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The Teller in the Tale:  
Aspects of Narratorial Voice in the Novels of George Eliot

Lesley Checkland-Orr

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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Lesley Checkland-Orr, 1994



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## ABSTRACT

The Teller in the Tale:  
Aspects of Narratorial Voice in the Novels of George Eliot

Lesley Checkland-Orr

The primary concerns of this study are certain aspects of narratorial voice in Eliot's novels, and how, through them, the narrator manoeuvres the reader into positions conducive to the "extension of sympathy" that Eliot wishes to inculcate in her readers, hoping, as she does, that sympathy aroused toward characters in the fictional world will, by extension, carry through to situations and people encountered in daily life. A multi-vocal narrative voice, full of variety of perspective and tone, is deployed to influence the response of the reader, and includes among its devices "engaging" narratorial strategies such as direct address, strategic use of personal pronouns, narrative metalepsis, invitations to the reader to superimpose his or her own "fabula" onto/into the story being read, and reflective prudential commentary that applies equally to the phenomenological world as to the world of the novel. Reader-response theory is considered along with narrative theory in an attempt to illustrate and account for the effectiveness of selected strategies. While reference is made to most of her works, the study concentrates mainly on Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, and Middlemarch.

This work is dedicated to my Mother,  
Doris I. N. Orr,  
who read to me, and taught me to love reading.

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## Introduction

This study is not an attempt at a comprehensive critical commentary on George Eliot's art and thought, but is chiefly concerned with certain aspects of narratorial voice, and how, through various strategies, Eliot, the moralist and sage, manoeuvres the reader into positions conducive to the "extension of sympathy" which she wishes to inculcate in her readers, hoping, as she does, that sympathy aroused toward characters in the fictional world will, by extension, carry through to situations and people encountered in daily life. This desire is central to Eliot's personal credo of tolerance and humanitarianism, and is demonstrated not only in the content of her novels and essays, but also in the ways in which the narratorial voice is used throughout the text to influence the response of the reader.

In Eliot's hands, narratorial commentary is much more than merely a Victorian literary convention: it is a brilliantly exploited means by which the reader is guided through the narrative, and encouraged into specific responses which aid him/her in assessing and often re-evaluating his/her perspective regarding characters. Prompted by the narrator, the reader's newly-reached understanding and acceptance tend toward a more humanitarian judgement than might otherwise have been reached, and this softened stance is often brought about by the reader's recognition that the characters, (and by



extension our fellows) experience parallel emotions, display similar endurance, fret over comparable problems and suffer the same pain, as he/she does.

Eliot's characters are ordinary people whose tribulations are those which can befall any of us, and with whom we can therefore all the more readily identify and feel sympathetic towards. Through narratorial commentary and asides which play on our sensibilities, Eliot, deeply concerned with the human condition, seeks through "aesthetic teaching" (Haight IV, p. 301) to mould us into being better people, sowing in us the seeds of tolerance and sympathy which should regulate our moral lives.

In my examination of selected narratorial strategies, I acknowledge the distinction between the narratee<sup>1</sup> (the construct encoded within the text), and the 'reader,' by which I mean the real person whose hand turns the pages of the book. However, though the two are distinct from each other, I suggest that due to the success of Eliot's 'engaging' (Warhol 17) narratorial strategies,<sup>2</sup> particularly "those in which the narrator establishes ...[an] attitude toward the reader [and] toward the characters" (Warhol 20), the flesh-and-blood reader finds him/herself able to identify with the "you" in the text, so that the 'gap' between narratee and actual reader closes. Just as there is always a narrator, there is also always a narratee inscribed within the text, "the agent which is at the very least implicitly addressed by the narrator,"<sup>3</sup> and the

"you" being addressed (the narratee) 'stands for' the reader, who is even sometimes explicitly addressed (by Eliot's narrators) as "Reader" or "dear Reader."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it "stands to reason that the degree to which an actual reader can or cannot identify with the figure being addressed affects that reader's reaction to the fiction" (27). Similarly, the reader's response to the text is bound to be affected by the attitude that the narrator displays towards the assumed narratee, particularly if the reader sees him/herself reflected in that figure. Eliot's narratorial interventions express and encourage communion on many levels within the text, and "imply that the fiction's referentiality may extend beyond the covers of the book" (Warhol 44) into the world of lived experience. This, of course, serves the purpose of didactic realism well, "rais[ing] readers' questions about the connections between the real and the fictional worlds and gestur[ing] toward answering them" (Warhol 44).

If it is necessary to distinguish between reader and narratee, it is equally necessary to distinguish between author and narrator. As Rimmon-Kenan points out, "[i]n the empirical world, the author is the agent responsible for the production of the narrative and for its communication...[whereas] [w]ithin the text, communication involves a fictional narrator transmitting a narrative to a fictional narratee" (3-4). The latter figures are "constitutive...factors in narrative communication" since

"there is always a teller in the tale, at least in the sense that any utterance or record of an utterance presupposes someone who has uttered it" (88), and, by the same token, there is always a listener. Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes "forms and degrees of perceptibility of the narrator in the text" (89) and "different degrees and kinds of telling" (108). My primary interest is how, through utterances which take the form of wise sayings, commentary, asides and direct address, the "teller in the tale" manipulates the response of the reader, who belongs, of course, to the "empirical world" of the author, the world in which the text is created and consumed.

Just as there seem to be grounds to argue that a 'merging' of narratee and reader occurs in texts which feature engaging narratorial strategies, I contend that an argument could also be made, in the case of Eliot's works, that there is no clear distinction between author and narrator. That is to say that the line of distinction between them is intentionally blurred in order to develop the effect of an all-knowing, all-pervasive presence: the author (in the sense of creator of the work) who, through the narrator, projects an image of universality, of an omniscient and omnipresent being whose wisdom and humanity transcend sexual boundaries. Even though Eliot wrote under a masculine pseudonym, and even while adopting the persona of a male narrator (in Scenes of Clerical Life and, to a lesser extent, in Adam Bede), the content of

Eliot's Humanitarian message is untainted by the bias of gender, and represents the essence of her "best self."<sup>5</sup>

In some of her work, the blurring of the roles of author and narrator is a stylistic feature: in Adam Bede, for example, she poses, at one point, as a figure akin to an "Egyptian sorcerer" and promises to reveal to us (as if staring into a crystal ball which looks backward to the past rather than forward to the future) Adam Bede's world as reflected in a drop of ink at the end of her pen. Later in the same novel, she records a conversation between herself (i.e. the narrator, her male persona) and Adam Bede, thus entering the text as a character/participant -- another blurring of conventional lines.<sup>6</sup> In much of her work the narrator adopts the stance of partial or peripheral participant by posing as one who is engaged in reminiscence, speaking with the voice of memory. This use of memory as a dramatic device fosters the impression of direct personal implication, of having a greater stake in the story than might otherwise be the case.<sup>7</sup>

Through non-fictional writing by Eliot, we know that the humanist philosophy expressed by the narrator in asides, commentary, and interventions such as chapter seventeen of Adam Bede, is Eliot's own. Interjected narratorial remarks regarding the moral purpose of art also express Eliot's own precepts, and are echoes of statements which she has made in her non-fictional writing. Theophrastus Such<sup>8</sup>, for example, expresses the opinion that writing should be "the best

warranted of vocations" (121) and that writers should exercise discrimination in what and how they write, and not rush into print on any and all subjects. We know from reading some of Eliot's articles and reviews<sup>9</sup> that these are her own opinions.

The lines between narrator/writer and narratee/reader are intentionally blurred further by judicious use of the first person plural pronoun, "we," which implies a universality of sensibilities and a shared viewpoint. Another type of "blurring" occurs when the narratee/reader is addressed in something of the same mode as the listener is addressed in Browning's dramatic monologues<sup>10</sup> -- as an assumed presence or passive participant in the events of the novel. Sometimes this is done in such a way as to invite the reader to accompany the speaking-subject ("Let me take you into that diningroom....We will enter very softly..." (Adam Bede, ch.5)) to a location where, together, they will "spy" on the characters from a vantage point beside them (but invisible) in a room, or from outside, peering in through a window. In instances of narrative metalepsis<sup>11</sup> such as these, levels of diegesis<sup>12</sup> are blurred, the boundaries between them violated, as the illusion is created that author/narrator, reader/narratee, and characters all inhabit the same plain of reality.

The distinction between reader and character is also blurred when their sensibilities are shown to be similar, causing the reader to perceive in him/herself a likeness to

the character, and therefore to feel a union or fellowship with him or her. In an extreme version of manipulation of the reader's sensibility, his/her memory is brought into play (prompted by the narrator), and fragmentary recollections of past emotional experience are recovered and superimposed by the reader onto the text. On these occasions when the reader's memory allows "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" to be re-experienced, "recollected in tranquillity,"<sup>13</sup> we see through the eyes of the character, literally feeling his/her pain as our own in an acute form of empathy made possible by the remembrance of our own suffering. On the subject of her writing, Eliot noted the difficulty of "trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to [her] first in the flesh and not in the spirit...so that the presentation will hold on the emotions as human experience -- will... 'flash' conviction on the world by means of aroused sympathy."<sup>14</sup> This is an accurate description of what the narrator achieves within the reader's breast when a personal memory (in the form of sensation rather than verbalized thought) is invoked to illustrate the bond of sensibility and common emotional experience between the reader and a particular character. This rhetorical strategy, which hurtles into the present "powerful feelings" from the reader's past, epitomizes what Bina Freiwald has so tellingly called "the inextricability of word and flesh, story and life, experience and narrative...self and other."<sup>15</sup>

Dealing, as Eliot does, with universal emotional experience (that is to say with the emotions held in common by humanity), Eliot's "ideal reader"<sup>16</sup> could be of either sex -- what she asks of us is, after all, equally applicable to men and to women: a greater compassion for, and tolerance of, each other -- a "morality" which rests on humanitarian principles. Obviously much concerned with how her audience would respond to her novels, Eliot puts interesting remarks regarding the activity of writing, and the writer's imaginative evocation of his/her audience, into the mouth of Theophrastus Such, who says that

The act of writing, in spite of past experience, brings with it the vague, delightful illusion of an audience nearer to my idiom than the Cherokees, and more numerous than the visionary One for whom many authors have declared themselves willing to go through the pleasing punishment of publication. My illusion is of a more liberal kind, and I imagine a far-off, hazy, multitudinous assemblage, as in a picture of Paradise, making an approving chorus to the sentences and paragraphs of which I myself particularly enjoy the writing. The haze is a necessary condition. If any physiognomy becomes distinct in the foreground, it is fatal. The countenance is sure to be one bent on discountenancing my innocent intentions: it is pale-eyed, incapable of being amused when I am amused or indignant at what makes me indignant; it stares at my presumption, pities my ignorance, or is manifestly preparing to expose the various instances in which I unconsciously disgrace myself. I shudder at this too corporeal auditor, and turn toward another point of the compass where the haze is unbroken....I leave my manuscripts to a judgement outside my imagination...<sup>17</sup>

Theophrastus also comments that he "keep[s] the pleasing, inspiring illusion of being listened to when writing" (8),

a remark which seems to apply very much to Eliot herself, as one of her strategies is to set up narrative situations in which the narrator addresses the reader, so that a "conversation" of sorts occurs. As Barbara Hardy remarks, "the sense of the reader and the intimacy of the author makes itself felt as part of the whole fabric of narrative" (Hardy 158), and the intimate tone of the voice is more than just a device; it is a strategy which presents the narrator as omnipresent rather than omnipotent.

The reader, like the author, is situated outside the text; narratorial strategies, however, are rhetorical features belonging to the text. That being so, as Warhol points out, "[s]tudying narrative structures, such as interventions and addresses to the reader, is clearly not the same activity as studying "reader-response" (26). Nevertheless, "in many ways the two approaches have converged in the critical imagination" and "the temptation to conflate the two kinds of inquiry is strong" (26). This is not surprising: after all, as Louise Rosenblatt comments, "...what is perceived involves both the perceiver's contribution and the stimulus" (Rosenblatt 19). The temptation to conflate the areas of rhetorical and reader-response inquiry (Warhol 27) is therefore not without foundation.

In the minds of most critics and theorists, however, there exists a split between literature and rhetoric, which Lionel Gossman traces to "the final phase of neoclassicism" in



the eighteenth century, when

the term "literature" became more closely associated with...poetic and figurative writing, and...took on the meaning of a corpus of privileged or sacred texts, a treasury in which value, truth, and beauty had been piously stored, and which could be opposed to the world of historical reality. (5-6)<sup>18</sup>

Narrative voice implies "utterance," in which rhetorical strategies are deployed by the narrator, who "speaks" to the reader, playing on his/her sensibilities to initiate specific responses. Eliot seeks to accomplish this end by various narratorial means, one of which being the critically disparaged trope of direct address. It may be helpful, at this stage, to survey some critical theories which impinge on this study. I turn first to rhetoric.

Rhetoric is the oldest form of literary criticism in Western culture.<sup>19</sup> Narrowly defined, it is the study of the interpersonal effectiveness of language, and as such it focuses both on text and on readers (or listeners, since rhetoric was originally an oral tradition) insofar as it examines the functions of formal devices of language, such as the arrangement of figures and tropes, and assesses their effect on the reader. By studying the emotional affect of language, and how discourse can be used persuasively (either in the form of speech or in writing), rhetoric pays attention to the social aspect of language, and therefore of literature. It has long been realized that discourse can be constructed to

achieve certain effects, and this being so, theorists who study discourse, or rhetoric, do not concern themselves solely with examination of the formal devices of language--its writing, or composition and structure--(the main concern, for example, of Formalists, structuralists and semioticians whose interest is centred on the text), but are interested in the communicative function of language; how, in other words, language does what it does to its listeners or readers, manipulating certain responses.<sup>20</sup>

Rhetoric still has as its main concern, however, less the reader than the text, since although it is interested in the response of reader (or listener in the case of oratory), its primary focus is on the art of discovering all available means of persuasion in any given case, and of employing them to achieve the maximum effect. It is more the means and devices used by an orator or writer in order to persuade his audience to adopt his point of view, than the actual reaction of the audience itself that is the central concern, though both are inextricably linked.

In his Poetics, Aristotle distinguishes between poetry, which he defines as a mode of imitation (a representation of people feeling, thinking and interacting) and rhetorical discourse, which he sees in terms of the art of persuasion.<sup>21</sup> Horace, however, in Ars Poetica, blurred this distinction by declaring that the aim of the poet is either to instruct or delight, or preferably both. This type of pragmatic criticism

therefore expanded the terms of traditional rhetoric, viewing a poem as a skilled "deployment of established artistic means for achieving particular effects upon the reader or audience."<sup>22</sup>

Horace's pragmatism was dominant until the early nineteenth century, when "expressive" theories of literature, (which view a work as expressing the feelings and personality of the writer) gained credence, to be challenged (beginning in the 1920s) by "objective" theories of literature which conceive of a work as an object in itself, independent of the subjectivity either of the writer or of the reader.<sup>23</sup>

Both the "expressive" and the "objective" theories of literary criticism tended to de-emphasize or ignore rhetorical considerations and the "transactional" relationship between the producer and the consumer of the text (both of which are crucial to this study), since the former stressed the author and virtually ignored the reader, and the latter eliminated both from its evaluation of the work. In 1946, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley coined the phrase "affective fallacy" and defined it as the error of judging a poem by the emotional effects that it has upon the reader. They felt that by allowing one's evaluation to be influenced in this way, the poem itself disappears as an object of specifically critical judgement, causing the criticism to be subjective, basing itself in impressionism and relativism. <sup>24</sup> Beardsley later modified this view by conceding that "it does not appear that

critical evaluation can be done at all except in relation to certain types of effect that aesthetic objects have upon their perceivers."<sup>25</sup> But even with this modification, the formulation is still a claim for objective criticism in which the critic must play down the effects of the work, and steer away from describing them, devoting his powers instead to the close study and analysis of the form of the work and the devices, figures, and attributes of the poem as "verbal icon".

In the 1950s, literary critics again returned to the consideration of the role of rhetoric, and displayed a renewed interest in the view of literature as a "transaction," a verbal act of communication between writer and reader. This rhetorical criticism, while still focusing primarily on the work itself, brings the reader back into the picture by analyzing the elements of a work which are put there by the writer with the reader in mind. It studies, in other words, "the rhetorical resources available to the writer...as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader."<sup>26</sup> These resources might include the use of tone, voice, persona, or any other means which the writer can deploy in order to shape, guide and direct the emotional response of the reader (or the specific audience) to whom the work is addressed. Here the emphasis is on the devices by which the writer tries to influence his or her reader in order to engage his/her interest and acquiescence in

becoming part of the fictional world into which the writer tries to draw readers.

