison that she subsequently makes between the Christian and Pagan faith, embodied by Dino, and Tito, who is likened to 'a sun-god who knew nothing of night', pitches Romola into an alarmed and inaugural self-interrogation (182). She attempts to resolve the ideology of her brother, 'straining after something invisible', with the radical pursuit of joy with which both she and Tito are involved. Romola asks how the human world can sustain such opposite ideals:

> was there never any reconciling of them, but only blind worship of clashing deities, first in mad joy and then in wailing? Romola for the first time felt this questioning need like a sudden uneasy dizziness and want of something to grasp; it was an experience hardly longer than a sigh, for the eager theorising of the ages is compressed, as in a seed, in the momentary want of a single mind. (183)

In such passages, Eliot uses the fictive medium as a way of alternating between aphoristic sententiousness and a language based on the particular emotions which are owned by, and thus are expressive of, a single character. As such, she stages how fiction can work as philosophy, but one that relies on organic rather than theoretical systems. By interposing Romola's affective 'questioning need' for some unifying belief, Eliot materialises philosophy and thus resituates the search for meaning within a context that appeals to the feeling of being similarly human. This is what fiction can do.

Romola shares an affinity with Maggie in her sudden desperation for some form of guide or answer to the questions she is asking. The self's need for a working theory is momentarily illuminated within the radical individualism of the single mind. The tracing of an immanent idea throughout the personal thought-system is revealed in its highly corporeal aspect. The 'questioning need' for an ideal that might not be eroded by the indeterminacy of competing ideologies manifests itself in a physical 'dizziness and want of something to grasp'. Romola's desire for a haptic form of psychological resolution manifests a deeply Victorian sense of knowing in which touch features as an elementary and foundational route to understanding of our being in the world.[253] The seizure of an object both confirms and denies the agency of the self, as its ability to be grasped is dependent on its resistance to the hand that takes it. Thus, this metaphor for Romola's need of a positive theory by which to live negotiates the barrier between theoretical self-sustenance and the shaping force of external context. Unlike Maggie's taking up of Thomas à Kempis in a moment also curiously dominated by a 'quiet hand', Romola's experience of the desire for philosophical or theoretical knowledge is anti-epiphanic.

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[253] For an insightful article on this see Roger Smith, 'Kinaesthesia and Touching Reality', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2014). DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.691

It is of the moment, as all epiphanies must be, but it is also unyielding. Romola chooses to make an ideal of her lover, her 'joy', over pursuing a unification of the varying affections of happiness and sadness within a single philosophy, and therefore denies herself a satisfactory system of ethics.

Time and again, then, Romola's affections prove the limitations of philosophy, yet Eliot nearly always accompanies this move into a non-didactic representation of self-improving emotion with a reference to the philosophy that it abandons. Although Romola's capacity for idealization is continually tested throughout the novel, it is an evolving power that comes to be identified with self-reliance. Tito's duplicity, particularly exemplified in the sale of her father's library against the one desire of the old man's life, causes Romola to metamorphose her 'lost belief in the happiness she has once thirsted for' into 'a hateful, smiling, soft-handed thing, with a narrow, selfish heart' (321). Like Maggie's thirst 'for all knowledge', Romola's emotions articulate themselves physiologically. The former ideal of happiness still exists for the latter, but this time it is degraded by embodiment. Tito is overly tactful diplomatically, but this does not translate into something personally touching. Recalling her happiness on her wedding day, Romola experiences:

> That heart-cutting comparison of the present with the past […] till it even transformed itself into wretched sensations: she seemed benumbed to everything but inward throbbings, and began to feel the need of some hard contact. (326)

Again, Romola feels like grasping something. This time it is the 'harsh knotted cord that hung from her waist', making part of her disguise as a nun in which she plans to flee her husband and the city of Florence. The moment navigates two tactile modes: the wish to feel for something outside the self in order to evade the predominant inner feeling for the wounded self that overrides all other sensation. It suggests, through the conditions of tact, what the narrator has already asserted of Romola: she has 'no keen sense of any other human relations' (326). This initial inability to feel her way into the social body beyond her small circle of acquaintances restricts her ability to control her own body: 'The

emotions of the past weeks seemed to rush in again with cruel hurry, and take possession even of her limbs' (326).

The narrator himself appears to be taken by surprise by the intensity with which Romola's body receives the temporal idea of the history of her affective loss. The comparison between her initial sense of joy and her current state of marital despair is shown to have '*even* transformed itself into wretched sensations' which, allied to how her emotions have taken occupation '*even* of her limbs', suggests a co-opting of the body, by the body, into a reflexive and inescapable circle of self-restriction. Yet, as we know from the above study of Spinoza and the reading of Eliot's material anthology of the corporeal idea, the fact that an idea can attain to embodiment should come as no surprise to the reader of such a novel. Eliot's recognition of the pain of disappointed love is as much about the philosophy of subjectivity as it is artistic in its portrayal of human loss. For Spinoza, an 'adequate idea' *is* an ideal because it is a form of reason, illuminated by the emotions, that proceeds directly towards a greater understanding of the requirement of a perfectible self. That Romola reaches for the cord of a nun's habit is significant: she has lost faith in her initial affective ideology and seeks other sources to replace it. She has lost both father, brother, and husband, and yet feels 'that there could be no law for her but the law of her affections' (325). These same affections are described as having 'made the religion of her life' without which her chances of being 'heroic' are nullified (325). Her recourse to the trappings of conventional religion only serves, therefore, to heighten a sense of her loss of an ideal to which she can cling without it being merely costume or sham. It is at this point that Eliot marks the transition that Romola makes from a purely emotive ideal to an affectively mediated philosophical one. In treating of the 'stoical philosophy in which [Romola's] father had taken care to instruct her', Eliot's narrator represents this as essentially redundant in the formulation of her self-conduct:

> she had never used it, never needed it as a rule of life. She had endured and forborne because she loved: maxims which told her to feel less, and not to cling close lest the onward course of great Nature should jar her, had been as powerless on her tenderness as they had been on her father's yearning for just fame. She had appropriated no theories: she had simply felt strong in

> the strength of affection, and life without that energy came to her as an entirely new problem. (325-26)

Romola may have 'appropriated no theories' but, in feeling 'strong in the strength of affection', she is distinctly similar to the Spinozan philosophy in which the capacity to be unremittingly loving creates an energy that sustains the self. An affect, in this philosophy, is both the thing that drives or restricts action and the ability to confect rational ideas of these emotions. It is through the affections, and an ontology of feeling, that we are able to self-care as well as formulate adequate relations with the world around us. Romola is therefore philosophical in conceiving how the loss of the objects of her affection has a palsying effect on her ability to act. Her solution to this 'problem', which 'seemed to her very simple', is described in characteristically corporeal terms. It resides in her 'instinct to sever herself from the man she loved no longer' and pursue a 'solitary loveless life […] animated by a proud stoical heroism' (326, 327). Romola retreats into a theoretical version of heroism that prescribes a divorce from feeling. And yet, bearing Spinoza and Feuerbach in mind, the reader knows that this can never be a valid way to take care of the self. Tito was the alternate embodiment of Romola's 'joy' and corrupted 'happiness', and this conforms to the changeable affective index outlined by Spinoza: 'Different men can be affected in different ways by one and the same object, and one and the same man can be differently affected by one and the same object at different times' (*E*, 198). This proposition does not merely state the obvious, but leads towards a more complex development of the idea of self. The emotive changes we locate within another's actions or being are therefore reflections only of our own subjective shifts. Thus, 'repentance is pain accompanying the idea of oneself as a cause; and self-contentment is pleasure accompanying the idea of oneself as cause' (199). The acceptance of emotive agency formulates an ideology of one's self. Romola 'snap[s] asunder the bonds she had accepted in blind faith', abandoning her belief in 'the gods of beauty and joy', because they do not conform to the idea of herself (332). Tito proves to be a false idol because he could not sustain the character Romola's ideal had created for him. From the beginning of their courtship he has been

'encompassed' by Romola because, as the narrator asserts, '[e]ach woman creates in her own likeness the love-tokens that are offered to her' (123). The collapse of this reflexive faith throws Romola once again upon herself for contentment. In abandoning her husband, she comes to a new inspiration independent from the outsourcing of her affections. Alone on the road, with her home city behind her, Romola begins by contemplating her lost joy:

> But presently the light burst forth with sudden strength, and shadows were thrown across the road. It seemed that the sun was going to chase away the greyness. The light is perhaps never felt more strongly as a divine presence stirring all those inarticulate sensibilities which are our deepest life, than in these moments when it instantaneously awakens the shadows. A certain awe which inevitably accompanied this most momentous act of her life became a more conscious element in Romola's feeling as she found herself in the sudden impalpable golden glory and the long shadow of herself that was not to be escaped. (334)

Eliot's novels are full of such moments – consider Dorothea at her window, or Maggie amongst her books – and yet none demonstrate a more explicit conversion of theophany into the more affectively stimulating experience of self-realization. As in *The Essence of Christianity*, the feeling of the divine is generated from within, latent in the sensibilities which form the central part of our beings and modulate the moment-hand of existence. Eliot writes in her 'Notes on Form in Art', 'a flash of light is a whole compared with the darkness which precedes it', and with such moments of 'fundamental discrimination is born in necessary antithesis the sense of wholeness or unbroken connexion in space and time'.[254] The sense of rupture, of apartness, allows for the eventual reconciliation of part with whole and self with world. 'Romola's feeling' is heightened when she finds herself 'free and alone' surrounded by the 'golden glory' of the natural world. Her body, illuminated by the sun, casts its long shadow by which she can regard the inescapable self. The moment does not contribute much to a perfectionist narrative; there is no resolution here. The perceived permanence of the self, however, is undoubtedly treated positively. Romola's ideals are changeable, yet self remains intact, and this realization is something that comes to modulate all future experience. She thus participates in the kind

[254] Eliot, 'Notes on Form in Art', *Selected Essays*, p. 232.

of liberal individualism, such as that promoted through post-Smilesian Victorian culture, in which it is possible that a woman might be allowed to have 'invented a lot for herself' (327).

Akin to her desire to encourage a 'widening psychology' through an 'ethics of art' that allows for the 'truthful presentation of character' no matter how faulty and noble, Eliot details in *Romola* precisely what her ethical aesthetic entails:

> After all has been said that can be said about the widening influence of ideas, it remains true that they would hardly be such strong agents unless they were taken in a solvent of feeling. The great world struggle of developing thought is continually foreshadowed in the struggle of the affections, seeking justification for love and hope (449-50).

With this, Eliot offers perhaps her most unambiguous view on the relative positions philosophy and literature should take in reference to the progress of the world and to the individual who instigates it. She does not separate or prioritise the terms 'feeling' or 'affections' but renders them synonymous, whilst steering clear of the more widely used 'emotion'. In this she enacts, to quote Frederic Jameson, a 'transformation of the sensorium' in which the body is engendered with a peculiar kind of power.[255] She is closer here to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, to whom Lewes refers regularly in *Problems of Life and Mind* (1873-79). Discussing the importance of reflection to the psychological competence of the individual, Lewes draws upon 'that Inner sense which Kant marks as the distinguishing attribute of man when it makes its own affections objects of thought'.[256] It is a view that is, of course, reflected by the philosophers considered in this chapter. The sensory is incorporated into the reasonable, which in turn compels the move towards self-development and self-knowledge. Eliot's insistence on this inner-tact is one that promotes a feeling form of agency, dissolving the realm of ideas or philosophy into something more palatable: an affective solution. She is not denying the influence of philosophical works, but advocating for the almost chemical reaction that these ideologies can create when combined with the vital influences encouraged by aesthetic experiment and personal engagement.

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[255] Frederic Jameson, *The Antimonies of Realism*, (London: Verso, 2013), p. 32.
[256] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, vol. 1 (London: Trübner & Company, 1879), p. 135.

Chapter Four

Life Forms: *Middlemarch* and the Body of the Text

> An idea in the brain is not a legend carved on a marble slab: it is an impression made on a living tissue, which is the seat of active nutritive processes. Shall the initials I carved in bark increase from year to year with the tree? and shall not my recorded thought develop into new forms and revelations with my growing brain? (Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Mechanism in Thought and Morals*)[257]

> 'Oh, how cruel!' said Dorothea, clasping her hands. 'And would you not like to be the one person who believed in that man's innocence, if the rest of the world belied him? Besides, there is a man's character beforehand to speak for him.'
>
> But, my dear Mrs Casaubon, said Mr Farebrother, smiling gently at her ardour, 'character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.'
>
> 'Then it may be rescued and healed,' said Dorothea. (Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 692)

> [A book can be] where one finds oneself; and when a reader is grasped and held by a book, reading does not feel like an escape from life so much as it feels like an urgent, crucial dimension of life itself. There are books that seem to comprehend us just as much as we understand them, or even more. There are books that grow with the reader as the reader grows, like a graft to a tree. (Rebecca Mead, *The Road to Middlemarch*)[258]

The above passages, though varying slightly in concern, attest to a shared vocabulary of self-development. All three authors use the living body as a figure for the capacity of the individual mind to grow, change, or mutate. The two nineteenth-century authors, Oliver Wendell Holmes and George Eliot, liken the developing self to a text etched onto an organic surface. This is an image that Rebecca Mead, in an act of surprising critical symbiosis, also uses to show how a book can change and be changed by the readerly self. The form of the novel in question, *Middlemarch*, is generated by the act of reading it as much as by the design of the author. The three passages consider the growth of the

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[257] Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Mechanism in Thought and Morals: An Address Delivered Before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard University, June 29, 1870* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1871), p. 57.
[258] Rebecca Mead, *The Road to Middlemarch: My Life with George Eliot* (London: Granta, 2014), p. 16.

individual as legible through the marks it makes on a living tissue; they also represent this legibility through textual form. Holmes's 'initials', Eliot's 'character', and Mead's 'book' represent how genuinely reformative books can appeal to and alter the conditions of a life by somehow mimicking or performing the physiological conditions of a life. This chapter claims that Eliot closely conflates the system of text with the system of the body – in *Middlemarch* and elsewhere – and that she uses this connection to generate new forms of moral teaching.

Eliot read Holmes's *Mechanism in Thought and Morals* (1871) during the composition of *Middlemarch*.[259] The striking similarity between Holmes's image of the idea cut into 'living tissue' rather than carved onto a 'marble slab', and Eliot's description of Farebrother's observations on character is intriguing. The dual meaning of the term character, which represents Lydgate as both living being and legible sign, means that Farebrother's comment appeals to the textual conditions through which character might be shaped and read. This passage alludes, therefore, not only to the novel's preoccupation with how individuals can and must adapt themselves, but also to the responsibility of the text to allow for this capacity without merely relying on the reception of a 'character beforehand'. In order to represent this, Eliot refers the reader to an organic site that has the added benefit of being immediately accessible as an interpretative device: the human body. Character is 'something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do'. And yet, as Dorothea rightly points out, this also means that the moral constitution can be cured if we are prepared to extend the language of therapeutic technologies usually applied to the physical constitution. Eliot's narrator again conforms to Holmes's equation of 'moral evil' with 'bodily disease'. Holmes notes that 'what is most singular in the case of moral disease is, that it has been forgotten that it is a living creature in which it occurs, and that all living creatures are the subject of natural and spontaneous healing processes. A broken vase

[259] See 'A Check List of George Eliot's Reading: January 1868-December 1871', in *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks*, ed. John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt (London: University of California Press, 1979), p. 283.

cannot mend itself; but a broken bone can'.[260] The author's difficulty, then, lies in representing the morally flawed and thus improvable character in bone rather than in porcelain.

This form of 'aesthetic instruction' is something that Summer J. Star remarks upon in demonstrating how, for Eliot, it is:

> somehow most like the manner of lessons we learn from our bodies—from the effects of sleep deprivation, hunger, strength training, or bones set and reknit. The "teaching" potential of any novelist is thus proportional to the extent that she allies herself with this slow, experiential, physical mode of learning and resists the attraction of becoming a philosopher, politician, or other producer of abstraction.[261]

The decision to write the feeling body into a self-help philosophy through fiction is supremely present in *Middlemarch*. In his introduction to the novel, David Russell remarks that *Middlemarch* 'attends to the difference between knowledge in the abstract and knowledge understood as part of lived and embodied experience – between knowing something and really feeling that knowledge, we might say'.[262] This idea chimes with those expressed in his book, *Tact* (2018), in which he deciphers Eliot's 'sense of the ways in which the forms of life that are available are made use of and felt as experience'.[263] Such a feeling form – positioned between effective and affective experience – is consistent with the conditions of tact, a skillful handling which Russell mainly considers in relation to the social rather than the individual body. Through at times referring to a form of 'self-tact', my chapter extends away from, whilst being indebted to, his reading of Eliot's style. Additionally, it moves away from Star's arguments through a specific focus on how textual form can take on the properties of the physical body for therapeutic ends.

What follows does not claim to open a completely new vista on *Middlemarch*, were such a thing even to remain possible. Complementing this chapter's tracing of a living, infinitely adaptable form, I

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[260] Holmes, *Mechanism in Thought and Morals*, p. 89.
[261] Summer J. Star, 'Feeling Real in "Middlemarch"', *ELH*, 80.3 (Fall 2013): 839-69 (841).
[262] David Russell, 'Introduction' to *Middlemarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. ix.
[263] David Russell, *Tact*, p. 99.

am drawing on a long-established line of criticism. Eliot's novels' use of physiological language as a means through which to consider both the human condition, organic theory, senses of otherness, and her own practices as a novelist has been explored by critics ranging from George Levine, Gillian Beer, and Sally Shuttleworth, to Rachel Ablow, Michael Davis, and Shalyn Claggett.[264] Allying itself with these arguments and indeed with the text-as-body, body-as-text critical paradigm, I aim to illuminate some underexplored avenues of where such a preoccupation occurs in Eliot's essays and fiction, with particular reference to *Middlemarch*. Where my chapter differs is that, rather than coming to the idea of intersecting physical and textual forms from a historical, social, or scientific context – evolutionary (Beer and Levine), psychological (Davis and Vanessa Ryan), or marital (Ablow) – it draws on several discourses at once in order to fully articulate what Eliot means by the term 'consensus', which she applies to her art. It also offers a new critical consideration of how Eliot's use of physiological form applies to her own version of self-help. Through aligning her text with the human body, which is changeable, personal and imperfect, she writes a system of ethics that is structured according to those conditions. This aesthetic theory is deliberately adaptable and re-adaptable, mirroring the unstable patterns of life forms, which gives force to her secular moral thinking in a clear break from her evangelical beginnings.

This chapter thus interrogates the interaction, neatly exposed in the pun on 'character', between physical and written character in order to address an essential problem in Eliot's work in general, and this novel in particular: how to shape a system of improvement through a vocabulary that can change 'as our bodies do'. The connection between Holmes and Eliot is a good starting point to explore this argument for how Eliot tends to shape a living text out of her characters (both figural and

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[264] See for instance George Levine, 'The Heartbeat of a Squirrel', *Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 245-60, Rachel Ablow, 'George Eliot's Art of Pain', *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 70-95, Shalyn Clagget, 'George Eliot's Interrogation of Physiological Future Knowledge', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 51.4 (Autumn 2011): 849-64.

literal). Both authors participate in what one might refer to as a shared physiological lexicon. Our personality or ideas evolve a personalised language which marks the living tissue of the individual self and gives it legible form. Character's inclusion in a system of physiological lettering thus refuses to conform to a calcified pattern of logical signification. This chapter interrogates how advice literature, encoded within the fictional text, takes on a life of its own within the individual in a manner like that recorded by Mead. How do the systems of morality expressed within works such as *Middlemarch* graft themselves upon us in the shaping of a personal ethics? What specific moments of the text reveal Eliot's intentions regarding physiological form? Attempting to answer these questions, this chapter hopes to develop a greater understanding of how Eliot consciously invokes the terms of a life form in order to generate a text that emulates the living tissue on which it works, thus effectively appealing to the conditions of the individual life.

Critical Bodies

Before looking at *Middlemarch*, this chapter turns to Eliot's criticism. Eliot demonstrates her tendency to represent books as living things in an 1860 letter written to Sara Hennell, in which she asserts her estimation of Hennell's recently published book *Thoughts in Aid of Faith* (1860) by repurposing the terms in which it has been criticised: 'I think you told me that some one […] had found your treatment of great questions "cold-blooded." I am all the more delighted to find, for my own part, an unusual fullness of sympathy and heart-experience breathing throughout your book'.[265] Hennell's book collects 'twenty years' listening and meditation' to and on recent theological and philosophical doctrines in order to formulate a deliberately personal structure of belief. Eliot's description of this project in terms of embodiment presents a particularly sensitive reading of the text. The term 'heart-experience' is

[265] Eliot to Sara Hennell, 7 July 1860, *GEL*, 3, p. 316.

Hennell's own, appearing in the introduction in which she mulls over the deep privacy of one's search for a structure of belief coexisting with the compulsion to publish it.[266] The construction of such a system, she states, depends on 'self-effort' which 'alone can serve us'.[267] Whilst this, and her appeal to 'moral culture', demonstrates that she views her efforts to digest such doctrines in terms of a practice of self-help, Hennell denies that her speculations should remain 'the solitary occupation of silent reverie'.[268] Instead, she states that when:

> it comes to be found that these same abstractions, so thin and cold, have an influence that unites them again with that severed world of feeling, – when they are felt to be blending themselves once more with all that is real and dear to the warmest pulses of actual life, – the need presses itself to proclaim that which is discerned, all faintly though it be.[269]

When Eliot writes that, in spite of their differing views of religious faith, 'your book has shown me that we are much nearer to each other than I had supposed', it is at least partially because of their shared belief in the efficiency of feeling when it comes to ethical awakening and the curation of knowledge.[270] Both authors refuse to present feeling as an abstraction by situating their subject within the body – i.e. 'the warmest pulses of actual life'. The absence of an adequate moral system can reliably be felt, whilst the 'need' for one 'presses' itself into actuality. In Hennell's account this affective impulse makes an impression and through this takes textual form. Physiology and writing are thus united forms, sharing an epistemological language. The body compels text.

This shared meaning is something that Eliot expands on throughout her works, but particularly in 'Notes on Form in Art' (1868). Here, she considers literary form as something that can be figured through the human body. As usual, however, the body goes beyond the figurative in her

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[266] Sara Sophia Hennell, *Thoughts in Aid of Faith: Gathered Chiefly from Recent Works in Theology and Philosophy* (London: George Manwaring, 1860), p. 3.
[267] Ibid, p. 1.
[268] Ibid, p. 8.
[269] Ibid.
[270] *GEL*, p. 316.

representations of how one reads, and provides a language through which to conceive of how texts have the power to make us feel and think. She writes:

> Plain people, though indisposed to metaphysical subtleties, can yet understand that Form, as an element of human experience, must begin with the perception of separateness, derived principally from touch of which the other senses are modifications; and that things must be recognized as separate wholes before they can be recognized as wholes composed of parts, or before these wholes again can be regarded as relatively parts of a larger whole.[271]

Form as haptic engagement, where the self learns of its limits and simultaneously of its power by its tangible exertion upon other objects and vice versa, is a Spinozan concept. What the inclusion of his philosophy in this essay does is remind the reader that Eliot is making not only a critical but a moral point about fiction's form: about the affects that it cultivates, and on which it depends for its production and distribution.[272] Meanwhile, Eliot figures the 'higher' text through the form of the living body. Objects insentient and sentient – 'a rock or a man' – are subjected to tests of dissection in order to show how successful forms of art are those that most resemble living 'organisms; viz. in proportion to the complexity of the parts bound up into an indissoluble whole' (*SE*, 234). Eliot is of course playing off the 'organic form' popularized by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in which the text is likened to a living organism because it evolves from within the poem rather than being written according to a preconceived form: 'the end of Mr Brooke's pen was a thinking organ, evolving sentences, especially of a benevolent kind, before the rest of his mind could well overtake them' (273). She goes beyond this, however, in her repeated insistence on the centrality of the human body not only as a metaphor for creation but as a necessity to it. The text, because formed through conditions of emotion and tact, becomes a corporeal construction capable of sustaining an affective interchange with the readerly self.

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[271] George Eliot, *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 233-234. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

[272] I am choosing to apply this essay to the form of the novel, despite it being written in conjunction with Eliot's long poem, *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868). This is an interpretation that is condoned by Eliot, who states that 'my concern in here chiefly with poetry which I take in its wider sense as including all literary production', *Selected Essays*, p. 223.

It is worth considering how Eliot's physiological conception of form allies itself to a specific language of nineteenth-century criticism of fiction. Reviewers of both French and English fiction frequently used the metaphors of dissection or vivisection in order to refer to the novels in question.[273] Take Edward Dowden, who argues against the view of Eliot's word as 'didactic treatises' (whose words can also be readily applied to my former consideration of the book of extracts):

> George Eliot herself is artist as much as she is teacher. Many good things in particular passages of her writings are detachable; admirable sayings can be cleared from their surroundings, and presented by themselves, knocked clean as we knock out fossils from a piece of limestone. But if we separate the moral soul of any complete work of hers from its artistic medium, if we murder to dissect, we lose far more than we gain.[274]

The body of the text can submit to critical, as well as authorial, anatomization. It is the latter image, however, that is most often employed when discussing Eliot, who more than most English novelists was referred to as alternately a 'vivisector', 'anatomist' or 'surgeon'. Henry James, in his famous pronouncement on *Middlemarch*, illuminates an aspect of why this was: the novel is 'too often an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley'.[275] This hints, however, at what distinguishes Eliot from other authors deemed literary anatomists which is how readily she complies with the critical terms aimed at her fiction. Indeed, by the time she was composing *Middlemarch*, it was likely with the physiological style of her critics in mind. One only need turn to R. H. Hutton's 'George Eliot's Moral Anatomy', his penultimate instalment of a series of six reviews on *Middlemarch*, in order to intuit this through the particular quotes he chooses.[276]

Hutton uses anatomical terms in order to express both an admiration for the intricacies of Eliot's characters, and his dislike of her occasional treatment of them, which he notes elsewhere 'seem

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[273] For an exposition of just how pervasive this critical language of the 'morbid-anatomy school' was, with specific relation to Balzac, see Juliette Atkinson's *French Novels and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 256-72.
[274] Edward Dowden, 'George Eliot', *Contemporary Review*, 20 (August 1872): 403-22 (404).
[275] Henry James, 'Middlemarch', *Galaxy*, 15 (March 1873): 424-8 (428).
[276] [R. H. Hutton], 'George Eliot's Moral Anatomy', *The Spectator*, 45.2310 (5 October 1872): 1262-4.

like broken lancet-points in a living body'.[277] Hutton thus employs the term 'anatomy' to signify the author's ability to perform sometimes painful dissections of her characters in the pursuit of a complete exposure of their innermost structure. Individual systems of ethics, whether moral or immoral, bleed onto the pages of *Middlemarch*. He points, for instance, to 'the first descent of the dissecting-knife into the motives of Solomon Featherstone'.[278] In Eliot's 'Moral Anatomy', her characters are seen to participate in a shared materiality that shapes the way the reader encounters the diverse moral systems latent in the text. The review is included in David Carroll's *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (1971), however it does not feature there in its entirety. After including Hutton's injunction to 'take the wonderfully skilful anatomy of the auctioneer Mr. Trumbull when suffering under pneumonia', Carroll omits what he refers to as 'several descriptions of Trumbull'.[279] This is not entirely accurate, as what Hutton actually does is quote two passages that deal with Trumbull's constitution more than his character. He quotes at length from a moment in the novel when the illness of the auctioneer is left to play itself out, under the scientific eye of Lydgate, with both characters convinced of the former's physical ability to overcome it without medicinal intervention. The passage merits inclusion in the *Critical Heritage*, as the criticism that Hutton is undertaking here complements Eliot's own. Indeed, Nicholas Dames, in a fascinating article on what he refers to as 'the Protocols of Victorian Fiction' represents why we should pay more critical attention to such moments of lengthy citation which he shows to be an entirely common practice in nineteenth-century reviewing. Making the reader a 'co-participant with the critic', he reveals how the '"part" in Victorian criticism of the novel – the long excerpt – performed […] the function of modelling, in miniature, the kind of readerly response the text in question elicits in toto'.[280] Thus, it is important to note how Hutton chooses, as his lengthy

[277] [R. H. Hutton], 'Review of Book 1', *The Spectator*, 44 (16 December 1871): 1528-9 (1529).
[278] Ibid.
[279] David, Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 305.
[280] Nicholas Dames, 'On the Protocols of Victorian Fiction', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42.2 (Summer 2009): 326-31 (pp. 329, 327).

concluding quotations, excerpts that position the body at the forefront as a means through which to highlight Eliot's literary ability.

Hutton follows this with what he pronounces one of the finer 'touches of moral anatomy' in quoting Eliot's description of the 'kindly liquid in [Trumbull's] veins' that runs counter to 'the sour-blooded persons' who disparage him.[281] Here, he is not merely using the body as an analogy for the affective style of Eliot's prose. Rather, the body of *Middlemarch*'s text responds to Hutton's criticism in a literalisation of his terms. In Hutton's coupling of this form of actual scientific anatomy, performed by Lydgate, with Eliot's later description of 'kindly' and 'sour' blood, he hints at the way through which Trumbull's constitution exposes a key stylistic element in *Middlemarch*. Eliot moves between literal and analogical description, in terms of using the body to express character, which works to blur the boundaries between the two. In this, she creates a physiological vocabulary that can be applied to both physical and moral states. Eliot thus constructs a system of ethics that takes physical being as one mode of its communication. As Hutton points out throughout his review, this system is non-dogmatic because dissent from the author through sympathy with the characters can always be *felt*. Through this, Eliot opens a space for individual thought and action which performs her moral thought.

In turning back to Eliot's 'Notes on Form in Art', it is useful to consider at least one of the examples of aesthetic treatise from which she may have drawn inspiration. There are a number of good reasons to suggest that Johann Gottfried Herder's *Sculpture* (1778) was an influence. Eliot's respect for 'the great Herder', as she referred to him in a letter of 1849, has been pointed to by some critics.[282] Yet, this is usually in reference to his concept of the versatility of race in opposition to universalisation, and how this political philosophy finds its most apparent reflection in *Daniel*

[281] Hutton, 'George Eliot's Moral Anatomy', p. 1263.
[282] Eliot to Mr and Mrs Charles Bray and Sara Hennell, 5 August 1849, *GEL*, 1, p. 293.

Deronda.[283] In Eliot's essay, however, it is Herder's aesthetic theory which expresses an intellectual kinship, whereby his arguments for the physiological production of art and artistic response accords with Eliot's own thoughts on the subject. Her emphasis on touch in the consciousness of form, 'of which the other senses are modifications', directly corresponds to Herder's own arguments on the subject, when he similarly states that '*sight* is but an *abbreviated form of touch*.[284] This is in addition to her emphasis on the 'human experience' of the aesthetic, which Herder represents as a sensuous condition upon which all real self-knowledge is grounded. He creates a tactile space of the self from within which an understanding of our own bodies, and the bodies surrounding us, interact through a shared participation in the embodied experience. In a style that anticipates Eliot's, Herder asks rhetorically:

> [f]or what are properties of bodies if not relations to our own body, to our sense of touch? The light that strikes my eye can no more give me access to concepts such as solidity, hardness, softness, smoothness, form, shape, or volume than my mind can generate embodied, living concepts by independent thinking. Birds, horses, and fish do not possess these concepts. Only human beings have them, because alongside reason we possess a hand that can feel and grasp. If we did not have this, if we had no means by which we could confirm the existence of a body for ourselves through our own bodily feeling, we could only infer and guess and dream and fabricate, and we would know nothing for certain. The more we are able to take hold of a body as a body, rather than staring at it and dreaming of it, the more vital is our feeling for the object, or, as it is expressed in the word itself, our concept of the thing.[285]

Herder places the ability to feel with our bodies at the forefront of humanity's capacity for knowledge production. Additionally, he demonstrates how the ability to grasp form, both physically and intellectually, is a prerequisite, or rather a pre-cursor to, the generation of 'embodied, living concepts' that surpass the merely logical because they are predicated on the situated knowledge of our physical

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[283] See, for instance, Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[284] Herder similarly states that '*sight* is but *an abbreviated form of touch*'. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. and trans. Jason Gaiger (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 38.

[285] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture*, pp. 36-7. Gaiger explains in his notes that what Herder finds 'expressed in the word itself' is 'the sense of seizing or taking hold of something carried by the German word Begriff [concept]. Together with the cognate verb begreifen [to understand], Begriff is etymologically related to greifen [to grip or take hold of something] and Griff [the grip, grasp]', p. 105. Herder's is a word play that Eliot would undoubtedly have enjoyed.

being.[286] The aesthetic moment, then, is one of a double recognition based on the simultaneity of feeling for form and for the bodily self. According to Herder, the statue can only truly be seen as a tangible and accessible object through the consideration of it from several angles, always with a sense of tact transferred from the experience of holding ourselves in hand. What is most important to point out is how Herder represents form as self-constitutive, whilst the generative forces of the body coming up against the object make that object alive. Aliveness is conceptual and breathes life into self-engendered concepts. This should remind us of Eliot's 'limits' of form. For both authors, a theory of art speaks directly to the physical and moral conditions of the self, whilst the term 'living' is used in relation to form in order to express this. Eliot's moral thought depends on an aesthetic of embodiment which continually adapts itself to the varied conditions of the body and thus teaches by complying with unstable patterns of feeling.