Kenneth Burke might be described as something of a maverick in the critical establishment insofar as he has always tended to distance himself from any single critical approach. In his search for a critical method which would not only explicate literature but would also help us towards an understanding of human nature, Burke sees literature as "equipment for living" <sup>27</sup> by which he means that far from being detached from everyday life (and therefore "pure" and divorced from the sordid (or at least mundane) practicalities of living), literature is "functional" and is actually used by people in order to deal with the situations which recur in their lives. Burke is considerably interested in human behaviour and motivation, and examines the nature of perspective, or what he calls "attitude", calling for what he terms a "sociological criticism" which counters the tendency of academic literary criticism to exclude other areas of scholarship in its drive towards specialization. Burke's brand of sociological criticism would "apply both to works of art and to social situations outside of art" (81), and it "would seek to codify the various strategies which artists have developed with relation to the naming of situations" (80): it would be an "attempt to treat literature from the standpoint of situations and strategies" and such a method of study would provide "a reintegrative point of view, a broader empire of

investigation" (81). Burke seems to advocate what might be termed a sociological version of rhetoric as the most worthwhile endeavour in criticism, seeing literature as a function or social activity which accomplishes an end. This view seems to echo Eliot's own convictions about the "sacred task" of the artist, and her oft-stated desire to teach us to extend our capacity for sympathy.

Walter Ong's interest lies in speculating about how literature creates particular responses, and, in particular, how the text creates a specific "role" for its reader by means of its language: in his view, which stresses the relationship between rhetoric and writing, rhetoric is "equipment" for writing, as the writer selects particular rhetorical devices according to what particular audience he has in mind. In other words, the writing is tailored to fit the readers that the author projects or imagines as "consuming" his text; a text always has an "implied reader", as Wolfgang Iser puts it. In his essay "The Writer's audience is Always a Fiction" (Con Davis 83-99), Ong is concerned with the relationship between reader and writer (an important consideration in this study) and particularly with the notion of a writer's projection of an expected audience. According to Ong, the reader's response is fully determined by the text whose author employs particular rhetorical practices which are necessitated by his imagined absent audience. Thus the writer envisages both a "fictionalized" reader figure and that reader's probable

response to the author's work: hence for Ong rhetoric and composition intersect as the writer uses certain rhetorical strategies and semantic devices to manipulate the response of his reader,<sup>28</sup> who is a function of the text. Though I contend that the addressee of Eliot's narrators is a real person, some of Ong's ideas are particularly relevant to my study of aspects of Eliot's narratorial voice, in which rhetorical devices and strategies (such as direct address) are used to manipulate certain responses in the reader, and to help establish a close relationship between the narrator and the reader, or, as Ong would put it, between writer and reader. The "intersection" of rhetoric and composition is also relevant to my study, and I later suggest that critical dislike of direct address may be caused, in part, by the critical tendency to separate discourse into two camps: "literature" and "rhetoric."

The theories of Burke and Ong are "text-dominant", but the emphasis moves more specifically to the reader when the focus of study shifts from the relationship between rhetoric and writing, to the relationship between rhetoric and the activity of reading. In this model, the reader's responses to the text are closely examined, and reading rather than writing (or rhetoric) becomes the central interest. Iser's reader, for example, fills in "gaps" or indeterminacies in the text (though he/she is directed by the writer to a certain range of conclusions), so that the text is completed through the

"activity" of the reader, his/her responses being determined partly by his/her own experience and partly by "clues" placed in the text by its author. This paradigm features both reader and writer (or text) in a fairly symbiotic relationship: the reader plays a creative role, but the text, though perhaps not dominating the reader, certainly controls his response through providing strong direction.<sup>29</sup> Whether the text/reader relationship is a more or less equal partnership, or, if it is not, which of the two (the text (author) or the reader) is really "in charge" is, perhaps, ambiguous. This dilemma about who holds the controlling interest, reader or writer, continues to plague Reader-Response critics to this day. As Patrocinio Schweikart<sup>30</sup> puts it, "the prevailing stories of reading generally vacillate between...reader-dominant and text-dominant poles" (123).<sup>31</sup>

Georges Poulet, a reader-response theorist who has produced interesting work on the dynamics of the reading process, credits the creative role of the reader but clearly sees the text as having, as it were, the upper hand in the reading process. He talks about the experience of "otherness" which a reader encounters when, during the process of reading (in an effect similar, I think, to suspension of disbelief), the reader abandons his own consciousness and finds his mind taken over, requiring him to surrender to the text so that an alternative consciousness (the "otherness" alien to the reader) comes into play. This consciousness, however, is not



entirely "other"; it simultaneously is and is not the reader's. It originates in the text but is incorporated by the reader so that object (the text) and subject (the reader) merge. One is tempted to say that, in this model, the "world" created by the author is entered and absorbed by the reader, but it would be more accurate to express the phenomenon identified by Poulet in words which would stress the domination of the text -- to say that the text "invades" the reader, forcing surrender or submission. In Poulet's own words, reading is

a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images and ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters and shelters them...I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers and acts within me. <sup>32</sup>

Poulet's formulation (discussed further in chapter three) has, I think, much validity, perhaps particularly in the case, not of reading, but of drama, when one tends to become (assuming the worth of the play) entirely caught up in the action. It is, however, relevant to remember that in Victorian times, works were often read aloud, a factor which would increase the dramatic dimension of reading, providing a reader presumably fairly practised in his/her role of presenting the work orally, and an audience equally accustomed to its role as listener. Thus, the factor of oratory, today almost entirely missing from the activity of reading, would have been present, and potently so, when Eliot was writing, and the text's rhetorical devices would have achieved, in the mouth of a

skilled reader, the full force of their potential for effect.<sup>33</sup>

In Poulet's model, there is a "dialectic of control" (Schweikart 135) in which the reader's subjectivity is ultimately subsumed by the author's, and Schweikart contrasts this to the "dialectic of communication" which pertains in the paradigm of reading in which women read texts written by women. The "dialectic of communication" with its concomitant relationship of intersubjectivity seems particularly applicable to texts written by Eliot, whose narrators take on the function of guide and mentor, and who communicate directly with the narratee/reader by means of narratorial devices aimed at maximizing the affinities which exist between writing and conversation, fostering a dialogic mode in which the reader's responses serve as "replies" to the narrator's speech. The reader feels him/herself to be interpolated into the text by means of several narratorial devices and strategies, including the use of the personal pronouns "you," by which the narrator signifies the narratee/reader, and "we," by which a community between them (and by implication, others), is signified.

Walter Ong, in the theory already discussed, postulates a "normative" reader and thereby stabilizes his (the reader's) position in response to the text being read, and in Kenneth Burke's theories, the "attitudes" and "typical recurrent situations" of life which are "generalized" into a sort of "essence" (Con Davis 80) which implies a collective

consciousness and a nonhistorical dimension to the "situations". Despite differences of gender, race, politics and change, the notions of a collective consciousness and a nonhistorical dimension -- the "timelessness" of situations in literature and the consequent possibility of applying literary "situations" to life today -- are valid up to a point, imbuing texts with transcendent significance: in much great literature, such as Eliot's, it is possible to "discern the general behind the particular." The tolerance and wisdom which she transmits through her narratorial commentary stand, in my estimation, for all time.

Current literary theory tends to focus on the transactional or reciprocal relations between text and reader, no longer seeing the text as a more or less autonomous object, with immanent properties. Instead, critics (following Ingarden 1973, Orig. publ. in Polish 1931) now stress the heteronomous properties of literature. Heteronomous objects have both immanent properties and "properties attributed to them by consciousness" (Rimmon-Kenan 118). Thus, the role of the reader, supplying the consciousness, is crucial in bringing vitality to an inert text:

a text can only come to life when it is read, and if it is to be examined, it must therefore be studied through the eyes of the reader. (Iser 1971b, pp. 2-3)

In this model, the text has a "virtual dimension" which requires that the reader fill in the "gaps"<sup>34</sup> by adding his or

her own building blocks of unwritten text to the written structure before his/her eyes (Iser 1974, p. 31). Thus reading is a dynamic process affording the reader active participation in the production of meaning. Though the text is undeniably interpreted and built up by the reader, it exercises its own control over the final structure of meaning erected in the mind of the reader by providing the foundation and cornerstones upon which to build, and a blueprint of procedural instructions for completion. In Eliot's case, the "blueprint" is provided especially by the narratorial interventions in which the reader is (subtly or overtly) instructed how to proceed, and in which the cornerstones of her art -- the narratorial commentary and epigrammatic utterances -- provide the stability upon which the rest of the structure depends. The reader's interpretive skills are honed by the text in an on-going process which prompts him/her to make adjustments and concessions as he/she goes along, so that a competence specific to that particular text is developed by it in the reader. As Rimmon-Kenan puts it, "[t]he reader is thus both an image of a certain competence brought to the text and a structuring of such a competence within the text" (Rimmon-Kenan 118).

To Rimmon-Kenan, then, the reader is a construct, whereas, as I have stated, when I use the term "reader," I am referring to a real person, or persons,<sup>35</sup> whose response to the text is skilfully influenced by narratorial strategies.

Therefore, though I am studying the texts I have selected "through the eyes of the reader," (which are, inevitably, my own eyes), I am also studying them through an examination of the rhetorical strategies of the narrator. The subjectivity of my own response is modified by the material itself, and by the narratorial strategies Eliot has used to influence, guide, persuade and direct the reader, appealing to his or her sensibility, and drawing upon universal human emotion. I surrender, therefore, to the temptation to conflate rhetoric and reader-response somewhat (also drawing on theories of narratology) in my examination of how the rhetorical devices of Eliot's 'engaging' narratorial strategies influence the response of the reader. The selection of specific aspects from each approach, and the modification of the theories which I bring together, imply a personal view of what is involved in the dynamics of reading.

As John Gardner<sup>36</sup> remarks, schools of criticism "avoid on principle the humanistic question: who will the work of art help?" (Gardner 16-17). We know, however, that Eliot considered art to have a moral purpose, and that she strove, through her didactic realist novels, to make the world a better place by influencing readers to develop greater sympathy for their fellows. Whether she was correct in her supposition that art can be a powerful influence for the good is perhaps debatable, though she is certainly not alone in

feeling that it can be. Contemporaries such as Dickens, Tolstoy and Stowe, to name but a few, and some modern writers and critics such as D.H. Lawrence,<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Burke, Walter Ong, John Gardner, Iris Murdoch and Josephine Donovan would agree. Donovan<sup>38</sup> argues, as many of us would, that "all great art is sustained by the integrity of a moral vision" (Donovan 217), and Gardner makes a case for the great moral tradition in criticism. Thus, to him, an artistic medium is "good" only if it fulfils the moral requirements of having

a clear positive moral effect, presenting valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction or indifference. (Gardner 18)

Eliot's works certainly fulfil these criteria, and her narrative strategies are formulated to encourage us to accept the moral lessons she wishes to teach. Written in an age "in which the spirit of critical inquiry had led the finest minds to question and doubt all established certainties,"<sup>39</sup> Eliot's humanistic philosophy "asserted the existence of a moral order in a Godless universe" (14). She wished readers to develop "the moral imperative of fellow-feeling,"<sup>40</sup> seeing in the humanist doctrine of sympathy a worthy replacement for the religious dicta which had hitherto governed moral conduct.<sup>41</sup> As Theophrastus Such remarks, "our civilization...is helplessly in peril without the spiritual police of sentiments or ideal feelings,"<sup>42</sup> and it is precisely these that she seeks to foster through her art. To her, art was "the nearest thing

to life;...a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot,"<sup>43</sup> a phrase which is echoed by Murdoch when she comments that art can "foster the growth of moral attention to contingent realities beyond the self and beyond self-promoting fantasies" (Donovan 223).<sup>44</sup>

Eliot was respected and honoured for her "sheer quality of mind" and for "intellect exhibited through feeling [and] wisdom conveyed through passionate imagination" (Gill 14). Her mental attributes and authorial skills "ennobled the novel" (144) and gained for her the reputation of a sage. F.W.H. Myers tells an anecdote about Eliot which illustrates this public image:

I remember how, at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellows' Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she...taking as her text the three words...*God, Immortality, Duty*, -- pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable the *second*, and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third*...I listened, and night fell; her grave majestic countenance turned toward me like a sibyl's in the gloom...<sup>45</sup>

To Eliot, "duty" is a paramount virtue, inextricably linked to morality -- the ethics and principles which should govern our lives.<sup>46</sup> It connotes responsibility and dedication to ideals deemed worthy. One such ideal for Eliot, as we know, was the "sacred task," or moral responsibility of the artist, whose work should, according to her lights, exert a positive influence.<sup>47</sup> As Stephen Gill comments, it was "[t]hrough

sustained thought about morality, truth, and art in its relation to life [that she] ... established the intellectual base on which all of her subsequent creative achievement was to rest" (17). Eliot herself elaborated on the theme of the artist's moral duty, and what might be gained from it, explaining that, "[t]he greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies."<sup>48</sup>

For sympathy to be an effective lesson, it must be engendered subtly, however. In her essay "Wordliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young" (163-213), Eliot criticizes Young's "pedagogic moralizing" seeing in it a lack of true "human sympathy," a "deficiency in moral, i.e. in sympathetic emotion," and contrasts Cowper's ability to call forth the desired emotional response from the reader by his honest and sympathetic representation of "objects for their own sake": Cowper, she states, "compells our colder natures to follow his in its manifold sympathies, not by exhortations...but by presenting to us the object of his compassion truthfully and lovingly." While Young is didactic and self-referential, dealing with abstractions and suggesting that we "meditate at midnight," Cowper, like Wordsworth, forges bonds of sympathy between reader and subject by depicting the subject "truthfully and lovingly." His own sympathetic nature, that is to say, draws forth the reader's: he leads by example, and the reader responds by following because a sympathetic chord has



been touched within him: like calls to like. In Eliot, as in Cowper and Wordsworth, we find

...that genuine love which cherishes things in proportion to their nearness, and feels its reverence grow in proportion to the intimacy of its knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

Eliot's art is moral rather than moralistic, following the aesthetic principle that it is the moral responsibility of the artist to fulfill Sir Philip Sidney's dictum to "teach and delight,"<sup>50</sup> by "amplify[ing] experience" and extending our sympathies "beyond the bounds of our personal lot." Eliot's faithful depiction of reality and her charitable understanding of human nature is intended to help us see others as they really are, and call to forth a correspondingly tolerant and accepting response to the foibles of ordinary folk.

Eliot, the humanist sage, by various narratorial strategies, communicates her wisdom to the world, preaching the doctrine of sympathy. My interest in her sagacity centres on the rhetorical means by which she seeks to convince us of its veracity, so that her literary works are, indeed, as Kenneth Burke would say, "equipment for living."

1. The narratee is, as Gerald Prince puts it, "someone whom the narrator addresses" ("Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" Reader-Response Criticism, ed. Jane P. Tompkins, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), p.7), an abstract figure, inscribed within the text. Studies of narratees and narrators "restrict [their] attention to the text, without reference to what happens when an actual person reads it" (Warhol 27).

2. In Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP), 1989, Robyn Warhol introduces the words "engaging" and "distancing" to describe the rhetorical moves represented by narrative strategies (Warhol 26). In Eliot's novels, the narrative voice is deployed to influence the response of the reader and includes among its devices asides to the reader, general commentary, aphoristic utterances, evaluation and explication of the text, and narrative interruptions. In most of these she employs 'engaging' rather than 'distancing' techniques which often include use of the personal pronouns "I" (to represent the speaking subject), "you" (representing the "addressee"), and "we" (which conflates "I" and "you" implying agreement and universality).

3. Schlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, (London and New York: Methuen), 1983, p. 89.

4. I do not, of course, mean to imply that Eliot, or any other writer, should more correctly address comments to "dear Narratee," but I do find it significant that such writers were obviously consciously communicating with, for want of a better appellation, the "reader" engaged in reading the words they wrote.

5. Eliot made clear statements of her Humanitarianism as well as her beliefs concerning the ethics and aesthetics of art and the responsibility of a writer, in articles and reviews written before she began writing fiction, and in the famous narrative intervention, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," in Adam Bede. The role of critic, which she occupied while contributing to the Westminster Review, is, of course, in itself an interesting blend of the roles of reader and writer.