A comparison between this passage from Herder and Eliot's own rhetorical question helps to make the connection more distinct:

> Sometimes the wider signification of poetry is taken to be fiction or invention as opposed to ascertained external fact or discovery. But what is fiction other than an arrangement of events or feigned correspondences according to predominant feeling? We find what destiny pleases; we make what pleases us – or what we think will please others. (*SE*, 233)

Eliot interrogates productions of feeling that become objects in literary form. Like Herder, she represents the realisations prompted by art as reified life experience. Fiction, for her, is the arrangement of fact through feeling. Knowing something for certain is an individual effort in both Herder and Eliot; artistic form represents a landing space where concepts concerning the self and life

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[286] I am aware that I am slightly adapting Donna Haraway's term for my own purposes. Herder's aesthetic ideology can also generatively be aligned with 'thing theory', whereby the thing is an object that has surpassed its physicality, outsourcing its mere utility to become something differently meaningful to the perceptive subject. The theory, extending from Heidegger's philosophy, is best addressed by Bill Brown in his 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22. His essay, 'The Bodies of Things', meanwhile, had clear implications for the subject of this chapter. As he writes, '[t]he participation of the thing in the body, which is the body's participation in the thing, confers above all a greater presence, which is self-presence', in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Boehm (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 221-28 (223).

might be made solid enough to grasp.[287] Herder's aesthetic theory constantly rejected a pedagogical motivation that might have aimed at the education of how to make art. The pleasure that one takes in making or viewing art is teaching enough. In 'Notes on Form in Art', Eliot also considers 'the plastic arts' and, like Herder, makes 'obvious' the fact that Form here 'means something else than mere imitation of outline' but depends on the work's 'composition' and 'the impression from a work considered as a whole' (*SE*, 233). Eliot and Herder would ask us to use this tactful consideration of the object in order to develop an instinct towards a reading of the self. Eliot's living form of the text is akin to Herder's '*corporeality*': the 'living, embodied truth of the three-dimensional space of angles, of form and volume'.[288]

Perhaps in tribute to Herder's essay on touch and sculpture, which draws upon the myth of Pygmalion for its inspiration, Eliot presents us with two statues in *Middlemarch*: one marble, the other living. In a museum in Rome, the location of Dorothea's disastrous honeymoon, we encounter two forms: 'The reclining figure of Ariadne, then called Cleopatra, lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness. [Will Ladislaw and his companion Naumann] were just in time to see another figure standing against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming girl' (177).[289] The statue's misnaming is a reflection on the several acts of the misreading of visible and embodied signs that are contained within the novel – mostly by Dorothea herself. By providing a 'fine bit of antithesis' for Naumann, Dorothea draws the eye away from her marble counterpart whilst conforming to the structural elements that render the

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[287] We might remember Romola, whose 'questioning need' for a theory of life manifests itself 'like a sudden uneasy dizziness and want of something to grasp', *Romola*, p. 183.

[288] Herder, *Sculpture*, p. 40.

[289] Gwendolen Harleth, in *Daniel Deronda*, knowingly participates in the tradition of the living statue. Desiring to appear in Greek dress, she casts about for a character that 'suited her purpose of getting a statuesque pose in this favourite costume'. Finally alighting on the character of Hermione from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1623), she emulates that character's abrupt return to life, though here through an experience of terror: 'Gwendolen, who stood without change of attitude, but with a change of expression that was terrifying in its terror. She looked like a statue into which the soul of Fear had entered', *Daniel Deronda,* p. 54. A comparison of the different ways in which this tradition appears in Eliot's novels is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter.

figure of Ariadne an aesthetic object (177). For Herder, the statue must appeal to the senses by seeming almost to breathe – must suggest a warmth to the tactful eye and thus *re*convey 'the *truth of the physical body*'.[290] Through the antithesis, Eliot performs the perceptive moment in which concrete form undergoes a realization in the mind of the onlooker. Dorothea's marital links to the abandoned Ariadne, aptly concealed within a misnomer, is an example of Eliot's striving within her fiction to make her 'ideas thoroughly incarnate'. Dorothea's living form becomes a metaphor for how we might read the novel in which she appears. The comparison also represents how this form of acquisitive formal reading towards self-knowledge, encouraged by Eliot and Herder, is very much an individualistic and sometimes selfish methodology. As such, Eliot images the moral and formal possibilities of this mode of interpretation whilst also gesturing to how it might exact a dangerous tyranny over how we come to knowledge through the object. Eliot never unambiguously promotes reformative texts (or objects).

Furthermore, when Will contemplates his encounter with Dorothea in which the two do not make eye contact:

> He felt as if something had happened to him with regard to her. There are some characters which are continually creating collisions and nodes for themselves in dramas which nobody is prepared to act with them. Their susceptibilities will clash against objects that remain innocently quiet. (179-80)

Dorothea could be seen, in her guise as living statue, as Will's 'innocently quiet' object in that she offers the perceptible limits which contribute to the development of Will's character. What sustains one body in the formative making of meaning, however, will not affect the other. Will's feelings towards Dorothea are described in terms of making an impression, like a sculptor's chisel, or a writer's pen, upon a neutral but ultimately generative surface. The etched 'characters', formed through

[290] Herder, *Sculpture*, p. 81. Herder makes constant recourse to the idea of the 'breath of God' breathing life into clay.

'collisions and nodes', demonstrate how art forms can lend self-legibility to the people who view or read them, whilst their properties become transformed in the process. Will creates a narrative for himself through contact with a distinct and self-contained form: self-help in motion. It helps that the term 'node' does not only mean a protuberance or knot, but also an anatomical term relating to a 'usually rounded structure or organ' (*OED*). As Will is soon to express to Dorothea the concept of feeling as 'a new organ of knowledge', this description of his affective response to her is apt. Our reaction to art forms such as the sculpture or the novel thus both confirms identity and images the self in an act of becoming. What we project onto and extract from the aesthetic form becomes a readable idea of ourselves: our values, concerns, even our obsessions. This heightens the stakes of what the text makes us feel.

Middlemarch is a novel in which forms can impress themselves into the physiological structure of one's being. For the living statue Dorothea, Rome's '[f]orms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory', the occasionally remembered image 'spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina' (181-82). This latter description is more than a simile. Aesthetic forms are freighted with the power to embody an entire system, physical or moral. Indeed, the whole description of Dorothea's response to the structures of Rome is punctuated with corporeal words like 'pleasure', 'pain, 'living and warm-blooded', 'breathing forgetfulness' and 'electric shock' (181). Eliot wants us to pay attention to the physical influence of aesthetic forms on the observant body. An emotive encounter with form can become a formative encounter with self. Through this, the system of the body becomes a site upon which the boundaries between thought and feeling break down, thus shaping a unique system of ethics that is dependent on this coalescence.

Naumann, in his observations to Will Ladislaw, refers to Dorothea's 'wonderful left hand' and it is poignant, given the interconnectedness of sculpture, touch, and artistic form that we have just explored, that there is a marble sculpture purportedly of Eliot's left hand (rather than her famous

cheese-making right) currently on display in the George Eliot gallery at the Nuneaton Museum (177). The hand rests upon but does not grasp a flower that is thus able to retain its essential objecthood – its formal limits – whilst adding beauty to the marble hand with 'a petal-like ease and tenderness'. Herder would have approved of such a monument. Given the fact that he believed we can only create a truly speaking form because of our hands and the knowledge that we accumulate through them, the representation of Eliot and her genius through this single sculptural form is especially apt. In announcing their acquisition, the museum issued the statement that staff 'were struck by the detail of the sculpture when you look at it close up and feel it is a very moving and personal object'.[291] Herder writes that '[i]n general, the *closer* we approach an object, the more *alive* our language becomes'.[292] It is not how they think, but how they *feel* about the form in front of them that the museum's curators wish to communicate. The gentle hand, laid out in marble below, performs the conditions of the author's life; it manifests a feeling for something beautiful.

[291] Becky Harvey, 15th December 2016, *Unveiling our new George Eliot Acquisition*, https://nuneatonmuseum.wordpress.com/2016/12/15/unveiling-our-new-george-eliot-acquisition/, accessed 20th January 2021.
[292] Herder, *Sculpture*, p. 42.

Fig. 2: The Left Hand of George Eliot, set on a cushion with a trailing plant. https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/george-eliots-hand-273235

It is worth dwelling a little longer on how Herder's theory of sculpture provides a useful way of framing what I mean by Eliot's living form. Jason Gaiger, in the introduction to his translation of *Sculpture,* outlines how Herder 'shows that he is concerned with touch only as it is incorporated into our psychological and imaginative engagement with three-dimensional objects. Literal touching of cold marble or bronze would destroy the constitutive illusion of animate life on which figurative sculpture depends'.[293] This sense of incorporation, an important term for Eliot, is useful in showing how art forms precipitate a taking into the body of certain ideas. These are manifested as feeling within the embodied self, which is an affect synonymous with, though not identical to, the nervous activity of the physical body. Given this formal cohesion, the senses of the body are used both as figures for the affections as well as being somatically linked to how we experience those affections. How to read the text that strives to engender a restructuring of the self according to a deeply personal reaction to

[293] Jason Gaiger, 'Introduction' to *Sculpture*, p. 18.

it is something that one finds encoded within the physical form. Self-help could not truly be self-enacted without this focus on the individual body. The sense of touch has a transferred reality, inhabiting both realms of feeling and knowing. Through the body we learn to recognise and name aesthetic concepts that thus attain real, apprehensible form. This is no clearer in *Middlemarch* than when Dorothea reappears to Will as he is working at her uncle's house. The moment is described in a luminous aesthetic of anatomical detail:

> When Mrs Casaubon was announced he started up as from an electric shock, and felt a tingling at his finger-ends. Any one observing him would have seen a change in his complexion, in the adjustment of his facial muscles, in the vividness of his glance, which might have made them imagine that every molecule in his body had passed the message of a magic touch. And so it had. 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 (364).

Will's feeling for Dorothea is carefully and deliberately explained according to his physiological reactions when he sees her. We must recall the author's description of Farebrother's inward speech, when walking away forever from his potential union with Mary, and 'think of the part one little woman can play in the life of a man' (636). Dorothea is a genuinely reformative force in Will's life, pulling him away from the vague pursuit of 'self-culture' in favour of political 'duty' and action (433). That Eliot figures her effect on him through the body is important in showing how she conceived of formative influence. More importantly, her description of Will's body is one that elides the gap between literal and metaphorical usage. I read the passage through three stages of tact: anatomical, analogical, and a conflation of the two. Dorothea as form – Will, remember, is not allowed to touch her at this point and believes he will never be able to do so – is something that seems to demand from him the sensation of being *in* touch with her and, through this, with himself. The detail of his tingling finger-ends, like the electric shock, is a sensation that compels – via its familiarity – a readerly identification with Will's embodied state. We are alive to it. This sense of touch, however, undergoes a change within Eliot's synaptic molecules: it now becomes a method through which to 'imagine' what is going on in Will's

body, in an expression that conforms to the processes of touch whilst exceeding its physiological boundaries. Magic, after all, stands for the trans*form*ative. The performance of this hermeneutics of the haptic is only possible, Herder would argue, because the onlooker (here the reader) has the physical knowledge of having touched real objects. The two aspects of touch thus cohere within a system that unites metaphysical feeling with physical touch, and uses the latter to generate forms of reading that rely on bodily experience to convey a living realism. This coherence between the affective and the somatic, the refusal to distinguish between real touch and touch as figure, is why Eliot uses one word to describe 'the quality of the soul as well as the body'. These *touches* that convey constitutions moral and physical speak to Eliot's development of a physiological vocabulary, whereby character can be read by the hand and, via the hand, the body. The semantic collision of forms both concrete and conceptual creates Eliot's peculiar ability to enact the ideas present in 'Notes on Form in Art' throughout her fiction. The feeling at one's fingertips contains a moral.

Throughout her essay, Eliot reiterates that form has a duty to be *in*formed by traditions of 'human experience', the success of which will be tested by an embodied and inward sense of touch which conforms to processes of emotion or feeling. This is how Eliot plays with the textures of material and immaterial (or, to quote Eliot, 'metaphysical') form. The material and immaterial cohabit according to the interpretative consciousness that possesses them both. The production of meaning is thus dependent on the simultaneous feeling for the two and it is this complex form of relationism that Eliot proposes as a way not only of conceiving of form, but also of showing how it gets its 'living'.[294] A rock, if cut in two, would simply make two constitutionally identical rocks, 'whereas the outline defining the wholeness of the human body is due to a consensus or constant interchange of effects among its parts'.[295] The truly effective textual form would take to bleeding inwardly if separated

[294] George Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 231.
[295] Ibid, p. 234.

from even the most microscopic of its constitutional parts. When Eliot addresses herself to a critical literary term, she does so through a body language. The result is the establishment of a critical vocabulary that derives its legitimacy through an appeal to the closest form at hand to her readership: their own bodily frame.

One example of this is Eliot's particular dwelling upon the word 'consensus' which she doubles back upon in order to analyse it fully:

> The word 'consensus' expresses that fact in a complex organism by which no part can suffer increase or diminution without a participation of all other parts in the effect produced and a consequent modification of the organism as a whole.
>
> By this light, forms of art can be called higher or lower only on the same principle as that on which we apply these words to organisms. (*SE*, 234)

Compare this to what Lewes would subsequently write in his *Problems of Life and Mind* (1873), and it is clear that both viewed the word in terms of its moral connotations in addition to its scientific definition:

> Thus each new modification of structure is secured, each organ is independent yet subordinated to the whole; and instead of being an obstacle, this independence becomes, through the *consensus* and co-operation of each, a source of enhanced power in the organism. In organic, as in social life, the indispensable condition of perfect action is the co-operation of independent agents.[296]

For Lewes, this is a fundamental factor of physiological self-development and is, perhaps because of this, an important insight into the ethical condition of man. Of course, Lewes is also gesturing to the image of the social body whose functionality is viewed in terms of the organic body. For both Eliot and her partner, the aesthetics of organicism and the ethics of interdependence were deeply intertwined. This is a reading of Eliot's organic theory that has tended to dominate critical studies.

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[296] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind, The Foundations of a Creed*, vol. I (London: Trübner & Co., 1874), p. 107, pp. 116-17, *emphasis mine.*

Lewes's focus, however, is first on the perfectibility of independent agents, a preoccupation that I adhere to here.

Consensus is thus a good example of Eliot's tendency to employ words that have both corporeal and social resonances in her formation of a materialist ethics of reading. The term was relatively new at the point when Eliot employed it and was originally used solely in a physiological sense to mean '[g]eneral agreement or concord of different parts or organs of the body in effecting a given purpose; sympathy. Hence *transferred* of the members or parts of any system of things'. I have quoted the *OED*'s definition in full because of the intriguing and abrupt insertion of 'sympathy' after the term's main sense. The semicolon implies that this abstract noun is in some clear sense connected to the former clause. As the term is one famously associated with Eliot's fiction, it is probable that she would have been drawn to such a definition that knits both sympathy – a system of ethics – and the system of the body so closely together. To work in an organic sympathy, as the body does, is a useful way of conveying a moral dictate without appealing to dogma, conduct literature, or theory. This is one of the clearest examples of where the form of the body gives definition to a social concept, whilst positioning the sensitive form as a figure for common sense. For this and other reasons it is clear why Eliot chose this particular term, which only latterly came to mean general agreement, in the evolution of her theory of literary form.

Relations of Living Structure

In Eliot's fiction, the concern with becoming a full-pulsed device for the sensitive improvement of the reader is palpable.[297] This is particularly the case with regards to the scientific research of Tertius Lydgate. Lydgate's longing 'to demonstrate the more intimate relations of living

[297] I borrow the term 'full-pulsed' from Eliot's description of Dorothea, new to her life as an unhappily married woman: 'Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment' (258).

structure, and help to define men's thought more accurately after the true order' is analogous, as has often been noted, to Eliot's fictional impetus. 'Living structure' is a physiological system that can be used to 'order' 'men's thoughts' – i.e. provide a new system of belief or change people's minds. As such, Lydgate's 'anatomical conception' relates to a form of living realism that structures Eliot's own text.

Of the few critics who relate Lydgate's search for structure to Eliot's authorial methodology expressed in 'Notes on Form in Art', S. Pearl Brilmyer is one of the most insightful.[298] Her argument shows that within Lydgate's conception of living bodies there is the sense that '[a]s emotive, relational compounds, humans – like poems – possess a dynamic structure' wherein '[t]he complexity of the body's inner and outer relations translates to its potential to take on different forms'.[299] Whilst Brilmyer refers this to her argument of the plasticity of character in *Middlemarch*, this chapter considers the character from its other aspect: as a legible feature of the text itself. I am certainly not the first to note that 'text', meaning 'written character', is secondarily defined by the *OED* as '[t]exture, tissue', i.e. the 'tissue of a literary work', emerging from the past participle stem of *texere:* 'to weave'. Nor am I unique in connecting this to Lydgate's concern with 'certain primary webs or tissues' to Eliot's physiological conception of the novel form. Why Eliot deliberately constructs something that is, to borrow from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805), '[o]f texture midway betwixt life and books' is, however, worthy of more attention.[300] Why should the morally instructive text be akin to a skin-graft? How does the organic form enable both the formation and the dissolving of structures of belief, and why is it important to view these structures in terms of physiology?

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[298] Pearl Brilmyer, 'Plasticity, Form, and the Matter of Character in *Middlemarch*', *Representations*, 130.1 (Spring, 2015): 60-83 (68).
[299] Ibid.
[300] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: Or, The Growth of a Poet's Mind* (Text of 1805), ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 51

Lydgate's pursuit of a 'fundamental knowledge of structure' is couched in highly moral terms: 'he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness' (154). His microscopic studies have a therapeutic end that applies physical scrutiny to something that could be considered metaphysical. Self-improvement, Lydgate believes, can be enacted through the examination of bodily tissues. What is interesting is how easily Eliot moves between registers of form when discussing Lydgate's medical studies, never moving very far away from the process of reading. Good form, we might deduce, takes the body into account.

When Eliot first refers to Lydgate's anatomical epiphany, it is in the context of how he reads indiscriminately 'any sort of book that he could lay his hands on' until happening on 'the volumes of an old Cyclopædia' that gives rise to 'the moment of vocation' (134-35). Eliot chooses terms to describe this reading that links textual structures both to the physical constitution of the body and processes of development:

> The page he opened on was under the head of Anatomy, and the first passage drew his eyes was on the valves of the heart. He was not much acquainted with valves of any sort, but he knew that *valvæ* were folding-doors, and through this crevice came a sudden light startling him with his first vivid notion of finely-adjusted mechanism in the human frame (134-135).

That Eliot even describes the 'makeshift attitude' in which Lydgate reads shows that she wants to draw our attention the material implications of the reading process (134). The 'passage' that draws his eyes contains within it the idea of progress whilst referring to the structure of the page. The 'folding-doors' of the anatomical heart, the entrance into a new life, and the fold of the book's binding co-exist within a shared valency. Ian Duncan is particularly articulate in his interpretation of this passage which he represents as demonstrating 'the organic fusion of feeling and thinking'.[301] As he writes, 'Lydgate's

[301] Ian Duncan, 'George Eliot's Science Fiction', *Representations*, 125. 1 (Winter 2014): 15-39 (24).

revelation comes through the momentary defamiliarisation of a technical term. In a complex event of translation, his grasp of the literal, etymological meaning of valvae opens his mind to the original, figurative force of its scientific usage – opening, in Eliot's metaphoric amplification, the doors to his calling'.[302] What is of note is how Eliot explicitly links formative literature and the structures of belief engendered therein with the exploration of the physiological system. It prompts the reader to re-interrogate the somatic experience of reading. *Middlemarch* is inwrought with a structure of feeling which finds its image in the form upon which Lydgate operates. Reading is a form of re-encounter with the individual body. The affections are mobilised in a performance of self-development which becomes a science of its own.

When Lydgate quotes his 'favourite bit from an old poet' in an attempt to expand Rosamond's sympathy for his intellectual pursuits, it is no accident that his extract is ostensibly about authorship rather than medicine:

> Why should our pride make such a stir to be
> And be forgot? What good is like to this,
> To do worthy the writing, and to write
> Worthy the reading and the world's delight?
>
> What I want, Rosy, is to do worthy the writing, — and to write out myself what I have done. (411)

The extract is taken from Samuel Daniel's long poem *Musophilus* (1599), a dialogue that 'champions the vitality of civil learning for the nation state'.[303] In the early section from which it derives, the eponymous speaker stipulates for a reliance on poetry rather than progeny in his friend's pursuit of lasting posterity. He states that one's writing can 'make one liue with all' whilst allowing 'the dead-liuing vnto Councell call: / By you th' vnborne shall haue communion / Of what we feele, and what

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[302] Ibid.
[303] Entry on 'Samuel Daniel, *Musophilus* (1599)' in *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England: A Critical Anthology*, ed. William E. Engel, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 127-31 (127).

doth vs befall'.[304] By grounding the final line within the present tense, the poem suggests the possibility of a shared temporality which performs the kind of immortality that Musophilus suggests is attainable through such a form. Coleridge – who, in a happy coincidence, uses largely the same passages as I do from this poem as epigraphs to the first of a series of essays entitled *The Landing Place* (1818) – suggests something of this reading whilst dwelling upon the power of music.[305] Perhaps inspired by his chosen epigraphs, he writes that 'when having thus modified the Present by the Past, he [the musician] at the same time weds the Past *in* the Present to some prepared and corresponsive Future'.[306] The same processes, he states, can also be enacted through literature. Self is preserved as the moments it occupies are shared through an affective genealogy. So it is that Lydgate, rather than founding his hopes for his lasting name on any offspring that Rosamond might bear him, views the publication of his projected discoveries to be a means, not only of securing his reputation, but of offering 'counsel'. If we read a few lines above Lydgate's chosen quotation, the poem attains to an even greater relevance both to the characterisation of Lydgate and to the wider concerns of the novel. Musophilus constitutes the text from the human body:

> the words thou scornest now
> May liue, the speaking picture of the minde,
> The extract of the soule, that labored how
> To leaue the Image of herselfe behind […]
> For these Lines are the veines, the arteries,
> And vndecaying life-strings of those harts
> That still shall pant, and still shall exercize
> The motion, spirit and Nature both imparts[307]

[304] Samuel Daniel, *Musophilus: Containing a General Defence of all Learning*, ed. Raymond Himelick (West Lafayette: Purdue Univeristy Studies, 1965), p. 67.
[305] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, vol. 4, pt. 1: *The Friend* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 129.
[306] Ibid, p. 130.
[307] Daniel, *Musophilus*, lines 77-86, p. 67.

It should come as no surprise that these two proponents of organic form, Coleridge and Eliot, alighted on such a poem to include in their works. Nor is it too farfetched to suggest that Lydgate may have committed such a verse to memory because of its proximity to the anatomical imaging of literature. Because Gillian Beer has stated that '[t]he acquired language of science' lends itself, among other things, to an 'increased prowess of punning', I hope I will be forgiven for pointing out that here the aesthetic really does run in the veins: in the *art*eries.[308] It is important to remember that this representation of the poem as a life form occurs within a text written for the purpose of encouraging learning. Preserving oneself within the lines of literature is not simply personal, it is pedagogical. For Daniel and Eliot, the living structures of text are not just metaphorical or analogical; rather, they convey something about what successful advice literature should perform. When Rebecca Mead notes that Middlemarch has grown with her 'like a graft to a tree', she observes something that bears a fundamental relation to Eliot's intentions regarding textual structure. The conditions of moral growth are latent within the novel, just as the discovery of the cell lies latent in the science of anatomy for those who know 'how to use the preparation', but they require the embodied reader for their gradual unfolding (139). To figure the text in terms of a physiological structure places the body at the centre of this interpretative act and shows that individual systems of ethics can be influenced and constructed through a form of anatomisation. The reader's awakened attention to the feeling body as a gateway to heightened self-knowledge is enacted through the body's presence within the text and the sensible reactions of the reader to those bodies. Storylines and bloodlines are intermixed.

I would like to conclude this section by pointing to how Eliot constructs the sentence that follows Lydgate's poetic quotation, because I find it intriguingly odd. 'What I want, Rosy, is to do worthy the writing, – and to write out myself what I have done'.[309] In the first half of the sentence,

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[308] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 140.

[309] Aptly, considering Lydgate is so concerned here with the formative extract, this passage finds its way into Main's *Sayings*. Alexander Main, *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings*, 2nd Ed. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1875), p. 355.

Eliot chooses to have Lydgate quote from the poem verbatim, without its appearing within quotation marks: 'to do worthy the writing'. Instead of changing the order of the words so as to make syntactical sense, Lydgate's direct use of the extract to define his vocation prompts us to consider the application of text to life. For Lydgate, the poem shapes a language of existence that is meaningful from without the parameters of its original context. This textual appropriation stands for the interpretative consciousness that applies a personal signification to a distinct phrase, whilst performing the reading for a purpose. The syntactically strange beginning of the sentence only makes sense within the context of Lydgate's reading for the self. His drawing of the poem into the prose narrative of his life, without altering the conditions in which it appears, thus images the wider concern with the use we make of such instructive texts and the grammatical forms through which we imagine our being.[310] Lydgate does, however, develop the sentence to provide a commentary on the aforementioned quote; but this too is curiously phrased. His emphasis, it becomes apparent, is on his *character*. Lydgate represents the potential 'to write out myself' as an act of self-creation that precedes any notion of what might be done. The special emphasis on self-authorship, meanwhile, suggests an anxiety surrounding how his life might be interpreted. The text is thus empowered, here, to inform or deform an existence. Lydgate wants to affirm the sense of his own character through the textual sign. His scientific anatomical interests, his conception of self, and ideas surrounding textual form thus become wrapped up in a metaphor which structures the novel as a whole. In teaching a moral through this, Eliot proves the correctness of Devin Griffiths' bold statement that she 'cares more for scientific "parables" than procedures'.[311] Lydgate's concern with living tissue, with leaving a textual record of it, and with self-help through writing, emblematizes the living form which Eliot is writing.

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[310] This reading is obviously indebted to Melissa Anne Raines's *George Eliot's Grammar of Being* (London: Anthem Press, 2011).

[311] Devin Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature Between the Darwins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 198.

Living Words Fed with the Blood of Relevant Meaning

Towards the end of *Middlemarch,* the reader encounters Dorothea, 'the bride of a worn-out life' (739), as she struggles to reconcile her newly realised love for Will Ladislaw with the painful belief that he has formed an attachment with another woman, and a married one at that. Dorothea's loss of faith is both manifested and dealt with physically. Her emotional epiphany, for instance, coincides with a moment of self-tact:

> she pressed her hands hard on the top of her head, and moaned out —
> 'Oh, I did love him!' (739)

The unusual structure of this paragraph, with the articulate consciousness appearing singularly on one line, showcases the moment of realisation that is predicated upon a feeling for the self. The phrenological resonances implicit in the reading of the skull connects the interpretation of the physical form with the acquisition of self-knowledge. The structure of this reading is reflected on the page, as a certain organ of thought is isolated and examined. Eliot, then, develops a therapeutics of objects, or object-lessons. Lying down on the ground of her bedroom, Dorothea

> besought hardness and coldness and aching weariness to bring her relief from the mysterious incorporeal might of her anguish: she lay on the bare floor and let the night grow cold around her; while her grand woman's frame was shaken by sobs as if she has been a despairing child (739)

Dorothea is engaged in an act that resonates profoundly with Eliot's authorial endeavours: she is aiming to give form to feeling. In describing Dorothea's actions, Eliot juxtaposes the 'incorporeal' feeling of misery with the situatedness of the body. Dorothea, who has been so keen to abandon the desires of her body that it alarms the physician in Lydgate, comes in to a reformed contact with herself. In trying to find new forms for emotional relief, Dorothea is reconnected with her physical self. Eliot grounds Dorothea's epiphany within her bodily experience, taking pains to describe how she feels in

the morning: 'She was vigorous enough to have borne that hard night without feeling ill in the body; but she had waked to a new condition: she felt as if her soul had been liberated from its terrible conflict' (740). The change at Dorothea's awakening is not just mental but constitutional. Eliot positions the body at the forefront of her self-development for a reason. Dorothea's changed condition, for all her spiritual longings, is situated in the material world. Her body provides the grounds for a Feuerbachian 'living realism' which appeals to the good sense of Eliot's readership.

As if to knit together the idea of physical, aesthetic, and literary form, Eliot describes how Dorothea imagines Ladislaw, during her cold night, as 'two images – two living forms that tore her heart in two' (739). Recalling Eliot's application of physiological 'consensus' to textual form, Dorothea's belief that she has misread Will tears apart the stable patterns of meaning with which she has defined their relations to one another. The resulting discordancy of form is self-wounding. Dorothea's struggle out of emotional disembodiment conjures up double figures for her grief. One form 'was the bright creature whom she had trusted', the other:

> There, aloof, yet persistently with her, moving wherever she moved, was the Will Ladislaw who was a changed belief, a detected illusion — no, a living man towards whom there could not yet struggle any wail of regretful pity (740)

Eliot, through Dorothea, deliberately marks with a long dash the transition between forms dead and alive, as if she is changing her mind mid-sentence: 'two images — two living forms'; 'a detected illusion — no, a living man'. The sentence structures thus perform a certain aspect of their sense – the text is organic and expansive enough to house ideas both abstract and concrete, ideological or embodied. This is important when we reflect on Dorothea's 'chang[ing] belief' as she alternates between forms alive and dead in order find a figure for her new creed. Not content with referring to purely aesthetic 'images' of Ladislaw, Eliot instead refers to him as she does to the successful literary text: as a living form. Dorothea's imaginative grief produces a fiction of embodiment through which she can

interrogate the physical pain she is experiencing. When she imagines Will, her grief is no longer 'incorporeal' but embodied: 'moving wherever she moved'. In describing this transition from immaterial to earthly emotional forms, Eliot ground's Dorothea's experience within the body. The reference to Will as a 'form' also implies the construction of a narrative, and a false one at that. This, of course, is not the first time that Dorothea has been mistaken in a life form. What follows is a brief account of the misinterpretations of Dorothea which proceed from her hunt for a guide to life – almost a personified self-help book – and thus for 'living words fed with the blood of relevant meaning'. In so-doing, I draw upon Eliot's secularized version of 'the word made flesh'.

Dorothea is shown to be in a constant state of striving after 'an ideal life' (41). Akin to Maggie and Romola, she is also always in search of instruction or a guide. Plagued by questions such as '[w]hat could she do, what ought she to do?', Dorothea has 'an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings of and judgments of a discursive mouse' (26). The persistent and repetitive self-questioning of what she should and ought to do, combined with the manifestation of her 'great mental need', are clearly self-help tropes, whilst her rejection of the 'girlish instruction' available to her makes it apparent that the popular self-help books of the time were largely unavailable to the female sex. Understandably unsatisfied with the 'narrow teaching' of the advice literature allowed her, such as Mrs Frances Elizabeth King's *Female Scripture Character; exemplifying female virtues* (1813), Dorothea turns to living sources of instruction which happen also to be curiously textual (26).

In contemplating her marriage to Casaubon, Dorothea aims to satiate her 'soul-hunger' (note the irrepressible digestive image) through a 'voluntary submission to a guide' (27). The fact that it has taken less than half a page for Dorothea to move from disdainfully contemplating 'the perusal of 'Female Scripture Characters' to categorising Casaubon in terms of a guide(book) should alert us to her displacement of textual wisdom from written to embodied system (26-7). Dorothea believes she

has found in Casaubon 'something beyond the shallows of ladies'-school literature: here was a living Bossuet, […] here was a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint' (23). The literariness of the man she chooses to perform this function means that the boundaries between text and person become emphatically fluid. He is thus aptly described by Mrs Cadwallader's assertion that his blood, if viewed 'under a magnifying-glass', would be 'all semi-colons and parentheses' (65). Crucially these are not letters but characters that need to be embedded in text to have any functionality. They are dependent, for their grammatical cohesion, on the sentence in which they are based. It is thus a particularly sensitive reading of the scholar's existential problem. Casaubon's bloodlines all run to text, so that Dorothea's selection of a living guide over a written one is shown to be an irony and a fundamental error: a mistaken trust in form.

Casaubon poses an ironic embodiment of what is for Eliot a major preoccupation, particularly in this novel: he is the word made flesh. In Eliot's fiction, where knowledge is both figured by and gained from the body, we can see that her prose complies with a language of intelligent and particular feeling rather than a generalised vocabulary written up in fixed and thus opaque characters. Through the inclusion of this spiritual idea within her secular fiction, Eliot shows how words can indeed make moral system material through the form of the body. Marilyn Orr, with a focus on her early fiction, has demonstrated how Eliot 'constructs an aesthetic that is deeply rooted in two fundamental elements of her early experience among Evangelical Christians, incarnation and inwardness'.[312] She also shows how Eliot's incarnational poetics were modulated through her translations of Strauss – who 'redefines the incarnation as the idea of humanity as a whole incarnating Christ' – and Feuerbach.[313] For the latter, the story of the Incarnation, whereby God took on human form, is a parable revealing that '[m]an was already in God, was already God himself, before God became man, *i.e.*, showed himself as

[312] Marilyn Orr, 'Incarnation, Inwardness, and Imagination: George Eliot's Early Fiction', *Christianity and Literature*, 58.3 (Spring 2009): 451-81 (453).
[313] Ibid, p. 456.

man'.[314] According to these thinkers, we can read the patina of our belief systems through the conditions of our own flesh. What Eliot's fiction does is make such ideologies psychologically resonant by mediating them through provincial subjects, the actions and feelings of whom, in their recognisability and applicability to our own daily lives, generates an assent to principles that might otherwise be obscured by their proximity to the theoretic.

Thus, when Eliot describes how 'Miss Brooke argued from words to dispositions not less unhesitatingly than other young ladies of her age', it is important to note that she does so in terms of the long tradition of the word made flesh (23, *emphasis mine*). Dorothea reads Casaubon's words, or rather misreads them, according to an affective or embodied language: words become dispositions. For Dorothea, as for the reader of Eliot's text, '[s]igns are small measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable', particularly if they are based on the infinitely changeable conditions of our own feeling selves (23). Despite being in error, critically speaking, Dorothea nevertheless performs a hermeneutic of idealistic embodiment that we have seen Eliot encourage time and time again throughout her fiction as a source of individual empowerment. This technique of reading, with a finger on the pulse, finds an analogy in a passage from one of Eliot's earliest fictions, *Janet's Repentance* (1857):

> Ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapour, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh; they breath upon us with warm breath, they touch with soft responsive hands, they look at us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power[315]

Ideas, if they are to appear with the same physical presence as the light by which other earthly apparitions are perceived, must be 'thoroughly incarnate' – must appeal to the senses of the individual. In the story from which this passage is taken, Janet is precipitated into her Repentance through the intercession of the Evangelical clergyman, Mr Tryan. He becomes a figure for the kind of mediated

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[314] Feuerbach, *Essence*, p. 49.
[315] Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 293.

instruction that Eliot explores throughout her fiction. Ideas must appeal to the conditions of flesh, must live in this way.

Tryan exercises only a gentle compulsion, but the apprehension of a physical morality is Janet's own. As has already been discussed, to take a breath is to inspire, but this inspiration concurs with our own patterns of behaviour as the rhythmic quality of our breath implies a physical comparability with the body of our exemplar. The impetus to moral improvement, and our communication of it to others is essentially somatic. Take for instance, as Feuerbach does, the ideal of being merciful. This is the province '[n]ot [of] abstract beings – no! only sensuous, living beings, are merciful. Mercy is the *justice of sensuous life*'.[316] Living through feeling enables us to feel for the other, but such a mutuality of affect also connects the individual instinctively to a shared moral language that resists abstraction because registered through and by the body. Dorothea, therefore, participates in the sensuous moral life when considering the unhappy marriage of Rosamond and Lydgate through the lens of her own union: 'all this vivid sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance' (741). In Eliot's estimation, the feeling of sympathy is fundamentally as important and accurate a directive to action as 'acquired knowledge', so much so that the two are interchangeable. It is this that finally enables Dorothea to read character correctly. Through her use of the doctrine of the word made flesh – which she literalises through her physiological language – Eliot therefore revolutionises how the fictional text can apply to the physical and moral readerly body. As Philip Davis has shown, this is what the best literature does, in that it 'can restore the sense of lost primacies'.[317] In evolving this textual practise, Eliot develops a new form of therapeutic literature.

[316] Eliot (trans.), *Essence*, p. 48.
[317] Philip Davis, *Reading for Life*, p. 17.

Physiological Alphabets

> She did not want to deck herself with knowledge – to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action; and if she had written a book she must have done it as Saint Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience. But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr. Casaubon? (80)

Dorothea's troubled search for a guide that is at once written book and living being is a question of life forms. Through the interrogation of 'Notes on Form in Art' and her fictional interventions, this chapter has already demonstrated the fact that, for Eliot, true knowledge could only be successfully generated through logic's attention to the 'nerves and blood' of the physical feeling self. To place such a concept within the consciousness of the novel's main character is thus particularly important as it is perhaps the clearest instance in *Middlemarch* of a recognition that moral understanding is embodied in, and ethical action secured by, the affective resources of the physical self. As David Russell neatly puts it, Eliot thinks 'that philosophical axioms must be proved upon our pulses'.[318] The physical system prescribes a moral one. Dorothea wants to help both herself and others through the anticipated extension of her learning. Naturally, in a novel such as *Middlemarch*, this ambition is couched in bookish as well as bodily terms – the references to 'instruction' and burning the midnight oil all alluding to the self-help text personified, in Dorothea's imagination, by Casaubon. But what of the reference to her own authorial capacities which, by the somewhat odd addition of a semi-colon, are forced to appear as a natural progression from the description of her somatic consciousness? The abrupt transition from corporeal to textual knowledge transmission does a few things. It reinforces the body-as-text metaphor; it alludes to the constructed and material nature of narrative in recalling the St Theresa

[318] Russell, 'Introduction' to *Middlemarch*, p. ix.

exemplar figure (with whom she is linked throughout) as textual model; and, most importantly, it reiterates the alliance between conscience and physiology. 'Authority' and authorship appear at risk of being overwhelmed by the very primacy of the nervous, pounding, powerful body. Indeed, without some external text to refer to, Eliot might be suggesting that there is a danger of placing too much trust in physical form.

At this juncture, it is necessary to interrogate why Saint Theresa is invoked at a time when the body is so manifestly linked to both the conscience and to the text, as well as to Dorothea herself. Unsurprisingly, this can be referred back to the performative capacities of text. The saint came to understand the religious experience as one that is very much of the body. That she entered the Convent of the Incarnation upon her taking of religious orders is a reflection of this. Throughout her autobiography, she is also keen to stress both the danger and the help of the books that she so compulsively read. It is therefore no accident that Eliot begins her novel with a portrait of a woman who wrote what might be seen as religious self-help manuals or guide books. Theresa's works, such as the *Way of Perfection* (1577), were aimed at the instruction of her followers who wanted to learn. Much of her reference to her reading material is hinted at in the opening stages of Eliot's 'Prelude'.[319] In the autobiography, Theresa represents how, in finding a language for faith not just in God but in herself, books were her ultimate resource in the years following her taking of the veil: 'All that time, except immediately after taking Communion, I never ventured to start praying without a book. My soul was as much afraid to engage in prayer without one, as if it had to fight against a host'.[320] This dependence on spiritual guidebooks persists until a time when all of the 'good books' that she could

[319] Theresa's reading of the 'lives of the Saints' with the brother that she 'loved best' leads to them 'agree[ing] to go together to the land of the Moors, begging our way for the love of God, so that we might be beheaded there'.[319] Additionally, Eliot's reference to her burning through the 'many-volumed romances of chivalry' is due to Theresa's confession that she began to be 'lead astray' when, her mother being 'very fond of books of chivalry', she 'began to become addicted to this reading' to the point that she doubts she 'was ever happy if I had not a new book' (3), *The Life of Saint Theresa of Ávila, By Herself*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 26.
[320] Ibid, p. 36.

read in Spanish were taken away from her. She mourns this until hearing God's words of '[d]o not be distressed, for I will give you a living book' so that she has 'had very little or no need for books since'.[321] Theresa's life form is thus strategically co-opted into Dorothea's epistemic system, whilst the latter's realisation that the former lived according to bygone ideals prompts her to commit the error of seeing Casaubon as the only viable saviour. Her mistake, Eliot implies, is in not developing a 'living book' of her own, instead of bonding herself to Casaubon's dead letter.

From the contemplative cell of the religious devotional to the cellular fabric of the body, a language of an embodied morality persists; Eliot's novel might therefore be seen to offer a new kind of cell theory. Theresa notes (as have many of her biographers) the importance of a book her uncle gave her, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* (1527), which she cites as the inspiring force behind her new ability to 'recollect myself'.[322] This attention to holy words, as promoted by the text's author Francisco de Osuna, foregrounds the interpretative act as a means to self-recuperation. The very title of this early how-to book spells out a way of regulating behaviour according to a linguistic code.[323] This most fundamental of systems, whereby each of the twenty-seven letters of the Spanish alphabet stands at the head of a pedagogical statement, is used by Osuna to encourage the memorising of his teachings or, to use a term that he and Theresa would undoubtedly have preferred, the learning of them by heart. As we know that this is an activity that Dorothea readily engages in, given that she 'knew many of the passages of Pascal's Pensées and of Jeremy Taylor by heart', *Middlemarch* bears testimony to the continuation of such a textual tradition despite the relatively modern time in which it is set (8).

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[321] Ibid, p. 185.
[322] Ibid, p. 35.
[323] These spiritual alphabets were a quite common form of expressing a religious doctrine, and of encouraging the memorization of that doctrine in a way that mimics the telling of beads. Given her attention to the works of Thomas á Kempis in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot would possibly have been aware of his *Parvum alpahbetum monachi in scol Dei.*

If Eliot had followed her own advice and 'dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa', then she would have been aware of Osuna's vital influence on her exemplary subject.[324] Osuna and Saint Theresa were proponents of what Peter Tyler refers to as 'the *recogimiento* movement which places the heart and the *oración afectiva/ affective prayer* at the centre of [their] concerns'.[325] This shared concern should be familiar from my chapter on the affective philosophy explored by Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola*, particularly if we remember Maggie's 'sharpest inward cry for help' (437). Whilst there is no clear evidence that she read *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, were Eliot acquainted with only the title, which appears early on in the *Life*, she would surely have made the same connection between the basic units of language being used in order to systematise a form of self-help and have been interested in this early expression of a life form. Osuna's use of a writing system in order to construct a doctrine of a living spirituality that puts the body at the centre of its legibility resonates with Eliot's writing of what I have termed elsewhere a 'corporeal morality'.

Indeed, it is possible to read such an influence into Dorothea's desire to acquire a 'masculine knowledge' of languages such as Latin, Greek, and '[p]erhaps even Hebrew […] at least the alphabet and a few roots – in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian' (59). The Hebraic alphabet becomes, to Dorothea, a sort of ideographic [from the Greek for 'idea' and 'to write'] system. She represents the letter as signing towards not, as we might expect, a greater understanding of Judaic tradition, but active Christian duty. In so doing, Dorothea thinks of the alphabet in the sense deployed by Osuna. The alphabet is a teaching mechanism, but one that can

[324] Gabriela Cunninhame Graham describes how '[a[mongst the most precious and touching of her relics, preserved by her nuns of Avila, is the venerable tome by Francisco de Osuna, whose yellow pages bear the traces of constant study. Whole passages are heavily scored and underlined, whilst on the margins a cross, a heart, a hand pointing (her favourite marks), indicate the quaint thoughts and tender conceits which seemed to her the most worthy of notice in the Gothic text' in *Santa Teresa: Being Some Account of Her Life and Times*, vol. I (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1894). The description gestures towards the materiality of advice culture discussed in my first chapter. The reference of the book being one of her most 'touching' relics is eloquent in suggesting the tactile page, scored with a living hand, and thus co-opted into a personal system that is founded upon individual interpretation and reaction: 'a heart, a hand pointing'.
[325] Peter Tyler, *Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Soul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 48.

be wrested from its conformity to a series of impartial, concrete, and legible forms and compelled instead to perform the political, social, emotive and spiritual intentions of the person who uses it.

Written language in *Middlemarch*, isolated even within the single letter, is sometimes seen as an object of empowerment. Dorothea, just like her first husband, believes that philology might lead to the apprehension of an ultimate ontology. Her 'core of things' is Casaubon's key. Eliot's favourite philologist, Max Müller, appreciated the fluidity and yet the power of the writing system when he wrote his 'Proposals for a Uniform Missionary Alphabet' in 1853. He hoped to speak universally in favour of the Christian cause. Importantly, he grounded his proposals for this proto-Esperanto in the human body which he calls a '*physiological alphabet*'.[326] Intersecting with other nineteenth-century debates surrounding the physiological origins of language, such as Richard Trench's *On the Study of Words* (1851) and Charles Kraitsir's *Glossology, Being a Treatise on the Nature of Language and the Language of Nature* (1852), Müller announces this project in unambiguously physical terms that interestingly recalls Hutton's *Middlemarch* criticism: 'We proceed to-day to dissect the body of language'.[327] Despite the overarching spiritual theme, and the distinctly colonial connotations of Müller's missionary proposal, I think that Eliot would have appreciated the notion that we can feel our way not only into an articulation of what we mean, but also into a way of making ourselves understood to the other, or the other understood to ourselves. Such an idea is present in the performance of a gesture, which make legible the internal mind on the visible space of the body. As she writes in *The Lifted Veil*, we 'automatically perform the gesture we feel to be wanting in another'.[328] Indeed, a physiological alphabet that can be read through gesture is explicitly used by Eliot to define characterological 'type'.

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[326] F. Max Müller, *Proposals for a Missionary Alphabet* (London: A. and G. A. Spottiswood, 1854), p. 2.
[327] F. Max Müller, 'The Physiological Alphabet', *Lectures on the Science of Language: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in 1863*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 95-159 (95).
[328] George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, ed. Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 38.

Following a meeting with Mary Garth, which has only confirmed Mr Farebrother in his affection for her and his conviction that she prefers Fred Vincy, the narrator describes how

> As the Vicar walked to Lowick, any one watching him closely might have seen him twice shrug his shoulders. I think that the rare Englishmen who have this gesture are never of the heavy type – for fear of any lumbering instance to the contrary, I will say, hardly ever; they have usually a fine temperament and much tolerance towards the smaller errors of men (themselves inclusive). (383)

As such, the Vicar becomes an embodied aphorism, of the kind that will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis. He necessitates a peculiarity of observation; to shrug one's shoulders is usually interpreted as a mark of indifference, whereas Eliot's narrator wants us to understand it to mean something entirely different. As such, the gesture becomes manifestly communicative. Through an attention to the slight shrugs of Farebrother's shoulders, Eliot therefore mediates a self-improving hermeneutic technique. So as not to be a 'heavy type', we must tolerate errors in others and be aware of those in our selves. Meanwhile, Eliot's anticipation of, and allowance for, a departure from a universal body language – the 'lumbering instance to the contrary' – also performs a textual tolerance and consciousness of potential error. Thus, the Vicar's body, and the text in which it is contained, teaches through the simplest and most ancient of communications: a gesture.

The body is therefore a figure for language. Indeed, returning to echoes of the Hebraic language by looking to *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot shows how sometimes it *is* language. As William R. McKelvy points out, the Jewish mystic and author Mordecai sees in Daniel 'an unintelligible text' that will nevertheless become a fleshly archive within which to store not only his written belief – his corpus – but also his own soul when his physical body is silenced.[329] In trying to convince Daniel of the connection between them, Mordecai juxtaposes a physiological alphabet with a conventional language

[329] William R. McKelvy, *The English Cult of Literature: Devoted Readers, 1774-1880* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 243.

of legible signs. Note how he therefore combines two systems of language without fully dismissing the efficiency of either:

> Your doubts lie as light as dust on my belief. I know the philosophies of this time and of other times; if I chose I could answer a summons before their tribunals. I could silence the beliefs which are the mother-tongue of my soul and speak with the rote-learned language of a system, that gives you the spelling of all things, sure of its alphabet covering them all (*DD*, 469)

This passage is difficult to analyse because Mordecai does not so wholly condemn written systems that aim to standardise all things within a rigid vocabulary in the way that we might expect. Instead, he seems to allow for the translation of the 'mother-tongue of his soul' into something verbally comprehensible to other readers. In a sense, this means that language has the plastic capacity to codify our innermost beliefs. It can be personalized. This naturally gestures to the form in which we find this idea: the novel has at the heart of its concerns the desire to shape morality through language and also through interpretation. Through the readings of both Dorothea and Mordecai, Eliot analyses how much faith we put in textual forms and how they contribute to the way we live our lives. Here, Mordecai is placing the same faith in language as Dorothea, though more equivocally. His belief utterances come from within, voiced according to a physical vocabulary that needs no 'rote-learned language' to make itself articulate. The 'language of a system', like a philosophical one, facilitates the regulation of conviction into recognisable patterns so that it can be read. Something, however – as Mordecai suggests elsewhere in this chapter – is always lost in translation. This something is not alphabetical but essential. Mordecai seeks a literal incorporation of his ancient beliefs in the body of Daniel. In no other book does Eliot so firmly connect the process of textual inspiration with the life, and more specifically the breath of the body. Mordecai describes his ideas as coming to him as 'an inspiration, because I was a Jew, and felt the heart of my race beating with me […] I counted this heart, and this breath' along with a range of bodily activity only 'as fuel to the divine flame' (463). Mordecai's process of wisdom transference – his own 'heart experience' – is thus inevitably one of

embodiment and this is why it is so important that Deronda shares the blood of his race. Systems of language matter to Mordecai, especially if they have a pulse.

In forwarding this covert philosophy of the text, Eliot is suggesting that writing systems can actually morph into a form that suits the internal language of the individual consciousness. In this, she is like Mordecai, placing faith in a legible alphabet because of its capacity to expand beyond the limits of its visible form. Eliot's image of the personalisable text complies with this chapter's argument about *Middlemarch* as an animate text: it is alive to disparate and particular readings. It also caters to the act of literary criticism itself. The moral or emotional concerns that the reader saturates any truly effective and alive fiction with is analogous to the critical analysis of a reader who wishes to wrestle the words of a novel into a functioning thesis. Perhaps because of all her years of experience as a literary commentator, Eliot is wryly gesturing to this form of 'helping oneself'. The text expands to address a figure that is central to how Eliot viewed the form of her prose, which is that it must always be incorporative. This means, in its simplest terms, that one body is taken into another. Eliot probes, through her affective text, the means through which the body of the text might take its substance from an external one, informing and being informed by the feeling self to which it is addressed.

You are a Poem

When Will applies Dorothea's curious appellation, he negotiates the boundaries between life and art. In a novel that consistently represents the interface between body and text as an important formal innovation, the explicit juncture between self and textual form is important. Text is a praxis, formed from the versatile experience of the individual life. Systems – of language, of ethics – are foregrounded through a physiological primacy. When Dorothea later asks of Will, "'[w]hat is your religion? […] I mean – not what you know about religion, but the belief that helps you most'", she alludes to this moral privacy. Written doctrines are useless in the finding of something to live by – something that

helps (368). An active and sustaining faith is self-developed: text is tissue. Dorothea has broken from her search for an external ethical guide. Will's statement, meanwhile, seriously encourages the philosophical question of how one can be both a living being and a poem and this is compatible with how we allow texts to become part of our lives. J. Hillis Miller shows how Dorothea's being a poem is performative. 'She is a poem because, like a poem, she "produces" by being what she is. She performs by being herself, as in its way does a great novel like *Middlemarch*'.[330] Whilst I agree with this, I depart from the ease with which he transitions from characterization to the novel as a whole.

'Do not be distressed, for I will give you a living book': the precedent of Saint Theresa's internal structures of text is figured once again through Dorothea's characterisation as a 'poem'. The physiological alphabet that she strives to read outside of self is actually shown to reside within it. To be a poet, according to Will, is to be in possession of:

> a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that condition by fits only.'
>
> 'But you leave out the poems,' said Dorothea. 'I think they are wanted to complete the poet. I understand what you mean about knowledge passing into feeling, for that seems to be just what I experience. But I am sure I could never produce a poem.'
>
> 'You are a poem — and that is to be the best part of a poet — what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods,' said Will. (209)

Will's answer to Dorothea's '[b]ut you leave out the poems' is a firm rejection of the distinction between life form and text. The notion of feeling one's way into knowledge in a make-shift production of living text accords with Dorothea's learning to 'conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling – an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects' of Casaubon's 'equivalent centre of self' (198). Eliot allows space, within her novel, for the imaginative and sensitive engagement of the individual with the object, whose weighted, visible, and tactile presence informs without explicit instruction. Of course, it is necessary that these teaching forms be

[330] J. Hillis Miller, *Reading for Our Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2012), p. 116.

'equivalent' to the student who views them, i.e. an embodiment or a life form. Dorothea's philosophical pursuit of a 'binding theory' which could mediate her equal impulses towards 'life and doctrine' (79), held in tension by 'a nature altogether ardent, theoretic', performs the structures which Eliot's novel incorporates (27). How is knowledge to be communicated to the senses without dictating an experience of unparticipated sensation? Lewes considers the question of knowledge production, or how we create our own wisdom, in a way that appeals to a sense of how this might be achieved through form. In *The Foundations of a Creed* (1874), he details an 'analogy between the growth of an organism and the growth of knowledge':

> The sphere of knowledge is forever widening. From hour to hour and from day to day the individual experience is enlarged, from century to century the experience of the race. In direct contact with Nature through Sense, and in indirect contact through Thought, man is incessantly bringing more and more of the illimitable Unknown within the circle of the Known, — *assimilating it*, incorporating the new experiences in the old[331]

Along with his focus on making contact through both feeling and logic, articulates some the ideas that this chapter had attempted to develop. For Lewes, and for Eliot, the body was not just a way of communicating things to the consciousness – it is a consciousness. We know that *Middlemarch* is partially about the pursuit of self-knowledge, but how is that knowledge to be communicated without intruding upon the legitimate boundaries of the individual self? Through her use of the actuality as well as the metaphoricity of the feeling readerly body, Eliot communicates a knowledge that grows with the body, 'like a graft to a tree'. In dispensing with calcified instruction in favour of providing a text that can be lived through, Eliot creates a form that appeals to the motile systems of independent readers. She creates a life form whose interpretations are illimitable, for '[w]ho shall tell what may be the effect of writing?' (386).

Chapter Five

[331] Lewes, *The Foundations of a Creed*, vol. 1, p. 107.

Wit as Wisdom: Systems of Comedy in the Fiction of George Meredith

When we know ourselves Fools, we are already something better.[332]

> Among the visitors that I met at Morley's was George Meredith, who, of course, held me spellbound by his brilliant table-talk […] We had to listen as best we could while Meredith made merry in his deliciously extravagant manner over the unlucky attempts of some nouveau riche to spread a luxurious table and select choice of wines. Our host, shaken by laughter to the verge of tears, had at last to plead for a pause in the Rabelaisian torrent.[333]

This is how the psychologist and writer James Sully remembered his first meeting with George Meredith at the home of his editor. The picture is of a man striking people dumb with a constant flow of comic sentences. His conversation gravitated around three things that are always important to Meredith: an eye for the ridiculous in society, a self-reflexive turn for situational comedy (his table-talk is about a table) and, perhaps above all else, a concern with digestion. There is something else that such an anecdote brings to mind: the potential mischances that are associated with trying to bring something new (or old) to the table. I mention this because there is nothing more 'common' to Meredith studies than discussing his novels in relation to his theory of comedy, which I am also about to do.

Some of the best critical work to have emerged on Meredith since the 1960s has revolved around Meredith's use of comedy. This is unsurprising, given that he continually theorised a comic aesthetic through his fiction and, most famously, in *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* in 1877. Drawing upon the vast resources created by such a critical preoccupation, I explore how, by focusing on Meredith's reformative idea of comedy in terms of embodiment, we might reinvigorate such readings. Elisha Cohn's brief but insightful take on Meredith's use of comedy complements this. Exploring his 'cultural project for novel-writing and novel-reading as a means of generating self-

[332] Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, p. 9.
[333] James Sully, *My Life and Friends: A Psychologist's Memories* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1918), p. 133.

reflection and prompting cultural change', Cohn shows how Meredith 'proposes that the best and most advanced forms of writing expose social truths through laughter, without mockery and cynicism'.[334] This chapter focuses on how comedy allows for a like reading of the self through this mode, which Cohn and I are united in noting is mediated through the form of the body.

Gillian Beer's essay on 'Meredith's Idea of Comedy', which 'is more intellectual than humour, less derisive than satire', offers some striking arguments in its attempt to define her subject of enquiry.[335] Beer shows how Meredith's continual 'tussle between the two values of reason and passion' finds some reconciliation in his development of a tragi-comic style which allowed him to indulge both the detached rationality of the Comic Spirit, and an emotional engagement with his characters.[336] Nicholas Dames and Sean O' Toole, meanwhile, both consider *The Egoist: A Comedy in Narrative* (1879), partly through what that novel's titular genre meant to the author. Dames helpfully gestures towards a technique of self-improvement latent in the novel: 'The vast windiness of narcissism is deflated and made comprehensible by the puncturing precisions of comic wit'.[337] He pursues a reading of Meredith's complex use of organic form through quoting from Meredith's *Essay*, in which the connection between the successful comic form and the body is made explicit. Of Molière, the *Essay*'s exemplar figure, Meredith writes how his 'moral does not hang like a tail […] but is in the heart of his work, throbbing with every pulsation of an organic structure'.[338] Like Eliot, the representation of moral thought as something that seems to live is important to Meredith.

O' Toole also helpfully links what he refers to as the 'embodied dispositions' that populate *The Egoist* to the comic theory that the novel pursues. In an enlightening study of everything from gestures

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[334] Elisha Cohn, *Still Life,* p. 122.
[335] Gillian Beer, 'Meredith's Idea of Comedy: 1876-1880', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 20.2 (September 1965): 165-76 (165).
[336] Ibid, 167.
[337] Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, p. 193.
[338] George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897), p. 34. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

to narrative form, O'Toole describes how Meredith 'links comedy to the bodily habitus and the bodily habitus to narrative', spotlighting the idea that 'the intellect is to be found in bodily movements and tensions'.[339] Whilst this focus on *The Egoist* is undoubtedly productive, my chapter largely moves away from this text in order to analyse some under-explored aspects of Meredith's comic prose which he specifically mobilises in aid of readerly self-help. The Comic Spirit for Meredith is an indwelling faculty that bridges both the rational and instinctive parameters of the single self. As such, it is a reflective agent for self-change that he aims to embed within the reading of his novels.

Meredith was the student of Jean Paul Richter, whose own theory of humour, detailed in his *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1804), seeks to balance contesting claims of the material and metaphysical held in tension within the subjective self. Richter's theory represents what William Coker refers to as 'a dissonant aesthetics' which figures a 'fusion of transcendence and immanence, or marriage between mind and body'.[340] For Richter, there can be no purely intellectual thought without the material world, and this is something that Meredith seems to take for granted in the development of his theory. The lineage of such a philosophy is easily traceable through another of Meredith's comic heroes, Thomas Carlyle, who, in an essay on Richter, describes how '[t]rue humour springs not more from the head than from the heart; it is not contempt, its essence is love; it issues not in laughter, but in still smiles, which lie far deeper'.[341] In a passage from the *Essay* – which is clearly influenced by Carlyle's article, so similar is it in tone and the literary examples it provides – Meredith writes that the 'laughter of Comedy' is 'nearer a smile; often no more than a smile', whilst literary comic greats such as Shakespeare and Cervantes encourage 'the richer laugh of heart and mind in one' (88, 95). In this way,

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[339] Sean O'Toole, 'Meredithian Slips: Embodied Dispositions and Narrative Form in *The Egoist*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39.2 (2011): 499-524 (519, 504).
[340] William Coker, 'Jean Paul's Lunacy, or Humour as Trans-Critique' in *All Too Human: Laughter, Humour, and Comedy in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Lydia L. Moland (New York: Springer, 2019), pp. 51-71 (69).
[341] Thomas Carlyle, 'Jean Paul Friedrich Richter' (1826), *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Henry Duff Traill, vol. 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25 (17).

Meredith's idea of the successful comic form, where the moral is 'in the heart of [the] work, throbbing', combines with his conception of 'thoughtful laughter': a philosophy that is performed by, and predicated on, the pulse (62).

Such a consideration of what Nigel Bell refers to as Meredith's 'spirit […] of critical intelligence' might prompt an examination of what distinguishes 'wit' from 'humour'.[342] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has itemized the differences between the two modes as the Victorians saw them: 'Wit signalled artfulness, archness, turning other people into the butt of our jokes: it was a quality that manifested itself chiefly in laughing at. Humour, by contrast, signalled generosity, sympathy, recognising that we are all potentially ridiculous in each other's eyes: it was a quality that manifested itself chiefly in laughing with'.[343] George Eliot, however, cautions against making such distinctions, which she argues have become a critical preoccupation at the occasional expense of practical analysis. In her essay on 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine', she helpfully outlines the separate definitions accorded to Humour ('poetic', 'descriptive', 'whimsical') and Wit ('intellect[ual]', 'unexpected', 'sharply defined as a crystal'), before adding that '[l]ike all other species, Wit and Humour overlap and blend with each other […] facetious hybrids'.[344] Meredith's work is closer to the hybridity that Eliot evokes.

Meredith explores the idea that comedy as a self-corrective is somewhat blood-borne throughout his works. In the *Essay*, for instance, he acknowledges that:

> Laughter is open to perversion, like other good things; the scornful and brutal sorts are not unknown to us; but the laughter directed by the Comic spirit is a harmless wine, conducing to sobriety in the degree that it enlivens. It enters you like fresh air into a study; as when one of the sudden contrasts of the comic idea floods the brain like reassuring daylight. You are cognizant of the true kind by feeling that you take it in, savour it, and have what flowers live on, natural air for food. That which you give out – the joyful roar – is not the better part; let that go to good fellowship and the benefit of the lungs. (93)

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[342] Nigel Bell, 'The Egoist and Meredith's Essay on Comedy', *English Studies in Africa*, 53.2 (December 2010): 3-20 (6).
[343] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, 'The Comedian as the Letter C: Wit in *Martin Chuzzlewit*' in *Reading Victorian Literature: Essays in Honour of J. Hillis Miller*, ed. Julian Wolfreys and Monika Szuba (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 299-315.
[344] Eliot, *Selected Essays*, pp. 70, 72.

The Comic Spirit enters the blood-stream like 'harmless wine' that, in causing a greater 'sobriety' the more it 'enlivens', advocates for a greater self-control than if we were without it. Countless philosophers, when writing about humour, have equated it with a loss of self-control, ranging from Plato, to the Stoics, through Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain, and on to Henri Bergson. Where Meredith differs markedly, overwhelmingly, and (given the rootedness of this tradition) surprisingly, is in his representation of the truly comic apprehension not as a loss of self-control, but as a gaining of it. Whilst such a loss is easily figured through the shaking and importunate body, apparently uncontrollable to reason, Meredith inverts this form to show how the body and mind can enact an unlikely partnership through a 'laughter directed by the Comic Spirit'. Punning on the term 'spirit', Meredith employs one of his favoured topics – wine – in order to show how comedy is imbibed to the benefit of one's moral system. Sully writes in his own *Essay on Laughter* (1902) how 'a bitter laugh seems both to taste differently and sound differently from a perfectly joyous one'.[345] This reference to the palatable and the unpalatable joke, with humour being a matter of aesthetic and personal taste, complements Meredith's depiction of the valuable comic idea as one that can be 'savour[ed]'. Importantly, it is not the intellect, but 'feeling', that proves 'the true kind' of self-improving comedy, whilst laughter is both literally and figuratively inspiration, conspiring with feeling and mind so that something learnt lingers once the guffaw has passed out of the boundaries of the body.

This chapter's reading of the terms of improving literature through Meredithian ideas of embodiment hopes to facilitate a new understanding of the 'comic idea' within his novels which might be seen as letting 'fresh air into a study'. It focuses on two comic moments from *One of Our Conquerors* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* respectively, choosing to begin with the most basic form of physical comedy: the pratfall of Victor Radnor. It also considers the context for what I term Meredith's 'Systems of Comedy' because of the first word's applicability to written, moral, and bodily forms.

[345] James Sully, *An Essay on Laughter* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), p. 48.

Under the heading 'Nervous Laughter', I discuss the author's anatomical references to comic theory and the context of the influential nineteenth-century Relief Theory. I conclude with a visit to Meredith's Comic Pharmacopoeia to demonstrate how the terms through which he prescribed a therapeutics of literary comedy are often those, to quote from *Diana of the Crossways*, of an 'investigating physician' (II, 67).

Peels of Laughter

> A gentleman, noteworthy for a lively countenance and a waistcoat to match it, crossing London Bridge at noon on a gusty April day, was almost magically detached from his conflict with the gale by some sly strip of slipperiness, abounding in that conduit of the markets, which had more or less performed the trick upon preceding passengers, and now laid this one flat amid the shuffle of feet, peaceful for the moment as the uncomplaining who have gone to Sabrina beneath the tides.[346]

The habit of reading the works of George Meredith with a furrowed brow, deliberately encouraged by the circuitous complexity of the author's prose, tends to militate against the relaxation of those features into a happy smile or laugh. Yet Meredith is a comic novelist. The passage above is – as close as is possible in prose – a piece of physical comedy. That this has not been treated at any length is unsurprising. Gillian Beer has provided the best (albeit brief) commentary on this 'staple of raucous comedy': 'Meredith transforms the fall and the gentleman's graceless encounter with his working class rescuer into a complex exploration of half-conscious inner life as well as a meditation on political power and class conflict. The absurdity of the fall itself remains important' because of 'the slippage between comedy and overwhelming psychological analysis'.[347] The complexity of Meredith's pratfall is funny in itself and it falls to the reader to try to work out why this is.

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[346] George Meredith, *One of Our Conquerors*, ed. Margaret Harris (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1975), p. 1. All further references will be to this edition.