6. Fielding and Thackeray also do this.

7. Barbara Hardy makes this point in The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1959, p. 156.

8. The narrator of The Impressions of Theophrastus Such (1879). Reprinted by George N. Morang and Company, Toronto, 1902.

9. Such sentiments are found, for example, in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," (Westminster Review, October 1856), and in chapters fourteen ("The Too Ready Writer") and sixteen ("Moral Swindlers") of The Impressions of Theophrastus Such.

10. Browning's dramatic audience is, however usually, much more clearly defined than Eliot's.

11. By "metalepsis" I mean transgression of narrative levels.
12. "Diegesis" roughly corresponds to "story."
13. William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802).
14. Letter to Frederic Harrison, 1866, The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. IV, p. 300.
15. Bina Freiwald, "This isn't one to be told/ in the third person": Wallace's Life-Stories," in Open Letter: a Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory 9: Winter 1991, p. 227.
16. Her actual "ideal reader" was, of course, George Lewes, whose enthusiastic and emotional response to her work, coupled with his unflagging support, encouraged her to believe that she "[h]ad not mistaken [her] work" (Letters 111, 63. Quoted by Warhol, p. 102). By the same token, her publisher, John Blackwood, seems to have represented in her mind something less than an "ideal reader," since he occasionally expressed doubt about the appropriateness of some of her narrative techniques. Warhol suggests that Eliot "projected what she saw as the adversarial position of Blackwood onto the part of her imagined audience that Lewes could not occupy: the ladies" (116), so that when, in narrative interruptions, she pauses to remonstrate with "lady readers" whom she presumes to have developed the wrong attitudes toward certain charters or events in the novel, she imputes to them reactions which had been voiced by Blackwood. As I discuss in a later chapter, though addressed as female, these erring readers could as easily be male -- calling them "lady readers" may well be a tactful (though somewhat sexist) narratorial strategy.
17. The Impressions of Theophrastus Such, chapter one, "Looking Inward," p.16. Though it is Theophrastus Such who speaks, and therefore arguably not Eliot herself, the "pale eyed...too corporeal auditor" might well be reminiscent of John Blackwood, whereas Lewes would be an actualized member of the "far-off, hazy, multitudinous assemblage" which chorused approval and was "nearer to [her] idiom than the Cherokees."
18. Lionel Gossman, "History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification," in The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding, eds Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1978, pp 3-39. Quoted by Robyn Warhol, 194-5.
19. Much of the following information is drawn from Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literal and Cultural Studies, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, 2nd edition, (New York: Longman, 1989).

20. In this respect, the study of rhetoric has affinities with reception theory and with reader-response which examine what one might term "consumer response" to discourse in the form of literature. Reception theory is an historical application of reader response: its focus is diachronic, examining the changing responses of the reading public over time, whereas reader-response is synchronic in its focus, its prime interest being the response of a single reader at a given time.

21. In the case of Eliot's didactic realist fiction, the narrative is presented as "representing people feeling, thinking and interacting," while the narratorial interventions utilize the "art of persuasion" to influence the reader's responses.

22. M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 5th edition, (New York: Holt Rhinehart and Wilson), 1988.

23. When dealing, however, with Eliot's narratorial interventions, in which the "I" of the speaking subject (the narrator) addresses a "you," questions of subjectivity cannot fail to arise; moreover, the "transactional" dynamic of reading is spotlighted by such a rhetorical strategy. In addition to this, although I do not wholeheartedly subscribe to the "expressive" theory, I do feel (as I have stated) that in the case of Eliot, who stated her own convictions regarding the ethics and aesthetics art in numerous articles, we are justified in "reading into" her novels some of her own beliefs.

24. Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," reprinted in W.K. Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon (1954).

25. Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (1958), p.491.

26. Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961).

27. Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living", 1937, reprinted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, 2nd edition, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, (New York: Longman, 1989) 76-81.

28. There is a double role-playing in Ong's model: the

writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role--entertainment seekers, reflective sharers of experience (as those who listen to Conrad's Marlow)...[and] the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself...play[ing] the game of being a member of an audience that "really" does not

exist...  
(Con Davis 87).

The audience Theophrastus Such constructs in his imagination, is one "nearer to [his] idiom than the Cherokees," (Theophrastus Such 16), "a far-off, hazy, multitudinous assemblage...making an approving chorus to the sentences and paragraphs of which [he himself] enjoy[s] the writing," and I have suggested that Theophrastus's thoughts on the subject of writing and his imaginative evocation of audience are probably Eliot's own, and would perhaps roughly fall into Ong's category of "reflective sharers of experience." Eliot's readers are encouraged into reflective meditation on events in the novel and their application to life, by narratorial commentary which simultaneously draws the reader in and allows him/her to stand back from the story for a moment to deliberate, with the narrator, on the human condition.

29. This certainly seems applicable to Eliot's texts, in which narrative interventions seek to direct and guide the response of the reader.

30. Patrocinio Schweikart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", reprinted in Robert Con Davis Contemporary Literary Criticism, 118-141.

31. The reaction of readers is, of course, by no means a new interest. For example, Aristotle (in his theory of catharsis), and the Romantic poets (in their poetic theory), were concerned with the sympathetic response of listeners or readers to language. Victorian writers of didactic realism (such as George Eliot and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to name but two), sometimes modelling their rhetoric on that of sermons, also displayed considerable interest in the means by which language could influence readers' response, and skill in achieving the desired result.

32. Georges Poulet, "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority," trans. Catherine and Richard Macksey, in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Structuralism, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 43.

33. Not only was reading aloud common, but certain passages would tend to be re-read, too. This would happen in the case of favourite or "difficult" passages, and sometimes for the sake of coherence and continuity (as many Victorian novels were published serially). Narratorial commentary and rhetorical techniques perhaps strike more forcefully after the first reading (or hearing), as the reader/listener, on subsequent occasions, is already privy to what comes next. It should also be remembered that George Eliot was herself a skilled and attentive reader, being an experienced literary

critic.

34. One could argue (against Iser's view of the dominance of the text) that "gaps" are only there if you see them, or, to put it another way, the "gaps" you see will be the result of the reading strategies you employ (Schweikart 123). In Iser's model, the text controls the reader; in the other model, which is close to Fish's idea that the meaning which a reader produces from a text is influenced by the interpretive community (see Stanley Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum", reprinted in Con Davis, pp. 100-117) to which the reader belongs, the "gaps" are not inherent in the text but are, to a certain extent, conjured up by the reader, and are filled in a way which is dictated not by the text but by whatever interpretive strategy is being used by the reader.

More recent formulations of the theory of how readers respond to texts stress the actual workings of the reader's mind as the text is "processed". Stanley Fish, for example, like Iser, postulates a reader who anticipates and reconstructs developments and "sense" as he proceeds through the text, and Fish goes so far as to say that the meaning of an utterance is not some final corrected result, but the reader's **total** experience of the text, so that even "mistakes" made during the process of reading constitute part of the meaning of the text. For Fish, then, and for Norman Holland and David Bleich (who are practitioners of "subjective criticism"), the reader "controls" the text, really creating it as he goes along. Holland and Bleich extend the notion that the reader holds the greater power in the struggle for control which exists between text and reader: they feel that there is no such thing as a misreading. They centre their theories on questions of personal identity and self-awareness, and therefore take a psycho-analytical approach to interpretation, seeing the text as a sort of mirror in which the reader will find his own personal concerns reflected, so that interpretation is dependent merely upon one's own desires and motivations. (See, for example, Norman N. Holland, 5 Readers Reading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); and David Bleich, Subjective Criticism, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978)).

35. Theories concerning readers are as diverse as the titles bestowed upon them, but they fall roughly into two camps: on the one hand the reader is considered as existing in reality, a real person (or persons); on the other hand the reader is a concept, a theoretical construct rather than a flesh and blood creature.

36. John Gardner, On Moral Fiction, (New York:Basic Books), 1978.

37. D.H. Lawrence remarks that, "[t]he novel can help us live, as nothing else can" in "Mortality and the Novel," Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald, (London, 1936), p. 532.
38. Josephine Donovan, "Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism," Denver Quarterly 17,4 (1983), 40-57. Reprinted in Contexts for Criticism, 2nd edition, ed. Donald Keesey (Mountain View, California:Mayfield), 1994, 214-225.
39. See Stephen Gill's introduction to the Penguin edition of Adam Bede (1980), p. 14.
40. Thomas A. Noble's Introduction to Scenes of Clerical Life, The World's Classics, (Oxford and New York:Oxford University Press), 1988, p. viii.
41. The Christian equivalent is, of course, the commandment "Love thy neighbour." It is clear that Eliot "sought to retain the ethos of Christianity without its faith, its humanism without its theism," as Dr Richard Niebuhr puts it in his introduction to a modern edition of Ludwig Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity (New York, 1957), ix, quoted by Thomas A. Noble in his introduction to Scenes of Clerical Life. (See footnote 12). The importance, in moral life, of the sympathetic imagination, was part of the Romantic ethos, as well.
42. The Impressions of Theophrastus Such, chapter ten, "Debasing the Moral Currency," p.89.
43. "Worldliness and Other-worldliness: The Poet Young," Westminster Review, 67 (January 1857), 40.
44. Murdoch comments on the value of art as a form of education, which aids moral growth by "helping us to see beyond the usual illusions and facile stereotypes by which we habitually organize the chaos of 'reality'" (Donovan 222).
45. F.W.H. Myers, Century Magazine, XXIIII (1881), p. 62. Quoted by Stephen Gill in his introduction to the Penguin edition of Adam Bede, p.14.
46. Moral duty is implicitly extolled in Eliot's works. Romola, for example, must wed responsibility, duty, commitment to love, and so must society. As the narrator of Romola comments, "[o]ur lives make a moral tradition for our individual selves as the life of mankind at large makes a moral tradition for the race: and to have once acted nobly seems a reason why we should always be noble" (ch 39). Believing that personal ethics can have an effect on the world, Romola teaches Lillo that we must have "wide thoughts

and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves" (674).

47. The following lines, quoted to Rosamond by Lydgate (Middlemarch 358) in an attempt to justify his ambition to write about his work, could be considered as expressing Eliot's own feelings about her art:

What good is like to this,  
To do worthy the writing, and to write  
Worthy the reading and the world's delight?

(Samuel Daniel, Musophilus:Containing a general defence of learning (1599), 197-200).

48. "The Natural History of German Life," Westminster Review, 66 (July 1856), 54.

49. "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young", 213.

50. Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86). The phrase is from his essay, A Defence of Poetry, (written 1579-80).



## Chapter One

Wise Sayings: runes with which to decipher the world.

Reader-Response theory has shown us that our "poise" as readers is, in the process of any reading, subject to continual readjustments as expectations are thwarted or as the unexpected happens.<sup>1</sup> It is my contention, however, that in reading George Eliot this "normal" state of affairs is deliberately exaggerated and manipulated in order to teach us something: and it is my further contention that, like any good teacher, Eliot supplies "correctives" to guide us and help restore our "balance." The repeated upsets that we experience in reading her texts, and the abrupt about-faces that she imposes upon us, are "corrected," I believe, precisely by means of the "wisdoms"<sup>2</sup> or gnomic utterances with which she sprinkles the text. Some of these authorial intrusions are in the form of direct addresses to the reader; others could best be described as "asides."<sup>3</sup> Some are cryptic and succinct observations, while others are more expansively expressed; but all are insightful and thought-provoking, and manipulate our response to the text while also commenting on life. When she remarks, for instance, that "...it is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view" (Middlemarch<sup>4</sup> 54), she is gently reminding us that it is humane to be tolerant and undogmatic in our dealings with our

fellows; and may also be hinting to the sensitive reader that he or she must be prepared to read carefully in order to avoid undue bias toward a particular character. Similarly, when she reminds us that "...character, too, is a process and an unfolding" (123), she encourages us towards a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature, both inside and outside the novel; while such a pithy observation as "...we begin by knowing little and believing much, and we sometimes end by inverting the quantities" (160) makes us feel that we are sitting at the feet of a wise person, one whose point of view we can trust.

Sometimes thrown off-course in our reactions as we read, Eliot's "wisdoms" serve to re-anchor us, stabilizing our assessments and refining our responses, tilting them in the direction desired, and widening the range of our vision and emotional response. Furthermore, these shrewd and philosophic observations are more than merely "truths" which consolidate, and comment upon, the events which take place within the universe of the novel, though they do perform this function: they are at the same time able to stand on their own, like proverbs or maxims<sup>5</sup>, separate from the text. Insightful and aphoristic, they are pertinent to the human condition itself, as well as to the novel, and are an integral part of Eliot's technique, the cornerstones of her didactic art.<sup>6</sup>

"Who shall tell what may be the effects of writing?" asks Eliot (Middlemarch 337), and it is well known that it was her

intention and hope that we might learn from her writings to be more tolerant and sympathetic toward our fellows<sup>7</sup> -- that the effect upon us of reading her work would be a beneficial one. Eliot's "wisdoms" are there to help further that moral purpose.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously commentary upon the moral universe of the novel and of the material world, they strike us as deep truths, irrefutable facts valid in both realms (art and life), philosophies corroborated by our own experience. Who, for instance, does not see him/herself in the following:

We mortals, men and women, devour many a disappointment between breakfast and dinner-time; keep back the tears and look a little pale about the lips, and in answer to inquiries say, 'oh, nothing!' (51),

and who can fail to agree that

...our tongues are like little triggers which have usually been pulled before general intentions can be brought to bear (299)

or that

...a man's past is not simply a dead history, an outworn preparation of the present: it is not a repented error shaken loose from the life: it is a still quivering part of himself... (502).

And who can deny the wry truth contained in the statement that "...when gratitude has become a matter of reasoning there are many ways of escaping from its bonds" (301)? We recognise ourselves in such comments, and our own experiences attest to their truth.

In chapter 17 of Adam Bede,<sup>9</sup> Eliot makes some important statements about her aesthetic aims. Rebutting the pleas of

those who would have the artist "improve" on reality by "touch[ing] up [the world] with a tasteful pencil, and mak[ing] believe it is not quite such a mixed entangled affair" (222), she assures us that this approach to her art would run counter to everything she believes in. On the contrary, she sees it as the "highest vocation" of the novelist to present things as they are: she "aspire[s] to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind" (221). This faithful rendering of life is an integral part of her philosophy of the moral purpose of art: to teach us tolerant acceptance for one another just as we are, irrespective of our irritating foibles and our more serious flaws. She points out that, in the real world,

...fellow-mortals, everyone, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people -- amongst whom your life is passed -- that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love... (222).<sup>10</sup>

If she were to create a fictional world that was easier to interpret than ours, one which she peopled with characters about whom it would be a simple matter to form the "correct" judgement, she would do us, she feels, a disservice. She would be deceiving us about how people really think, feel, and behave, creating for us a false climate of expectation so that we would be bound to be disappointed with reality by comparison. Not only could no one ever live up to the impossibly high standards of perfectly virtuous characters,

but no one, Eliot implies, could ever be so "bad" that they would be totally undeserving of pity either: the vast majority of us, after all, fluctuate somewhere near the mid-point" between the two moral extremes of "good" and "bad." As she reminds us, it is not about saints or heroes that she writes, but about ordinary mortals; not about wondrous exploits, but about the hum-drum doings of everyday lives.<sup>12</sup> And it is precisely the common herd who live "faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (Middlemarch 682) whose existence we must remember, lest we "may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes." (Adam Bede 224). According to Eliot's aesthetic credo, then, the faithful representation of ordinary people and "commonplace things" must be the aim of Art, which should "hold a mirror up to life" as closely as possible, teaching us to see ourselves in its reflection, thereby harnessing our self-love and extending it outwards to reach others with compassion and fellow-feeling.<sup>13</sup>

Eliot's "wisdoms," I suggest, are indispensable tools which go a long way towards fulfilling this purpose. Because her shrewd and compassionate "sayings" are applicable not only to the narrow context of the novel, but also to the boundless context of the world, the two realms -- fictive and real -- are linked by them, and we, as visitors to the former and inhabitants of the latter, feel a sort of union with each other, and with the characters whose universe is so like our

own. To put it another way: by eliciting from us a sympathetic response to characters which we are brought to recognize as being similar to ourselves and to our fellows, we are, by extension, encouraged to feel tolerance toward each other: and Eliot's "wisdoms" are often the keys which unlock our hearts, as well as the "anchors" which restabilize our responses.

As readers, Eliot never allows us to remain complacent for too long in our assessment of situations, or in our evaluation of conduct, or (perhaps particularly) in the warmth or coolness with which we respond emotionally to individual characters -- feeling sympathy and liking for some but not for others. Instead, she sees to it that our reactions are in flux, as we adjust our judgements and "extend our sympathies,"<sup>14</sup> and our moral vision is enlarged as our perspectives are altered. We find ourselves performing a sort of balancing act, repeatedly tottering and regaining equilibrium as we are swayed by the revelation of different facets of the personalities of the characters; as we are shown the various pressures which work upon them, coercing them into a series of "adjustments" that parallel the shifting stance of the reader; and as Eliot guides us by means of her philosophic observations.

At the time when Eliot was writing, there was a growing tendency to think of society as being both doomed and destined to evolve as an organic ongoing process<sup>15</sup>: and "organic" and "process" are key words. To use a biological metaphor, any

"society" is a community made up of the organic fusion of separate cells (individual people).<sup>16</sup> Society, moreover, is in its very nature never static, and in Middlemarch it is in the process of a painful transition. Individual human beings evolve, too: their characters are never "set" -- rather each individual continues (to a greater or lesser extent) to "grow," change, adjust him/herself to his/her environment. Realizing that this is so in "real life," Eliot creates characters who are similarly complex, and not pasteboard heroes or villains.

Bearing in mind Eliot's own reminder that "[t]he right word is always a power, and communicates its definiteness to our action" (Middlemarch 248), it is interesting to note that the name of the town<sup>17</sup> (from which the novel takes its title) has the potential connotation of the notion of a "middle way," with concomitant implications of the classical "rule" governing behaviour and self-control. We recall the motto "Nothing in excess" -- which expresses the belief that at the personal level as well as at the societal, an attempt should be made to find some sort of balance: the "golden mean" which will bring stability and poise to the individual, and to the society of which he/she is a member. This is particularly significant when we bear in mind that Eliot is writing about an era during which Society itself was in a particularly acute state of transition. Change was happening fast -- politically, economically, demographically, and ecclesiastically, and this

tended to produce an unstable mix of tradition and reform, an uneasy tug-of-war between old, accepted, conservative ways and emerging new methods and notions. The balance, or poise, which Eliot believed we would do well to seek, is, of course, something of an illusion: only in an ideal world would it be possible to attain; in the imperfect world in which we exist it must remain, to a large extent, an attractive theoretical stance, and a worthy but tantalising goal. Though inevitably fated to fall short of the mark, we instinctively feel, however, that we should nevertheless strive towards the elusive "golden mean" in the interests of harmony both personal and communal -- for our own peace of mind and self-content, and to facilitate our harmonious co-existence with our fellows. In her novels, Eliot amply illustrates the difficulties involved in such an aspiration by showing the extent to which external factors (societal pressures, for example) and one's own personality combine to subvert good intentions and alter the trajectory of lives.

The "poise" or balance which the name "Middlemarch" connotes is applicable not only to Eliot's fictional world which centres round the provincial town and its inhabitants, but also to the reader. The reader of Middlemarch must strive to combine the impartiality and fairmindedness of a Daniel with the agility and equilibrium of a high-wire artiste<sup>18</sup>: in short, he/she must constantly struggle to maintain a "balanced" view of, and a tolerant and empathetic stance



toward, all the characters -- not just some of them. This is a tall order because it involves the achievement of a sort of "golden mean" (or balance) between close emotional involvement with the characters and a certain intellectual distancing from them which allows the reader to judge them in an unbiased fashion, irrespective of his/her personal preference and inclinations. Furthermore, the emphasis, for the characters in the novel and for the "onlooker" or reader, is upon mutability and process rather than upon permanence or stability. As previously noted, the "characters" of the inhabitants of Middlemarch are not "fixed" or "set" any more than yours or mine is constant: they are "true to life" in their changeability: they are in a state of flux, continuously being formed and reformed. Similarly, the reader's emotional reaction to what he/she is reading is constantly shifting, adjusted by the subtle promptings of the text. Just as he/she begins to feel comfortable with a particular viewpoint which allows him/her to evaluate and categorize the characters and their personalities and conduct, or as he/she becomes accustomed to valorizing the perspective of a particular character, he/she is thrown into disarray by the narrator, who destabilizes the text and disorients the reader, leaving him/her uncertain of his/her response to the actions and reactions of the characters. No longer able to feel "settled" in his/her opinions and confident in his/her judgements, he/she has to reassess his/her responses in a process which

usually involves a certain amount of self-scrutiny, and which brooks no smug, patronising or condescending attitude toward the characters, such as he/she may have entertained before being brought up short. This trick of throwing the reader off-balance Eliot achieves in a variety of ways: she is a narrator-strategist who anticipates reader-reactions and works against them, undermining them as they become consolidated.

One instance of authorial intervention which radically unsettles the reader's "poise," and which initiates a change of reader-perspective, occurs when Eliot abruptly shifts narratorial gears by drawing the reader's attention to the fact that he/she has become accustomed to considering the Dorothea/Casaubon relationship exclusively from Dorothea's point of view -- itself necessarily a limited perspective which has brought about, in the reader, a response prejudiced in her favour. Up until the point of strategic narratorial intervention when we are directly asked the question "...but why always Dorothea?" (228-229), we have responded to the text by consolidating feelings of affectionate sympathy for the young bride, and of indifference, or even dislike, for her pedantic husband. As a consequence of the jarring authorial query, however, the reader must acknowledge that he/she has indeed been seeing things from one side only, a vantage point which provides a myopic and partial view rather than a clear-sighted and fair assessment. The narrator's question, then, forces us to realise the injustice of our conclusions, which

have been reached by means of our exclusion of Casaubon's perspective and through our reluctance to accord him the understanding and sympathy to which he, as a fellow human being, is entitled. Our natural response of affinity for Dorothea and of antipathy for Casaubon are revealed as lacking balance, as being judgments which are unfairly weighted and which have been governed, if I might be permitted the analogies, with the principle of a see-saw in mind (if Dorothea is high in our estimation, then Casaubon must be low), rather than that of a set of scales (which latter would allow, through a system of minor adjustments, a redistribution of weight leading to the establishment of a poised and equitable judgement).

From the point of directly addressing us with her key question, Eliot is able to tilt our judgement more in Casaubon's favour; or more exactly, to encourage us to see him not in opposition or contrast to Dorothea, but independently of her, so that we do not have to choose between them. She begins to sow in our minds more and more seeds of sympathy for him *as a man*. We become less and less able, therefore, to continue to see him mono-dimensionally, and consequently can no longer regard him simply as something of a caricature -- as *merely* a character in a book, in fact. As he is "humanized" by Eliot, who increasingly shows him to be susceptible to the same torments and fears that beset the rest of us, we begin to recognize in him some of our own insecurities. Suddenly his

quirks and foibles cease to take centre-stage in our estimation of him, fading instead into the background, and thus allowing us to see the whole man. Our new perspective precludes (or greatly down-plays) our former reaction of irritation and amusement tinged with distaste, and substitutes instead a new depth of vision which brings with it understanding and a compassionate response.

Feeling empathy or sympathy implies that we are acknowledging some basic connection with the object of our fellow-feeling -- some common ground of shared characteristics or experience.<sup>19</sup> These feelings of communion are not limited, however, to the realm of our reactions to flesh-and-blood people; they can, and do, apply also to how we feel about the characters brought to life by a brilliant and sensitive writer. Even though we, as readers, are "real" people, and they, as characters, are figments of their creator's imagination, this distinction ceases to be significant, and in fact disappears, since they become uncannily "real" to us. Consequently, we respond to them as if there were no boundary between the fictive and the real; as if "they" and "we" were equally human.<sup>20</sup> After signalling a change of perspective by means of the pivotal question "...but why always Dorothea?" Eliot proceeds to show the human side of Casaubon, rather than the side which has hitherto been emphasized by many remarks about him which stress his bloodlessness and pedantry, his lack of vitality, and his inability to respond with emotion or

enthusiasm to what for others would be the most satisfying of life's experiences. Up until this point he has been presented, not as a flesh-and-blood person, but rather as sort of walking concept, as "abstract" as the "abstracts" which have been his life's work. For example, it has been suggested (through the opinions of other characters) that his blood, if viewed through the lens of a magnifying-glass, would be seen to be constituted not of red and white cells but of "semi-colons and parentheses," (58) and that even his sleeping mind shuns sexuality, adhering instead to a strict "textuality" which only permits him to dream "footnotes" (58). This "parchment man," however, is slowly transmogrified into a creature of flesh-and-blood, whose feelings, hopes and dreams are revealed to us (after the authorial intervention) in all their vulnerability and pathos. The narrator's query, coming shortly before Casaubon's death, heralds a new dispensation for him; and the reader's change of heart is further prompted by another direct address from the narrator, who announces her own emotional response to Casaubon with the unambiguous words, "For my part I am very sorry for him" (230), a statement which is amplified by one of her "wisdoms" -- a moving and insightful comment, here ostensibly pertaining merely to Casaubon's lot, but also, we divine, having much wider significance, being no less than a deliberation upon the human condition:

It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present

at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self -- never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted (230).

Here is a prime example of how Eliot employs a sapient assertion to link the two worlds -- fictional and real -- and to foster the response that she desires from the reader: one of tolerance and pity. Her use of the phrase "what we call" (... "to be what we call highly taught...") emphasizes that the type of person whom we commonly categorized as "highly taught" is familiar to us; and the classification itself, it is implied, is easily recognizable, too -- so much so that "we" have developed a code-name ("highly taught") to describe it. Not only do "we" reach consensus in recognizing the type, we also agree as to the expression to define it. The introduction of the image of "a small hungry shivering self" is a masterstroke of pathos. It resonates in the mind, reminding us of those pathetic and helpless waifs whose basic needs are neglected, and whose only hope lies in arousing the pity and benefaction of others. It also reminds us of our own vulnerability, a point which I discuss in chapter six. The repeated use of the first person plural pronoun ("we") throughout the whole comment endorses, again and again, our shared participation not only with each other in our reactions to life, but (at the level of the text) with the character (in

this case Casaubon) with whom we are shown to have much in common. Thus the "we" straddles the two worlds (fictive and real) so that we stand, like Colossus, with a foot in each.<sup>21</sup>

The troubling image of the "small hungry shivering self" is echoed once more in the final sentence of the paragraph, a sentence which is extraordinary in its vivid imagery and evocative power. Eliot begins this *tour de force* by forthrightly asserting that what she is about to say must have been said before, and she implies, in addition, that its first utterance must have been made by the lips of a philosopher or sage: "Doubtless some ancient Greek has observed..." she begins, thus validating what is to follow by conferring upon it an almost proverbial status. Having ushered in her observation with such a portentous introduction, Eliot proceeds to pursue her double goal of arousing our pity and tolerance for one of her characters (here Casaubon), and of making us aware of our own vulnerability and nature (and, by extension, that of our fellows) -- indeed it is, of course, her method to achieve the former by means of the latter. In this instance, she draws an analogy between ordinary human behaviour and that of the actors upon the stage of a Greek amphitheatre, exhibiting our own tendency to put on masks to screen "the real us" from public gaze, and revealing our cautious, brave attempts to conceal from the world our weaknesses and fears. The sentence reads:

Doubtless some ancient Greek has observed that  
behind the big mask and the speaking trumpet, there

must always be our poor little eyes peeping as  
usual and our timorous lips more or less under  
anxious control

(230-231),

and the image of the "small hungry shivering self" is recalled by the phrase "our poor little eyes peeping" and by the reference to "our timorous lips more or less under anxious control."<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that it is not only the fictive world of Casaubon and the real world in which we live that are linked in this example: there is also a parallel being drawn between the world of ancient Greece and the contemporary world, so that we are shown to be linked through time as well<sup>23</sup> -- Eliot's observation must, she implies, have been made before, in a distant land and in a remote era, which indicates that little in the human condition changes.<sup>24</sup>

Our compassion for Casaubon reaches its highest pitch when he is brought face to face with the fact of his impending death. Because death is the ultimate experience common to us all, and because the thought of it occasionally fills most of us with dread and fear, we as readers, are brought into a state of emotional union with Casaubon as we see him trying to deal with it on the level of a personal and fast-approaching certainty: a certainty acutely felt, rather than an impersonal and abstract concept sufficiently distant from us to seem, for the time being, relatively unthreatening. This is how Eliot describes Casaubon's confrontation with the fact of death as a pending personal event:

Here was a man who 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 the 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... (347).

No matter how little sympathy one has been able to muster for Casaubon prior to this description, it is surely now impossible not to feel the utmost empathy and pity for him as the full impact of the nearness of his death strikes him and he feels horror in its (physically almost tangible) lurking presence. We cannot but stand in his shoes, quaking in revulsion as we, with Casaubon, look into Death's eyes, and feel his chill fingers close around our throats (347). By personifying Death, moreover, Eliot is able to draw upon our collective imagination: the horrific image of the Grim Reaper is familiar to us all. Our brains register a vivid tableau featuring the struggle between Death as a palpable presence, and a frail figure who is (and is not) Casaubon: we see, in fact, the Grim Reaper versus the "small hungry shivering *self*" (my emphasis), with its "poor little eyes peeping in alarm" at the merciless ones of Death, and with its "timorous lips more or less under anxious control" in its (our) struggle not to give way entirely.

Again, the use of the pronoun "we" ("when we feel the truth...") accentuates the commonality of experience, mental

process and emotional reaction which we, as humans, share; and we are told that Casaubon is "passing through one of those rare moments of experience when...[something happens]" an expression which, while admitting the rarity of the occurrence, simultaneously (and correctly) assumes that we have all experienced similarly significant and pivotal moments. Once more, the phrase "what we call" is used to emphasize that the linguistic terminology which we use is the one which we as a group have sanctioned and that we all therefore use automatically -- here it involves the use of vocabulary derived from the root word "knowledge." But while Eliot, by employing the "what we call" phrase, is asserting on the one hand that our chosen word (in this case "knowing") is automatically selected and recognized as appropriate, she is really drawing our attention to the fact that in this situation (and, by implication, in many others) it is inadequate, failing fully to express what we mean. Eliot is, of course, accentuating the enormous difference between "knowing" and "feeling" -- the former tending to be associated much more with the intellect than with the emotions, and the latter having to do with sentiment and sensation rather than with reason. When we "know" something, we accept its "truth" intellectually, and tend to assimilate it as an abstract fact, one which perhaps can be proved either scientifically or, in the case of folkloric or frequently observed phenomena, by general consensus. In either case, the "knowledge" is

impersonal and in a sense incomplete, quite different from that which is "felt along the pulses" and which therefore involves "knowledge" in the sense of full awareness -- a combination of one's own experience and emotional response. To "feel" the truth of something is to "know" it with every fibre of your being, as an intensely personal and vividly experienced certainty which directly involves you -- indeed which seems *uniquely* to involve you.

The particular "commonplace" here is the "knowledge" that death eventually claims us all.<sup>25</sup> Death is one of the two truly collective experiences of life (the other, of course, being birth), and in that sense it is, indeed, a "commonplace" -- an experience which we hold in common with every living creature. But though this is so, our own death is *uniquely ours*, and the realisation that it is but part of a process ultimately undergone by everyone else, is of little comfort to the individual soul contemplating his own extinction.<sup>26</sup> The knowledge that "We must all die" is a "commonplace" at the linguistic level as well as the factual. But though the phrase serves to acknowledge our acceptance of the inevitability that all life comes to an end, it is expressed in an impersonal manner; and though in reading hearing or saying "We must all die" we accept, at a certain level, that the "we" includes the "me" who is of paramount importance to each of us, the idea still seems abstract -- curiously distant and detached from the Self. There lies an enormous gulf between the commonplace

"We must all die" and the intensely personal awareness (rational, emotional, *visceral*) that death is coming to claim You, and is close at hand. As Eliot puts it,

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... (347).

This gnomic utterance hits home with tremendous force. We pity Casaubon, we pity ourselves; we feel a sense of helplessness and outrage that none shall escape the clutches of death -- not even we, ourselves, are exempt; and we instinctively "know" (feel) what Casaubon feels as death-in-the-abstract suddenly becomes a concrete "fact" or entity. Once more the boundary between the world of the novel and the world which we inhabit has disappeared, dissolving the distinction between character and reader by focusing on an experience with which we identify at the deepest level. Thus we cannot remain indifferent to Casaubon, or be unmoved by his plight; we cannot but see him as pathetic and worthy of our compassion. Our initial (and natural) emotional response to him has been replaced by sympathy and even identification -- in his agony he is Everyman. Here, then, is a case in point of the moral purpose (and the method) of Eliot's art: by teaching us to respond with sympathy and pity to those who seem at first to be unappealing and even unlikable characters in fiction, she hopes that we will learn, by a process of extension, to apply the lesson to real life. Primed by lessons at her knee, it is her hope that we will be able to look beyond the superficial

aspects of those of our fellows whose demeanour may initially cause us to react with impatience or contempt, and learn instead to recognize, respect, and respond to what we have in common with them -- humanity. Her "wisdoms" are effective tools of her didactic purpose, and through them she hopes to augment our capacity for a tolerant attitude and an empathetic response to our fellow mortals, facilitating the "extension of our sympathies" which will lead us to conclude, as she did, that "human nature is lovable" (Adam Bede 229).