[347] Gillian Beer, 'Systems and Extravagance: Darwin, Meredith, Tennyson' in *Darwin, Tennyson and Their Readers*, ed. Valerie Purton (London: Anthem Press, 2013), pp. 135-53 (148-9). Vanessa L. Ryan also points to this beginning as a 'comic moment', but leaves the question of why this is unanswered in *Thinking Without Thinking*, p. 144.

Taken from the opening paragraph to Meredith's *One of Our Conquerors*, the description of Victor Radnor's progress across London Bridge is tortuous, opaque, allusive, and possibly best summed up by the title of the proceeding chapter which Meredith, with typically self-reflexive humour, marks as transitioning 'Through the Vague to the Infinitely Little' (11). One must seriously engage all intellectual capacity to be in with a chance of understanding the first chapter in which everything from social class and satirical journalism to the state of the nation is drawn in and out of view at a pace. But this is surely part of the joke, as by the fourth, or perhaps fifth reading, one begins to harbour the suspicion that it is all serious nonsense. It has taken our dwelling on such themes – centring on classist and nationalist ideologies – in order to be let into the joke which Meredith has written out in long-form. The fall of a man is funny; the interrogation of why that may be, however, is not. Comedy, Meredith is aware, allows for this self-investigation into the motivations behind laughter which are always social, subjective, and embodied. As such, it re-focuses the reader's attention on the body and the lessons we might learn from its energetic apprehension of the comic in life and literature.

'[W]ho can follow, for instance, the first paragraph of the novel?', an early reviewer asks, firmly concluding that '[t]his is surely not the way to write'.[348] This bemusement might inspire a companionable smile in the modern-day critic of Meredith who must recognise these feelings of frustration from their own reading of this problematic novel. We must also consider, however, that the style of the opening passage – and indeed of the entire first chapter – is performative of its substance; it is meant to trip you up. The 'sly strip of slipperiness' is what Radnor later remembers to be an 'orangey spot on London Bridge' (94), these descriptions being the nearest Meredith can bring himself to saying what the object actually is: a piece of orange peel. This novel – which traces the attempts of a city banker to cancel out his daughter's illegitimate birth by attracting a noble suitor

[348] Unsigned review, [untitled], *Saturday Review,* lxxi (May 1891), cited in *The Critical Heritage: George Meredith*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 357.

through a variety of financial and societal interventions – thus begins with one of the oldest acts of physical comedy in the book. It is an instance of what V. S. Pritchett finds 'maddening' – in a novel where he deems the 'Comic Spirit to be in abeyance' – 'that Meredith could follow every fine thread of this moral dilemma yet sandwich it from time to time between some of his stickiest prose'.[349] One might say slipperiest prose, as the typical Meredithian text is littered with sly bits of slipperiness that the reader can trip up on. The failures of comprehension exercise a gravitational downwards pull so as to engender the feeling of misunderstanding the joke and therefore exclusion from a form of complicit knowingness. The reader is consequently compelled to work hard to gain a footing in Meredith's textual world.

Henri Bergson (to whom Meredith is often compared) also writes of the man who falls over and raises a laugh in his seminal essay on *Laughter* (1900).[350] He describes how the 'laughable element […] consists of a certain *mechanical inelasticity*, just where one would expect to find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliableness of a human being'.[351] Bergson's conception of the comic figure in freefall resonates with Meredith's representation of his 'Conqueror' who, having got to his feet with some assistance from onlookers, begins by 'questioning his familiar behind the waistcoat amazedly, to tell him how such a misadventure could have occurred to him of all men' (1). Radnor's fall puts him at odds with the conception of himself as infallible, having been 'performed' upon by an object which by the subsequent reversal of power renders him the object of misfortune. Self-knowledge – its absence or constitution – is a major concern in the comic theory of both Meredith and Bergson. The opening chapter dramatizes Radnor's lack of it, whilst slyly gesturing to the fact that he might gain it 'upon the close of his history' (10). For Bergson, the temporary suspension of Radnor's animation

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[349] Pritchett, *George Meredith and English Comedy*, p. 120.
[350] Indeed, Bergson's and Meredith's essays on comedy are collected together in a book edited by Wylie Sypher: *Comedy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
[351] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudsley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1911), p. 10.

would comply with his famous theory that comedy happens when 'something mechanical [is] encrusted upon the living'.[352] He further writes this 'general law', that '[*a*]*ny incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned*'.[353] As the following section will detail, Meredith wants to make a moral out of the strenuously embodied figure of Victor Radnor.

Margaret Harris, who has considered the opening chapter to *One of Our Conquerors* in great depth, both in her edition of the novel and in an illuminating article on Meredith's prose style, has perhaps come closest to defining Meredith's allusive form of comedy in her depiction of his 'hyperactive verbal awareness' as 'an almost metaphysical wit'.[354] *Almost* metaphysical, because no matter how diffuse and abstracted Meredith allows his comic prose to become, this form of philosophical speculation is always weighted down in the world of flesh and blood. Radnor, for all his seemingly high-brow musings on the state of the nation, is shown to be a comic embodiment: he bears 'a lively countenance' which is soon to betray a Bergsonian 'comic physiognomy'.[355] Radnor's role as a comic figure takes on another aspect, one of caricature, as a mournful glance down at his waistcoat (dirtied by one of the 'little band of observant Samaritans […] who knew himself honourably unclean') 'necessitated wrinkles of which could be stretched by malevolence to a semblance of haughty disgust; reminding us, through our readings in journals, of the wicked overblown prince regent' (2). This reading of the face is at odds with Radnor's own attempts to stage-manage his reaction to the ludicrous state in which he has found himself:

> he laughed, shook his coat-tails, smoothed the back of his head rather thoughtfully, thankfully received his runaway hat, nodded bright beams to right and left, and making light of the muddy stigmas imprinted on the pavement, he scattered another shower of his nods and smiles around, to signify, that as his good friends would wish, he thoroughly felt his legs and could walk unaided. (1)

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[352] Ibid, p. 49.
[353] Ibid, pp. 50-1.
[354] Margaret Harris, "The Fraternity of Old Lamps': Some Observations on George Meredith's Prose Style', *Style*, 7.3 (Fall 1973): 271-93 (284).
[355] Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 22.

Many of the major comic theorists – from Bergson to Simon Critchley – reference the 'runaway hat' as a comic signifier. Herbert Spencer, for instance, begins his article on 'The Physiology of Laughter' with the question: 'Why do we smile when a child puts on a man's hat?', whilst Sully has a whole section in his introduction in which 'The Comic in the Hat' is examined in his *Essay on Laughter*.[356] As Sully writes, 'the hat has become a symbol, and means for us the man's hat and the dignity which belongs to it'.[357] Meredith is therefore drawing on a well-known comic figure for embarrassment in this description. The highly gestural description of Radnor's recovery, meanwhile, anticipates the physical comedy of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp. The pacey short clauses, perpetuated by so many commas, give the passage an accelerated quality that does justice to Eugene Ionesco's principle that '[i]f you want to turn tragedy into comedy, speed it up'.[358] Radnor's body obtrudes itself to the momentary detriment of his self-control when he slips. His immediate reaction is to engage his body performatively in attempting to re-write the preceding narrative, wrestling a physicality that has betrayed him back into a regular pattern of behaviour.

In dramatizing Radnor's self-encounter, Meredith stages the act of comedy which works on the motile border between the physical and the cerebral upon which both battle for supremacy. Meredith's prose revels in these philosophical grey-areas in which the act of laughing or falling appears. In this, he is complemented by the work of Helmuth Plessner, who analyses that 'dual and intermediate creature', the human being, through the expressions of *Laughing and Crying* (1940), which he describes

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[356] Herbert Spencer, 'The Physiology of Laughter', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1 (March 1860): 395-402 (395).
[357] Sully, *Essay on Laughter*, p. 16.
We might remember the famous comic scene in which Vladimir and Estragon swap hats for a prolonged period in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952).
[358] Eugene Ionesco, quoted in Matthew Bevis, *Comedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 28.

as falls in their own way.[359] These expressions form new relations to what Plessner ingeniously distinguishes as the 'living body in a physical body'[360]:

> Man falls into their power; he breaks—out laughing, and lets himself break—into tears. He responds to something by laughing and crying, but not with a form of expression which could be appropriately compared with verbal utterance, expressive movement, gesture, or action. He responds—with his body as body, as if from the impossibility of being able to find an answer himself. And in the loss of control over himself and his body, he reveals himself at the same time as a more than bodily being who lives in a state of tension with regard to his physical existence yet is wholly and completely bound to it.[361]

Plessner's focus on these moments of breakage – a term that bears within it a physical rupture as well as a psychic pause – implies that it is in the hiatus that such moments allow us from being in control of the self and the body that we access a greater knowledge of our inner as well as outer life. Meredith participates fully in what Plessner refers to as an anthropological philosophy. He is clear throughout *One of Our Conquerors* that the fall of Victor Radnor is responsible for any self-development that he eventually obtains. We watch as he is filled with reformative feelings such as self-doubt and a new reflectiveness 'never afflicting him anterior to the stupid fall on London Bridge' (191). Meredith subtly encodes the serious nineteenth-century preoccupation with self-improvement within the comic situation. Not only this, but it is the sense of the body that teaches the capacity to treat of oneself in clarifying terms.

Dwelling on the consequences of his fall, Radnor exclaims

> 'But I am treating it seriously!' he said, and jerked a dead laugh while fixing the button of his coat.
>
> That he should have treated it seriously, furnished next the subject of cogitation; and here it was plainly suggested, that a degradation of his physical system, owing to the shock of the fall, must be seen and acknowledged; for it had become a perverted engine, to pull him down among the puerilities. (4)

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[359] Helmuth Plessner, *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behaviour*, trans. James Spencer Churchill and Majorie Grene (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 14.
[360] Ibid, p. 32.
[361] Ibid, p. 31.

Aliveness, we have seen, matters to comic perception so that Radnor's 'dead laugh' signifies his sense of humour failure. As such, Radnor's pratfall emblematizes 'a conception of the Comic that refines even to pain', which he approvingly notes Molière to have performed (*Essay*, 52). Through this, Meredith demonstrates how solipsism is somatic and how the body might represent a pretty accurate index to egoism, were one trained to read it for a diagnosis. Radnor settles for a vaguely scientific explanation for his misplaced seriousness in the 'degradation of his physical system'. Ironically, however, the term 'degradation' relates to one of the chief theories of humour in the nineteenth century. Alexander Bain, via the Hobbesian theory that laughter is produced by a sudden feeling of superiority to the laughable object, represented the 'occasion of the ludicrous' as 'the degradation of some person or interest possessing dignity in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion'.[362] Through Radnor's recognition of his literal and figurative fall, Meredith embodies the terms of degradation, exploiting the term's organic meaning in addition to its comic antecedents.

Radnor anatomises his consciousness through the interpretation of his body. The comic scene has moved irrepressibly inwards, through the physical comedy of Radnor's fall, zooming in on the surface caricature of his lively features, and still further into his own contemplation of his 'system'. Such a progression is an exercise in intimacy, which performs something that Meredith wants to say about comedy. The body moves from being the object of physical comedy during Radnor's slip to being the locus of his psychological fall: 'for it had become a perverted engine, to *pull him down* among the puerilities'. Intellect and bodily sensation cohere to form a method for reading a life, and this is no more apparent than in the moment of comic apprehension. This interpretation of the body, meanwhile, coupled with Radnor's physiological hermeneutics, showcases the kind of embodied criticism that Meredith wants his readers to perform. The fall is emblematic of Radnor's comedy of anti-superiority. He goes from feeling himself the child of fortune to being painfully aware of his

[362] Alexander Bain, quoted in James Sully, *An Essay on Laughter,* p. 121.

degradation with a slip of the foot. As the French critic Ramon Fernandez writes, in a much-admired essay about Meredith's ultimate optimism, '[i]f the ego skids on things, the ego must be badly balanced; if things vanish in it, then it does not preserve their essentials'.[363] This egoistic skidding is literalised in Radnor's unbalancing episode with the orange peel. Such a device teaches him a lesson that slowly crystalizes throughout the text.

Nervous Laughter

> Science misses an advance for want of a live subject to dissect…Society must consent to see its members laid bare if it has the will to improve.[364]

With this aphorism, written in one of his early notebooks, Meredith explicitly refers the improvement of society to a vivisectionist and anatomical figure. The specificity of the 'live subject', meanwhile, implies that society cannot be changed without attention first and foremost to the single self. Cohn uses this maxim to demonstrate how it features in the claims Meredith makes for his own literature as means of laying bear the human condition and improving it through the reader's consequent identification with the thing exposed. This figures only a slight departure from Bergson's later claim that a 'humourist is a moralist disguised as a scientist, something like an anatomist who practices dissection with the sole object of filling us with disgust'.[365] Cohn writes, specifically in relation to *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, how the maxim 'implies an analogy between science and the biographical form of the novel itself – both keenly observe the "live subject" by probing the surface and revealing the inward'.[366] As Meredith throughout his career consistently linked the improvement of society with the

[363] Ramon Fernandez, *Messages*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927), p. 190.
[364] Beer and Harris (eds.), *The Notebooks of George Meredith*, p. 43.
[365] Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 128.
[366] Cohn, *Still Life*, p. 122.

correct valuation of the Comic Spirit, the potential for the comic style to be linked to this anatomical figure should be explored further.

Of the many comic authors who preceded Meredith, he is most often compared to Renaissance author and physician François Rabelais. This comparison, alongside Meredith's aphorism, encourages a scrutiny of a drawing depicting Rabelais at work on one of his satirical works. As we can see from Fig. 3., Rabelais is depicted in the very attitude described by Meredith. The point of Rabelais' quill could either be positioned on the page, or in the flesh of one of his live subjects, whilst his gaze

RABELAIS dissecting society and writing his book

Fig. 3: From The Works of Rabelais*, illustrated by Gustave Doré*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1873), p. 9.

dwells indeterminably on both. It is possible that Meredith had this image in mind when writing not only the above aphorism, but also of those whom 'Rabelais would call agelasts; that is to say, non-

laughers; men who are in this respect as dead bodies, which if you prick them do not bleed' in his *Essay* (9). These people who harbour a moral aversion to the comic ironically foreclose their access to the moral benefits of a good laugh. The anaemic specimens impaled by Rabelais are being skewered in a similar way to those in *Essay*. Societal improvement, comedy, and the body are thus held in suspension by the dissecting instruments of Rabelais and Meredith. Comedy, for both, is meant to make their audiences nervous; that is, alive to the self-engendered principles that the comic teaches.

One of the writers who most frequently compared Meredith to Rabelais was James Sully. Of the many philosophers and theorists whose writing on humour Sully collects and analyses for his *Essay On Laughter* – including Kant, Schopenhauer, Spencer, and Bergson – Meredith emerges as the figure who is most frequently quoted with approval.[367] Such a reception was not afforded to Sully by Meredith, however; though writing back with congratulations to his friend on the book's accomplishments, Meredith caricatures him in a postscript to Leslie Stephen: 'Sully with perspiring brow digging for the source of Laughter is provocative of his theme'.[368] Developing this, Meredith builds a comedy around a fictionalised version of Sully's book which he titles the *Philosophy and Psychology of the Laugh*, and to which he recurs in multiple letters dating from 1907.[369] Though C. L. Cline dismissively refers to these letters as 'chaff' in his notes, they do showcase how Meredith views comedy as being particularly amenable to the scalpel. Purporting to quote from several rather envious French reviews, presumably due to Sully's encroachment on a national (because Bergsonian) theme, Meredith writes how:

> One by Ptolemée de Saint-Adrin amused me. It begins – 'Dans ce Rire de Mr. James Sully il n'y a rien de riant. C'est une chose bien grave. C'est en effet le cadavre du Rire, et comme dans la célèbre leçon d'Anatomie de Rembrandt, nous voyons M. Sully scalpel en main,

[367] In the introduction to his book, Sully writes how '[t]he combination of a fine feeling for the baffling behaviour of this [comic] spirit with a keen scientific analysis, such as is found in Mr. George Meredith's *Essay on Comedy*, seems to be a rarity in literature', *Essay on Laughter*, p. 4.
[368] Meredith to Leslie Stephen, 2 December 1902, *LGM*, 3, p. 1471. Meredith is curiously oblivious to the fact that his *Essay* might be tarred with the same brush.
[369] Meredith to Sully, 22 August 1907, *LGM*, 3, p. 1604.

> montrant et expliquant aux farceurs, avec une gravité presque prodigieuse, toutes les articulations du Rire.' The article is in this vein, rather too prolonged to sustain the humour, such as it is.[370]

Meredith's pun-based laughter at Sully's expense depends upon reading the body-as-text and vice versa. He plays with the idea of Sully as Rembrandt's anatomist, picking over the body of his subject in a grave, pedagogical manner. Such puns as the 'corpse of a laugh' are readily understood, while others require translation. 'Farceur' means a joker or prankster, but 'farce' can also mean flesh or, recalling my 'Reader's Digest' chapter, meat stuffing. Furthermore, 'les articulations du Rire' means either to explain or articulate something, whilst also referring to physiological joints. This late letter thus demonstrates that Meredith thought of comedy in terms that could be figured by the system of the body. Though used in a rather facetious way here, such a connection serves to elucidate certain moments in his novels in which the comic is shown in its essential corporeality. As in 'The Anatomy Lesson', the body and its experience of comedy is self-teaching. It is no accident that certain important studies of humour bear titles such as 'The Anatomy of Humour', or 'The Anatomy of Laughter', and also that they pay attention to the embodied therapeutics that such a concern produces.[371] Meredith's final pun, meanwhile, through which he refers to the *vein* in which his facetious style is written, showcases a style of sinew which was shaped by the physio-comical theories of the nineteenth century to which we will now turn.

The predominant nineteenth-century concept of humour was 'Relief Theory'. Laughter as relief resides at the intersect between body and mind. Sully, for instance, shows how laughter, being a 'sudden relaxation of the strain of attention', 'is likely to occur as another mode of physiological relief

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[370] Meredith to Sully, 6 September 1907, *LGM*, 3, p. 1605. 'There is nothing to laugh about in Mr. James Sully's laughter. It is a very serious thing. Indeed, it is the corpse of a laugh, and as in Rembrandt's 'The Anatomy Lesson', we watch Mr. Sully, scalpel in hand, revealing and explaining to the jokers all of laughter's joints, with an almost prodigious seriousness'. Translated by Steven Daly.

[371] Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humour* (London: Routledge, 1999), *The Anatomy of Laughter*, ed. Toby Garfitt, Edith McMorran and Jane Taylor (London: Legenda, 2005).

from the attitude of mental strain'.[372] The theory originated in an eighteenth-century work by The Earl of Shaftesbury who was the first to use the term 'humour' in reference to the comical in his *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709). Prior to this, 'humour' applied to the four bodily fluids thought 'to determine, by their relative proportions and conditions, the state of health and the temperament of a person or animal' (*OED*). Shaftesbury's innovation, therefore, retains the centrality of the body in the theorisation of humour. In his treatise on the reformative value of wit and humour – which allows us to 'polish one another and rub off our corners and rough sides by a sort of amicable collision' – Shaftesbury demonstrates how rational thought can only be properly tested if the social body is open to the tests of ridicule or humour.[373] As one of the first philosophers to treat the topic of comedy so extensively, it is clear that he does so in fulfilment of his belief in the moral capacity for mankind to improve themselves. Since at least the eighteenth century, then, laughter and self-help have been considered as natural bed-fellows.[374] I want to suggest that within the philosophy of humour lies a paradigmatic example of a kind of self-help that can be systematized through the private experience of the individual body.

The emphasis on moral utility is something that Meredith complies with in his *Essay on Comedy*, which was the published version of a lecture that he delivered at the London Institution on 1 February 1877, entitled 'On the Idea of Comedy and of the Uses of the Comic Spirit'. Given that one of the Institution's founding objectives was to provide lectures for the diffusion of useful knowledge, Meredith's philosophy is rooted in more traditional aspects of the self-help discourse. The lecture's title also demonstrates how its author aimed to interrogate a subject that would not only be explanatory

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[372] Sully, *Essay on Laughter*, pp. 68, 69.
[373] Lord Shaftesbury, 'Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend', *Shaftesbury: Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 29-69 (31).
[374] This is not the same as self-love, which a Hobbesian philosophy would suggest is preeminent in comic apprehension. The superiority theory depends on the fact that we cannot laugh at our present selves, but only at those who fall beneath us in our sense of being better than they are. Theories such a Shaftesbury's deny this, demonstrating that human beings are continually put in mind of their own weaknesses – largely through comic perception– which leads to good humoured self-criticism and therefore self-improvement.

(as to the nature of comedy) but also effective. It would show how the comedic spirit could be used for an individual's entrance into a 'bettering state' (19). The essay portrayed the Comic Spirit in a manner similar to Shaftesbury's idea of humour, as being recognizable only to those with common-sense, and also as a great civilising power. Meredith demonstrates to his audience that were we to 'look about us in the present time, I think it will be acknowledged that in neglecting the cultivation of the Comic idea, we are losing the aid of a powerful auxiliary. You see Folly perpetually sliding into new shapes in a society possessed of wealth and leisure, with many whims, many strange ailments and doctors' (62). Meredith's transformation of Folly into a medical subject gestures towards comedy's capacity for the diagnosis and remedying of such ills. In Meredith's thought, the nerves are conscripted into a system of self-regulation, where the clarity of one's comic perception can be tested through the flinching body: '[s]ensitiveness to the comic laugh is a step in civilisation. To shrink from being an object of it is a step in cultivation' (94). Both these terms – 'sensitiveness' and 'shrink' – lie on the intersect between moral and physical meaning. The body's manifestation of its comic awareness performs the intermediacy of the 'thoughtful laugh' (62).

Meredith's physio-philosophical approach to comedy corresponds to the theory of laughter of his contemporaries. In its nineteenth-century permutation, the relief theory of comedy was most directly shaped by the materialist philosophy of Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer. The pair entered into a debate about laughter following the publication of the former's book, *The Emotions and the Will* (1859). Both writers, heavily involved as they were in the scientific field of physiology, adapted what Shaftesbury could only refer to as 'animal spirits' into a theory of nervous laughter. Bain's theory of degradation is one in which the build-up of nervous energy, at a sudden shock or excitation, has to be released through laughter. Sully refers to this 'ingenious idea' when discussing Spencer's development of his theories on the subject.[375] He concedes that laughter might appear as 'a relief of sur-charged

[375] Sully, *An Essay on Laughter*, p. 68.

nerve centres, which process would seem to be better described by the figure of a safety-valve arrangement'.[376] Humour as hydraulics is traceable back to Shaftesbury's idea of the volatile body, through Spencer's essay on 'The Physiology of Laughter', and into the twentieth century and Sigmund Freud.[377]

In Spencer's essay, meanwhile, the body is represented as having an inbuilt coping mechanism that instinctively transforms nervous energy into laughter. As Michael Billig has pointed out, this topic mattered to the author not because he thought comedy was socially important, but because he wanted to show how it fit into his evolutionary theory. He 'was proposing more than a theory of biological evolution. He was suggesting that all systems – whether natural, biological or social – develop according to the same principles'.[378] Spencer's theory of human development through a gradual perfection of these systems depended on such coherency. He was therefore compelled to explain why we emit what he labelled as the purposeless exhaustion of energy when we laugh: 'laughter naturally occurs when consciousness is unwittingly transferred from great things to small – only when there is what we call a *descending* incongruity'.[379] His article thus pays its dues to both the incongruity theory and the relief theory of comedy, whilst maintaining that the human body is the site on which humour is essentially generated: 'emotion is reflected back, accumulates, and grows more intense'.[380] Laughter is a psycho-physiological resource of the self who, in Spencer's view, enters into an independent encounter with the potentially laughable scene and guffaws or frowns according to a nervous thermodynamic. In his connection of this theory to an ideal of progress, his reflections on comedy showcase self-help at its most basic, biological root. Meredith, grounded as he was in this comedic

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[376] Ibid, p. 69.
[377] For a summary of Freudian relief theory, see Critchley's *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3. For Meredith's influence on Freud, and thus his potential impact on the development of this theory, see Sean O' Tool's 'Meredithian Slips'.
[378] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 94.
[379] Spencer, 'The Physiology of Laughter', p. 400.
[380] Ibid, p. 397.

science, explored how fiction could give play to the conditions thus evoked. They are particularly manifest in his first novel, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.*

A Good Wind of Laughter

In his 1969 Clark Lectures on *George Meredith and English Comedy*, V. S. Pritchett recounted an anecdote revelatory of 'the embarrassed relations of […] two old Pretenders', Henry James and Meredith:

> "Poor old Meredith," James is reported to have said. "He writes these mysterious nonsenses and heaven knows what they all mean."
> To which Meredith replies:
> "Poor old James. He sets down on paper these mysterious rumblings of his bowels – but who can be expected to understand them?"[381]

This was not, of course, the first time that Meredith described authorship in terms of the digestive system. The link between James's imagined perception of Meredith's 'mysterious nonsenses' and the coarse, bodily humour through which the latter conceives of Jamesian mysteries introduces a strange and as yet unstudied portion of Meredith's first novel, *The Ordeal*, in which a scene which involves the 'rumblings' of 'bowels' is given a central position in the plot.

Meredith was not averse to structuring the tragedies of his novels around a crude comic event. Radnor's pratfall and an embarrassingly positioned tear in a pair of trousers in *The Amazing Marriage* (1895) are examples. Richard, meanwhile, loses the trust of his father, on whom ultimately the fate of his happiness and marriage relies, because of a fart joke. Typically, the brashness of such a device is shrouded by its overt literariness. The comical scene occurs at a pivotal moment in the novel. Richard, after a long illness, has lost his enthusiasm for his first love affair with Lucy. This development is immensely desirable to his father because Lucy is the niece of a farmer and a Catholic. She is therefore

[381] Pritchett, *George Meredith and English Comedy*, p. 13.

not deemed a fit mate for the son of his system. Richard, wan and serious, is considered safe enough to offer fit company for his dyspeptic uncle's trip to London, which the latter is undertaking in order to visit his quack doctors. When on the train, Richard's gloom suddenly dissipates as his uncle's actions remind him of his Uncle Adrian's reference to his Uncle Hippias' flatulence. The resultant fit of hysterics is witnessed by his confused father as a sign of his son's deception, considering his previous emotional coldness. Such is the scene that sets in motion the rest of the novel, with the father's suspicion of his son's honesty driving his extreme reluctance to admit him and his bride (Richard marries Lucy almost as soon as he gets to London) at his house, with dire consequences for the young couple. The scene is one whose comic reception by his readership Meredith goes to great lengths to ensure. Why this should be the case, and why it matters that the tragedy of the novel should hinge upon a laugh, is important. That this is central to a story about a system of education, and thus about the manual culture of the nineteenth century according to a physiological figure, is also intriguing.

In hinging the fates of his characters, as well as the rest of the novel, upon the misinterpreted laugh, Meredith recalibrates the attention the reader pays to such a moment. The fart joke is puerile, basic, corporeal, and universally funny. As such, it raises key critical questions about why we laugh at a normal function of the body and what this says about instinctive and unifying humour, whilst showing that the three main philosophical theories of comedy – superiority, incongruity, relief – can interact within this one moment. Meredith certainly did not want his readers to ignore its significance to the plot, and nor (much to my amazement) do I. And so without further ado, I present *The Fart Joke of Richard Feverel.*

It all begins with the winds of Spring, which pass through the usually compacted digestive system of Uncle Hippias, causing that surprised but delighted gentlemen to feel all of the proverbial joys of the season:

> It happened that in the turn of the year, and while old Earth was busy with her flowers, the fresh wind blew, the little bird sang, and Hippias Feverel, the Dyspepsy, amazed, felt Spring

> move within him […] He spoke of all his physical experiences exultingly, and with wonder. The achievement of common efforts, not usually blazoned, he celebrated as mighty triumphs, and, of course, had Adrian on his back very quickly (228).

Such a connection between seasonal change and bowel movements might be read through Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400), whereby the opening line to prologue in which 'that Aprill with his shoures soote' convulses with the infamous fart of Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*.[382] Such delightful sensations, however, do not last for Hippias who travels to London in the hopes of reclaiming them. Sir Austin encourages Richard to join him, having grown 'uneasy about his son's manner. It was not natural. His heart seemed to be frozen' (231). Such unhappy spirits draw Adrian, 'The Wise Youth', to attack them on grounds of a species of this wisdom: wit. Here are the more pertinent aspects of the scene:

> "Look at him now," said [Lady Blandish]. "He seems to care for nothing; not even for the beauty of the day."
>
> "Or Adrian's jokes", added the Baronet.
>
> Adrian could be seen to be trying zealously to torment a laugh, or a confession of irritation, out of his hearers […] The Wise Youth's dull life at Raynham had afflicted him with many peculiarities of the professional joker.
>
> "Oh! the Spring! the Spring!" he cried, as in scorn of his sallies they exchange their unmeaning remarks on the sweet weather across him. "You seem both to be uncommonly excited by the operations of turtles, rooks, and daws. Why can't you let them alone?
>
> "Wind bloweth,
> Cock croweth,
> Doodle-doo:
> Hippy verteth,
> Ricky Sterteth,
> Sing Cuckoo! (234-235)

Though Adrian doesn't coax even a smile from his nephew at this point, the joke is greeted with a delayed reaction when Richard erupts into laughter at the sight of Hippias who,

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382 This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart,
As greet as it had been a thonder-dent,
That with the strook [Absolom] was almosy yblent
Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 23, 76.

> on finding the carriage-door closed on him, became all at once aware of the bright-haired Hope who dwells in Change […] and to express his *sudden relief* from mental despondency at the amorous prospect, the Dyspepsy bent and gave his hands a sharp rub between his legs: which unlucky action brought Adrian's pastoral,
>
> 'Hippy verteth,
> Sing cuckoo!'
>
> in such comic colours before Richard, that a demon of laughter seized him.
>
> 'Hippy verteth!' (238-239, *emphasis mine*.)

It is this uncharacteristic relief from restraint that Sir Austin sees as the train pulls out of the station and which he comes to dwell on with such disastrous bitterness. Adrian's 'pastoral' is an adaptation of a thirteenth-century musical composition entitled 'Sumer Is Icumen In' that was meant to be sung in the round. The original lines, adapted to include his relatives, read 'Bulluc sterteþ /bucke uerteþ', the latter being the first known appearance of the verb 'to fart' in the English language.[383] Though this is contested ground, in Meredithian as much as medievalist studies, there is I think no doubt that Meredith was using it in the sense which most academics credit as having been intended.[384] A glance

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[383] 'Summer Is Icumen In', Harley MS 978, The British Library.

[384] Another reading of the verb 'verteth' is 'to change direction; to dart about', the *OED* quoting only George Meredith for its origins. The dictionary chooses the moment at which Hippias is amusing the still laughing Richard with his hopeful demeanour on the train to London: 'He flew about in the very skies, *verting* like any blithe creature of the season' (239). Whilst this is certainly one reading, it is not correct to assume (as several critics have) that this operates to exclude its other meaning. Why Richard would laugh so uproariously at the idea of Hippias darting about is the first stumbling block to this argument. Coupled with Hippias's very stationary action of rubbing his hands *between his legs*, and the passage I have already discussed concerning the winds of Spring, it makes claims that Meredith did not know the true meaning of what he was writing not only outlandish, but humourless. As my argument demonstrates, it would have mattered to Meredith that we read his low-brow textual insertion on the same level as the high-brow matter of his novel. Nevertheless, there was a debate surrounding Meredith's use of the term 'verteth', which culminated in John Tyree Fain's note on the subject in 1951. Here, he rather apologetically represents E. E. Ericson's 'famous little gloss' of the passage as yielding an 'erroneous interpretation'. He hastens to justify himself by saying that he 'should hesitate to labor such a point which the reader may consider obvious, if Ericson had not stated that Meredith used the taboo word in question without realizing what he was doing and if the commentators who are building up a little literature around the flatulent buck of the old spring song had not followed him in this apparent error', 'Meredith and the "Cuckoo Song"', *Modern Language Notes*, 66.5 (May 1951): 324-326 (324, 325). Fain builds a useful list of critics who have blatantly misread this aspect of the novel, including one Thomas Pyles, who rather patronisingly refers to Meredith's apparent misuse of the word as 'one of the world's worst literary "bricks"'. Meredith would have roared with laughter could he have foretold these pedantic misreadings of Adrian's joke. Fain, in a self-effacing gesture that puts him at odds with the critics he mentions, concludes his note with a certain ambivalence: 'If Merdith (*sic*.) does not have that meaning in mind, he certainly goes to great lengths to point up a pointless episode—which is very unlike Meredith' (326). These 'great lengths' that Meredith goes to certainly should not be thought of as accidental, or ignored in favour of more serious material, because there is a point to the 'verting' of Hippias which must be met both with good humour and due criticism.

at the medieval illustration of this rather sheepish mythical creature depicted in Fig. 4, the bonnacon, should demonstrate the fact that the artists of the time were not shy of aesthetically detailing such improper actions.

Fig. 4: De Natura Animalium, Cambrai ca. 1270, Ms. 711, fol. 8r, Bibliothèque municipal, Douai.

Given this fact, and accepting (as I think we must) Meredith's knowing use of the archaic verb, it is now worth considering why the author hinges his plot upon a moment of such crude humour, how this fits in to his comic philosophy, and what this has to do with self-help.