In her earlier work, Eliot has not consistently perfected the technique which was later to lead to the creation of an almost "seamless garment" in which authorial intervention is so well blended into the text, and so relevant to the events of the novel and to the human condition, as to seem to occur naturally and without strain. In Scenes of Clerical Life<sup>27</sup>, for example, she is still guilty of the occasional arch aside, usually made in a confiding, chatty tone.<sup>28</sup> For example such comments as "you shall hear, if you will accompany me to Cross Farm" ("Amos Barton" 8), and "we will look over his shoulder while he reads it" (17) would not occur in her later work: they are too much like intimate gossip.<sup>29</sup> That is not to say, however, that in Scenes of Clerical Life Eliot never rose to great heights in her authorial comments: she did. Already she was capable of such aphoristic gems as "The thing we look forward to often comes to pass, but never precisely in the way we have imagined to ourselves" ("Amos Barton" 36); and the

astute and moving

...love is frightened at the intervals of sensibility and callousness that encroach by little and little on the dominion of grief, and it makes efforts to recall the first anguish ("Amos Barton" 63),

and this perceptive reflection from "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story,"

Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow, which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty; and the trivial erring life which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered (166).

And in "Janet's Repentance" there are several instances of "wisdoms" as sophisticated and perfectly executed as anything you will find in her more mature work. These include the cryptic "...hatred is like fire -- it makes even light rubbish deadly" (224); the philosophic "The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence" (228); and the shrewd and wryly comic "Errors look so very ugly in persons of small means -- one feels they are taking quite a liberty in going astray; whereas people of fortune may naturally indulge in a few delinquencies" (285). These sage-like remarks are noteworthy, yet unobtrusive: threads woven neatly into the whole garment of the stories which contain them.

There is an interesting instance in "Amos Barton," however, of a thread which stands out from the cloth rather too obviously, yet is also a valuable (even indispensable) means of attaching the reader's interest. It takes the form of

a direct address to the reader which, on the face of it, seems arch and awkward, but which, upon further consideration, reveals itself to be rather more complex and interesting than it first appears. It comes after the "weakness" of Milly -- wife of the "superlatively middling" Amos ("Amos Barton" 40) -- has been revealed as an interest in clothes: and since this "fault" is so slight in the scale of human error, the "aside" may be taken (on one level) as ironic. At any rate, Eliot addresses the reader with the question "You and I, too, dear Reader, have our weaknesses, have we not?" ("Amos Barton" 27). Because of its tone, diction and sentiment, and because it is simultaneously an "aside," a direct address to the reader, and (in its way) a "wisdom," I should like to consider it at some length.

It is not, I contend, so easy to pigeon-hole it as merely "arch," though one could certainly argue that it is a bit clumsy, and not quite up to the standard of tactful discretion and unobtrusiveness which later seems to become second nature to Eliot. For all its awkwardness, it is, however, clearly an attempt to establish/assert a common ground -- a shared tendency toward moral lapses or failure (the distinct possibility of irony aside)<sup>30</sup> -- and, in ways which I will attempt to explain below, it subtly draws attention to man's dual significance as an individual and as part of a social whole. But it does more, even, than simply that. Its diction prompts the reader to acknowledge the verity of the

observation: a response which involves some introspective reflection on his part, and which relies upon his willingness to concede that he, too, has his faults. The confiding, affectionate tone of the question which Eliot poses (and the fact that it *is* in the form of a question, which implies that the reader has the theoretical freedom to disagree with the proposition), puts him at ease. He is reassured, too, by the question's non-judgemental tone, which owes a lot to Eliot's use of the first person singular pronoun. By its use, she directly and specifically includes *herself* in the "question" (which is really a rhetorical one), and by coupling her "I" to the reader's "you", she creates a unit, a "we" (the pronoun is voiced later in the aside) which serves to help the reader admit his own failings, by implying the existence of at least one other person (the writer) with similar flaws. The reader is thus not allowed to feel ashamed of his faults -- how could he, since the writer is openly admitting similar weaknesses? The pronouns "I" and "you" (each describing distinct individuals, though with shared characteristics), become "we", which implies a "whole," the composition of which emphasizes similarity rather than difference, union rather than separation.

The first person plural pronoun here bonds more than reader and writer, however. The common ground established between *them* is, by implication, extended to embrace humanity as a whole. "You and I, and indeed everyone, has his faults"



is the message, and the observation, phrased as a question -- albeit one that cannot really be denied -- is cleverly rounded off by words with which it would be virtually impossible to disagree. The persuasive phrase "have we not?" neatly cajoles the reader into acquiescence in much the same way as the French "n'est pas?" or the German "nicht wahr?" do -- one is expected to agree with the preceding words; it asserts a strong narratorial position, like-mindedness is taken for granted. Furthermore, I think that it is reasonable to suggest that reading Eliot's coy "You and I, too, dear Reader, have our weaknesses, have we not?" might well put the reader in mind of Alexander Pope's more forthrightly phrased proverb "To err is human", thereby reassuring him/her (once again) that he/she is by no means unique in his/her failings, but merely fallible like all the rest of us. Moreover, because the familiar proverb is a commonplace, accepted without question as a just assessment of the human state, recalling it would tend to validate Eliot's milder, less succinct and impersonal version of the same truth. To recapitulate: the reader's rueful acceptance of the adage, and his/her readiness to see (and judge) fault in others, is now necessarily tempered by compassion and tolerance, and these responses are triggered by the recognition on the one hand that the reader makes mistakes, and, on the other, that everyone (that is to say, humankind in general) does.

Eliot's observation, then, has led us to ponder life in

general -- as her "wisdoms" always do -- but we must not lose sight of the fact that Eliot's "we," ostensibly referring to her reader and herself (though also, as we have noted, implying humankind in general) applies *not only* to the "general" -- the world we inhabit and about which the proverb "To err is human" is a just comment -- *but also to the particular instance of the novel*. This may seem to be stating the obvious: after all, the narrator's remarks do, presumably, primarily pertain to the narrative upon which they comment, whatever wider meaning and application they may also have. But in view of the fact that I have made much of the pertinence and "truth" of Eliot's "wisdoms" in the broad arena of the phenomenological world, it is (perhaps) worth stressing the relevance of such observations to the microcosm of the novel *itself*, and acknowledging the purpose which they serve *at this level*. It is Eliot's technique to argue from the particular (the novel) to the general (the world): we start by reading and forming opinions about the conduct and morality of the characters who people the fictional world created by the narrator, and then by quietly dropping her aphoristic comment (such as, in this case, "You and I, too, dear Reader, have our weaknesses, have we not?") into the text, she thereby encourages our acknowledgement of the imperfection of humankind in general. But this acknowledgement in turn *reflects back* on the novel, forcing us to concede that the standards that we were seeking to impose upon the novel's

characters, and by which we smugly judged them, were unreasonably high -- that though they err, they are not to be despised, but accepted. We have moved from the particular to the general and thereby back to the particular: "We all make mistakes, none of us is without sin" is her message, and at the level of the novel, she is pleading for leniency in our judgement of the behaviour of her characters. But it is, of course, equally (and ultimately, more importantly) true that she is pleading for compassion and tolerance in our day-to-day lives, so we have come full-circle. Her "message" applies equally and simultaneously to the world-in-small which is conjured up by her art, and to the broad canvas of which the former is an illustration.<sup>31</sup>

Whether we call them "asides," or "wisdoms," and whether they are grafted onto the page in the form of direct address, or blended subtly into the text, Eliot's insightful comments tend to pull the reader up short, forcing him/her to give a few seconds' reflection before continuing, often with a new perspective. Briefly intruding upon his/her imaginative involvement in the story, they momentarily bring him/her out of the novel and back to reality, so that he/she will re-enter the world of the novel with a modified and less judgemental point of view -- a new tolerance that is intended to spill back over into "reality" again.<sup>32</sup>

One might say that reading Eliot is somewhat like walking a tightrope: the reader must always be prepared to adjust

his/her footing, as it were, in response to the slipperiness of the narrative line, and to the skill with which Eliot nudges him/her in varying directions. Momentarily off-balance, the reader strives to re-establish his/her equilibrium, and fortunately help is provided. Just as the tightrope-walker's balance is aided by the balancing-pole he or she carries, so the reader is aided by the "wisdoms" -- those sagacious omniscient comments -- which Eliot provides, and which tend to re-stabilize the reader's response, offering him/her (once again) a firmer foothold, a surer grip, a viewpoint which is more poised -- until the next unsettling jolt. Offering him/her, too, food for thought beyond the pages of the novel, insights which will help in the understanding of self and fellows: runes with which to decipher the world.

1. See Reader-Response theorists such as Georges Poulet and Michael Riffaterre, but particularly Stanley Fish's "Interpreting the Variorum" (1980), reproduced in Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (New York and London: Longman) 198, 101-117.

2. Isobel Armstrong also uses this word ("wisdoms") in her essay "Middlemarch: a Note on George Eliot's 'Wisdom'", in Critical Essays on George Eliot, ed. Barbara Hardy (London: 1970) 116-132, preferring it to the simplistic, though more often used, "authorial comment," which seems inadequate to express the truth of the comments. On this point, as on many others, I concur with Armstrong. She, too, sees the "wisdoms" as a "necessary constituent of George Eliot's art" (117) rather than as contrived and intrusive narratorial interference. My comments, however, are my own; as are the conclusions which I have reached.

3. Direct addresses to the reader are intended to involve them in the action, to get their attention, and also to establish a close relationship between them and the writer -- but

sometimes, I feel, they tend to distance readers in a way, by reminding them that they are audience to a fiction and not invisible onlookers upon reality; shattering their suspension of disbelief, erecting instead of dissolving the "fourth wall." One thinks of the deliberate attempts in some modern theatre pieces to address members of the audience in order to maintain, not destroy, the separation of actors from spectators, and therefore to emphasize the artificiality of the experience, by reminding them that it is only a play; re-establishing (against their wills) the "disbelief" that they have so willingly suspended in order to enter the world of the play. Eliot's earlier "asides" and direct addresses do have this effect occasionally: to take one example, consider the "Listen With Mother" tone of

And now that we are snug and warm with this little tea-party, while it is freezing with February bitterness outside, we will listen to what they are talking about ("Amos Barton" 9).

In the above example we, reading it, are both there and not there, an odd mixture of audience and participant; and the tone is irritatingly arch. But for the most part (and certainly in her later work) Eliot's "authorial intrusions" blend (rather than separate) the fictive and the real world by being supremely relevant to both.

4. George Eliot, Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life, The World's Classics edition (Oxford:Oxford University Press) 1986. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and will be made parenthetically within the text.

5. I am certain that Eliot is very much aware that many of her philosophic observations "read" like proverbs or maxims. She even goes so far as to parody the style of biblical proverbs at one point, as if to underscore her consciousness that she, too, employs similar phraseology. In one of her frequent narratorial intrusions, she remarks, "Solomon's Proverbs, I think, have omitted to say, that as the sore palate findeth grit, so an uneasy consciousness heareth innuendoes" (Middlemarch 245-246).

And she makes an interesting allusion to the type of phraseology we associate with the Bible when she remarks of Caleb Garth (whose "religion" is the performance of the best work of which he is capable), that

It was one of Caleb's quaintnesses, that in his difficulty of finding speech for his thought, he caught, as it were, snatches of diction which he associated with various points of view or states of mind; and whenever he had a feeling of awe, he was haunted by a sense of Biblical phraseology, though he could hardly have given a strict quotation (Middlemarch 337).

Eliot's "wisdoms" often have a similar diction; one that

invests them with a quality of truth, validating them as "givens".

The word "maxim" is also deliberately used by her when talking about the miser Peter Featherstone (he of the name which indicates irreconcilable opposites, a personality incapable of achieving any sort of "golden mean"). "Peter's maxim," Eliot tells us, was that "money was a good egg, and should be laid in a warm nest" (249). The fact that this unsavoury character formulates and lives by maxims might cast aspersions on such trite sayings, but it is more likely that we are meant to read the passages concerning Featherstone and his would-be inheritors with a good deal of irony.

6. Eliot came reluctantly and late to write fiction, having established herself not only as a journalist, but as a literary critic: often an outspoken one impatient with many of the stylistic tendencies which "lady novelists" employed in their "silly novels". Though she believed in the moral value and "purpose" of art, and though her work has often been criticised for being too "preachy," as a critic Eliot rejected many novels for being excessively didactic. This is not, however, the contradiction it first appears. What she objects to is not the moral intention of the author, but the awkwardness of the forced and unnatural style and contrived plotting of the story which served as vehicle for the moral lesson. Just as poetry should come as naturally as a leaf to the tree (to paraphrase Keats), so should the various elements of the novel ideally grow naturally together into an organic whole in which the plot, characterization, dialogue and "message" combine, supporting and complementing each other, so that nothing seems artificially imposed, unnatural, or obtrusive. The successful achievement of this ideal involves, amongst other factors, truthful portrayal of character, and realistic situations skilfully chosen and depicted so as to show the characters' spiritual struggles and moral dilemmas -- if skilfully interwoven, the didactic message of the tale should be evident to the thoughtful reader, yet subtle, arising naturally from the events. In addition to this, a great and sensitive writer can discretely direct the reader to modify his reactions to the conduct or personality traits of the characters in the narrative. The reader's perspective is altered by a subtle and almost invisible hand, so that he adjusts his opinion, or tempers his response. This new, revised and modulated response seems entirely "natural" to the reader, and not one that has been artificially imposed upon him, though, of course, it is the writer's skill which manipulates the reader into "surrendering" to the text.

7. Eliot wrote that "[t]he greatest benefit that we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies...A picture of human life such as a great

artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment" George Eliot, The Natural History of German Life, *Westminster Review*, 66 (July 1856), 54.

8. E.M. Forster's maxim, "Only connect!" seems particularly apt to describe the status of Eliot's "wisdoms" which "connect" the world of the novel to our world, and the reader to characters.

It is, of course, Eliot's wish to teach us to feel a communion, or "connectedness" with one another: a sympathetic union which will foster fellow-feeling.

9. George Eliot, Adam Bede (Middlesex:Penguin), 1980. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and will be made parenthetically, within the text.

10. It is Eliot's belief that novels which present simplistic, clearly delineated "good" and "bad" characters who never deviate from their paths of virtue or of wrong-doing would be likely to influence us to form harsh opinions of the real people with whom we are in daily contact: ordinary people such as ourselves and our neighbours whose lives may contain sadnesses and vicissitudes about which we are unaware. By showing, on the other hand, that each individual is a complex psychological mixture whose behaviour, on occasion, runs the gamut from the noble to the shameful -- and whose motives are rarely clear even to himself -- she presents a truer picture and helps us achieve a greater depth of understanding about the human condition: an understanding which, she hopes, will bring with it compassion and tolerance. In short: the representation, by the novelist, of "a world so much better than this" would, she feels, make the real world that much less pleasant to inhabit, by predisposing us to "turn a harder, colder eye...on the real, breathing men and women, who can be chilled by [our] indifference or injured by [our] prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by [our] fellow-feeling, [our] forbearance, [our] outspoken, brave justice" (Adam Bede 222).

11. The name "Middlemarch" denotes, amongst other things, the idea of a mid-point -- see my comments below.

12. In Eliot's own words, it is "a "monotonous homely existence which has been the fate of so many more among [her] fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions" (Adam Bede 223).

And in this vein, Eliot's translation of Theocritus, Idylls, xvi. 3-4, and which she uses as the epigraph which heads

chapter XXVII of Middlemarch:

*"Let the high Muse chant loves Olympian:*

*We are but mortals, and must sing of man."*

neatly expresses her philosophy concerning the fitting subject-matter, and the responsibility of the poet/artist.

13. "...there never was a true story which could not be told in parables..." remarks Eliot on the subject of means available to the artist/novelist to "elevate a low subject" (Middlemarch 279). Though she recognises that "Historical parallels are remarkably efficient in this way" (280), she concludes that

The chief objection to them is, that the diligent narrator may lack space, or (what is often the same thing) may not be able to think of them with any degree of particularity, though he may have a philosophical confidence that if known they would be illustrative (280).

Historical parallels not always being obvious or readily recognizable, she concludes, therefore, that "It seems a shorter way to dignity" to obtain the same effect through the use of parables, which will "ennoble" the plain story being told, elevating it to a higher philosophic level.

A "parable" is, one might say, a means of making a *comparison* -- it is usually a short fictitious story used to illustrate a moral attitude or a religious principle. (Christ, for example, made effective use of such means of teaching his followers.) Novels such as those which Eliot writes have a moral purpose, and I contend that the "parables" which she sets up in the telling of her tales, are often paraphrased in the "wisdoms" which she utters for our instruction, and which serve, also, to "*compare*" the fictive world with our own -- showing us that what is true in one is equally true in the other: helping us to apply the fictive example (or exemplum) to real-life situations, sugaring the didactic pill. "These things are a parable," she emphasizes (Middlemarch 217), after describing how when a candle is held close to a polished surface, minute scratches will be seen to radiate around it: "The scratches are events," she goes on to explain, "and the candle is the egoism of any person..." (217); in other words, we all, inevitably, see ourselves as the centre of our own world.

14. See endnote number 7.

15. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), among others, expressed this idea.

16. Man is simultaneously an individual and a member of a social group: in Jacob Bronowski's words, he is a "social solitary" (See his The Ascent of Man). In addition to belonging to a community (or familial group) of some sort, he



is also, of course, a member of that generic mastergroup, mankind. We are all single cells, as it were, which together make up an organic Whole. Just as the body is a system of interconnecting (and symbiotic) tissues, so is society a body of interconnected individuals. Dr. Lydgate's search for the "primitive tissue" (Middlemarch 122) which he believes all living organisms to possess in common, is a parallel to (and parable for) our basic "relatedness" as fellow humans: we are all brothers under the skin, one might say.

17. Careful consideration of the name "Middlemarch" produces rich rewards: the name in many ways epitomizes Eliot's philosophies. Neither completely rural nor yet urban, Middlemarch is a provincial town populated by a cross-section of ordinary folk rather than by the fashionable and famous. One could say that it is "small-town" in the sense of its size, geographical setting, and xenophobic tendencies; and it is "small-town" also in the slightly perjorative sense of "a likely hot-bed for gossip." In addition, the "via media" which is implied by the name "Middlemarch" can be translated as "mid-way" (rather than the more literal "the middle path"), and taken to infer the mid-point in a journey from somewhere to somewhere else -- or in temporal terms, the transition from one state, or way of life, to another. Most of the characters in the novel arrive at one or more such turning-points in their lives, circumstances forcing a change in direction of the course of their lives.

18. As Walt Whitman once tellingly remarked, "the process of reading is not a half-sleep, but, in the highest sense, a gymnast's struggle" (Prose Works 1892, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York:New York University Press), 1964, 11.

19. Eliot herself says, "...sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form..." (George Eliot, "Janet's Repentance" p.258, in Scenes of Clerical Life, The World's Classics Edition ((Oxford and New York:Oxford University Press) 1988. She is known to have translated the works of German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, and to have felt entirely in agreement with his teachings. Her sentiments concerning sympathy can be seen to be close to those expressed by Feuerbach when he says "Love does not exist without sympathy, sympathy does not exist without suffering in common...Sympathy presupposes a like nature" Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (New York, 1957), 84.

20. I deal with this concept at greater length in the final chapter.

21. I enlarge on Eliot's use of personal pronouns in chapter two, drawing on the work of Emile Beneviste in Problems in General Linguistics, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, (Coral

Gables, Florida:University of Miami Press), [1971]]. In this chapter, however, my discussion of Eliot's narratorial use of personal pronouns will be confined to general observations, rather than to theoretical concerns.

22. Both phrases are discussed at length in chapter five.

23. One is reminded of Matthew Arnold's reference to Sophocles in the second stanza of "Dover Beach." Speaking of "the eternal note of sadness" which the monotonous "grating roar" of waves on the shore produces, Arnold reflects that

Sophocles long ago  
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought  
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
Of human misery...

which reference leads us, in turn, to Sophocles' Antigone, lines 583ff.

24. In addition to these parallels, the separate worlds of theatre and of reality are brought into alignment and shown to be much less distinct from each other than might be imagined: they are inextricably entangled, in fact, if we consider the extent to which art reflects life and life art, and how much "acting" goes into everyday existence.

25. Eliot's choice of word is fascinating, however, as "commonplace" has multiple connotations, among them "customary," "conventional," and "unexceptional"; implying something so familiar as to be taken for granted, or (at the level of language) an obvious and trite observation -- a "saying" which, through repetition and familiarity, is accepted as axiomatic: an aphoristic piece of handed-down conventional wisdom which seems universal in its "truth". Given the fact that Eliot's "wisdoms" sometimes fit this description, or are framed to seem as if they do, the word is particularly interesting, and warrants further study.

26. One is put in mind of Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Wreck of the Deutschland," lines 81-88, which distinguishes between our acceptance of universal death and our individual fear.

27. George Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life, The World's Classic's Edition (Oxford and New York:Oxford University Press) 1988. All subsequent references will be to this addition, and will be made parenthetically, within the text.

28. In fact, Eliot sometimes sounds quite like Mrs. Gaskell in Cranford -- which, I hasten to add, is not to imply that Gaskell is a poor writer, but merely that while she tends to limit her direct addresses to the reader to quaint and

appealing remarks such as "Have you any red silk umbrellas in London?" (Cranford 2), Eliot, who seems to have begun in this vein -- for example the excruciating "Reader! did you ever taste such a cup of tea as Miss Gibbs is this moment handing to Mr Pilgrim?" ("Amos Barton," 8) -- progressed to greater things. Of course, the comparison is hardly fair, the tone of Cranford inviting such cosiness, and its style being one of intimacy and gossip.

29. They also involve metalepsis, which I discuss in chapter four.

30. Although the question undoubtedly has its ironic side, since Milly's "weakness" is scarcely worthy of the name, I am much more interested in its other implications, and it is these which I wish to analyse.

The possibility that some of Eliot's aphoristic statements are meant to be taken ironically, has not been a consideration of this paper, and warrants further work. There are some "wisdoms," for example, which do seem tongue-in-cheek, or intended to elicit a reaction of denial rather than of agreement. One such is the puzzling (and playful) "Every man who is not a monster, a mathematician, or a mad philosopher, is the slave of some woman or other" (Middlemarch 34). This seems more of a sweeping generalisation than an insightful, omniscient remark -- is Eliot using reverse psychology here, or are we meant to agree?

31. As Eliot put it, "Art is the nearest thing to life: it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the boundaries of our personal lot." ("Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young," Westminster Review 67 (Jan. 1857), 40).

32. The idea of entering into something sympathetically does have a critical history: see, amongst other works, M.H. Abram's The Mirror and the Lamp for further discussion of the concept and its history. Whether we are, indeed, influenced to the good by art is, regretfully, a different matter from simply being made to sympathize with characters within the bounds of the novel. Does having your sympathies aroused in the world of the imagination really alter you as a person? It is a moot point, but I am not yet cynical enough to deny the possibility that we benefit from the exercise. On the obverse side, there certainly seems to be some evidence which tends to indicate that there is a correlation between exposure to violence and pornography in "art," and the tendency to behave in socially unacceptable ways. Perhaps it is just more difficult to "prove" beneficial influence.

## Chapter Two

### Eliot's use of pronouns: "taking pronouns personally"

George Eliot's strategic use of personal pronouns in narratorial commentary and asides to the reader is the subject of this chapter. I contend that in both these instances, a sort of pseudo-dialogue<sup>1</sup> (albeit one-sided) is set up between narrator and narratee, the latter (intra-textual construct) being, for the purpose of my argument, rarely distinguishable from the actual reader of Eliot's work.<sup>2</sup> In his Problems in General Linguistics, Emile Benveniste<sup>3</sup> remarks that while some pronouns "belong to the syntax of a language, others are characteristics of ... 'instances of discourse,' that is, the discrete and always unique acts by which the language is actualized in speech by a speaker" (Benveniste 217).

The formal designation of "person" to the personal pronouns "I" and "we" (first person), "you" (second person), and "he"/"she" (third person) is being brought into question by Benveniste, who argues that "'Person' belongs only to I/you and is lacking in he [sic]" ("The Nature of Pronouns, 218, in Problems in General Linguistics). Analysing the pronoun "I" reveals that each "I" has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such" (218). This being so, the "reality" to which the pronoun "I" or "you" refers is "solely a 'reality of discourse'" (218). That is to say that whereas nominal signs (nouns) are defined in terms of

the objects they stand for, the pronouns "I" and "you" shift, as it were, according to who is doing the speaking. "I is 'the individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance I' [and thus], by introducing the situation of 'address,' we obtain a symmetrical definition for you as the 'individual spoken to in the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance you" (218). Grounded in discourse, the pronouns "I" and "you" are, therefore, involved linguistically in "intersubjective communication" (219), referring not to "'reality' or to 'objective' positions in space and time but to the utterance, unique each time, that contains them" (219). Thus, in a conversational exchange between two or more speakers, "I" will be appropriated in turn by each speaking subject, and, correspondingly, "you" will stand in turn for the non-speaker of the moment. This seems transparently obvious, but it is interesting nonetheless, as no other "signs" behave in such a fluid manner, being grounded in an unshifting 'reality' -- a "material reference" (220) -- a tree is always a tree, etc. In contrast to this stability, "I" and "you" remain fluid and "mobile" (220) signifiers "actualized [only] in the instance of discourse" (220), the former appropriated by the speaker, announcing his role as such; the latter used by the speaker to designate the person being addressed.

When George Eliot (as narrator) addresses the reader

(either in the form of a narratorial comment on the story she is telling, or in a direct aside to the reader) by uttering a remark containing both "I" and "you," she is, needless to say the speaking subject, and we, as readers, are those being spoken to, the 'addressees.' In other words, when the pronouns "I" and "you" are used in situations not involving characters' dialogue, they are used judiciously by her to instigate a type of 'dialogue' between herself (speaker) and us (those spoken to, 'narratees,' or listeners/readers).<sup>4</sup>

Before continuing this line of thought, I must acknowledge that I am aware that there is a difference between "narratee" and "reader," though it is my contention that Eliot works to blur the line between them. The "narratee" is, of course, a construct, a figure encoded within the text, whereas the reader is (as I use the term) a real person who is engaged in the act of physically reading the text. The narrator assumes that the "narratee" will respond in a certain way to the text, and exerts his/her skills to ensure that this is so; accordingly, the more "engaging" the narrator is, the more likely it is that actual readers will follow suit.

In answering the question posed at the beginning of chapter 21 of Problems in General Linguistics: "If language is...the instrument of communication, to what does it owe this property?" (223), Emile Beneviste concludes that it has "qualities [that] make it suited to serve as an instrument" (223), as "it lends itself to transmitting what [we] entrust

to it -- an order, a question, an announcement -- and it elicits from the interlocutor a behavior which is adequate each time." He proceeds to use the terms "stimulus" and "response" (drawn from the realm of behavioural psychology) to describe how language behaves or functions as discourse, which he defines as "language put into action...necessarily between partners" (223). Abandoning the notion of language as an "instrument" (a concept which separates man from nature), he concedes that speech, or discourse, is the actualized form of language, and is "enabled by language" to be the vehicle (instrument) of communication (224). Thus from considering language's ability to communicate in the light of the properties of speech, speech is now seen to be merely actualized language. It is therefore within language itself (rather than in the dynamics of speech) that we must seek the properties which make verbal communication so effective. Though it is difficult to pinpoint just what properties of language allow it to be so effective, our ability to appropriate language to our own ends by positing ourselves as "subject" of the utterance we are making (by using the pronoun "I") ranks high in importance. "It is in and through language that man [sic] constitutes himself as a **subject**" (224), and this being so, it follows (again borrowing psychological terminology), that "language alone establishes the concept of 'ego'" (224). Thus "subjectivity" is "the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experience it assembles

and that makes the permanence of the consciousness" (224). Moreover, (whether in "phenomenology or psychology"), "subjectivity" is "only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language" (224). In other words, as Benevise puts it himself, "'Ego' is he who **says** ego" (224). This is, I feel, highly relevant to parts of Middlemarch, which, amongst other things, deals with questions of "ego" and self-centredness, points of view and perspective. Take, for instance, the famous parable of the pier-glass (Middlemarch 217): we are told that the random infinitesimal scratches on the surface of the mirror will "seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles" (217) around the light shed on a specific area by a candle flame, but move the flame, and the "little sun" will be the centre of another set of similarly concentric circles. The narrator interprets this metaphor, or parable, for us with the words "The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person..." (217). I think it would be equally true to say that the candle-flame could be seen as a metaphor for Eliot as narrator, as she illuminates the text for us, throwing new light first on one area, then on another, refusing to allow us to view events for long with the "exclusive optical selection" (Middlemarch 217) which prompts us to privilege one character over another, but causing us, rather, to change our point of view, to focus elsewhere, to see things from a different perspective, in a different light. In Middlemarch, for example, the most obvious



instance of this would be the much-discussed "But why always Dorothea?" (228-229) passage, which forces us (albeit reluctantly) to transfer our attention somewhat from Dorothea to Casaubon, and to see him more clearly, since "he ha[s] an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference" (Middlemarch 173).

Benevise argues that it is only possible to be conscious of "self" if we experience another entity with which to contrast the notion (224). It is, of course, here that the signifier "you" comes in, designating one who is not-self. The very use of the word "I" implies the existence of another person, who will become "my echo to whom I can say **you** and who [in turn] says **you** to me" (225). As Benevise puts it, "I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a **you** in my address" (224). In this model, dialogue activates the exchange of subjectivity and sets up a "polarity of persons [which] is the fundamental condition in language" (225). The pronouns "I" and "you" are diametrically opposed to each other, (yet unequal, as "I" is valorized over "you"), and at the same time, "I" and "you" are mobile, being reversible and reciprocal, "I" being appropriated by whoever is the speaking subject of the utterance, and "you" being "the other." It is the reversibility of the complementary I/you dichotomy that causes "the old antimonies of 'I' and 'the other,' of the individual and society [to] fall" according to Benevise (225); subjectivity, then, is mobile rather than static, and

must be viewed as a "dialectic reality that incorporates the two terms [the dichotomies of the individual ('I') versus society ('you' as 'other')] and defines them by mutual relationship" (Beneviste 225). Certainly, in the hands of Eliot, pronouns are useful tools which help build bridges of connection between all the (interchangeable) positions of subject ("I," "you," "we," "one," and even, by implication, "they.") Her skilful and persuasive use of personal pronouns in addresses to the reader and in other instances of narratorial commentary "works to undo the hierarchical dichotomy of subject and object, teller and tale, speaker and listener."<sup>5</sup>

Various strategies are used by the narrator to sway us, and manipulate our emotional response. One of these strategies is the use of the pronouns "I" and "you" in asides to the reader, and in what I might term general narratorial commentary. As readers, then, we are drawn by this strategy into a situation which has within it elements of discourse (conversation), but to which we cannot, of course, respond verbally. It goes without saying that we readers are separated in time and space from the writer/speaker, so that the best that can be achieved is the **illusion** of discourse, or conversation. However, even though our response must necessarily be silent, we can (and do) respond emotionally and intellectually both to the content of the utterance, and to its form. Intellectually, we will agree or disagree with (or

possibly feel ambivalent towards) the burden of the message, and the degree to which we concur has to do with how close a "match" the reader has with the encoded "narratee" figure, who is assumed by the narrator to be in agreement; emotionally, we will respond to the somewhat "confessional" or confiding air that such utterances made in the first person tend to have -- to the intimacy that exists between speaker and reader and also between any "I"/"you" duality. When I, as reader/listener -- by being referred to as "you" -- am included in what could be termed this rather one-sided conversation, I am drawn into an alliance with the speaker which transcends my inability to respond verbally, face to face. I am addressed by a singular voice in conversation with others, of whom I am one, and with whom I (and the narrator) share experience.<sup>6</sup>

Instances of asides and narratorial commentary in which Eliot utilizes "I" and "you" abound through all her writing, but I will draw my first examples from Scenes of Clerical Life as this was her first attempt at writing fiction, and (in general) the narratorial interventions in it are less perfectly integrated into the text than they tend to be in her later work.