Before Richard's laughter at Hippias's 'verteths', Meredith makes a claim for the necessity of the comic through language that is evocative of that particular comic moment. As such, the joke is embedded in the novel's comic fabric even before Adrian's adaptation. Meredith's observations centre on the Baronet who has just forcibly separated Richard from Lucy and is contemplating a slightly admonishing letter from his admirer, Lady Blandish. Meredith outlines why such a love-affair was met with unfeeling and ultimately futile resistance: a lack of sense of humour. Sir Austin 'was cognizant of the total absence of the humorous in himself (the want that most shut him out from his fellows)'

(204). Such reflections upon those 'weak point[s]' in his character are prompted by his imagining what Lady Blandish might, if un-blinded by passion, make of him. Meredith represents the Baronet's physiognomy as displaying the characteristics of a man who can look clearly at himself and pronounce judgments accordingly: 'his eyes were wide, as one who looks at his essential self through the mask we wear' (204). As such, he corresponds to one of an extensive collection of aphorisms that Meredith scrawled down on the inside back covers of Hubert Ries' *Violin Schule* (1840), now held at the Beinecke Library: 'There are few things that bear so strong a likeness to ourselves as the masks that disguise us'.[385] Such a self-reflective perceptiveness, according to the author, shows that:

> he was capable of great-mindedness, and could at times snatch very luminous glances at the broad Reflector which the world of Fact lying outside our narrow compass holds up for us to see ourselves in when we will. Unhappily, the faculty of laughter, which is due to this gift, was denied him; and having once seen, he, like the companion friend of Balaam, could go no further. For a good wind of laughter had relieved him of much of the blight of self-deception, and oddness, extravagance; had given a healthier view of our atmosphere of life: but he had it not. (204)

To truly see ourselves as we really are, we have to be able to laugh at ourselves. Such an action is summarized by Sully in what he calls 'Kindly Laughter'. He encourages the performance of 'the practice of a humorous self-criticism', for if 'humour always involves some degree of sympathetic self-projection into the object of self-contemplation, it should not be difficult to turn the humorous glance upon one's own foibles. Self-inspection is a thing of various kinds'.[386] Sully's argument is that this ability to conduct a laughing self-inspection is constitutive of what he calls the 'higher ego' which not only complements the ideas expressed by Meredith above, but also pre-figure the Freudian theory of humour in which a kindly super-ego keeps the ego in check through comedy. Matthew Bevis shows how, for Freud, '[h]umouring yourself is like parenting yourself. Self-mockery becomes a form of self-care by establishing a framework for how you wish to be mocked, which is itself a confession about

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[385] George Meredith Collection, GEN MSS 953, Series IV, Box 40, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[386] Sully, *An Essay on Laughter*, p. 321.

the person you want to be'.[387] Before Sully and Freud, then, Meredith was staking the claims of self-help upon the process of having a good laugh. Sir Austin, like Balaam, is unable to progress along the road of self-development because of his lack of humour. Meredith explicitly refers to laughter in the context both of relief and self-improvement so that when we reach the stage where 'the fresh wind blew', causing Hippias to feel 'Spring move within him', the reader is drawn back to this language of relief: 'a good wind of laughter had relieved him of much of the blight of self-deception'. Winds of all kinds conspire, in this novel, to make us laugh. Digestive relief is equated with the relief from self-importance brought about by reflective laughter. Physiological comedy, no matter how basic, performs the function of self-humouring. Such analysis is crass, but it enables a shift in one's critical patterns that declines to be over-serious and possibly improves one's reading as a result.

A moment in the text prior to this scene on the train demonstrates that Richard's laughter comes as a relief so unfortunately denied to his father. As such, it is an eruption of nervous energy which complies with the predominant comic theory of the day. We have already seen Sir Austin's concern over his son's unnatural coldness and the apparent loss of his youth. Such an explosion of hilarity is thus uncharacteristic and unmeasured according to its cause: 'he laughed so immoderately that it looked like madness come upon him' (239). Evidence for Meredith's knowledge of the relief theory can be found in an earlier scene in the novel. Richard, having become inflamed by desire for an object known only as 'the Bonnet', takes to writing youthful verses on the subject. Their existence, however, is swiftly discovered and disposed of by the disapproving Baronet. This, it turns out, is a decided misstep by the System as Richard, finally alerted to the charms of womankind, seizes

> pen and paper to relieve his swarming sensations. Scarce was he seated, when the pen was dashed aside, the paper sent flying, with the exclamation, "Have I not sworn I would never write again?" Sir Austin had shut that safety-valve. (123)

[387] Matthew Bevis, *Wordsworth's Fun* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 233.

Richard's nervous energy, pent up within his Systematized system, cannot be expended through poetic juvenilia. For Spencer, 'laughter is a display of muscular excitement' that 'illustrates the general law, that feeling passing a certain pitch habitually vents itself in bodily action' – something that, he writes, 'scarcely needs pointing out' and is in this very *manifestedness* Spencer locates within the laugh that we can find an interesting connection to the author of *The Ordeal*.[388] Meredith is interested in those moments of the body that make manifest a philosophy of life. The simple maxim that the individual cannot and must not be controlled according to a rote learned system is emblematised through Richard's relief-laugh.

I have already quoted Sully's description of Spencer's physiological laughter as showing a process that would 'be better described by the figure of a safety-valve arrangement'. This bears repeating, not only because of its use in a different context by Meredith in the passage quoted above, but also because of how it represents the human body as having an in-built therapeutic system that yields to communications made by the nerves rather than the intellect. As such, it represents a strikingly new form of self-help that depends on physiology rather the prescriptive format imposed by doctrines such as Sir Austin's. Here is Sully:

> supposing, as seems certain, that laughter in its moderate degrees, by bringing a new briskness into the circulation, relieves the congested capillaries of the brain, may we not go father and say that nature has probably come to our aid by connecting with the mental upheavals and the cruel strains here referred to, which pretty certainly involve a risky condition of the cerebral system of capillaries, a mode of muscular reaction which is peculiarly well fitted to bring the needed relief.[389]

Richard is consistently represented as both an object of study and a feeling, individual self. He is, for instance, the 'System |incarnate' or his father's 'Experiment | – the living, burning, youth' (237, 205. *I have demarcated the division between the two states*). Within the person of Richard, then, Meredith is actively comparing two systems – moral and physiological – in order to show how the two cohere or misalign.

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[388] Spencer, 'The Physiology of Laughter', p. 398.
[389] Sully, *An Essay on Laughter*, pp.69-70.

Most importantly, he represents the body as a text, an attentiveness to which might bring about moral change, but only if the legitimate desires of that body are allowed to remain unrepressed.

In a novel which is so much concerned with digestive as well as ethical systems, it is no surprise that flatulence should burst in. Whether we expect this from a Victorian novelist is another thing. Such a reaction is comprehended in the nineteenth-century novelist, Arabella Shore's pronouncement that the novel contains 'humour, to our taste at least, unpleasingly broad'.[390] It is partly because of this, and partly because we are bound to take his views on the moral restraint imposed by comedy seriously, that Meredith's highly funny take on the physiological lack of restraint has received no sustained critical attention since the 1950s. The Hippy verteth joke, however extraordinary it might seem, is pivotal to the plot because of how it embodies the novel's key themes. It occupies a space in which the moral necessity of relief is highlighted in a novel that has for its main theme the attempts of a pedagogical figure to impose a system upon the living body and the danger of such systematization. When the Baronet takes Richard's laugh as a signal of his failure in this respect, the narrator steps in to make explicit exactly how and why this is the case:

> If, instead of saying, Base no system on a human being, he had said, Never experimentalize with one, he would have been nearer the truth of his own case. He had experimented on humanity in the person of the son he loved as his life, and at once when the experiment appeared to have failed, all humanity's failings fell on the shoulders of his son. (328)

The echo of the unenviable fate of Christ, rather than heightening the grief of the father, merely expands the bathetic quality of Sir Austin's consciousness. The biblical resonance, meanwhile, marks the hollowness of all creeds that are too rigid to allow for diversions from whatever dogma one is held to. To 'verteth' or to laugh: both break the boundaries of the body to intrude upon a society that might at any moment take offence. In both cases of the laugh and flatulence the body breaks its boundaries and becomes public. The individual self, held within this bodily suspension, is socialised but at risk of

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[390] Arabella Shore, 'An early appreciation', in *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 192-102, p. 194.

being intruded upon by externally precipitated feelings of shame or self-doubt. Richard's irrepressible laugh at the thought of something similarly uncontainable shows the unreliability but also the individual agency of the self.[391]

The obtrusive physiology of Richard's laugh, and its subject, stages Meredith's aphorism: 'Never experimentalize with a human being'. The scientific term used here deliberately attacks the his system-maker's methodology, as the sociological aims of the System are reframed in biological terms. Sir Austin's error is fundamentally one of discipline. He participates in the very Victorian mania of making a science out of a social practice and consequentially maims not only Richard's mind, but his body also. The self-help system that Sir Austin attempts to write, however, is thwarted by the uncontrollability and vitality of the physical body. Hippy's verteths and the hilarity that they produce are not, therefore, a casual but a causal moment in the novel.

An important question this comic incident raises, then, is how we are really supposed to read Meredith's work. It is crucial to note the fact that this is a nineteenth-century novel and therefore is inevitably read through a tradition noted (however unfairly) for its morally upright, prudish, and weighty qualities. Meredith humours such serious readings by couching his reference to flatulence within archaic terms that are dependent on the reader's translation to communicate the correct meaning. Comic lowness, by this alchemy, *almost* becomes high-brow. We may interpret the ordeal that Richard Feverel has to go through in terms of the traditional *bildungsroman*, but if all his further self-development hinges (no matter how obliquely) upon his comic reception of a fart joke, then our sense of the jarring incompatibility of such a catalyst with generic expectations must garner questions

[391] John Morreall connects these two physiological apparitions within his commentary on the Relief Theory of Shaftesbury and Spencer, albeit in a decidedly negative sense. He quotes John Dewey's ideas that laughter "marks the ending…. of a period of suspense, or expectation." It is a "sudden relaxation of strain, so far as occurring though the medium of the breathing and vocal apparatus…The laugh is thus a phenomenon of the same kind as the sigh of relief' and asserts that '[r]educed almost to the level of belching and farting in this way, laughter might be less interesting in the Relief Theory than it was in the other two [Superiority and Incongruity]' in *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humour* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 17.

about that genre. The validity of the hermeneutic structures that can be built around these narratives of individual progress are tarnished by such an association; our grasp on the essential meaningfulness of the text slips. Meredith relishes this generic indeterminacy which militates against stable patterns of interpretation. Life, he seems to be saying, is like that. Comedy seeps into tragedy, into aesthetics, and into traditions of literary seriousness. Our recognition of such an incongruity – and a descending one at that – is like laughter. The literary comedy depends for its success, Meredith states, upon a mutual receptivity – i.e. the reader's good humour – which becomes an interpretative device.

Meredith makes such a readerly technique explicit in *The Ordeal*. In a passage that precedes the comic moment I have been considering, Meredith begins by apologising directly to his reader, as he often does, for such an apparently trivial part of the story. In doing so, he details an exemplary reader whose presence, as we shall see, is only momentarily deferred:

> At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for Blood and Glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. One will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machine at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh, of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive, moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of a small one.
>
> Such an audience, then, will participate in the Baronet's gratification at his son's demeanour, wherein he noted that calm bearing of Experience not gained in the usual wanton way: and will not be without some excited apprehension at his twinge of astonishment, when, just as the train went sliding into swiftness, he beheld the grave, cold, self-possessed, young man throw himself back in the carriage violently laughing. Science was at a loss to account for it. Sir Austin checked his mind from inquiring, that he might keep suspicion at a distance, but he thought it odd, and the jarring sensation that ran along his nerves at the sight, remained with him as he rode home. (238)

The two paragraphs detail Meredith's peculiar authorial obsession, not only with the micro-moments that manage a life, but also with the ideal reader's intellectual responsiveness to such moments. This compression is something that Dames notes to be an integral part of the author's comic methodology.

He quotes Meredith's assertion in *The Egoist* that 'to be alive, to be quick in the soul, there should be diversity in the companion throbs of your pulses' which showcases how he 'describe[s] the effects of small-scale penetration', with Dames concluding that '[t]his practice of detecting the minute is what goes under the name of Comedy'.[392] Whilst Dames explores narrative fragmentation in *The Egoist*, however, my reading applies these nerve-wracking comic moments to Meredith's ideas of systems scientific, bodily, moral, and textual, and how they coalesce within the humorous framework.

Meredith's claims for the chosen 'One' amongst his future audience, who will care as much for the minute and particular as the grand and universal, resonates profoundly with another author's address to her readership and also with the concerns of the Victorian novel as a whole. Eliot similarly begins one of her most famous passages in *Middlemarch* with an apology for remarking upon the 'anything [but] very exceptional' tears of Dorothea on her honeymoon (182). Like Meredith, she registers her concern for the limits of her audience's sympathy, even patience, when presented with something that is 'not unusual' (182). Yet, in their mutual representation of such sympathetic reading as existing in potential within a future audience, both authors use their texts as a mediatory device between current and future ethical readership:

> That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. (182)

Both authors adopt the 'frame' of the nervous body in order to showcase how an alternative reader might read. Of course, invoking this spectral presence necessitates, via the performance of this act of reading, an identification of the present reader with it. Whilst in Eliot's depiction of this future life the speculative body trembles and dies of this sensory overload, Meredith's is shaken with knowing laughter. The mock-prophetic tone contains a joke that pertains to the scene that has rendered the

[392] Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, p. 194.

apology necessary. Meredith's future reader is one who, in being able to perceive the 'elementary machine at work […] will feel the winds of March when they do not blow'. The reference to this must, if we are textually attentive in the way Meredith intends, link us back to the 'fresh wind' that encourages Hippias to feel 'Spring move within him' and thus on to Adrian's crude adaptation of the Cuckoo Song and, through this, to Richard's fatal laughter. Everything really does 'hang together'. Meredith's deeply serious sounding address crumbles, given the context from which it springs, but still manages to teach something about particularity in the novel. The reader he is describing is one that can encounter all the various 'winds' in the novel with both good humour and an intelligent eye. It is thus the perfect defence of the following scene of Richard's 'elemental' laughter because, if we want to correspond to the exemplary reader Meredith is evoking, we must not view the 'Hippy verteth' joke as 'trivial'. Rather, through embodied signs such as 'a smile, a laugh', the perceptive reader of his novel will 'see the links of the things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of a small one'. To be so attuned is described in terms of an uncommon-*sense*; a faculty that occupies the interstice between sensation and intelligence. Meredith's 'thoughtful laughter' is a figuration of this.

The final thing to note is how the reader is slowly made to participate in this small-scale sensation in a performance of the claims that Meredith makes for fiction. The mind can be worked upon and transformed through reading, and he exposes the conditions of such a philosophy in this paragraph. The unspecific pronouns 'they' and 'them' subtly rewrites the former exclusivity of the 'One' reader and gestures towards inclusivity. Such an identification with this reading technique is borne out within the next paragraph, with the sizable break between the two bearing material witness to the fact that Meredith wants us to pause over our reading. Such a paragraph break happens only a handful of times in *The Ordeal*, and usually suggests that Meredith is about to communicate a maxim. Here, the space might figure the moment of transformation, or at least signify a breathing space to get

us in the right frame of mind. The reader, then, becomes '[s]uch an audience' through an implied somatic synchronicity with the Baronet's feelings. Through the unremitting attention paid to Sir Austin's body, the reader is bought to a nervous 'apprehension' of his state. This is furthered by our ready identification with such physiological feelings as a 'twinge' or the 'jarring sensation' that runs across one's nerves at the sight of something unaccountable. The description thus puts us in sympathy, not only with the shock of Sir Austin, but with the claims that Meredith is making for his narrative. The audience's awareness of the minute changes in our bodies that compel or accompany conscious feeling and therefore action must make them amenable to the author's deterministic claim: that 'the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow'. We must consequently be even more resistant to a suspicion that the plot of the novel cannot hinge upon a laugh.

In such ways, Meredith uses the nerves of the body to trace a literary theory. Writing systems and bodily systems conspire to endow the reader with a sensitivity necessary to gain an accurate reading of life. This is generated through a feeling consistency between readerly mind and written narrative. The positioning of the laugh within this theory, both in the passage above and in the comic moment for which it serves as an apology, demonstrates the centrality of comedy to Meredith's idea of a teaching fiction. Writing so long-windedly (if I may) on the fart joke is certainly not something I anticipated when beginning this thesis on Victorian self-help and morality. This, however, only gestures to Meredith's distorted genius, his daring, and his humour. The most basic joke can lead to a recognition of some of the great things in fiction. The message is ultimately subversive because it opens a space for that message's potential dismissal. So many critics have ignored *The Fart Joke of Richard Feverel*, and frankly who can blame them? It simply does not fit in to our carefully learned patterns of interpretation, at least where the nineteenth-century novel is concerned. What is overt in

the novels of James Joyce, for instance, is covert in the novel that he quotes from in *Ulysses* (1922).[393] Meredith would have smiled at such critical resistance because this is what the Comic Spirit is meant to raise in us: questions of whether we are taking the text, or ourselves, too seriously. Such novelistic incongruities – a *bildungsroman* fated by such a moment of basic corporeality – attest to Meredith's conviction that we should be reading for ourselves, according to what we notice and understand personally, rather than according to tradition or some strained sense of duty to textual grandeur. Such an encounter is figured by the laugh which in turn teaches a moral about how written systems can indeed shape the self.

Balsam, Pill, Tonic: Meredith's Comic Pharmacopoeia

> Comedy, or the comic element, is the specific for the poison of delusion while Folly is passing from the state of vapour to substantial form. (64)

The process of comedy here, outlined by Meredith in the *Essay*, is one of chemical conversion, with comedy countering the crystallisation (Bergson would say encrustation) of the laughable into concrete form. The term 'specific' is used in the sense of a remedy, and therefore references a therapeutic technique that each of us can develop through a close attention to what is comical in life and in ourselves. Quackery, the swallowing of false nostrums, and the dubious side effects of false remedies, has a tendency to be related in both Eliot and Meredith's work to the false maxim or moral system. The panacea, drug, or tonic is also occasionally used by Meredith as a way of elucidating how he wants his text to be read for the improvement of the individual. As he repeats in *The Egoist*, 'Art is the specific', 'an antidote' to 'our modern malady' that mere 'Science' cannot solve (34). Meredith is a connoisseur of the remedial short-form, coining maxims or aphorisms with an amused sense that they

[393] In *Ulysees*, Buck Mulligan reads from a telegraph sent to him by Stephen that '[t]he sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done', and aphorism from *The Pilgrim's Scrip. Ulysees*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 392.

are at best ambivalent guides to behaviour that, given their fictional origins, should only be warily considered as advice. The image of the medicinal capsule is an ideal figure for such short-form instruction. It professes curative properties, but may actually be at best a panacea, at worst a poison.

Meredith's frequent inclusion of such 'specifics' within his novels is deliberate; they make us question what we swallow into our systems. The fact that mentions of these remedies often co-habit with evocations of the Comic Spirit is a natural outgrowth of Meredith's vision of the curative function of this latter style. The importance of the compact comic idea – easily digested – is expressed in the *Essay*. Resonating with the portable wisdom located in the pocket-books and anthologies considered in chapter one, Meredith writes, 'I do not know that a fly in amber is of any particular use, but the Comic idea enclosed in a comedy makes it more generally perceptible and portable, and that is an advantage' (104). Meredith's aphoristic style is present here, where the literary comedy preserves an idea for the examination of the reader that is independent of a specific timeframe.

In *The Egoist*, it comes as no surprise that the well-regarded Dr Corney, who dispenses sense as regularly as physic, is both a 'popular physician of the county and a famous anecdotal wit' (134). That Corney also indirectly prescribes an antidote to the heroine of the novel, Clara's predicament (she is unhappily engaged to Willoughby Patterne) is surely no accident. Clara's fiancée repeats one of Corney's anecdotes, which comically treats of an egoist, and thus unwittingly supplies Clara with a definition for what she finds so objectionable in him: 'None of them saw the man in the word, none noticed the word; yet this word was her medical herb, the illuminating lamp, the key of him […] Egoist! She beheld him – unfortunate, self-designated man that he was'.[394] The word is not a curative of her position – she remains engaged – but treats instead an ailment of unknowing how to define her antagonism. Meredith is suggesting, perhaps, that this is what literature really does.

[394] George Meredith, *The Egoist*, ed. George Woodcock (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 137. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

One has to be on the look-out, however, for false prescriptions – an imposition upon a system – at the heart of Meredith's remedial figures. We might recall Eliot's early assertion that '[i]t is the quackery of infidelity to suppose that', when it comes to individual progress, the moral systematiser 'has a nostrum for all mankind, and to say to all and singular, 'Swallow my opinions and you shall be whole".[395] Through his comic prose, Meredith represents that what we swallow into our systems must be individually rather than generally regulated. This is exemplified through Willoughby, who has taken to 'abhor[ing] comic images' and scorning what he sees as the 'laughing empty world' (564). His one comfort, however, comes from the thought of his friend, Horace's De Craye's impending disappointment regarding his own designs of marrying Clara. With a sarcastic laugh, the egoist speaks thus: "Horace is an enviable fellow,' said Willoughby, wise in The Book [of Egoism] which bids us ever for an assuagement to fancy our friend's condition worse than our own, and recommends the deglutition of irony as the most balsamic for wounds in the whole moral pharmacopoeia' (565). Willoughby's text is a dubious source of advice, seeing as The Book to which he refers is one that categorises him as a synecdoche for egoism. This blindness to his condition unsteadies the validity of Meredith's prescription of irony, though experience might inform the reader that such a 'deglutition' (or swallowing) acts as at least a placebo for a wounded ego. Such a realisation enacts an uneasy identification with Willoughby, engaging our sympathy whilst we question his remedial outlets.

The re-appearance of The Book draws the reader back to the novel's Prelude, in which Meredith explicitly relates his text to the 'specific'. Therapies of self are book-bound:

> we must read what we can of it, at least the page before us, if we would be men. One, with an index on the Book, cries out, in a style pardonable to his fervency: the remedy of your frightful affliction is here, through the stillatory of Comedy, and not in Science […] Comedy he pronounces to be our means of reading swiftly and comprehensibly'. (35-6)

[395] George Eliot to Sara Hennell, 19 October 1843, *GEL*, 1, p. 162.

The Prelude is packed with references to this 'moral pharmacopoeia', whose wisdom is dispensed pill-like through a comic 'compression' (33). Techniques of reading become a technique of self-help: a comic distillation that enters the blood-stream 'swiftly and comprehensibly'. The Comic Spirit 'proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness' and forces us into 'the recognition of our individual countenances' (35, 34). The fact that the reader, before entering upon Meredith's 'Comedy in Narrative', is referred to this indexing of self is important. The Book of Earth in the Prelude is automatically related to Meredith's own text. This curious self-help manual, punctuated by the Comic Spirit and informed by the physiological figure, therefore seeps into the rest of the novel. Meredith helped to develop a literary genre whereby to read for the mind is like feeling through the body.

In *The Ordeal*, Meredith relates his aesthetic theory of authorship to the image of a Pill. Before Richard's final laugh, Adrian recalls his nephew's former attempts at poetry, thus connecting that potential form of relief with the mode through which it finally occurs. Having failed to inspire any laughter through the Hippy verteth joke, Adrian turns to mocking Richard's romantic verses which, he affirms, treat admirably her 'Lips, eyes, bosom'. They offer a 'likeness', however, that cannot 'be considered correct when she has no legs' (235):

> O Richard of the Ordeal! I'm aware that you've had your lessons in Anatomy, but nothing will persuade you that an anatomical figure means flesh and blood. You can't realize the fact. Do you intend to publish when you're in town? It'll be better not to put your name. Having one's name to a Volume of Poems is as bad as an advertising Pill. (236)

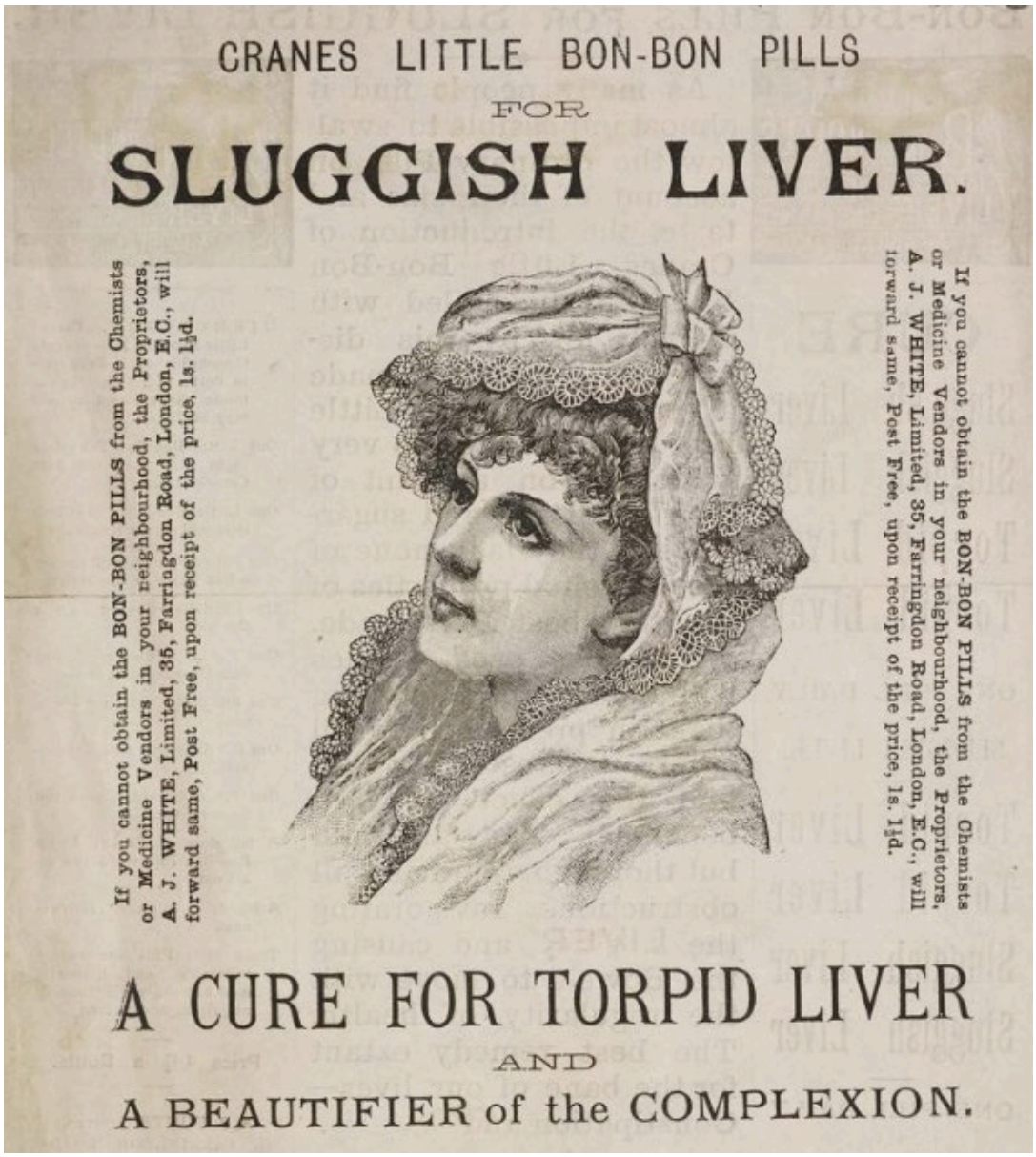

Fig. 5: 'Cranes Little Bon-Bon Pills for Sluggish Liver', estimated 1885, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/advertisement-for-cranes-little-bon-bon-pills-for-sluggish-liver

Various therapies of the self fall victim to Adrian's joke, in which the science of the body colludes with poetic form to render Richard's attempts at sensational relief abject and objectless. Adrian is essentially suggesting that Richard's love must only be ideal because of his poetry's blatant inability to get physical. Though facetious in the extreme – a nonsense poetry – Adrian's further comments on the issue do allude to a Meredithian technique of the novel which is a noted absence in the poetry he is critiquing. For Meredith, good form always appeals to the physiological form. The image moves

from an embodied writing system to wider conditions of publication which are alluded to through a similar, though distinct, physiological vocabulary. As we can see from Fig. 5, to put one's name to a quack's medicine such as 'Crane's Little Bon-Bon Pills for Sluggish Liver' might well be embarrassing, even laughable. Certainly, the desire to appeal to women shown both through this particular advertisement's title and the idealised female depicted is comical. The diminutive 'Little Bon Bon's' meant to tempt her appetite jars quite delightfully with the decidedly indelicate sounding 'sluggish liver'. Such a 'descending incongruity' would not be amiss as an exemplar for Spencer's theory of laughter. Besides this, and the further joke Adrian has at the mutual expense of Richard's writing and Hippias's digestion, the comparison Meredith chooses to make between Poem and Pill – two different forms of manufacture – is telling. It links writing with remedy, but also with quackery, whilst authorial identity risks coming into contact with infamy.

Within the context of the novel, it is clear why Meredith includes this. Many of the fictional texts that the novel mentions aim to propose a cure for humanity's ailments but do about as much good, and perhaps as much harm, as we can imagine the little bon-bons did. The Baronet's book of aphorisms, THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP, for instance, dispenses wisdom with the aim of curing mankind from various maladies. It slowly loses its therapeutic capacities, however, as its readership dwindles into oblivion. Another text, this time the Baronet's friend Denzil Somers's collection of verse, serves its author's propensity 'to lash the Age, and complain of human nature' (22). We learn that '[h]is poems, published under the pseudonym Diaper Sandoe, were so pure and bloodless in their love-passages, and at the same time so biting in their moral tone, that his reputation was great among the virtuous' (22). Note the use of 'bloodless' in Meredith's description of what we must take to be bad verse and compare it with Adrian's calls for a flesh and blood poetics in the above passage. This moral dose, meanwhile, tarnishes slightly when we learn that the poet has run off with the Baronet's wife,

whose betrayal catalyses the writing of the System, another systematic poison masquerading as a social medicine.

Written systems – of education, morality, wisdom literature, sexuality – are all called into question in the novel, and in part through Adrian's comparison of poem to panacea. This joke is really targeted at the author himself. Adrian, in naming 'Richard of the Ordeal', effectively titles Meredith's novel. This makes our connection of the joke to Meredith's own name and publications almost inevitable. By self-reflexively placing *The Ordeal* not only within the context of those shameful public literary productions, but also the fictional texts embedded in the novel, Meredith invokes a similar dubiousness about his own work and how much faith the reader should place in its remedial properties. Literature has the ability to communicate a therapeutics of the self, but its readers should be wary of swallowing such nostrums without exercising an intellectual independence. By premising such a lesson so often and so obviously on the body – here, the body in laughter – Meredith promotes a new kind of attentiveness to what the individual can learn from these embodied processes.

Shortly after he finished the *Essay on Comedy*, Meredith wrote a short story for publication in the *New Quarterly*. 'The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper' appeared in 1877 and is, according to Gillian Beer, 'a more doctrinaire product of his theories than any other of his works'.[396] This claim is certainly true, as Meredith writes a short parable that clearly aims to show how self-improvement can be obtained through comic means. To suggest, however, as Beer does, that it is 'correspondingly less successful as fiction' might be reappraised.[397] Comedy, as an impulse to self-restraint that is mediated through the body, is the undoubtable theme of the story in which Lady Camper acts as both scourge and redeemer of the self-satisfied general who is emotionally blinded by egoism. He is cured by being subjected to a series of tests, mainly communicated through caricatures drawn by her, whose

[396] Beer, 'Meredith's Idea of Comedy', 168.
[397] Ibid.

skill in making him ridiculous to himself finally enables him – via a brief descent into near-madness – to exert his powers of self-help.[398]

Lady Camper's intuition that systems of improvement depend, to quote from the *Essay*, on 'appeals to the individual mind' is borne out by Ople's personal development (21). Comic susceptibility, indeed a nervousness around it, is also necessary: 'Fortunately for you', she informs Ople, 'you were sensitive to ridicule' (341).[399] With such a line, Meredith links his comic system of self-help to the theory of ridicule expressed by Shaftesbury amongst others. '[C]aricature is rough truth', according to Willoughby in *The Egoist*, a maxim that is countered by his eventual wife Laetitia's statement that it is 'one end of it' whilst 'realistic directness is another' (438). Lady Camper exhibits both arts in her campaign to incubate within the General a habitual and reformative self-vigilance, the success of which is seen in Ople's stuttering assertion, 'I – I – I never know when I am not looking a fool' (322). Living and artistic form thus become curiously intertwined through Meredith's ekphrasis. The reader is never sure whether the General is more concerned with looking a fool on paper or in reality, and this is precisely Meredith's point.

When apologising for the advanced age of his characters, Meredith informs us that '[o]ur closest instructors, the true philosophers – the story-tellers, in short – will learn in time that Nature is not of a necessity always roaring, and as soon as they do, the world may be said to be enlightened' (331). As Meredith's story claims this natural kinship, he self-referentially positions his funny little tale as a source for enlightenment and instruction. He intends us to read for a form of comic therapeutics, and we know this because he deliberately centres the pharmacy within this narrative. Elements of Lady

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[398] This plot line seems absurd, formed for a moral rather than for realist fiction. It is quite amusing, then, to learn from Lionel Stevenson that this story was taken from one of Meredith's friends, William Hardman's 'fund of anecdotes about his Kingston neighbours. A certain General Hopkins, a retired officer […] had been persecuted by his erratic next-door neighbor, Lady Cathcart, who persisted in sending him unflattering caricatures of himself until he felt obliged to bring legal action against her', *The Ordeal of George Meredith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 240. Parable and reality form an unlikely alliance here.

[399] George Meredith, *The Tale of Chloe – The House on the Beach – The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper* (London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1893), p. 341. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

Camper's caricatures involve General Ople 'in a confused mixture of the moral with the material', and this forms a subject line for the rest of the story (313). Ethical systems collide with material remedies when Ople, hounded by his caricatures, decides to move house:

> From the house-agent's shop he turned into the chemist's, for a tonic—a foolish proceeding, for he had received bracing enough from the blow he had just dealt himself, but he had been cogitating on tonics recently, imagining certain valiant effects of them, with visions of a former careless happiness that they were likely to restore. So he requested to have the tonic strong, and he took one glass of it over the counter […] He longed for the hour of his next dose, and for a caricature to follow, that he might drink and defy it. A caricature was really due to him, he thought (332-33).

Ople's search for a stimulant that will enable him to meet Lady Camper's caricatures with equanimity emblematizes the remedial conditions of the wider text. It is also a nod to the vast array of drug-based tonics that were available to the nineteenth-century consumer, many of them infused with a tincture of opium, cocaine, or cannabis which would no doubt have had the emboldening effects that Meredith describes. He figures his philosophy of comedy, therefore, by relocating the search for a remedy to ridicule within the body. Meredith, however, is careful not to separate the material 'dose' from the moral one as we can see from the latter's parenthetical inclusion in the penultimate sentence. Systems of comedy, both material and aesthetic, coalesce within the novel's pharmacopoeia. Even the story's title, 'The *Case* of General Ople and Lady Camper', speaks to its medicinal concerns. In a story that is indeed his most 'doctrinaire' application of his ideas of comedy to self-improvement, the use of such an overt figure in is telling.

The tonic and the comic, already implicitly connected through a half rhyme, are further linked through Lady Camper's appraisal of her improving aesthetic at the end of the work: 'I will not say I meant to work a homeopathic cure. But if I drive you to forget your collar, is it or is it not a triumph?' (340). Though couched in a denial, Ople's tormentor signals to the oblique message of the text that

the best system of self-help is one that takes its form from the physical self. [400] Laughter is a corrective, especially if it is the reformative laughter at one's own self.

An anonymous contemporary recognised the figuration of text as tonic in Meredith's comic pharmacopeia. Reviewing the recently published *The Egoist* for the *New Quarterly Magazine*, the same journal in which Meredith's short story appeared, the writer represents the author's work as a curative. His words thus form a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Speaking of the 'disease' facing readers at the turn of the century, '*la maladie du siècle*, about which the French are so emphatic', he proceeds:

> it must be observed, [it] is a real and not an imaginary illness. Brisk people who deride it as the result of dyspepsia, fail to perceive that they are able to laugh, not because their digestions are good, but because they have discovered the point of view that suits them […] For those who cannot thus escape, art is the specific […] Of all forms of this remedy comedy is the best, not only showing us how to regard the world, but supplying the tonic that makes the spectacle exhilarating; it cures as well as demonstrates.[401]

Readers of this chapter will be able to distinguish several key Meredithian concerns within this passage, which is part of what makes it so convincing. 'Art is the specific' is a claim that complements Meredith's own, that it is the 'comic element' that prescribes the cure. Fiction is alternative medicine.

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[400] It is clear from Meredith's letters that he was a great believer in homoeopathic medicine. In a letter concerning the health of his young son, Arthur, he writes 'the medicines of the old system do no suit him. Even for a trifling illness, I wish him to have the attendance of a homeopathic physician'. George Meredith to Augustus Jessopp, October or November 1863, *LGM*, vol. I, p. 231.

[401] [Unsigned and Untitled], *New Quarterly Magazine* (January 1880), *The Critical Heritage*, p. 232.

Chapter Six

'Reading syllables by touch': Meredith's Embodied Aphorisms[402]

> Oh, he that is true to flesh and blood
> Is true to his own being! […]
> And he that is false to flesh and blood
> Is false to the star within him[403]

The fact that Meredith's works are full of an 'aphoristic wisdom' has been a critical commonplace since George Eliot's review of *The Shaving of Shagpat* in 1856.[404] My titular term 'embodied aphorism', meanwhile, comes from Justin McCarthy's 1864 article for the *Westminster Review*, 'Novels with a Purpose'. In his essay on Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Emilia in England* (1864), together with Caroline Norton's *Lost and Saved* (1863) and Matilda Charlotte Houstoun's *Recommended to Mercy* (1862), McCarthy defines 'novels with a purpose' as those works written 'to help us on with the work of human improvement'.[405] McCarthy reflects upon the 'new influence' that the authors of such novels were beginning to accrue and their social purpose in producing them, whilst ultimately questioning their necessity. Largely through the analysis of Meredith's novels, McCarthy works through several self-help tropes which he sees as being at that time most 'influentially' expressed through fiction. Commenting on the only 'half-reluctant admiration' Meredith's books elicit from his readers, he suggests that a good reason for this

> is that Mr. Meredith always seems to write with a purpose. He is always apparently meditating on some phase of human life, some tendency of human nature, some melancholy confusion or misdirection of human effort; and his whole soul is not in the work itself, but in something behind it, and of which it only faintly shadows out the reality and the meaning.[406]

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[402] George Meredith, *One of Our Conquerors*, p. 291.
[403] George Meredith, 'Phantasy', originally published in *Once a Week* (Nov. 23, 1861), reprinted in *The Poetical Works of George Meredith* (London: Constable and Co., 1912), p.116.
[404] George Eliot, 7, *Leader* (5 January 1856), in *George Meredith: The Critical Heritage*, p. 41.
[405] Justin McCarthy, 'Novels with a Purpose', *Westminster Review*, vol. 82 (July 1864): 24-49 (27).
[406] Ibid, 39.

McCarthy pitches Meredith's novels of improvement against the purely aesthetic work of art that would become increasingly dominant towards the end of the century, whilst the author's meditations upon human faults lend themselves to a corrective hermeneutic which compromises 'the work itself'.

McCarthy, then, suggests that Meredith's prose is outdated because explicitly performative of a self-help methodology. The article chimes interestingly with the Kantian aesthetic theory of 'purposiveness without purpose'.[407] Accurate judgement of a beautiful form, and the necessary pre-condition of that form as beautiful, relies upon the indistinguishability of its purpose and yet the conviction that such a purpose must exist. As Jean-Luc Nancy has further explained, 'we designate as beautiful what orientates itself according to a direction, or even according to a destination to which no end can be assigned' because 'the attained and realized end effaces the purposiveness within it'.[408] McCarthy's suspicion of 'novels with a purpose', and his easy dismissal of the work's aesthetic integrity because of this, is a critical perspective that has remained largely intact even today. Such an easy separation of the purely aesthetic work and narratives about and for improvement is, as this chapter argues, mistaken. Kant himself demonstrates this in ultimately allying the understanding of purposiveness without purpose, perceptible within the sublimity of nature for instance, with an internalisation of such a faculty that we 'naturally seek in ourselves'. Through this we attempt to intuit 'that which constitutes the ultimate purpose of our being, viz. our moral destination'.[409] The sublime and sensational enjoyment of a beautiful form, be it completely unmodulated by a rationalisation of ends and purposes, still contributes to a narrative of self-improvement. The 'sensational' reactive body in this is representative of a living wisdom; it teaches.

McCarthy's conviction, as he goes on to write, that 'most of Mr. Meredith's secondary characters are not realities: they are walking types, embodied aphorisms', is meant to disparage the

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[407] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. J. H. Bernard (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1914), p. 68.
[408] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, trans. Philip Armstrong (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 91.
[409] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 180.

novelist; however, the phrase tallies with Meredith's own conception of his characters.[410] In *One of Our Conquerors*, for example, a pair of formidably moral aunts are described as 'an embodiment of their principles' (270). I would extend the categorisation of 'embodied aphorisms', or embodied principles, to include most if not all of Meredith's characters. In referring to Meredith's characters as 'embodied aphorisms', McCarthy did not mean that they represented a quotable line from the pages of wisdom literature, of the kind explored in Chapter One, but that they are made to gesture towards a reformative truth throughout the narrative. This chapter argues that Meredith wanted to create a new style and form for the novel, one that was expressive of the nature of the human body, and through this its capacity to shape a system of individual improvement. It argues that the aphorism is the ideal way through which to conceive of this authorial technique, given that it is a literary form that is most performative of its subject matter. As Chris Baldick has defined it, the aphorism is a 'statement of some general principle, expressed memorably by condensing much wisdom into a few words'.[411] The form of the aphorism teaches as much as the words contained within it. By communicating his wisdom through physiology, Meredith shapes a language of advice that appeals to the self's resources of feeling and reason. The boundedness of the aphoristic form complements that of the body, whose parameters govern how we experience the world, which is the very thing that the aphorism aims to expose and adapt. As such, it is a form that allies itself with the shared systems of self-help and physical being.

Embodiment and the aphorism have a shared history. The first extant record of the term 'aphorismos' comes from the *Hippocratic Corpus*, in which the aphorism is mainly used to convey concise knowledge about medical conditions and their treatment. The body, however, serves a therapeutic function in more ways than one. As Brooke Holmes writes, 'by using 'the body (sôma)' to

[410] McCarthy, 'Novels with a Purpose', p. 37.
[411] Chris Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008),https://www.proquest.com/lion/docview/2137969548/3CBD6687204C4885PQ/76?accountid=14511 [Accessed 2nd November 2021].

organise and guide their perceptions of disease and the theories they developed of human nature and its malfunctioning, the Hippocratic writers lay the groundwork for understanding the body not just as an object of medical knowledge, but also as a philosophical problem that would persist for the next two millennia'.[412] One of Meredith's main literary influences, Thomas Carlyle, also applies the malfunctioning body to a wider consideration of human nature. He opens his essay 'Characteristics' (1831) with the 'Physician's Aphorism': 'The healthy know not of their health but only the sick', adding that 'it holds no less in moral, intellectual, political, poetical, than in merely corporeal therapeutics'.[413] Meanwhile, Friedrich Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde, 'the twin progenitors of the modern aphorism', developed a philosophical monism of body and mind (or soul) through this form.[414] Nietzsche is particularly important in the evolution of a psycho-physiological morality akin to that developed by Meredith. 'Moral judgements', he writes, are 'symptoms of sign languages which betray the process of physiological prosperity or failure'.[415] Additionally, the epigraph to *Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith* makes explicit reference to the currency of the embodied aphorism. Taken from Coleridge's 'Introductory Aphorisms' in *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of Manly Character* (1825), Gilman chooses to quote how '[e]xclusive of the abstract sciences, the largest and worthiest portion of our knowledge consists in aphorisms; and the greatest of men is but an aphorism'.[416] Meredith actively participated in this discourse, which links the living form to a mediated textual pedagogy.

Meredith's infamous aphorist, the systematizing Sir Austin of *The Ordeal*, is described in this very act of this embodiment when, pencilling down a new thought in his notebook: he 'restored the skeleton of a great Aphorism to his pocket, there to gather flesh and form, with numberless others in

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[412] Brooke Holmes, 'Body' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hippocrates*, ed. Peter E. Pormann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 63-88 (63).
[413] Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics' (1831), in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle. Vol. 28*, ed. Henry Duff Traill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-43 (1).
[414] 'Introduction', *Aphoristic Modernity: 1800 to the Present*, ed. Kostas Boyiopoulos and Michael Shallcross (Boston: Brill, 2019), p. 4.
[415] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 258.
[416] Gilman, *Wit and Wisdom of George Meredith*, p. i.

a like condition' (154). This skeletal sententiousness is an image that is also discoverable in Barthes's essay on the maxims of La Rochefoucauld. Form and the body are conflated as, within the successful maxim, 'the skeleton – and bones are hard things – is more than apparent: spectacular'.[417] In Meredith's novel, the incorporation of such a device into the text alerts us to the deployment of fleshly character as a moral device. As we have seen, there is also a danger in trying to conscript the human body into the performance of principles. Sir Austin 'behold[s] the son of his heart, his System incarnate', only to see that System eroded by Richard's uncontrollable impulses toward individualism (237). Previously, Sir Austin had gone so far as to feel quite complacent about the first of his son's serious illnesses in the novel, believing his moral system to be a powerful enough restorative to override the deterioration of Richard's physical system:

> Was the Scientific Humanist remorseful? Not he. He had looked forward to such a crisis as that point in the disease his son was the victim of, when the body would fail and give the spirit calm to conquer the malady, knowing very well that the seeds of the evil were not of the spirit […] Anxious he was, and prayerful; but with faith in the physical energy he attributed to his System. (221)

Through this, Meredith provides us with a reading of the form of the body for ethical signification. Sir Austin's interpretation of 'the young Experiment' is contemptible, but he is ultimately correct in predicting his son's recovery. The predication of this on an aphoristic embodiment shows the lineaments and limits of pedagogy through a human form. The 'old Doctor did admit that Richard's constitution was admirable': Richard's recovery is just one moment in the text which seems to demonstrate the fact that Sir Austin's System is actually working, which colours our reading of it with a level of ambivalence that is crucial to Meredith's method (222). Projected onto the sick body are Sir Austin's philosophical expectations and interpretations. They are confirmed by circumstances here, but are ultimately destroyed by his son's final illness which results in Lady Blandish's assertion that

[417] Roland Barthes, *New Critical Essays*, p. 5.

'Richard will never be what he promised' (492). Through this, Meredith establishes the body as a site on which prescriptive ideas of improvement can be made and unmade. Abstract theory is consistently overpowered by the conditions of flesh, which can also be transformed to manifest other ideological values. Through continually representing the forms these take, Meredith encourages a corporeal hermeneutics which pertains to the individual reader's sense of self.

The Mind and the Joints

Beauchamp's Career (1875), as Meredith put it in a letter to his American editor, is one in which a 'certain drama of self-conquest is gone through, for the hero is not perfect'.[418] Like *The Ordeal*, it is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, but concludes in a scene of anti-fulfilment signified, as in *The Mill on the Floss*, by the drowning of the central protagonist. In what serves as an introduction to both Nevil Beauchamp and the kind of novel he is undertaking, Meredith writes that:

> following the counsel of a sage and seer, I must try to paint for you what is, not that which I imagine. This day, this hour, this life, and even politics, the centre and throbbing heart of it (enough, when unburlesqued, to blow the down off the gossamer-stump of fiction at a single breath, I have heard tell), must be treated of: men, and the ideas of men […] these are my theme; and may it be my fortune to keep them at blood-heat, and myself calm as a statue of Memnon in prostrate Egypt. (6)

As John William Morris notes, Meredith frequently refers to Carlyle as 'a sage and seer' in his letters and was also personally instructed by him to write history rather than fiction.[419] Carlyle's presence in the text signals his influence over it, particularly with regards to Meredith's desire to keep 'men, and the ideas of men […] at blood-heat'. In *Sartor Resartus,* Carlyle writes, for instance, that 'Language is

[418] Meredith to Moncure D. Conway, 18 June 1874, *LGM*, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 485.
[419] John William Morris, *Thomas Carlyle's Influence on George Meredith's Theory of Literature*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1954: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/3250. Stevenson, in his biography of Meredith, records how Carlyle intended to compliment Meredith by saying "'Man, ye suld write hesstory! Ye hae a heestorian in ye'" to which Meredith responded "'Novel-writing is my way of writing history'", *The Ordeal of George Meredith*, p. 74.

the Flesh-Garment, the Body, of Thought', which gestures to a form in which 'moral' and 'corporal therapeutics' (57) coalesce.

The passage, meanwhile, manifests a style representative of Meredith's belief in what fiction can do and the equally important question of what it shouldn't. As he writes, in introduction to the passage just quoted, his novel attempts to offer 'the position of the country undisturbed by any moralizings of mine' (5). And yet, as the above clearly demonstrates, literature cannot remain neutral and undisturbed by either authorship or readership. A narrative expression of reality might 'blow the down off the gossamer-stump of fiction at a single breath' but, as with the dandelion head, the act of dispersal is a fertilization. Furthermore, as this thesis has already demonstrated, Meredith's idea of recording the 'ideas of men' through a legible pulse is not unique to this novel. His texts are laden with references to embodied ideals which, whilst sparing the author from 'moralizing', cannot help but communicate a mediated morality of their own. To keep one's 'characters at blood-heat' (6), as Meredith reiterates he must be allowed to do, becomes a methodology in his novels. His books depend, at times, upon opening a shared vein that runs from the reader's body to the text. It works to heighten the feeling of being a body, and appeals to the heuristic capacities latent within that. *Beauchamp's Career* does biography differently to Smiles. For Meredith, an individual's ideal has a 'throbbing heart' which works to warm the blood. As J. P. Stern writes, the 'origins of the pivotal figure of the aphorism lies in the imaginative mode of language. Its roots are an enigma of growth and custom and human disposition, its form and properties a synthesis of sound, thing, and man over the long centuries of changing life'.[420] Meredith's narratological 'throbbing heart' corresponds to this theory. Such a warmth encourages a readerly contact that breaks the boundaries between text and self with a potentially transformative effect.

[420] J. P. Stern, 'A Literary Definition of the Aphorism', *Lichtenberg: A Doctrine of Scattered Occasions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), pp. 189-227 (203).

Proof that Meredith intended the connection to be made between body and text, and that he associated it with self-consciously improving literature, can be found only a chapter later. Nevil's constant admirer, the widowed Rosamond Culling, observes 'the peculiarity of the books he selected for his private reading' (19). Meredith describes, in startling detail, how one particular author – 'one writing of heroes' – makes her feel when reading him. The book is written:

> in (so she esteemed it) a style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed; a wind-in-the-orchard style, that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionary words giving a hand to street slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints. This was the effect on the lady. (19)

This is a poetics of readerly experience. Meredith, though ostensibly describing Carlyle's *On Heroes*, self-consciously mimics the style he describes in an appropriate performance of the influence that such books can have over both self and text. As Dames has noted, this is also a deliberate reflection of how a 'series of joltingly crabbed or breathtakingly elongated sentences, a chaotic mixture of different registers, and a jerky, far from seamless accumulation of aphoristic phrases marks Meredith's style'.[421] Certain aspects of Meredith's description certainly figure the aphorism imbedded in the looser prose of a full-length text. Remembering the fruit imagery of the anthology, Meredith's 'appreciable fruit' refers to a digestible form of wisdom, whilst the abruptly manifesting sentences and the 'slant rays' of light all recall the sudden moments of illumination associated with the aphorism. Most importantly for my purposes, Dames isolates the 'strange intent of this passage' which 'is to register the somatic and intellectual effect of a difficult prose style' through 'the language of reading physiology'.[422] For Rosamond, the 'electrical agitation' that she experiences binds body to mind through an affective synchronicity. For her, such a feeling of reading is 'abominable' (19), but for

[421] Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, p. 167.
[422] Ibid.

Nevil it is an 'illumination' (20). This latter term is representative, for Stern as well as his aphoristic authorial subject, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, of the 'less stable kind of truth' to which the aphorism aspires, which is 'the truth of suggestion or illumination'.[423] By comparing the reception of the same text by two different readers, Meredith caters for hermeneutic difference in a mode that colours his entire oeuvre. What appeals as concrete truth to one reader will not strike another in the same way. Importantly, the figure he uses to express this is one that takes the individual body into account.

Woolf's Dead Characters

Writing in 1892 to Julia Stephen, Meredith noted his reluctance to have his portrait painted: 'I have no ambition to provoke an English posterity's question, Who is he? and my grizzled mug may be left to vanish'.[424] In the same letter, he writes warmly of Stephen's ten-year-old daughter who would grow up to become Virginia Woolf and one of Meredith's most prescient and thoughtful critics. Assessing Meredith's reputation thirty-six years later, Woolf deemed that '[h]e will be read, one may guess, by fits and starts; he will be forgotten and discovered and again discovered and forgotten like Donne, and Peacock, and Gerard Hopkins'.[425] This prediction of Meredith's critical reception – being read in fits and starts – is aptly performative of his aphoristic style and echoes his description of such a method of reading in *Beauchamp's Career*. It has also been proved true by subsequent critical trends. The reasons for which, according to Woolf, Meredith's appeal had waned since his death in 1909 are also at the heart of his chapter. She writes:

> His teaching seems now too strident and too optimistic and too shallow. It obtrudes; and when philosophy is not consumed in a novel, when we can underline this phrase with a pencil, and cut out that exhortation with a pair of scissors and paste the whole into a system, it is safe

[423] Stern, *Lichtenberg*, p. 217.
[424] George Meredith to Julia Stephen, 25 December 1892, in *LGM*, 2, p. 1114.
[425] Virginia Woolf, 'The Novels of George Meredith (1928)', in *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1935) (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 236.

> to say that there is something wrong with the philosophy or with the novel or with both. Above all, his teaching is too insistent. He cannot, even to hear the profoundest secret, suppress his own opinion. And there is nothing that characters in fiction resent more. If, they seem to argue, we have been called into existence merely to express Mr. Meredith's views upon the universe, we would rather not exist at all. Thereupon they die; and a novel that is full of dead characters, even though it is also full of profound wisdom and exalted teaching, is not achieving its aim as a novel.[426]

Like McCarthy, Woolf pitches what she deems to be Meredith's deliberately instructive fiction against the necessities of true aesthetic success. The reader's receptivity to what she calls the 'intermittent brilliancy' of the Meredithian literary project is compromised by a simultaneous Gilmanesque compulsion to transcribe this received wisdom into a kind of systematized common-place book or anthology. Evoking the extensive 'scissors and paste' self-help manuscript culture, Woolf's Meredith teaches by the extract, leaving his piece-meal fiction at the mercy of its readership's dissection.

Whilst this is important, my particular interest lies in Woolf's evocative juxtaposition of dead and living wisdom. According to her reading, the strictures of system prevent Meredith from 'hear[ing] the profoundest secret' which fiction can self-generate and communicate back to its author. His compulsion to improve the reader nullifies the autonomy of the text which, Woolf states, would otherwise work to instigate wisdom from within its own aesthetic conditions. In silencing this living wisdom, or rather talking over it, Meredith curates the curative rather than allowing for spontaneous conception, thus ultimately curtailing the development of the minds he wishes to liberate. In order to drive this point home, Woolf compares two materialities with which she associates instructive reading. One is the cut-up method which illuminates the paper-thin quality of textual doctrine. The other represents the ideal of 'aesthetic teaching', echoing George Eliot's preferred methodology, in which teaching is 'consumed in a novel' and thus effortlessly internalised. This physiological ingestion of instruction, whilst reminding us of previous chapters, takes us to Woolf's dramatization of Meredith's characters. Her claim that the inhabitants of Meredith's fiction die because they are unable to express

[426] Ibid, pp. 233-4.

their own opinions creates a tempting opportunity for a pun as, resulting in 'a novel that is full of dead characters', words and people succumb to the plague of 'profound wisdom and exalted teaching': Meredith's dead letter.

Ironically, Meredith supplied a similar criticism to Woolf's, in his capacity as a publisher's reader for Chapman and Hall. Arguing against the publication of H. B. Marriott Watson's *Faint Heart*, he writes 'I have had this before. It may have been amended. There is feeling for humanity, & ideal in it - & characters made to suit. They do not live, they – & others who are shallow – talk incessantly – It would not be read'.[427] Meredith surely envisaged another authorial mode for himself, one in which the characters *do* live unconfined by written systems. Contrary to Woolf's diagnosis, Meredith builds an environment in which his characters attain some autonomy, and they do this by living through their patterns of development and through their subscription or resistance to this ontology. As embodied aphorisms, in Meredith's famously difficult prose, the character is empowered to develop a hermeneutic opacity that insists upon the attention and evolution of the reader.

For Woolf, Meredith's characters need fleshing out. '[W]ith Meredith there are no touches' given by his fictional protagonists, which would impress the affective experience of fiction onto the reader.[428] Willoughby Patterne, from *The Egoist*, strikes her as 'a wax model and not entirely living flesh'.[429] In her approach, Woolf associates the successful novel with tact; with the ability to feel and promote feeling in others. The absence of such an encounter would, however, be contested by a handful of Meredith's contemporary critics, who actively consider what might be described as Meredith's life forms. His close friend Robert Louis Stevenson, for instance, writes:

> I have just re-read for the third and fourth time *The Egoist*. When I shall have read it the sixth or seventh, I begin to see I shall know about it. You will be astonished when you come to re-read it; I had no idea of the matter – human, red matter he has contrived to plug and pack into

[427] George Meredith as Publisher's Reader, Original Manuscript Notes for Chapman and Hall, George Meredith Collection, GEN MSS 953, Box 40, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[428] Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p. 232.
[429] Ibid, p. 233.

> that strange and admirable book. Willoughby is, of course, a pure discovery; a complete set of nerves, not heretofore examined, and yet running all over the human body – a suit of nerves.[430]

Meredith, Stevenson suggests, is writing a new kind of fiction whose legibility depends upon a mutual nervous comprehension between character and reader. The passage from his letter is particularly concerned with interpretation, the correct reading being the slow apprehension of Meredith's embodied authorship. Physiology becomes a philosophy through the author's novels, which in turn lends itself to a methodology of how to read his works. As V. S. Pritchett would later write, again of *The Egoist*, 'you *are* made to feel the bodily, physical shape of feeling. It is in the nerves and muscles'.[431] We have already explored how somatic simultaneity between reader and character matters to both Eliot and Meredith. Here, I want to discuss how he specifically applies it to a form of instructive short-hand, i.e. through an aphoristic physiology.

Such a reading is implicit in the words of one of Meredith's most perceptive admirers, the poet and critic Lionel Johnson, who noted his ability to render abstract moral ideas as physical entities. He writes that 'with Mr Meredith style and subject change or grow together. In proportion as the subject is simple, or idyllic, or tragic, or humorous, or rapid, so does the style assume those qualities'.[432] Such an organic mode of writing contributes to Meredith's ability to see

> thoughts as things, emotions as images, the abstract as concrete. He has eyes for the form and colour of an idea; he presents it to us full of life. It is now a truism to say that a cause is identical with its effects; but the illustration may help us out. When an ordinary writer gives us an idea, he gives it us in a dull and sparing way; the implicit truth is there, but it remains implicit: he states, as it were a cause. Mr Meredith states the effects, the explicit operations of the cause, the thought is expressed in concrete terms. His lively phrases are not metaphorical but logical; the ideas are translated into their equivalent expressions in actual life.[433]

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[430] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson to His Family and Friends*, ed. Sidney Colvin (London: Methuen and Co., 1906), pp. 238-39.
[431] Pritchett, *George Meredith and English Comedy*, p. 44.
[432] Lionel Pigot Johnson, the *Academy*, lxxi (May 1891), *The Critical Heritage: George Meredith*, pp. 360-63, p. 361.
[433] Ibid, p. 362.

The 'truism' that Johnson mentions here interestingly alludes to William James's theory of the emotions, which the philosopher had first laid out in his article for the journal *Mind* in 1884. In 'What is an Emotion?', James demonstrates how the organic effects of a feeling not only precede, but constitute, the conscious feeling of an individual. For James, the cause of an emotion such as modesty resides within the blush rather than with a perception antecedent to the body: 'bodily expression' generates 'mental affection'.[434] Through Johnson's application of James's theory of the emotions to Meredith's novels, then, we can see how his criticism is situated within a psychological debate that aims to refer abstract emotional forms to the physical body in order to better understand and potentially control or harness those forms. In stating the 'effects, the explicit operations of the cause', Meredith allows the reader to perform the realization of such concepts through a form of subjective *translation*. His novels, according to Johnson, are written in a language of affective immediacy where the idea is immanent within the language of his prose. Actual life changes its form within Meredith's novels, so that it can be read and instinctively understood by the reader. Such a process is akin to interpreting the aphorism, in which its philosophical concepts are made to resonate with the reader through implicit rather than explicit illumination. Aphorisms initially appeal because of how they make one *feel* about their correctness in revealing the experience of life. This feeling of knowingness is the form of wisdom that Meredith aims to incubate within the reader through his novels.

An Aid to Life, Quick with our Blood

Defending the inclusion of philosophy within fiction in *Diana of the Crossways*, Meredith's narrator shows how both genres interact to reify human characters who would otherwise appear as 'a picture

[434] William James, 'What is Emotion?', *Mind*, 9.34 (April 1884): 188-205 (189).

of figures modelled on no skeleton-anatomy' (I, 27). In perceiving that 'we are coming to philosophy', the narrator encourages his reader to

> imagine the celestial refreshment of having a pure decency in the place of sham; real flesh; a soul born active, wind-beaten, but ascending. Honourable will fiction then appear; honourable, a fount of life, an aid to life, quick with our blood. (22-23)

Only Meredith could make reading his novels sound like a brisk walk up Box Hill. This is not too surprising, however, given how fitness in itself was a philosophy for Meredith. As Seamus Perry writes, he was one of the most prominent proponents of 'the combination of a strong pair of legs and a healthy cast of mind that so powerfully appealed to the late Victorian intelligentsia'.[435] Meredith, then, in uniting philosophy and fiction, connects both to the conditions of 'flesh'. The accumulating four-syllabic clauses of the final sentence encourage a rapid assent to this reformed ideology of the novel. For the author, the 'honour' of fiction depends upon the interdependency of multiple life forms. The novel becomes a 'fount of life' for the characters made 'real flesh' by philosophical treatment, which in turn 'aids' the lives of those who read about them. Meanwhile, the whole project is vitalised by the unified pulsations of human blood. Blood, as several of his novels demonstrates, is an important word for Meredith. We have seen this in his characterisations in *Beauchamp's Career*, whilst it also represents a vehicle for a consciousness that has both instinctive and moral qualities. This is the case with Nataly, a key character in *One of Our Conquerors* to which we will now turn. She is described as being 'drawn' by her 'warm blood […] to some acceptance of the philosophy of existence' (176). In other words, Meredith engages the reader in an experimental play of novel conditioning which aims to extend the capacity for aesthetic learning without curtailing the necessary freedom of the reader's interpretation. This is a technique that is also key to the successful aphorism. Throughout *One of Our Conquerors*, then,

[435] Seamus Perry, 'Drugs Anyone?', *London Review of Books*, 37.12 (June 2015): Online. https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v37/n12/seamus-perry/drugs-anyone.

Meredith produces a flesh-and-blood morality that defies the structural strictures of the single philosophic line of argument.

Time and time again in *One of Our Conquerors,* its characters' moral development is described in material and physiological terms, so that they most resemble living systems which only subsequently translate into moral ones. Meredith himself alluded to this progression in a letter to an American student written only four years before the publication of the work:

> I have never started a novel to pursue the theory it developed. The dominant idea in my mind took up the characters and the story midway.
>
> You say that there are few scenes, is it so throughout? My method has been to prepare my readers for a crucial exhibition of the personae, and then to give the scene in the fullest of their blood and brain under stress of a fiery situation.
>
> Concerning style, thought is tough, and dealing with thought produces toughness. Or when strong emotion is in tide against the active mind there is perforce confusion.[436]

In this, Meredith acquiesces to Woolf's depiction of his characters' conscription to the performance of the 'dominant idea in [the author's mind]'. Contrary to other facets of her argument, however, Meredith describes his novel in terms of a living, self-generative vehicle for the production of 'theory'. His novel is rendered here in somatic terms, whereby it is 'the personae' who manifest both the 'blood and brain' which give the text its scenes. Meredith's representation of his writing process as only the delayed embodiment, both characterological and textual, of a slowly crystallising idea is intriguing because it is so deliberately organic. The alive idea's successful communication necessitates the active involvement not only of the author but also of the reader. Meredith's avowed preparation of the reader involves a form of affective training which in turn drives the plot towards an emotive scene. The novel is structured by and around this teaching.

Meredith's use of the word 'personae' is a clear reference to the performative aspect of his fictional people, who act for the reader and through the reader's capacity to react to what he refers to as the 'stress' of scene. The word stress, related to both an affect of the body and a linguistic register,

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[436] George Meredith to George Pierce Baker, 22 July 1887, *LGM,* 2, p. 876.

relates to the transformative intentionality of Meredith's prose.[437] Within Meredith's literary theory, the embodied reactions of his characters are meant to be felt as well as understood. His novels experiment with emotional reification – a teaching that transcends the page and becomes physically manifest. In this, he avoids the cut and paste systematizing that Woolf locates in his fiction. Rather, the system Meredith wants his readers to pay attention to is the physiological one. Embodiment is written into his text as a core principle: 'Concerning style, thought is tough, and dealing with thought produces toughness'. Meredith represents the psycho-physiological reaction he wishes to develop in his reader as necessary in order to encounter the 'strong emotion' exhibited in the text, which otherwise might threaten to overwhelm the 'active mind'. He therefore conceives of his fiction as a form of mental training whereby the mind becomes more capable of simultaneous emotional and rational encounter. Meredith works to make knowledge constitutional.