In this first foray into the world of fiction, as in her other works, some interventions take the form of "chatty" remarks which interpolate the reader into the text: "I think you will admit..." ("Amos Barton" 22), "I can't help

thinking..." (23), "...you will be glad to hear..." (64); "You can imagine..." ("Mr Gilfil's Love Story" 71), "...I am sorry to say..." (69), "...let me assure you..." (74); "...as I have told you..." ("Janet's Repentance" 192), "...you might wonder why...if I did not tell you..." ("Janet's Repentance" 171), "It is apt to be so in this life, I think" ("Janet's Repentance" 221). These interventional phrases, by and large, are the kind of throw-away verbal gestures we make when chatting informally to a friend; liberally scattered throughout the text, they are intended to conjure up an informal, gossipy<sup>7</sup> tone, and they reassuringly invite the reader to join the conversation, to enter the text. Asides such as these are much less frequently deployed in Eliot's later work.

Similar but more "loaded" instances of the use of "you" also occur quite frequently in Scenes from Clerical Life, as for example, in statements such as "If you had seen him...you would have inferred..." ("Mr Gilfil's Love Story" 73). Here, the reader is told that had he/she been present as spectator (rather than hearing about this situation second-hand), he/she would have drawn a specific conclusion. Eliot as narrator is claiming (as close friends might claim of each other's responses to certain circumstances) that she knows what that conclusion would have been, which seems either to imply that she knows "you" well enough to prophesy "your" reaction, or that she takes it for granted that "your" reaction would be

the only reasonable one, and therefore the same as hers. In other words, Eliot as narrator expects "your" response to "match" that of the "narratee," and makes this expectation explicit.

In another example from the same story, Eliot again second-guesses the reader, this time considering him/her not as a potential spectator (except in the imaginative sense), but merely as reader. She states as a fact that "You already suspect that the Vicar did not shine in the more spiritual functions of his office; and indeed, the utmost I can say for him in this respect is, that he performed those functions with undeviating attention to brevity and dispatch" (69). These comments pre-empt the reaction of the reader, nodding towards his/her shrewd assessment of Mr Gilfil's performance, tacitly agreeing with it in the laconic admission that "the utmost [she] can say for him is that he performed those functions with brevity and dispatch," and what gentle irony is contained in that phrase, "...with brevity and dispatch"! Again there is a presumed "match" between reader and "narratee," and there is fostered, moreover, a feeling that the narrator and reader are kindred spirits -- that Eliot enjoys a "closeness" with the reader, the kind of closeness or intimacy which is shared by friends who think alike.

Interestingly, the feeling that there exists in the breast of the narrator and reader alike, a concurrence of similar (if not identical) opinions or responses can also be

produced without the aid of the pronouns "you" and "I" in narratorial comments such as the following example from "Janet's Repentance." At this point in the story, the much-abused Janet has been widowed, and the reactions of the citizens of Milby to their acquaintance, Janet, are being noted. However, as is frequently the case in Eliot's work, the following comment seeks not only to explain (though not condone) the reactions of these fictional characters, but also the reactions (which are the same) of citizens of the phenomenological world:

Errors look so very ugly in persons of small means -- one feels they are taking quite a liberty in going astray; whereas people of fortune may naturally indulge in a few delinquencies. (285)

Here the opening clause is stated with confidence, as a truism about life outside the text, in the real world: the faults of poor or ordinary people stand out and are harshly judged. The final part of the sentence continues this line of thought (still in the form of a truism) by supplying the contrasting reaction to faults in the more privileged. It is significant that "look" in the first clause (which implies perception and judgement) becomes "may naturally indulge" in the last part of the sentence, implying that judgement gives way to "natural law," as we tend to avert our gaze from the delinquencies of the privileged, while taking every opportunity to be judgemental of the poor. The middle part of the sentence, ("one feels they are taking quite a liberty in going astray") is interesting, for it justifies the judgement contained in

the opening clause, and utilizes the fascinatingly evasive pronoun "one" to do so. "One" can be used in a variety of ways in English, sometimes (in formal English speech) corresponding roughly to "I," but nevertheless carrying a connotation of collectivity, so that the implied "I" of the speaking subject is aligned with an unexpressed "you" (that is with other people who would think or act in a like manner). When "one" is used in this way, the unstated "I" and the implied "you" merge into an alliance of like-mindedness which could be signified lexically as "we." Thus the entire comment, which starts assertively, implies that it is stating an undisputed fact, which we all agree upon, and the middle section reinforces the aura of collectivity about the whole utterance, as "one" implies a concensus built on the self. We are left no alternative but to agree that we all react judgementally to the foibles and indiscretions of the less advantaged, and yet turn a blind eye to the same faults in the privileged (which does not mean that this is how we should react, of course.) In fact, it is Eliot's intention to show us the error of our ways, and teach us to be less judgemental, and more sympathetic, to all our fellows. The effect of the comment, with its factual tone and its interesting use of "one" is to force us to acknowledge that what is stated is true -- we do tend to react this way. We are also encouraged to examine this tendency critically, however, in the light of our feelings of sympathy for Janet's lot, and it is Eliot's hope that once

having learned to check our "natural" response within the bounds of our response to the story, we will, by extension, be able to do so in daily life. The narrator continues, after a few lines, by remarking "...heaven knows what would become of our sociality if we never visited people we speak ill of: we should live, like Egyptian hermits, in crowded solitude" (285, emphasis added). Here the previously implied collectivity becomes overtly expressed in the pronominal forms "we" and "our," and again we are nudged into acknowledging that we, too, share a trait with the fictional characters -- in this case, hypocrisy. Again, this state of affairs is presented as being "natural," and it is implied (because we are all guilty) that we are not particularly blameworthy; the conscience of the sensitive reader is gently pricked, however, at the same time as he/she is being reassured, so that he/she is left not entirely complacent, but rather somewhat uneasy.

Sometimes the use of "we" drives a point home with tremendous force, as we recognize a truth which transcends time, and place, since it is indisputably part of our common experience. Seeming to refer to the situation of the character within the text, such comments "reach out" from the text and into the realm of shared experience, negotiating between the particular (textual) instance and the collective (extra-textual) experience. Though the majority of really effective passages of this type appear more frequently in her later work, a few do exist in Scenes from Clerical Life. One such



comment is made about the regrets we feel after the death of a loved one, when Amos Barton, in the story of that name, has lost his wife, and reproaches himself, as we all do in such cases, for things not done, and things left unsaid:

O the anguish of that thought, that we can never atone to our dead for the stunted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their complaints or their pleadings...(60).

Who amongst us has not been visited by such remorseful self-accusation after the loss of a loved one? This is an emotional reaction common to everyone who has suffered bereavement, and the oft repeated "we" reinforces the relevance of the comment to our own lives, and connects us all in acknowledgement of common, deeply felt, experience. Reading such a passage, we empathize with the suffering widower in the story, and we feel again, briefly, the ghostly touch of such an emotion once lived through in our own lives. After all, "sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form" ("Janet's Repentance" 258).

Almost always, Eliot's narrator is "engaging" rather than "distancing,"<sup>8</sup> and her strategic use of personal pronouns furthers her cause (the development of toleration and sympathy for each other) by creating the illusion of bonding between the narrator and the reader, and by fostering in the reader the recognition of similarities between himself/herself and characters, or certain aspects of characters. This recognition is meant to open the reader's mind in daily life so that his

response to fellows is also duly softened as a result of what he/she has learned emotionally while reading. In general, and particularly in the novels which succeeded Scenes of Clerical Life, she engages the reader in her asides, including him/her in her comments by means of tone and stylistic devices. Consider, for instance, the intimate tone and inclusive style of the following lightly ironic aside, which comes after the "weakness" (fondness for clothes) of Milly -- wife of the "superlatively middling" Amos ("Amos Barton" 40) -- has been revealed: "You and I, too, reader, have our weaknesses, have we not?" ("Amos Barton" 27). (This aside is discussed at greater length in another chapter, but it brooks a few brief remarks here.) Though, measured against the standard of her later comments, this aside is fairly unsubtle, it nevertheless effectively uses several "engaging" strategies to establish/assert a common ground. First, the remark (which, interestingly, is cast in the form of a question, albeit a rhetorical rather than an interrogative one) insinuates the reader into a process of self-scrutiny which, it is implied, the narrator has already undergone. By assuming the dialogic mode, which invites the reader to participate in a "conversation" of sorts, and by posing a question, rather than asserting a fact, Eliot invites the reader to respond, and to agree. She utilizes the first and second person pronouns in such a way as simultaneously to acknowledge individuality (the "You" standing for the reader, and the "I" of the speaking

subject are discrete entities), and yet emphasize their collectivity (the inclusive "our" and "us", and even the "and" which links "you" and "I" psychologically as well as syntactically.) In this example, the particularity of the individual "you" is subsumed by his/her similarity to others - - to the "I" of the narrator, and, by implication, to all of humankind. In this respect, the pronouns of person seem to blur their distinctions of positionality, inviting us to see ourselves as "I," "you," "one," and (most importantly), as "we."

In the interchangeability of the first and second person pronouns ("I"/"we" and "you"), Beneviste (as I have commented) sees "the old antimonies of 'I' and 'the other,' of the individual and society, fall" (Beneviste 225), and it is this aspect of our humanity -- the fact that we are all, as members of the human race, simultaneously separate (as individuals) and united (as constituent members of the affiliated "Whole") that is emphasized by skilful use of the pronouns which can express both aspects (autonomy and community) of what philosopher Jacob Bronowski referred to as our "social solitary" human condition. In Eliot's narratorial interventions, "you" is a protean-like pronoun which is "flexibly inclusive"<sup>9</sup> and can dissolve the distinction between singular and plural ("you" refers to the individual reader, but also to all readers, and even to humanity in general), and between "ego" and "other" as it modulates into an implied

"we". As Bina Freiwald has remarked, "'you' is an expansive projected 'I' that easily turns into the inclusive and collective 'we'."<sup>10</sup> It

lends itself to all kinds of substitutions of persons, [as] 'you' not only retains the immediacy of address (interpellating us directly), but always also contains within it both the common and the particular, both the plural and the singular.<sup>11</sup>

Expanding on the properties of "you", Freiwald remarks on its ability to articulate an intensely personal gesture (to stand in for an "I" in its function as a mode of address) but also to constitute an individual as a member of a group (the plural "you") (Freiwald 229).

Believing that "...the only true knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him" ("Janet's Repentance" 228), in narrative interventions which plead that we tolerate and sympathize with each other, Eliot frequently implicitly asks her readers to put themselves in the position of a particular character, to subject themselves to an imaginative exchange of place with him or her. Again, as readers, we are often aided in this by her strategic use of pronouns which encourage us (sometimes overtly referred to as "you") to agree with the speaking subject (which sometimes overtly enunciates itself as "I" in the intervention); in such cases our task is sometimes temporarily to shed our "ego," as we merge our own identity with that of the character (the "other" within the text). Use of the inclusive pronouns, "we,"

"our," and "us," stress our collectivity and common experience, persuading us to acknowledge our similarity to the narrator, and to the textual figures. We are brought to realize that experience is ultimately intersubjective and communal, "situated at the juncture of the private and the public, the singular and the common" (Freiwald 229). In Eliot's words, "sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form" ("Janet's Repentance" 258) and it is a truism that as we recognize facets of ourselves in others, we find it difficult to condemn them. In this way, our sympathy, (rather than our condemnation) is activated towards characters, and thereby, it is hoped, will also be extended to those "others" that we encounter in the real world.

Not absolutely all instances of "you" create a comfortable mutuality, however, though most do. Sometimes we are drawn up by a narratorial admonition which attempts to prevent us from going astray, or seeks to bring us back into the fold if our preconceptions and uncharitable tendencies have already led us from it. In the lines immediately prior to the following excerpt, various citizens have been shown to have differing (though all somewhat condemnatory) judgements of the Evangelical preacher Tryan's shortcomings, and Eliot as narrator reminds us that how we perceive others depends on our own nature and experience, exhorting us in the following words:

See to it, friend, before you pronounce a too hasty judgement, that your own moral sensibilities are

not of a hoofed or clawed character (231).

The reference to hoof and claw is an echo of a previous remark (230) about how even great intelligence could not alone guarantee success, if impediments such as a lack of fingers existed. This is, for Eliot, an unusually heavy-handed, severe admonition: the appellation "friend" is scathing, and the message is stern and moralistic, smacking of the pulpit, and delivered in a hortatory tone quite unlike the persuasive one she more often adopts, and which is much more effective. Largely because of this tone, it has a distancing (almost alienating) effect. We feel we are in the presence of someone who, while warning us "Judge not, lest ye be judged," is, notwithstanding, judging us, and finding us wanting. This aside does not develop bonds of kinship between narrator and reader, as most Eliot asides tend to do. In this instance, rather, the reader is left perhaps feeling chastened; certainly feeling chastised.

1. It could, of course, be argued that any kind of narrative sets up a species of "dialogue" between writer and the reader, in so far as the "message" of the text is transmitted by the writer and received by the reader.

2. My use of the word "narratee" follows that of Gerald Prince, in his essay "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," trans. Frances Mariner, in Reader-Response Criticism, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins, (Baltimore:Johns Hopkins UP), 1980, 7-25. Not the person whose eyes actually read the text, the 'narratee' is inscribed within the text as "someone whom the narrator addresses" ("Introduction" 7); the "you" in the text who may (or may not) be mirrored by the real reader. When the narrator engages, rather than distances) the reader through narratorial strategies, the gap between narratee and real reader will close. For the terms "engaging" and

"distancing" (as applied to narratorial techniques), I am indebted to Robyn R. Warhol, Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP), 1989.

3. Emile Beneviste, Problems in General Linguistics, Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press), [1971].

4. In 1854, George Eliot, as Marian Evans, translated Ludwig Feuerbach's Das Wesen des Christentums (1841) (in English, The Essence of Christianity). While I am not suggesting that her strategic use of personal pronouns was in any way influenced by Feuerbach, it is interesting to note that he comments in The Philosophy of the Future (1843), that man, the essential being of man, exists "only in community, it is found only in the unity of man with man -- a unity that is supported only by the reality of the difference between I and Thou" (p. 43), and that "Man with man -- the unity of I and Thou -- is God" (pp. 72-73). Quoted by A.S. Byatt, ed. George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 1990, p. 458.

5. Bina Freiwald, "'This isn't one to be told / in the third person': Wallace's Life-Stories", in Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory 9: Winter 1991, p.125.

6. The dramatic monologue is a significant Victorian literary form which experiments with the same sense of speaker and audience. However, the reader of Eliot's asides is in accordance with the speaker, and therefore the reader and the encoded "narratee" figure merge. In contrast to this, however, the implied audience in a Browning dramatic monologue tantalizes the reader, because there is a painfully sharp distinction between addressee and reader: reading "My Last Duchess," for example, though we might initially admire the Duke's commanding self, we come to feel revulsion towards the speaker, and are dismayed by our inability to intervene against him.

7. Patricia Meyer Spacks observes that "gossip's 'I's inevitably turn into a we" (Gossip 261), seeing this mode of communication as one that is rooted in common experience and fosters alliance and relationship.

8. These terms are from Robyn Warhol's Gendered Interventions (1989).

9. Bina Freiwald, p. 128.

10. Bina Freiwald 129.

11. Bina Freiwald 129.



## Chapter Three

### Perspectives: Seeing is Believing

Though the narrator's presence within Eliot's novels has been disparaged<sup>1</sup>, I contend that her narrative interventions and commentary are multivocal and full of variety of perspective and tone, and constitute the backbone of her artistic achievement. In Middlemarch, for example, I would go as far as to say that the most important "character" is, in fact, the narrator, and in her other works as well, the role of the narrator is that of guide and mentor, assisting the reader in interpretation of the narrative, and in responding to its "lessons". Reading a novel by Eliot, the reader<sup>2</sup> is, as it were, taken by the hand, so that the experience of reading becomes somewhat like a journey with a trusted companion/guide. The narrative interventions are sometimes like way-stations on the journey, where narrator and reader pause and rest, taking stock before setting out again, sometimes in a different direction, always after due consideration of the terrain already traversed. Eliot<sup>3</sup> is palpably present in her novels, in the role of narrator, because it is always her intention to teach through her art the humanistic precepts which, in the absence of religious conviction, must shape our morality and govern our lives, guiding us as to proper conduct in our relationships with our fellows, and most importantly, to an attitude and stance

towards others that is best described by the phrase "brotherly love". Sympathy is the emotion we must develop and offer those that we encounter in the world in which we live; it "is always a source of love" ("Amos Barton") and is "the subtlest essence of culture" ("Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" 317). If we can be brought to sympathize with the characters which populate a novel, despite their failings and foibles, then, Eliot hoped, we would be more likely to respond with "brotherly love" to our fellows.