Meredith habitually refuses to comply with the conventions of literary realism, and this is especially the case in *One of Our Conquerors*. Considering Meredith's previous novels in *The Decay of Lying* (1891), Oscar Wilde refuted the claim that the novelist's methodology was one of realism:

> Ah! Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything, except articulate […] whatever he is, he is not a realist. Or rather I would say that he is a child of realism who is not on speaking terms with his father.[438]

Wilde's muted admiration for the novelist is expressed through the recognition of his subject's disavowal of the strictures of form and even language. Realism is still in Meredith's blood despite his non-conformity. As 'a child of realism', these genetics are shown within his characters rather than in

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[437] It would be difficult to read about the 'stress' of language without thinking immediately of Gerard Manley Hopkins's innovations on the subject. Indeed, Margaret Harris notes, in the introduction to her edition of *One of Our Conquerors*, that both Meredith and Hopkins belonged to 'the era of the great English philologians of the rank of Skeat and Furnivall […] with more attention actually being directed to a study of the language. Hopkins' poetry is suffused by the resulting verbal intoxication, and so to some extent is Meredith's prose', pp. 3-13, p. 7.

[438] Oscar Wilde, *Intentions* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Company, 1891), pp. 16-17.

his plots. Wilde, in alluding to the flashes of illumination that Meredith's novels offer, refers to an aphoristic style with which both writers were intimately acquainted. For Andrew Hui, in his introduction to *A Theory of the Aphorism* (2019), whilst 'the philosopher creates and critiques continuous lines of argument', the aphorist 'composes scattered lines of intuition. One moves in a chain of discursive logic; the other by arrhythmic leaps and bounds'.[439] This aphoristic structure suits the reading of *One of Our Conqueror*'s particularly well. The aphorism divides the text into luminous fragments that can only be systematized by the active involvement of the reader. Meredith conceives of the embodied aphorism as a way of effecting the formation of an affective tutelary system.

In what remains one of the best and most formative essays on the novel, Gillian Beer refers to this aphoristic style in her argument that the novel represents

> the apotheosis of the new artistic freedom which came to Meredith as the result of a legacy in the early 1880s. He put this freedom to some curious uses. His late novels often seem cryptic, self-absorbed, baulking our efforts as readers. But on re-reading, the crabbedness obtrudes itself far less, the intelligence, the poignant consciousness of human complexity comes fully home.[440]

The strenuous effort this novel in particular requires from its readers – the 'cryptic' and 'crabbed' language employed in the construction of it, and the compulsion to 're-reading' that it effects – lends the text its peculiar style. The aphorism is meant to be re-read, puzzled over, and re-imagined, so that it begins to become a personalized system of signification. As Hui writes, '[t]he best aphorisms admit an infinitude of interpretation, a hermeneutic inexhaustibility. In other words, while an aphorism is circumscribed by the *minimal* requirements of language, its interpretation demands *maximal engagement*'.[441] Through Meredith's curation of aphoristic moments, expressed through embodiment, he creates a new and anti-prescriptive system of self-help.

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[439] Andrew Hui, *A Theory of the Aphorism: From Confucius to Twitter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 2.
[440] Gillian Beer, 'One of Our Conquerors: Language and Music', *Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), pp. 265-80 (265).
[441] Hui, *A Theory of the Aphorism*, p. 3.

Meredith re-writes the conventions of the domestic novel so as to force the reader to question what they expect from such a text. Victor Radnor, wife of Nataly and father of the novel's other chief character Nesta, an immensely wealthy city speculator, has for largely financial and (it is hinted) some complex psychological reasons, been married for a number of years to the wealthy but much older Mrs Burman. For the past twenty years, however, he has been living with Mrs Burman's former companion Nataly, to whom he refers as his wife. The rest of the novel tracks Radnor's ambitions of becoming a public figure by joining parliament, the strain this puts on Nataly, who would prefer to remain in social seclusion, and his daughter's development into a liberal-minded and independent woman. The novel culminates abruptly in the death of both her mother and father, as well as that of the obstacle to their union, Mrs. Burman. As if to balance the books, however, Meredith ends by confirming Nesta's marriage to Dartrey Fenellan, the author's avowed exemplar of the champion of women, after one of the vaguest and most unromantic courtships ever put to paper.

My reading of this novel coincides somewhat with Judith Wilt's monograph *The Readable People of George Meredith* (1975). Wilt's project is to track the evolution Meredith wishes to inspire within his readers' minds, which she says resides in the 'drama in the reader's finding of his real self and in the restoration of his freedom to act from his real self without the distractions of his time-bound life'.[442] Wilt does not go far enough, however, in elucidating just how 'readable' Meredith's characters are meant to be: they are textbook. In *One of Our Conquerors*, Meredith considers the frequency with which people are parcelled out and made exemplars of by the speculative public. The '[a]necdotes of England's happiest man', Victor Radnor, go some way towards proving this as:

> We are indebted almost for construction to those who will define us briefly: we are but scattered leaves to the general comprehension of us until such a work of binding and labelling is done. And should the definition be not so correct as brevity pretends to make it at one stroke, we are at least rendered portable; thus we pass into the conceptions of our fellows, into the records, down to posterity. (110)

[442] Judith Wilt, *The Readable People of George Meredith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 13.

Whilst Alice Crossley finds this 'explicit in praise of external judgement on individual character', I view its meaning as more equivocal.[443] The distillation of all that we are into a text the size of a pocket-book implies not only conservation but also confinement. Radnor himself, for instance, encountering a man on the street who derides his 'dam punctilio', is so affected by the speaker precisely because, as Beer asserts, 'it 'renders him portable' – it circumscribes him, classes him' (3).[444] Indeed, thinking upon the term 'punctilio' again, Radnor becomes 'unable to cope with it reflectively' (5). Meredith's incisive treatment of reflexivity is highlighted here in that, given that 'reflectively' means both thoughtfully and indirectly, it alludes to Radnor's inability to help himself. He is defined and thus over-determined. A single word expressed by the other can thus re-define the limits of one's self-affirmation and sometimes eradicate it. In this instance, Meredith performs the transformation from personality to textuality. Describing the self as being a matter of form, and more specifically of textual and social forms, he evokes the figure of the book-binder gathering pages of material selfhood in order to compress it into a brief biographical entry in the annals of posterity. The sentence showcases the creation of an aphorism – a condensation of wisdom into a pithy remark – and also the reduction of living system into written wisdom. It is important to note that '[w]e are indebted' to this metaphysical bookmaker not for 'existence', but for 'construction'; personality is theoretical in Meredith and is therefore continuously, to borrow a phrase from the novel, 'pointing a moral' (509).

The aphorism has always depended on its capacity to be interpreted by the individual reader, and to be transformed by this engagement into something with personal currency. It is highly compatible with the discourse of self-help because of its ability to shape a practical and individual

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[443] Alice Crossley, *Male Adolescence in Mid-Victorian Fiction: George Meredith, W. M. Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope* (London: Routledge, 2016), ebook, np. Crossley's section on 'Manly Conduct: Meredith and the culture of improvement' considers the majority of Meredith's books in the context of the literature of advice. My reading differs from Crossley in moving away from notions of gender towards a more generalized readership. Crossley represents Meredith's fictions of self-help as one primarily addressed towards young men.

[444] Beer, *Meredith Now*, p. 269.

ontology. Meredith's prose is intensely stylised as he experiments with the transformative effect of his aphoristic language. Writing of this language, Beer notes Meredith's determination that it should be morally active, affective, effective and, most importantly, revelatory of 'the responsibilities imposed by language and by the articulated consciousness'.[445] Beer's *Meredith: A Change of Masks* (1970) makes it clear that she does not view this consciousness as simply an authorial or characterological articulation. Instead, she presents this as an open-ended manifestation in which Meredith's 'exploration of the possibilities of the novel as a form' allows for the construction of 'new channels for consciousness to flow in'.[446] Meredith's fiction performs the conditions of thought to deliberately blur the lines between fictional construction and reality. This places his prose in a category that surpasses ordinary notions of the *bildungsroman* because his novel of development caters not only for the evolution of his characters, but also for the neurological capacities of the reader. This idea is keenly demonstrated in Vanessa L. Ryan's chapter on Meredith's 'muscular' readership: Ryan addresses the 'deliberate goal of Meredith's prose, which aims to train the reader's mind', whilst demonstrating how this accords with much physiological psychology present in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[447] This lends itself well to an appraisal of the embodied aphorism in *One of Our Conquerors* and to the system of living wisdom that Meredith sought to curate through his experimental prose.

Meredith communicates his teaching deceptively; the reader finds herself as its subject before becoming fully conscious of the fact. The immanent assent this encourages is actually a call to re-evaluate the means by which it was secured, as we slowly retrace the prose in order to dissect it. This enhances its aphoristic quality, as it forms a whole statement that re-situates our attention and calls for either corroboration or dissent. This is best demonstrated in a scene between Radnor and his 'wife' Nataly in which her methods of self-preservation are elucidated. Here, the pair discuss a potential

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[445] Ibid, p. 266.
[446] Gillian Beer, *Meredith: A Change of Masks: A Study of the Novels* (London: Athlone, 1970), p. 1.
[447] Ryan, *Thinking Without Thinking*, p. 127. Dames also explores this in *The Physiology of the Novel.*

avenue, opened up by a rumoured relenting of Radnor's legal wife, towards a legitimisation of their relationship. The manner in which Nataly yields to her partner's assertion of Mrs Burman's change of heart is described by Meredith as follows:

> The histrionic self-deceiver may be a persuasive deceiver of another, who is again, though not ignorant of his character, tempted to swallow the nostrums which have made so gallant a man of him: his imperceptible sensible playing of the part, on a substratum of sincereness, induces fascinatingly to the like performance on our side, that we may be armed as he is for enjoying the coveted reality through the partial simulation of possessing it. (55)

Meredith is concerned with the theatre of self and the lulling inclusivity of that performance. What is perceptible is just how closely the author scrutinises the psychology of mutual persuasion and the self-generative comfort this installs in both individuals. In addition, he subtly extends his study beyond his characters. What begins as the description of a situation unique to the novel evolves to reflect on the the readership's unavoidable familiarity with like occurrences in their own lives. Meredith folds this observation around a colon, reaching out for an explanation of Nataly's reaction to how this might be received 'on our side' and admitting us into 'the partial simulation' of experiential proprietorship. In forcing the reader into a slow reception of this, brought about through the complexity of the long, clause-heavy sentence, Meredith incubates a consciousness of the performative aspect of self-deception. Added to the glut of pronouns, this induces a confusion in the reader as to who is doing what, which surreptitiously encourages identification with the characters. As Dinah Birch writes, in her analysis of Eliot's occasional vagueness, 'style may function as a feature of language, but it may also, more radically, express a dynamic process of thought, or of identity itself'.[448] In Meredith, it is the identity of the reader that is under construction.

[448] Dinah Birch, 'Just Proportions': The Material of George Eliot's Writing', in *Thinking Through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) pp. 167-83, p. 176.

The 'fascination' Meredith has for the human psychology of partial wish-fulfilment promotes the sense of our selves as a subject for study. It lends credence to the idea that the parts the characters play is for our own good. The 'sensible playing of a part' heightens the connection between consciousness and the feeling towards security through nervous stimulation. Meredith is interested in tracking the mind's qualified assent to subjective roles. The deceiver operates upon 'a substratum of sincereness', whilst his co-conspirator enters into a reality of gratification which is dependent on 'the partial simulation of possessing it' in reality. The word 'partial' might mean 'almost whole' or 'biased towards' meaning that deception may also be self-motivated. There is a line of honesty, in these attempts to convince the mind of what the mind knows to be false, that renders this communion only a partial unreality. Meredith implies that at the heart of self-performance is a concrete truth, which is secured via that very conscious duplicity. Through self-reflection we enter a world that is more real to that self than the fictions external life might support. Performance is a form of self-assertion. The mind of the individual refuses to be conscripted into using the factual world as its only point of reference. In this it is free but also uncontrollable and dark to reliable self-review. Through the complex aphorism, then, Meredith shapes an embodied principle.

In *One of Our Conquerors*, the point of reference is shifted from the page to the mind of the reader who has been forced into a near-constant performance of inference. This contributes to a style that contains within itself the conditions necessary for self-help. Meredith's deliberate depiction of consciousness and its extension between character and reader is thus conspicuous. Much has been written about Meredith's articulation of the unknowable pre-Freudian depths of the unconscious and of the impossibility of truly mapping that space. There remains, however, something to be said for that capacity of the mind to be improved, which Meredith undoubtedly believed in. The over-consciousness – Meredith would refer to it as the 'front mind' (176) – deserves as much examination as the unconscious in a work so concerned with acknowledging the workings of the former. Meredith

belonged to a generation that believed in the psychological, scientific, and philosophical capacity of the individual to aid the self. Yet throughout his work his tone is undidactic and appealing. Indeed, in his addresses to the reader it appears as if he is continually amused by his attempts to engage them, fabricating a space in which the novel becomes a conversant social medium at ease with moral performatives. Meredith believed in the curative facility of fiction and plots his novels accordingly. Much like Eliot, his method of improvement is via the mediated instruction of the aesthetic experience. As he writes, '[i]n obscurity, feeling is a guide' (280). Meredith makes his characters perform aphoristic modes which, for being human, are not quite lexical or logical fixities.

Phosphorescent Hieroglyphic

Meredith's embodied aphorisms are often used to explore and remedy the female predicament in the late nineteenth century. Much has been written on what some refer to as the author's feminist leanings. Others acknowledge his championship of women's rights without going so far.[449] In *One of Our Conquerors,* it is through the character of Nesta that he transcribes and embodies his instructive ideals in this context. A large portion of the novel is devoted to the friendship that Nesta forms with a young woman she meets whilst holidaying in Brighton. Mrs. Marsett becomes particularly attached to Nesta due to the latter's refusal to judge or abandon her upon discovering that she is not married to Mr. Marsett, but is in fact his lover. Mrs Marsett asks whether Nesta would see it as particularly harmful to her reputation to visit her at her lodgings. When the latter answers 'No', Meredith states that 'it was her nature that projected the word' (342).

[449] For more on this see for instance Jane Marcus, "'Clio in Calliope": History and Myth in Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*' in *Art and Anger: Reading Like a Woman* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), pp. 20-49, Richard C. Stevenson, *The Experimental Impulse in George Meredith* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), Lucy Ella Rose, 'A Feminist Network in an Artists' Home: Mary and George Watts, George Meredith, and Josephine Butler', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 21.1 (January 2016): 74-91.

> Her vision of the reality of things was without written titles, to put the stamp of the world on it. She felt this lady to be one encompassed and in the hug of the elementary forces, which are the terrors to inexperienced pure young women. But she looked at her, and dared trust those lips, those eyes. She saw, through whatever might be the vessel, the spirit of the woman […] Reason is not excluded from these blind throbs of a blood that strikes to right the doings of the Fates. Nesta did not err in her divination of the good and the bad incarnate beside her […] Reason, acting in her heart as a tongue of the flames of the forge where we all are wrought, told her surely that the good predominated. She had the heart which is at our primal fires when nature speaks. (343)

Words as projections of nature resonate profoundly with Meredith's authorial style. As Sussman writes, 'from the earliest stages of his career Meredith searched for an alternative set of formal means to embody what we might regard as standard objects of representation'.[450] Surely no more standard an object of representation exists than the written word, which Meredith takes aim at here, processing language through embodiment. Remembering how readily Dorothea argues 'from words to dispositions', for Nesta her disposition *is* her word, something that is heavy with moral implications. In his excellent commentary on 'Meredith's unrelenting synthesis of curt and loose forms', Sussman also shows how the former, 'identified with metaphor and epigram, gravitates toward the philosophical intensity of poetic condensation, while the second, identified with plotting and syntax, seeks the imaginative freedom of discursive prose'.[451] Both forms cohere in Nesta's sensitive encounter with the moral system of Mrs Marsett, which is both figured by and literalised within her body.

Physiological form serves as a compression of the 'elementary forces' and the corresponding concepts such as 'good' and 'bad'. Mrs Marsett's lips and eyes are, to the attentive Nesta, a philosophical short-hand through which to correctly interpret character. If an aphorism can be thought of as a personal recognition of a truth that crystalizes through feelings of aptness generated by textual form, then this is something that Nesta performs through her reading of the 'vessel' as an index to the 'spirit' of Mrs Marsett. Reason, as Meredith strives to make known, is not to be excluded

[450] Sussman, *Stylistic Virtue*, p. 164.
[451] Ibid, pp. 164, 145.

from feeling and vice-versa. In suggesting this, Meredith includes an aphorism that resists narratological linearity in order to offer a more general statement that could indeed be cut-and-pasted according to Woolf's model: 'Reason is not excluded from these blind throbs of a blood that strikes to right the doings of the Fates'. In the isolation of this statement, Meredith connects the bodily system of the reader to that of Nesta's interpretative form through a somatic synchronicity of companionable throbs. If Mrs Marsett's body reveals a moral, then this can be extended to support the extractable aphorism which refers reason and right-doing to the blood-stream. Whether we feel 'moral aversion' or 'sisterly sympathy' (343) with someone – two states that Meredith applies to the feelings of Nesta – such a condition can be registered by the pulse. As such, the heart provides a rhythmic heuristic capacity which works to convince the self of the correct reading of a textual phrase or, indeed, a person. To be the embodiment of one's principle's, then, is literalised in Meredith's aphorism. Kirstie Blair, who considers the nineteenth-century 'culture of the heart' specifically in relation to poetry, shows how 'the reader repeatedly encounters such moments, slippages between the metaphorical and the literal'.[452] She notes how the heart is used to make the borders between reader, author, and character permeable through affective routes. 'Without a good heart', she writes, 'the curative properties of affective literature are in doubt'.[453] Though she is referring here to certain anxieties surrounding the figure of the heart, her work relates to Meredith's idea of improvement through aphoristic embodiment. Reading the text, Meredith is clear, should have material implications for the self.

On the topic of the true marital status of Mrs Marsett, Nesta reflects on whether 'she had actually been aware of the facts now known' (347). Meredith continues his idea of pulse-proved reading by showing how Nesta did indeed know, and that this was felt in the blood – as almost a

[452] Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 1.
[453] Ibid, p. 10.

genetic sense, inherited from her mother's own unmarried condition. Before her friend's revelation, Meredith describes how Nesta's

> quick sensibility curled to some breath of heated atmosphere brought about her by this new acquaintance: not pleasant, if she had thought of pleasure: intensely suggestive of our life at the consuming tragic core, round which the furnace pants. But she was unreflecting, feeling only a beyond hidden. (337)

'A beyond hidden' is grammatically strange, conjuring from the affective depths of Nesta's unconscious the sense of another space in which to conceptualise the self. The implication is that there can be a self-knowledge that exists *beyond* what is acknowledged by reason, which is only accessible to feeling. The lack of a comma between 'beyond' and 'hidden' likewise suggests the ability of the individual to create new languages of subjectivity that exist independently from accepted knowledge. Though 'unreflecting', Nesta knows a truth that is constructed and systematized through feeling.

> Those wits of the virgin young, quickened to shrewdness by their budding senses—and however vividly—require enlightenment of the audible and visible before their sterner feelings can be heated to break them away from a blushful dread and force the mind to know. As much as the wilfully or naturally blunted, the intelligently honest have to learn by touch. (347)

Meredith is a great botanical novelist, and the image of Nesta's 'budding senses', reminiscent of her 'quick sensibility curled to some breath of heated atmosphere' like a hothouse flower, shows how her knowing feelings are forced into bloom only through the tangible realties of sight and sound. Meredith adds to this very corporeal ontology another physical condition of knowledge, that of tact. Russell suggests that 'small, tactful moments of handling could contain within them claims and assumptions from which to demand new relationships in a shared world'.[454] In resonating with this, Meredith is stipulating a feeling for the self which is traced upon the lineaments of the external world. It is the world itself, here, that becomes an embodied aphorism – a fragmentary and isolated object through

[454] Russell, *Tact*, p. 3.

which to read the occasional truth. Ben Grant has traced the 'appeal of the aphorism' to something akin to Russell's 'small tactful moment'. Grant writes that 'we a drawn to it because the smallness of the form makes it a tactile object, something we can almost hold in our hand, which we can cherish, repeat and make our own by learning it by heart'.[455] Nesta's con*tact* with reality becomes a source of 'the heated atmosphere' which so often accompanies her enlightenment, but in this scenario it is more the comforting warmth that accompanies the placing of a hand upon flesh. Meredith laces his text, as we have seen with the image of heat and flower, with fragmentary signs that compel the reader into a compilation of signification which largely relates to a form of aphoristic reading.

Nesta elsewhere appears as a 'phosphorescent hieroglyph' who is consequently liable to misinterpretation or productive translation (347). Hieroglyphics can be, to quote Carlyle, symbolic of 'concealment and yet revelation' whereby from 'Silence and Speech acting together, comes a double significance'.[456] To render the characters into a meaningful language requires a performance of both the material and mystical capacities of the text. The hieroglyph thus emblematises the way Meredith thinks of the formative capacities of his work and characters. His novels are not structured according to plot, but through the luminous hieroglyphics that he scatters throughout the text. Whether we pick up on these fragments is a highly individualising technique, as every reader takes note of different things. Our hermeneutic links are thus governed more by feeling that by critical reason. Thus, by promoting the capacity for 'reading syllables by touch', which Nataly uneasily sees Nesta doing in her learning of the ways of the world, Meredith commits to the material and sensuous affect of the text without separating it from the image of a teaching device (245). He dramatizes the feeling towards knowledge by our fingers' ends – thus linking the accumulation of wisdom to accumulative feeling. This fragmentary reading technique, which involves a reflection on preceding images and their

[455] Ben Grant, *The Aphorism and Other Short Forms* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 4.
[456] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 166.

application to current ones, affords the reader a latent assurance of development and signifies the brain-work on which Meredith bases the success of his fiction.

One such fragmentary image is that of Nesta as a forge, which is reiterated throughout the text and serves to create an anthology of elusive and allusive textual moments that speak to a thermodynamics of self-help. Looking to all three of the passages quoted above, this emblem of the forge burns itself onto our vision. Nesta's primal reason acts 'as a tongue of the flames of a forge where we all are wrought' (343). Proving her metal in an unfriendly world to women such as Mrs Marsett is thus a moment of self-fashioning, whilst her half-intuited notions of sexual relationships suggest a 'life at the consuming tragic core, round which the furnace pants' (337). 'Feelings', meanwhile, 'can be heated to break them away from a blushful dread and force the mind to know' (347). Meredith's covert use of the figure of metallurgy, which the reader can only define through a connection of these phosphorescent hieroglyphs, shows how affective transformation can be made by the self into a tool or even weapon. Feelings are knowledge and the body is an aphorism. Nesta forges herself.

When Nesta finally allows herself to understand the true state of her parents' marriage, and thus her illegitimacy, this image comes particularly to the fore:

> This burning Nesta, Victor's daughter, tempered by Nataly's milder blood, was a girl in whom the hard shocks of the knowledge of life, perforce of the hardness upon pure metal, left a strengthening for generous imagination. She did not sit brood on her injured senses or set them through speculation touching heat; they were taken up and consumed by the fire of her mind. Nor had she leisure for the abhorrences, in a heart all flowing to give aid, and uplift and restore. Self was as urgent in her as in most of the young; but the gift of humour, which had previously diverted it, was now the quick feeling for her sisterhood, through the one piteous example she knew; and broadening it, through her insurgent abasement on their behalf, which was her scourged pride of sex. (354-5)

Recalling my last chapter, Meredith represents humour as aiding Nesta in her self-control and in the development of moral feeling. Reading the passage correctly, meanwhile, requires us to return to our anthology of quotation regarding this specific feature of Meredith's prose. In-so-doing, the reader

participates in the novel's moral schema, where the correct reading of Nesta's self-development actually instigates our own as readers.[457] Nesta is molten, the steel of her 'Victor' of a father being 'tempered' (and thereby strengthened) by her mother's blood. Biology and analogy mix metaphors in Meredith's forging of his exemplary woman. The image of the forge is used once again to describe Nesta's active formation of her consciousness. She makes her own maxims through a chemical interaction with self. In both this passage and the one quoted above, Meredith uses corporeal terms in order to describe how ontological realisations are registered physiologically. The development of a moral system interacts with the fortifying of a physical one: 'shocks' lend a further 'strengthening' to Nesta's character. This figures another embodied aphorism through which Nesta enacts a process of self-help. In suggesting that it is through the widening of a 'generous imagination' that this is accomplished, Meredith utilises the conditions of fiction in order to prompt the reader to participate in them. Images of the 'burning' subject, in addition to the hammering 'shocks' likened to 'the hardness upon pure metal', again depict Nesta's consciousness as a self-fuelled forge through which she constructs improving ideals. Instead of the 'mind-forged manacles' of Blakean origin, Nesta activates the conditions for the manufacture of her own liberty. In this, she is akin to Diana, who confesses herself to be 'sustained neither from above nor below, except within myself, and that is all fire and smoke, like their new engines' (I, 166). Nesta's 'urgent' self similarly creates its own energy, participating in a self-generative thermodynamics whose product is independent thought.

The second sentence of the passage above is less easy to unpack, though perhaps this indeterminacy works with the use of the term speculation here. Nesta does not allow her 'injured

[457] Fred C. Thomson also notes the opacity of this passage but, rather than attempting to understand why this was the case, he refers it to Meredith's 'ghastly pudency' around 'young maidens'. He writes, exasperatedly, that 'since the them of the second half of One of Our Conquerors is precisely the effect on a young girl of such dangerous knowledge [i.e. the fact that some couples pursue a sexual relationship without being married], he had to find a method. The one he chose was a generalized tropical obliqueness that inevitably reduced the individuality of character'. 'The Design of One of Our Conquerors', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 2.4 (Autumn, 1962), pp. 463-80 (479, n. 18).

senses' to solidify into concrete objects of consciousness but merely uses them to fuel 'the fire of her mind'. Bearing in mind the analogy of Nesta's internal smithery, she refuses to 'set [these senses] through speculation touching heat'. In a novel which documents Radnor's various failures as a speculator, speculation is represented here as a negative faculty that has the power to shape and calcify unhelpful thoughts. Nesta takes out the guesswork involved in such thought-processes, converting the feeling for herself into that for 'her sisterhood' which has been legitimised by the 'one piteous example she knew'. Through this embodied form of self-help, Nesta derives the energy to aid others and to develop an impassioned and affective feminism: 'her bosom bled to help' (355). In this self-reflexivity, Nesta performs what her mother, who 'propitiat[ing] a simulacrum, reflected from out, of an enthroned Society within' cannot (259). Meredith writes aphoristically that this is because it is '[n]ot until we are driven back upon an unviolated Nature, do we call to the intellect to think radically: and then we begin to think of our fellows' (259). Nesta begins to think radically because she has fallen back from society upon her own resources: 'she was responsively emotional, her blood virginal; often it was a tropical lightning' (290). Through a last reference to the image of the mind as self-generative forge, Meredith reaffirms this image: 'Her bitter gathering of the knowledge of life had sharpened her intellect: and the intellect, even in the young, is, and not less usefully, hard metal rather than fallow soil' (411). Meredith leaves it the reader to forge what we can from this ringing aphorism.

The Physicality of Ideas

Threaded through *One of Our Conquerors*, as one of its most constant yet obscure images, is what Meredith refers to as 'the mind idea' that occurs to Radnor (39). This half-formed, undefined, and yet persistent 'idea' dramatizes, in part, the mind's determined search for a reasonable cause of action and, as such, is concerned with self-help. The idea shapes a self-generative form of thought that might eventually either constitute an ideal or sink further into obscurity. As such, it could come to be

regarded as a figure for the Meredithian aphorism. Crucially, the idea most frequently manifests itself in corporeal terms. Radnor's consciousness is formed and explored through 'his ineffectual catching at the volatile idea' (11). The noun, after remaining in the abstract for several chapters, eventually goes through a pronominal revolution, becoming the 'Idea' (94). This concretization does nothing to explain what Radnor actually means by it: 'Definition seemed to be an extirpating enemy of this idea, or she was by nature shy' (10). I would argue, however, that it is representative of how the self builds upon the singular thought. It also reflects how the reader is supposed to read and make use of such terms within our own systems of knowledge. By the stage in which the Idea is thus re-formulated, the reader's acquaintance with it naturalises this enhancement. The Idea could be about anything: we read into it, and that is precisely the point. It encourages the act of *methexis* between reader and text. In its obscurity, therefore, the Idea is self-teaching.

Radnor's 'ineffectual catching at the volatile idea' begins with his fall on London Bridge and thus, as Sally Shuttleworth puts it, at 'the moment at which his social and psychological certitudes start to unravel' (11).[458] Echoing William Hazlitt's essay 'On People with One Idea', Radnor's Idea is really only about himself.[459] The Idea is at all times inferential, so that Meredith plays with the straining towards meaning making that the reader is simultaneously inclined to perform. Idea never finds an exact and meaningful correlate to what Radnor is thinking at the time, accompanying him for instance, on such diverse themes as his musings upon his political and potentially socialist leanings, and expansive theories about how society should be governed. At least twice, the Idea is implicated in bouts of severe anti-Semitism, which exemplifies the potential for abstract ideas to become destructive ideology. The Idea, however, cannot be classified as simple signifier of social or nationalistic thought-process. At one point it seems to reside in Randor's very physical fear of falling, whereby his 'nerves

[458] Sally Shuttleworth, 'Diseases of City Life and One of Our Conquerors', *Margaret Oliphant and George Meredith, The Yearbooks of English Studies*, Vol. 49, (2019), pp. 103-19 (105).
[459] William Hazlitt, *Table Talk; or, Original Essays on Men and Manners* (London: Henry Colburn, 1824), pp. 135-59.

clutched him, like a troop of household women', at another he feels that '[h]e had the idea so warmly, that his bath-water heated' (15, 493). In Meredith, thought processes have a stridently material presence. Through this, we can read Radnor's growing realisation that 'there had certainly been a moral fall, fully to the level of the physical, in the maintaining of that scheme of Lakelands', the vast house that he has built for his family in the hopes of entering the upper echelons of society (494). Meredith reverses the usual application of the metaphor of the fall. The image of a moral fall comes before the consciousness of a physical one. Metaphysics crashes down 'fully to the level of the physical' so that moral system becomes something entirely different: embodied reality, one in which the allegorical submits to a sensational equivalency.

The Idea becomes an ideal of embodiment. When Radnor loses the thread of his Idea, his bath-water chills: 'He jumped out and rubbed furiously with his towels and flesh-brushes, chasing the Idea for simple warmth, to have Something inside him, to feel just that sustainment' (494). The fact that the Idea, at least for Radnor, remains forever in the abstract means that it becomes a symbol of un-spent potential which he as much cherishes as fights against. It contributes to a personalised and ever-elusive reformative ethic that is left unclaimed by the protagonist by the end of the novel. As Beer has stated, however, this covert potentiality might be precisely the point of having the Idea. It acts out Meredith's 'artistic problem' of language as '[t]he idea can only truthfully exist through action; recorded, it loses all its substance and reverts to bromide'.[460] The image used by her is apt: bromide was used in the nineteenth century as a sedative which could easily be toxic in the body and Radnor's repeated recourse to the Idea for sustainment eventually leads to his madness and early death. Radnor's body provides the sort of accumulated wisdom that one might anticipate from any form of wisdom literature – or book of aphorisms. But even here, the reader gains no further notion of what Radnor's Idea consists. In fact, the multiple assertions of the 'Idea', made by Radnor, lead only to the

[460] Beer, *Meredith Now*, p. 273.

performance of the illegibility of self, whilst highlighting the desire to form consistent judgements upon it.

There is an as yet unexamined source for the 'Idea' that is so frequently invoked, but never defined. This is the 'Divine Idea' that appeared consistently in the works of the German Romantic philosophers with whose works Meredith, having been schooled in Germany, was familiar. He would also have been informed of this concept through reading Carlyle who most clearly addresses the Divine Idea in his essay on 'The State of German Literature', published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1827. Beginning with a declamation on the concept of art for art's sake, whereby 'Art is to be loved, not because of its effects, but because of itself', Carlyle then makes a detour in which he focuses on the philosophical make-up of the German literature that he considers. In particular, he refers to Fichte and to that philosopher's notion of the literary man. In Fichte's ideology, which Carlyle undoubtedly admires, it is the duty of the author to meditate upon and finally attempt to convey the Divine Idea. What this 'Idea' consists of, however, is almost as indefinite here as it is in *One of Our Conquerors*. The Divine Idea is an intuitive form of cognition that pertains to the tenets of perfectionism – i.e. of virtue, knowledge, and freedom – without the prescriptivism that usual accompanies such systems. Carlyle is clear in identifying what this means to Fichte, in that it depends for its revelation on literary teaching: 'in every century, every man who labours, be it in what province he may, to teach others, must first have possessed himself of the Divine Idea, or, at least, be with his whole heart and his whole soul striving after it'.[461] There is strong evidence to suggest that Meredith was in sympathy with this view of authorship.

[461] Thomas Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: John B. Alden, 1885), p. 62.

In *Diana of the Crossways*, for instance, whilst exploring the relative merits of literature, he writes that 'Idea is the only vital breath' (I, 20). Max Müller's 'The Philosophy of Mythology' (1871) alludes to the divine aspect of 'vital breath':

> When man wished for the first time to grasp and express a distinction between the body and something else within him distinct from the body, an easy name that suggested itself was *breath* […]ψυχή*, which originally meant breath, was chosen to express at first the principle of life, as distinguished form the decaying body, afterwards the incorporeal, the immaterial, the undecaying, the immortal part of man—his soul, his mind, his Self.*[462]

Meredith would have been aware of, and interested in, this philosophy and the sacred meaning behind the phrase. As Müller goes on to write, in this 'philosophical mythology', '*Psyche*, meaning originally the breathing of the body, was gradually used in the sense of vital breath, and as something independent of the body […] thus giving rise to the conception of the soul'.[463] Both Müller and Meredith, however, believed that the soul was intimately bound up with the body. For the latter, the Idea, though sacred, was expressive of the mortal self and a means through which to come to some understanding of it. The Idea, in *One of Our Conquerors*, breaths into Radnor at least some social consciousness. It is inspirational in all senses of the word, as the moral conditions on which the Idea is founded (and founders) is a taking in of breath. Meredith writes, this time of Nataly's competing ideals of 'intellect' and 'reverence':

> They clash to the end of time if we persist in regarding the Spirit of Life as a remote Externe, who plays the human figures, to bring about this or that issue, instead of being beside us, within us, our breath, if we will; marking on us where at each step we sink to the animal, mount to the divine. (176)

By such means, Meredith does away with transcendent ideologies such as faith or fate where a distant power controls the individual. Instead, the Spirit of Life is in the surrounding atmosphere and is also

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[462] Max Müller, 'The Philosophy of Mythology', in *The Essential Max Müller: On Language, Mythology, and Religion*, ed. Jon R. Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 152. Richard Cronin has demonstrated that Meredith was aware of Müller's work. He writes that 'Meredith was much struck by a little book by Max Müller, German Love, and sent it to his friend Eyre Crowe, the painter, as a belated Christmas present' with a letter stating '[t]he writing is beautiful…so German!' in *George Meredith: The Life and Writing of an Alteregoist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 155.
[463]Stone (ed.), *The Essential Max Müller*, p. 153.

within us. Like breath, it is something we intake from the natural world and project back into that environment. It has an etching capacity, delineating where the individual has either lived up to or fallen away from the self-created ideal. An embodied morality is once again referred to, through the physiological conceit of the written character becoming a fleshly characteristic: actions are self-forming as we come to bear the marks of them. The philosophical tone resonates with that of Carlyle in the self-generative force of the individual's ability to reflect upon the self. The 'Spirit of Life' is located only through an active attention to the conditions of selfhood, whereby the focus on breath alludes to the meditative capacities of this faculty. Meredith represents this embodied ethic as being both noumenal and natural, grounded in the affective reality of the felt experience.

In this he is also much like Goethe, whose work declares an affinity with his era's 'obsession with breath', utilised in 'a quest to find a common continuum between nature and humanity'.[464] As we might recall from my introductory remarks about Emersonian breathing, breath is biological but is also frequently referred to as spirit. It is invested therefore with a luminous divinity that unites the mystical and natural world in a monism allied to Goethe's world-view. Gaston Bachelard intuits this in his representation of Goethe as a 'great breather'.[465] He states that the writer 'breaths as the earth breaths. Goethe breathes with all his lungs as the earth breathes with all its atmosphere. The man who reaches/ attains the glory of respiration breathes cosmically'.[466] It is a striking image of the poet in nature, and one that resonates with Meredith's imagining of moral/ mortal breath in addition to the repeated themes of his poetical works. Goethe, like Carlyle and Fichte, believed in the literary man as something of a divine intermediary. This is the conception of 'theopneustia', which Humphrey

[464] John Durham Peters, 'The Media of Breathing', in *Atmospheres of Breathing*, ed. Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), pp. 179-99 (181).
[465] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) p. 180
[466] Ibid, p. 181.

Trevelyan has defined as 'the special susceptibility of the great poet or artist to the "divine breath"'.[467] Meredith's textual gestures towards the 'Divine Idea' and 'Divine Breath' therefore places him amongst the tradition encouraged by his literary heroes. In asking for the reader to attach interpretative value to the Idea, Meredith endows his novel with philosophical resonances that demarcate the potential duty the author owes to his reader in shaping their minds.

Linking Meredith to Eliot, then, is a shared aesthetic of the incarnate idea and its corresponding breath, which the latter detailed in her letter to Harrison. She describes the 'agonizing labour' that it takes an 'English-fed imagination'

> To make art a sufficiently real back-ground, for the desired picture, to get breathing, individual forms, and group them together in the needful relations, so that the presentation will lay hold on the emotions as human experience – will, as you say, 'flash' conviction on the world by means of an aroused sympathy.[468]

As Philip Davis writes, 'in George Eliot's terms, the idea and the spirit have to work within the individual flesh' in order to convey her ideal of 'aesthetic teaching'.[469] This was undoubtedly also Meredith's concern. His aphorisms strive to attain a 'breathing, individual form' expressive of a style, as he details in his *Essay*, 'of the feelings and the idea' (52). Eliot's flashes of conviction, meanwhile, sound an aptly aphoristic note: one in which sententiousness depends on the sympathy awakened in the reader.

Thought and feeling collide in Meredith's embodied aphorisms for pedagogic but not prescriptive purposes. This is no more evident than when Radnor attempts to fix his Idea upon his appallingly anti-Semitic politics: 'But his Idea had been surpassingly luminous, alive, a creation; and this came before him with the yellow skin of a Theory, bred, born of books' (479). Whilst being an evident critique of Radnor's misplaced claims to a grandiloquent consciousness, given his racist and

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[467] Humphrey Trevelyan, *Goethe and the Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941), p. 74.
[468] Eliot to Frederick Harrison, 15 August 1866, *GEL*, 4, pp. 300-301.
[469] Philip Davis, *Why Victorian Literature Still Matters* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2008), p. 32.

reductionist politics, this apprehension is also applicable to how the Idea in this novel can be applied to Meredith's wider sense of what his novels perform. It juxtaposes two systems of wisdom, one textual, the other physiological, in promotion of a living conception that is luminous precisely because of its obscurity. As Gary Saul Morson writes, explaining the distinction between two kinds of short-form wisdom, a 'dictum demands we attend to it. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. An Aphorism, by contrast, seems to be found in hiding'.[470] Importantly, despite the contrast between alive idea and dead letter, Meredith still links books to the body by describing the theories they incubate as a 'skin'. A yellowed skin is like vellum, torn from the living body to supply writing material. The thing that disappoints Radnor conversely alludes to Meredith's own style which, as we have seen, is conveyed through appealing to pulsing forms. Such a methodology is complemented by Nesta's desire for stories with blood in them over Satire: 'As little as our native public, had she then any sympathy for the working in the idea: she wanted throbs, visible aims, the Christian incarnate; she would have preferred the tale of slaughter – periodically invading all English classes as a flush from the undrained lower, Vikings all – to frigid sterile Satire' (433). Through this recourse to incarnate ideals, mediated through the physicality of the Idea, Meredith gestures towards a philosophy of improvement, whilst complying with a non-dogmatic literary principle.

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This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how Meredith's work dramatizes a form of encounter between reader and text that reflects the conditions necessary for self-help. As he writes in *Beauchamp's Career*:

> My way is like a Rhone island in the summer drought, stony, unattractive and difficult between the two forceful streams of the unreal and the over-real, which delights mankind […] My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual, yet uncommon. It is the clock-work of the brain that they are directed to set in motion, and – poor troop of actors to vacant benches! –

[470] Gary Saul Morson, 'The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason', *New Literary History* 34.3 (Summer 2003): 409-429 (418).

> the conscience residing in thoughtfulness which they would appeal to; and if you are there impervious to them, we are lost.(480)[471]

Meredith rebelled against the production of what he terms, in *Sandra Belloni* (1887), a mere 'copper coinage of wisdom', whilst still wanting to improve the minds of his readers.[472] He navigates these two contradictory impulses through a style that invokes a performative intellect. When we interrogate the description of his style here, we find the nonsensical interacting with the sensible. How can there be 'two forceful streams' in a 'summer drought'? Meredith situates his fiction in 'difficult' environments that occupy a middle-ground between the unreal and the over-real, a space that we might intuit to be the real-real, but which Meredith insists can only be understood through analogy. The analogy malfunctions, but is still intelligible, and for this reason it is like an aphorism. Such a reading is made lucid through our own input of brain-work. Meredith compels a hallucination of meaning that obliges the reader to invoke an individualistic system of interpretation. His characters act for us through being 'actual', working to resituate conscience in thought through the production of feeling. This chapter has cast some light on how this uncommon actuality is achieved. Meredith wants us to be amenable to the teaching character through affect – being impervious would mean the dissolution of the Rhone island and our own standing ground. To be impervious, moreover, is to be inaccessible to water, and thus lost to the two streams from which Meredith's fiction takes its shape.

I will conclude with reference to one of Meredith's favourite forms of short-hand wisdom: the aphorism seemingly against aphorisms that actually works to reclaim the aphorism. In one of his notebooks Meredith writes that:

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[471] Margaret Harris, in her edition's note on what Meredith means by 'the unreal and the over-real', casts this important light on the phrase: 'Meredith refers to the mid-century debate over the art of fiction, which can both explore and exploit realms beyond the physical – as did the sensation novelists of the 1860s – or concentrate rather on the detail on the mundane – as, for instance, George Eliot declared her intention of doing', p. 593.

[472] Meredith, *Sandra Belloni* [Originally published as *Emilia in England* in 1864] (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), p. 329. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

> A brilliant saying arrests thought: a simple observation instigates it: an idea that fixes the mind to itself cannot be of entire truth: one that leads it forth, altho' it be into the darkness, is the better guide. What we desire to hit is around us, not ahead, and moving with us, around us.[473]

In his epigrammatic hierarchy, Meredith vouches for simplicity over complexity, which, considering that his prose is always associated with the latter, is deeply ironic. This forces us to dwell on what he actually stipulates for in a form that actively opposes the brilliancy of the saying, and thus the genre favoured by wisdom-compilers of the kind that we have encountered in Chapter One. Meredith's elimination from the moral truism of what he refers to, in *One of Our Conquerors*, as a 'morbid indulgence in reflection' speaks to an interest that concerns and yet surpasses the self (191). It also gestures to a necessary distance between the mind and its consideration of self which thus circles back on the idea of self-reflexivity without pronouncing upon how such a process should ideally be communicated. With Meredith, one can always be in two minds. By offering us such an aphorism, Meredith is suggesting why so many of those discoverable within his novels are obscure. They are 'better guide[s]' for not calcifying independent thought. His writing is thus for our own good, as true self-help would be impossible without this darkness. The final image Meredith employs is one that reminds me of the image of breath that has been circulating throughout this thesis. Meredith writes inspiring prose, which shows that true self-knowledge is 'around us, not ahead, and moving with us, around us'.

[473] Beer and Harris (eds.), *George Meredith's Notebooks*, p. 50.

CODA: Self-Criticism

> In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. [474]

> In the majority of women's books you see that kind of facility which springs from the absence of any high standard; that fertility in imbecile combination or feeble imitation which a little self-criticism would check and reduce to barrenness; just as with a total want of musical ear people will sing out of tune, while a degree more melodic sensibility would suffice to render them silent.[475]

The *OED* draws its second example to illustrate the compound 'self-criticism', meaning 'criticism of oneself or one's own actions', from Eliot's 1857 essay on the poet Young. Given how self-critical she always was of her own authorship, this early usage seems appropriate. It is also a fitting manner in which to conclude this thesis. How does a practice of literary self-criticism get written into the novels of Eliot and Meredith? What does it mean to write criticism about the elusive concept of the self? How would I critically interrogate this thesis? I hope to briefly address these questions here.

When Nietzsche applied an evaluative preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886), originally published in 1872, he titled it an 'Attempt at Self-Criticism'.[476] The title forms a distancing device between intention and the critical idea of the imposing self that aptly performs his philosophy. Nietzsche wrote this self-criticism, which he said could either appear at the beginning or end of the new edition, because of his book's divergence from his latter emphasis on physiological aesthetics and a moral philosophy of the body. His example suggests three things of relevance to this coda: that self-criticism can never be entirely reliable, that it is

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[474] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright, vols. 1-6 (London: Vintage, 1996), vol. 6, p. 273.
[475] George Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 161.
[476] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

nevertheless encouraged by the idea of the body, and that this thesis might well have more closely engaged with Nietzsche's works.

Emblematic of the work of self-criticism is the commonplace book, which is a system of selected sententiae or passages which are deemed to be important to the particular self. While literary criticism is fundamentally a process of purposeful extraction, commonplacing involves a compilation of textual extraction in the pursuit of self-development. Both depend upon a method of quotation at once willed and fortuitous. As such, it is a means through which to give critical thought to the self, and through this to the text, in order to contribute to the readerly subject's ideal formation. This form of textual extraction and notation is therefore intimately linked to the tradition of self-improvement. The commonplace book was a means of textual self-culture that most prevalent in the eighteenth century but undoubtedly contributed to the evolution of self-help texts in the nineteenth.[477]

Commonplace books represented a system of textual fragmentation that would come to represent the self, its concerns, desires, and admirations. The transformation of self into text, and the incorporation of text into the idea of self, reflects the concerns of this thesis. Foucault describes such a methodology in developing a concept of 'Self-Writing', in which he describes the curation of hupomnēmata, which 'could be account books, public registers, or individual notebooks serving as memory aids' used as 'books of life' or 'as guides for conduct'.[478] Enabling the establishment of 'a relationship of oneself with oneself', the curation of such a text, which involves a collection of disparate writings, was 'for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self'.[479] Crucially, Foucault follows Seneca in showing how the role of this specific mode of writing

> is to constitute, along with all that reading has constituted, a "body" […] And this body should be understood not as a body of doctrine but, rather – following an often-evoked metaphor of

[477] See David Allen's *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) for an excellent history of the practice.
[478] Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. Robert Hurley and others, ed. Paul Rainbow (London: The Penguin Press, 1994), p. 210.
[479] Ibid, p. 211.

> digestion – as the very body of the one who, by transcribing his readings, has appropriated them and made their truth his own: writing transforms the thing seen or heard "into tissue and blood" […] It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself.[480]

This thesis has shown how Eliot and Meredith correspond with this idea so neatly exposed by Foucault. Whilst commonplacing involves the digestion of a wider text through a process of extraction, I have shown how these two authors literalised such terms in order to join their moral sentences to a tradition of textual aid without separating it from the mutable body of the individual. The two happen to coalesce in Montaigne's essay 'Of pedantry' in which, again like Seneca, he warns against learning by rote instead of through personal mediation by reference to the dietetic: 'We take other men's knowledge and opinions on trust; which is an idle and superficial learning. We must make it our own […] What good does it do us to have the stomach full of meat, if it do not digest, if it be not incorporated with us, if it does not nourish and support us?'[481] These passages thus recall my chapter on Eliot and Meredith's 'Reader's Digest', whilst gesturing to how such themes might be productively developed in another study.

A good place to start would be Meredith's *The Amazing Marriage*, in which one of the richest men in Britain, Lord Fleetwood, engages the services of a self-professed philosopher with a 'capacity for shaping sentences', which the latter is constantly writing down in his notebook.[482] In response to a curt piece of advice concerning his actions from Fleetwood's 'prosy castigator', Gower Woodseer, he says '[y]ou may fancy committing any impertinence and be not much out', to which his friend responds, '[t]he saving of you is that you digest it when you've stewed it down' (355, 353). Such an image is repeated, this time in a specific equation of sententiousness with self, when Woodseer is described as being 'discontented all day, both with himself and the sentences he coined […] So we

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[480] Ibid, p. 213.
[481] Michel De Montaigne, *Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton, ed. William Carew Hazlitt (London: Reeves and Turner, 1877), p. 156.
[482] George Meredith, *The Amazing Marriage* (London: Constable & Company, 1913), 83. All further references will be to this edition and page numbers will be given in the text.

must fret and stew, and look into our selves, and seize the brute and scourge him, just to make one serviceable step forward: that is, utter a single sentence worth the pondering for guidance' (436). For Meredith, the self must be interrogated and improved before textual guidance can be produced. Wisdom systems are thus circular, like the blood in the body, in that they evolve out of and return to the question of the individual.

The Amazing Marriage teems with people who, like Fleetwood, 'thirst for brilliant wits and original sayings' (75). As in *The Ordeal*, the novel includes an instructive text written by the father of the novel's heroine, Carinthia Jane, who resists the exclusion posed by its title 'MAXIMS FOR MEN' – 'a very curious book, that fetches a rare price now wherever a copy is put up for auction' – in order to live by its principles which are 'as sharply bracing for women as for men' (7, 334). These fictional books of instruction, which contain maxims such as '*Mean it when you're doing it*' are important to Meredith because they demand a new attentiveness to the textual conditions within which the reader participates (38). Maxims attain a new interpretative structure from within their fictional setting, forcing us to confront how they appeal to a reality which is both of and beyond text. When, for instance, we read one of the maxims of 'the Old Buccaneer's', as Carinthia's father is known, we are allowed the freedom to either extract the sentence as a piece of real wisdom, or merely interpret it as a fictional device used only in application to the character who reads it – '*Look backward only to correct an error of conduct for the next attempt*' (334). Meredith's maxims are both fictional and real, dependent on how they chime with the individual reader. As such, they complicate the novel's compliance with a generic fixity and re-centre the question of what it means to offer textual advice. To understand these aspects of the Meredithian text, one must enact a criticism that takes the individual self into account.

Woodseer, airing his frustration in being forced to add to the anthologisation of his sayings by Lord Fleetwood, states 'I'm to talk italics, for you to store a smart word or so' (355). He may as well be speaking directly to Meredith's readership, whilst also representing another of Meredith's embodied

aphorisms. Fleetwood founds his capacity for self-help on this process of extraction, demanding harsh truths from his philosophizing friend: 'I want stuff for a place in the memory' (354). Such a methodology of self-criticism is like commonplacing, which is founded in the desire to improve one's memory and self. It is also like literary criticism which, akin to the anthologizers with which this thesis began, depends on separating 'the smart word or so' from its context and making it perform a function from which it was originally quite removed. In writing this work of self-criticism, I have been compiling a type of anthology, which hopefully develops new ways of encountering the improving body in the works of Eliot and Meredith, but which of course excludes myriad other ways of reading for the self. It would be perfectly possible, for instance, to write an entire thesis on 'book[s] full of the world's wisdom' found in Meredith, to adapt an image from the prelude to *The Egoist*, but this wouldn't have allowed for my focus on the body. When Woodseer says that, beyond all other possessions, 'I care from my note-book, because it's of no use to a human being except me', he speaks to both the idea of the utility of writing things down for one's self, and to the particularity with which these endeavours are associated. No notebook is the same, though the same people might read the same texts, and this is the foundation of all criticism. Writing is both the engineer and the destroyer of systems which, when reading or writing for ourselves, depend on personal feeling, knowledge, and personality. It is important to acknowledge this for, as Eliot's Theophrastus confesses in *Impressions*, 'check ourselves as we will, the first impression from any sort of work must depend on a previous attitude of mind' (96).

At the close of *Diana of the Crossways*, Diana responds to her friend Emma's anxious questions about her happiness by coining an aphorism which she attributes to the inspiration provided to her: 'I heard you whisper, with your very breath in my ear: '*There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by*' (III, 326). In reflecting on this, Emma interrogates it critically: 'If not a great saying, it was in the heart of deep thoughts: proof to Emma that her Tony's mind

had resumed its old clear high-aiming activity; therefore her nature was working sanely, she accepted her happiness' (III, 327). Diana's character is read through the aphorism, which is another way of saying that the aphorism is given character. It no longer expresses a universal truism, but is taken into a personal system of signification through her friend's interpretation of it. As such, the defective saying nevertheless takes on an affective quantity in communicating the happiness of the one quoting it. Meredith here exemplifies his usual amount of self-criticism, or stylistic nervousness, through his confession that what he has just written for his character might not be 'a great saying'. Yet, through building the concept of the flawed aphorism into his text, Meredith bears witness to the constructed nature of wisdom and the fact that it might not work for everyone. As such, he encourages a reading of his moral sentences with a level of cynicism, interpretation, and resistance which makes sure that the reader only takes into their systems what really strikes them as true. He therefore resists the unequivocal role of an aphorist whilst providing a saying that offers a condensed formulation of the concerns of this thesis.

The Beinecke archives at Yale University, which hold extensive collections of manuscripts by Eliot and Meredith, reflect how fundamental a practice of textual extraction and compilation was to both Eliot and Meredith. Beer and Harris consider the distinct styles of both: 'George Eliot's notebooks offer us a wonderful compendium of intellectual material; George Meredith's jottings are more typically seized insight, glimpsed thought'.[483] In *Self-Help,* Smiles supplies an appropriate description of this manuscript culture:

> The practice of writing down thoughts and facts for the purpose of holding them fast and preventing their escape into the dim region of forgetfulness, has been much resorted to by thoughtful and studious men. Lord Bacon left behind him many manuscripts entitled "Sudden thoughts set down for use." Erskine made great extracts from Burke, and Eldon copied Coke upon Littleton twice over with his own hand, so that the book became, as it were, part of his own mind. (120)

[483] *The Notebooks of George Meredith*, p. xi.

Smiles's description of the epiphanic scribblings of Lord Bacon, and the careful and massy extracts made by Erskine, is reminiscent of Eliot's and Meredith's different styles of note-taking. Whilst advocating for this practice as a condition of self-help, Smiles's image of Eldon's non-marginal marginalia goes one step further. More than saying that Eldon merely committed to memory Coke's *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1628-44), Smiles rather wonderfully shows how a text can become a living part of the consciousness. This image not only recalls his own repetition of Milton's words, whereby a book 'is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life', but demonstrates how the self can be altered through a very material engagement with the text (306).

Eliot and Meredith's compulsive collection of aphoristic quotes and instructive passages is somewhat at odds with their decided ambivalence regarding how they saw themselves as moral dispensaries for bite-sized wisdom. Nevertheless, both authors deliberately and consistently wrote the form of the sententiae into their novels, lacing their texts with commonplaceable wisdom. Eliot, for instance, might be seen to replicate the commonplace book in the openings to the chapters of her later novels, which display an epigraphic patchwork of serviceable because oblique quotes from both her reading of other authors and her own extrinsic writing.[484] This practice is also performed through her archive. Eliot's Commonplace Book has been transcribed and published by Joseph Wiesenfarth as *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879*, whilst the precisely written extracts that pepper the blotting paper on the inside of her writing case appear as *George Eliot's Blotter: A Commonplace-Book*.[485] The latter is not a true commonplace book, lacking the clear systematization of the former work, and yet both bear testimony to Eliot's voracious appetite for compiling wisdom. The editorial naming of

[484] For a fascinating article on Eliot's use of epigraphs, see Eirian Yem, "An inordinate number of words': Epigraphs in *Daniel Deronda*', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 29 (2020), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.1926.
[485] *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook*, *1854-1879*, ed. Joseph Weisenfarth (Charlotesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), *George Eliot's Blotter: A Commonplace-Book*, ed. Daniel Waley (London: British Library, 1980).

such texts also matters, particularly in the latter instance, because of Eliot's authorial concern with writing for the commonplace. Macfarlane has written extensively on her rehabilitation of the previously stigmatised term, arguing that '[c]ommonplaces were for Eliot what made communication possible: meeting grounds whence the conversation could depart into less well-trodden intellectual territory'.[486] We might also consider the fact that a commonplace – defined as a 'trite saying, a platitude, a truism' – can also mean 'an interesting or notable passage, quotation, etc., copied for personal reference into a book or scrapbook intended for this purpose' (*OED*). Importantly, the transformation from 'platitude' to 'notable passage' depends on the intervention of the self and the textual resources that it fashions.

Something of this is comprehended in Eliot's fiction, which encourages a reading for the commonplace. In one of her most direct commentaries on her 'Art', represented in her chapter in *Adam Bede* 'In Which the Story Pauses a Little', she entreats: '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' (168). Her understanding of the commonplace, however, seems to have gone through a slight revolution by the time she wrote *Middlemarch*, which I would argue returns the term to its uneasy etymological borderland between the basic saying and the meaningful extract. When Lydgate informs Casaubon of his dangerously fragile health, Eliot describes the scholar thus:

> Here was a man who now for the first time found himself looking into the eyes of death – who was passing through one of those rare moments of experience when we feel the truth of a commonplace, which is as different from what we call knowing it, as the vision of waters upon earth is different from the delirious vision of the water which cannot be had to cool the burning tongue. When the commonplace 'We must all die' transforms itself suddenly into the acute consciousness 'I must die – and soon,' then death grapples us, and his fingers are cruel; afterward, he may come to fold us in his arms as our mother did, and our last moment of dim earthly discerning may be like the first. (398)

[486] Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p. 112.

Here, Eliot is treating of truisms that undergo a change in value by being attributed to the particular self. In so doing, she performs the process of aphoristic reading whereby something that is felt to be universally true is transformed into something that also attains an individual meaning to the person interpreting it. In Meredith's *Sandra Belloni*, he refers to his ideal readership as 'that acute and honourable minority which consents to be thwacked with aphorisms and sentences and a fantastic delivery of the verities'.[487] Aphorisms, if they are effective, can hit you hard. This is what Eliot shows in her depiction of Casaubon's 'acute consciousness'. For Casaubon, the commonplace is affectively clarified, bypassing knowledge and instead registering itself in a feeling akin to thirst. The fact that Eliot explains this through the analogy of real and imagined water is important, because we all know what it feels like to long for water. What Casaubon feels about his dying can therefore be registered by our own bodies. Sympathy is generated through systematic coherency and the knowledge we derive from our physical being. Commonplacing as the incorporation of small bits of wisdom into a personal system of signification thus achieves a living form.

There is, of course, a problem with placing too much faith in the feeling body as a site for moral judgement. As Eliot shows in this important passage, death can be handled in at least two ways, depending on perspective. Here, appropriately concluding the book preceding 'The Dead Hand', death is represented as tactile – grasping us with cruel fingers, or enfolding us in his arms. These are two distinct sensations through which to register the experience of approaching death. The fact that we can experience one feeling and then another proves the instability of the apprehending body, and thus its inability to offer a stable means of interpreting moral states. What I would argue, however, is that mediating advice through how it appeals to, and performs, the body precludes dogmatic or societal methods through which we judge of what is right and wrong. This interpretative instability is

[487] Meredith, *Sandra Belloni*, p. 400.

something that Eliot and Meredith harnessed in their reluctant but compulsive dispensing of wisdom literature.

This reading is something that Meredith can be seen to support in a remarkable archival text. Meredith scribbled a patchwork of aphoristic phrases in a condensed mass on the inside back cover-pages of Hubert Ries' *Violin Schule*. These occupy the interstice between marginalia and commonplace book, which commentators such as H. J. Jackson have shown is not unheard of.[488] Indeed, as the archivist describes on an accompanying label, the final part of the book 'has been used by George Meredith as a Common-Place Book, and is closely covered with Aphorisms and sayings in his characteristic style'.[489] Hidden in-between the pages of the violin book are a purple strand of flowering grass and a small pressed rose. Representative of the *florilegium* to which Meredith's collection of short literary sentences corresponds, they also give material form to the idea of the commonplace book, emblematising what the individual finds and thinks is worth saving. The manuscript is highly similar in form and substance to Eliot's Blotter, though the phrases in the former are all Meredith's own. As the title given to the manuscript demonstrates, Meredith very frequently quoted himself – an authorial trait that also can be seen in Eliot's chapter epigraphs, and a practice which would be worthy of further scrutiny.

For now, however, there is just enough space to consider one of Meredith's phrases, around which he has drawn a box that uniquely (in this manuscript) would allow him space for its development.[490] The apparently unfinished, yet substantial, aphorism reads: 'Wisdom is the <u>wedding</u> of the body and soul'.[491] Meredith never used this phrase in his novels, though it resonates with Diana's

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[488] H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Reader's Writing in Books* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 184.
[489] George Meredith, *Epigrams and apothegms later used in Meredith's novels on the inside back covers of Hubert Ries' Violin Schule*, George Meredith Collection, GEN MSS 953, Series V, Box 40, f. 352, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[490] See Fig. 6 for a picture of this. The sentence I am describing appears in the central column, seven rows down.
[491] Ibid.

saying: '*There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by*'. Wisdom is generated through the union of the mortal body with that metaphysical conception of self that is often called the soul. This thesis has communicated that Meredith viewed the two as inseparable. Material and metaphysical combine in the coining of this Meredithianism. Furthermore, this sentence offers a sententiousness that simultaneously advocates for self-generated wisdom which might render such a wisdom-phrase unnecessary. The stakes of this thesis lie within this contradiction. Meredith and Eliot used the body both to destabilise and establish an anti-systemic yet inherently systematic wisdom. An intriguing question appears as a single line in Meredith's first wife's commonplace book. Mary Ellen isolates the question 'Systems, what are they?' on one line of the notebook.[492] This is a question that her husband and Eliot also contemplated throughout their careers, and which this thesis has hoped to more fully interpret, if not answer. Something of this is expressed within the space that Meredith left around his aphorism. When it comes to writing a system of wisdom that is shaped by and shapes the self, there is always, and should always be, room for saying more.

[492] Mary Ellen Meredith (Peacock), *Commonplace book of extracts from various authors*, George Meredith Collection, GEN MSS 953, Series V, Box 40, f. 352, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

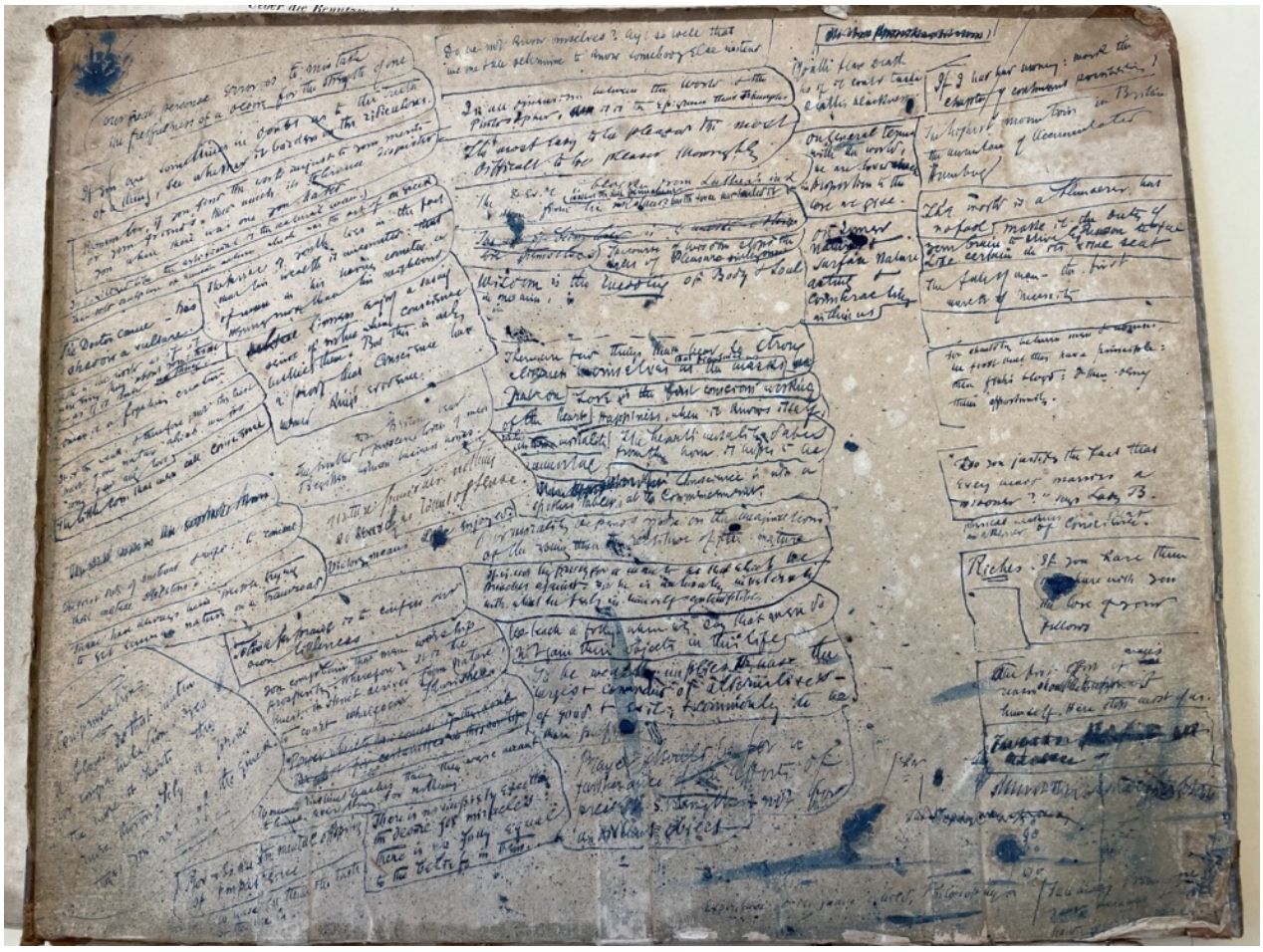

Fig 6: The Inside Back-Cover of Meredith's copy of the Violin Schule, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

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