On learning of Eliot's death, Lord Acton commented that it seemed "as if the sun had gone out" because no other writer could match her "manifold, but disinterested and impartially observant sympathy."<sup>4</sup> He commented, with particular reference to Middlemarch, that

George Eliot seemed...capable not only of reading the diverse hearts of men, but of creeping into their skin, watching the world through their eyes, feeling their latent background of conviction, discerning theory and habit, influences of thought and knowledge, of life and descent, and having obtained this experience, recovering her independence, stripping off the borrowed shell, and exposing scientifically and indifferently the soul of a Vestal, a Crusader, an Anabaptist, an Inquisitor, a Dervish, a Nihilist or a Cavalier without attraction, preference, or caricature. (60-61)

This salient observation deals with Eliot as writer, but is adaptable to apply, also, to us, as readers. Acton suggests that Eliot, the writer, has the ability to temporarily abandon, or at least submerge, her own identity in order to get under the skin of a character -- in a sense "becoming" the

character<sup>5</sup> -- and that having done so, she then sheds the skin, once more becoming an autonomous figure entirely separate from the character and resuming the objective role of narrator in order to comment impersonally upon that character. Having written from the perspective of the character, she afterward proceeds to regain her own perspective. Similarly, while engaged in the act of reading, readers experience within themselves a change in perspective. While reading, we are, as it were, assimilated by the text, being temporarily taken over by the world-view adhered to by a particular character.<sup>6</sup>

As I have discussed in my introduction (pages 15-16), this is the model of reading proposed by Georges Poulet: in it, the text dominates the reader, "invading" him or her, forcing surrender or submission. As I have previously stated, according to Poulet, reading is therefore

a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images and ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters and shelters them...I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers and acts within me. <sup>7</sup>

During the course of reading, we are periodically released from thralldom to the text, and "stabilized" by the narrator who intervenes in such a way as to free us from our "possession" so that we may weigh our experience, "re-group," and come to our own conclusions: conclusions based on a synthesis of what we have assimilated of the character's world-view, our own experience of life, and -- perhaps most significantly -- the direction of the narrator. We first lose

our own identity by surrendering to the text, then re-establish it, though only in part, as we continue to be swayed by the guidance of the narrator. This guidance usually encourages us to understand and sympathize with the character (though we may not agree with his precepts or condone his actions), and often prompts us to see in his behaviour or personality some echo of our own. Thus, the reader's literary experience (of reading the text) is transmuted by the narrator/mentor into a moral experience of much broader implications -- implications which spill over from the text to the world itself.

Compassion and acceptance are more easily generated in the human breast if we can be brought to acknowledge that the object of our judgement is not entirely dissimilar to our selves. Realism -- meticulously accurate (and sympathetic) representation -- is, to Eliot, as to John Ruskin, the pinnacle of artistic achievement. The "humble and faithful study of nature"<sup>8</sup> advocated by both Ruskin and Eliot implies, not merely a pictorial, but also a moral realism: a blunt acceptance of how things are as opposed to how they perhaps ought to be.<sup>9</sup> This frank depiction (in all realms of artistic endeavour, pictorial and literary) in turn "teaches its own lesson,"<sup>10</sup> perhaps sometimes by pointing up the lamentable discrepancy between the actual and the ideal, certainly always by "amplifying [our] experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" --

broadening our horizons and reducing within us the egocentric tendency toward "the vulgarity of exclusiveness".<sup>11</sup>

It goes without saying that the precepts Eliot held as a literary critic informed her own work when she began to write fiction. Her first venture into this realm, Scenes of Clerical Life (1857) offered three stories which explore private tragedies rather than the public aspects of early nineteenth century Anglicanism. Believing as she did that

our subtlest analysis of schools and sects must miss the essential truth unless it be lit up by the love that sees in all forms of human thought and work, the life and death struggles of separate human beings<sup>12</sup>

each tale concentrates on the personal history of its main characters rather than on the abstraction which is the Church of England.

Deeply concerned, in all her writing, with questions of epistemology -- how we "know" what we "know", how we form judgements and make coherent views of our world -- Eliot consistently displays startling psychological insight in her delineation of characters, and in her assessment of how the reader will respond to them. In Middlemarch, the problems associated with attempting to make sense of the world, and of trying to assess other people, and indeed, the difficulties inherent in self-appraisal, are shown to be various and difficult of solution. Socially and psychologically, we are interdependent upon each other, and as nothing remains constant, our relationships with each other, and even our very

personalities ("...for character, too is a process and an unfolding" Middlemarch 123), are forever altering, undergoing subtle changes and adjustments as we go about the business of living. Nothing is carved in stone; all is in a state of flux. Profoundly aware of this, Eliot endeavours, in her role as narrator, to bring some solid ground to the shifting sands of life, both within the novel and, by implication, beyond its bounds.

Large issues such as social change, smaller issues such as personal relationships, factors such as the vicissitudes of fortune, and our changeable moods -- all these combine to make, unmake and make again our visions of reality. People change "with the double change of self and beholder" (Middlemarch ch 11), which is to say that each of us changes inwardly so that our perceptions also alter subtly, and at the same time, in the perception of observers (who are also undergoing changes), we are seen differently.<sup>13</sup>

In Middlemarch, the problems of vision -- of how we "see" (or "read" the world around us) are stressed by optical analogies<sup>14</sup> which encompass the whole range of possible focus: panoramic views, bird's eye views, telescopic views, close-ups, microscopic views -- all are shown to be incomplete in themselves, simply aspects of reality, ways of seeing. But reality does not remain stable, we cannot ever really "know" each other, we have difficulty coming to true self-knowledge, indeed, we are not even entirely the same persons today as we

were yesterday or will be tomorrow: there is always an unstable, elusive quality to every aspect of life, but we have to try to interpret and make sense of it as best we can. Life is like the textile that Penelope endlessly wove and unravelled -- perhaps Eliot has this in mind when she remarks, in a narratorial aside, that as teller of the tale (of Middlemarch) she has "much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven" (116). We are all threads on the loom, entangled with each other, one pattern first seeming prominent, and then another, as perspectives are always changing, and "new discoveries are constantly making new points of view" (Middlemarch 182). Or life is like a labyrinth (another recurring image in Middlemarch): a puzzling entrapment of false starts and blind alleys.

Throughout this work, I describe how Eliot (especially in Middlemarch) weaves a virtually "seamless garment" (see chapter one, page 49), creating a text(ile) in which the narrative thread is embossed with interventions (asides to the reader, commentary, and "wisdoms"). Here, I want to examine some other narratorial strands.

In all George Eliot's works, the role of the narrator is of paramount importance. Omniscient narration is of course, as its name implies, "all-knowing" and therefore all-seeing. The vision and perspective of the omniscient narrator is

unbounded, and can range from the bird's eye view (panoramic in its scope and impersonal in its perspective), to the microscopic (but still external) scrutiny of details of the psyche of a character. Another "perspective" is the character's own self-revelation (how he/she reveals him/herself to the reader) which is unveiled by the narrator "from within" through the technique of allowing the "silent voice" -- the thoughts -- of the character to be heard, in free indirect discourse.<sup>15</sup> Used to "reproduce the idiolect of a character's speech or thought" (Rimmon-Kenan 114), free indirect discourse reveals the real person through his/her thoughts; there is no possibility of dissimulation. We gain "direct access" to the mind of the character, revealing to us the very core of his/her personality, and showing us how he/she makes sense of his/her world. The technique is used by Eliot occasionally in most of her works, interspersed with third person narration. Space constraints limit me to three examples, drawn, respectively, from Middlemarch and Adam Bede.

Though the narrator is apparently absent in free indirect discourse, creating the illusion that the thoughts come straight from the brain of the character without any mediation from the narrator, it is of course true that he/she is still telling the tale, notwithstanding.<sup>16</sup> If we are presented with the "indirect interior monologue" of a character, <sup>17</sup> this "tinting of the narrator's speech with the



character's language or mode of experience may promote an empathetic identification on the part of the reader"<sup>18</sup> or, if we sense ironic intent on the part of the narrator, it may cause us to feel somewhat distanced from the character, perhaps amused by, or critical of, him or her. Take the case of Mrs Cadwallader, the acerbic wife (highborn) of a poor clergyman, in Middlemarch. In the following description the technique of indirect discourse allows the narrator to move from a position external to the character to a position "within" her, as it were, so that we see, apparently unfiltered, the workings of her mind:

Her life was rurally simple, quite free from secrets either foul, dangerous, or otherwise important, and not consciously affected by the great affairs of the world. All the more did the affairs of the great world interest her, when communicated in the letters of high-born relatives: the way in which fascinating younger sons had gone to the dogs by marrying their mistresses; the fine old-blooded idiocy of young Lord Tapir, and the furious gouty humours of old Lord Megatherium; the exact crossing of genealogies which had brought a coronet into a new branch and widened the relations of scandal, -- these were the topics of which she retained details with the utmost accuracy, and reproduced them in an excellent pickle of epigrams, which she herself enjoyed the more because she believed as unquestioningly in birth and no-birth as she did in game and vermin....But her feeling towards the vulgar rich was a sort of a religious hatred: they had probably made all their money out of high retail prices...such people were no part of God's design in making the world; and their accent was an affliction to the ears. A town where such monsters abounded was hardly more than a sort of low comedy, which could not be taken account of in a well-bred scheme of the universe. (49)

This brilliant thumb-nail sketch of Mrs Cadwallader's world-view is aided by the transition from third person narration to

indirect discourse which reveals her prejudices in all their nakedness. The reader is, I think, amused on the whole, but perhaps uneasily so. Perhaps we feel slightly superior to the petty Mrs Cadwallader, the clergyman's wife who reveals her "religious hatred" of the "nouveaux riches." We are not permitted to feel smug for long, however, as the paragraph continues with a "tongue in cheek" narratorial intervention which is somewhat distancing in effect, warning us in the following words:

Let any lady who is inclined to be hard on Mrs Cadwallader inquire into the comprehensiveness of her own beautiful views, and be quite sure that they afford accommodation for all the lives which have the honour to coexist with hers. (49)

Here, Eliot is adhering to the (for her) unusual policy of addressing a specific group of readers -- "any lady" -- and implying that those who live in glass houses (and by inference this group includes all of us) should avoid throwing stones at Mrs Cadwallader.

It is perhaps especially fitting to employ the highly introspective mode of free indirect discourse in Hetty Sorrel's case, as she is quintessentially self-absorbed.<sup>19</sup> The "indirect interior monologue" seems particularly suitable for one who heeds only her own inner promptings, and turns a deaf ear to the words of those with whom she should feel a bond. In the following excerpt, Hetty, wandering in despair because of her pregnancy, comes upon a "dark shrouded pool" (411) in an

isolated and barren spot. She sits beside it and contemplates suicide:

She clasps her hands around her knees and leans forward, and looks earnestly at it, as if trying to guess what sort of bed it would make for her young round limbs.

No, she had not courage to jump into that cold watery bed, and if she had, they might find her -- they might find out why she had drowned herself. There is but one thing left to her: she must go away, go where they can't find her. (chapter 35, p.411)

The first paragraph above is narrated in the conventional "third person" mode of the omniscient narrator, from a position external to the character -- the "as if" signals a deduction on the part of the narrator rather than the statement of a definite fact regarding the significance of her posture and demeanour. The second paragraph, however, is cast in such a way as to reveal to us the thoughts of the unfortunate girl not as they are "omnisciently known" by the narrator<sup>20</sup>, but as they are experienced within Hetty's mind. This whole passage is cast in the present tense<sup>21</sup>, which heightens tension and increases suspense and dread: the illusion is created in the reader that he/she is watching what's happening as it's happening, like an eye-witness<sup>22</sup>. We dread what seems likely to be going to happen, and know that we are powerless to stop it, but it hasn't happened yet (so the tense tells us), so we feel that if only we could intervene, it might be averted. Temporal and spatial gaps between character and reader seem to disappear momentarily, until the use of the past tense resumes in the next paragraph.

An interesting effect occurs in the paragraph prior to the passage above, as we are told that

Soon [Hetty] is in the Scantlands, where the grassy land slopes gradually downwards, and she leaves the level ground to follow the slope. Farther on there is a clump of trees on the low ground and she is making her way towards it. No, it is not a clump of trees, but a dark shrouded pool... (411)

Here, also, the tense conjures up the effect that the reader is, as it were, "present" at the scene, as if watching a play on stage, or an incident glimpsed through a window. But is there another "presence," as well? Who is it that forms the thought "No, it is not a clump of trees, but a dark shrouded pool"?<sup>23</sup> On a careless first reading, we might think that this sentence is another example of "free indirect" speech, thus emanating from Hetty; soon, however, we are told that "She has thought of this pool often in the nights of the month that has just gone by, and now at last she is come to see it" (411). We realize, therefore, that she has been directing her steps toward this pool intentionally; she has not discovered it accidentally, after first taking it to be "a clump of trees." So it is the narrator's voice that utters the statement, and the effect is an odd one. We start with "Soon Hetty is in the Scantlands..." which (apart from its tense) is a piece of narrative information delivered in a detached tone, locating Hetty in a general area. The area becomes more specific with the phrase, "where the grassy land slopes gradually downwards," and we are told that Hetty "leaves the level ground to follow the slope." Gradually, the focus becomes

closer, as details of the terrain are identified (wrongly). At this point in the narrative there is an interesting shift from the simple present tense of "she leaves" to the present continuous form of "she is making her way towards it," and this switch forces us into a more minute examination of what is happening, slowing down the action so that it becomes highly significant, pregnant with potential consequence. It also brings about the effect that the narrator is, as it were, standing beside us as a co-observer, voicing what we are jointly observing, much as a television commentator will describe what the audience sees for itself. The sentence which begins, "No, it is not a clump of trees, but a dark shrouded pool..." increases this effect: it's as if the narrator has the better eyesight of the two, and has to interpret the landscape for the reader.

In chapter thirty-seven, there are many instances of free indirect discourse, as for example when Hetty, resting in bed in the inn, tries to decide what to do next. Far from home, her one plan -- to find Captain Donnithorne -- having misfired, she realizes that her rapidly dwindling financial resources are running out:

...this money would not keep her long: what should she do when it was gone? Where should she go?...What **could** she do? She would go away from Windsor...Yes, she would get away from Windsor as soon as possible: she didn't like these people at the inn to know about her, to know that she had come to look for Captain Donnithorne: she must think of some reason to tell them why she had asked for him (425-426).

Here Hetty endeavours to think her way out of the difficulties in which she finds herself, but to no avail. The aimlessness of her wanderings is mirrored by the circularity of her thoughts as she tries to formulate a plan, seeing only the need to tell yet more lies and put yet more distance between herself and those who love her. Intrinsically selfish and shallow, she has never put down roots, and has fled already from those who would have been most likely to provide her with support. Now sheltered by kindly strangers, she nevertheless determines to move on again, increasing her isolation. There is a "blank in Hetty's nature" (203), the "absence of any warm self-devoting love" (203); she lacks the capacity to feel any real "connection" to her family or "rootedness" in her community. She is therefore acting true to form<sup>24</sup> when she determines to continue wandering further from home and to keep her shame a secret even from the person who has previously vowed always to stand by her:

No; she would not confess even to Dinah: she would wander out of sight, and drown herself where her body would never be found, and no-one should know what had become of her (429).

The final paragraphs of this chapter offer several narratorial comments on Hetty's plight, calculated to encourage our sympathy for "Poor wandering Hetty" whose "narrow heart and narrow thoughts" (435) have contributed to her downfall. The narrator's attitude toward Hetty has already been signalled by the words "poor wandering Hetty," but lest we be in any doubt, the narrator intervenes, confiding in us with the words

My heart bleeds for her as I see her toiling along on her weary feet, or seated in a cart, with her eyes fixed vacantly on the road before her, never thinking or caring whither it tends, till hunger comes and makes her desire that a village may be near (435).

These are the images of Hetty that we, as readers, are to keep before us, and we are to respond to the picture of the aimlessly wandering woman-child, alone and directionless, with the compassion that the narrator confesses to feeling for her at this point in the narrative.<sup>25</sup>

"All the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective (focalizer),"<sup>26</sup> whether it be a character, or the narrator him/herself. Under the convention of omniscient narration, as I have discussed, the narrator is privy to the innermost thoughts of the characters, and can reveal them through various narratorial strategies such as by **telling** us directly what the character thinks and feels (the narrator, though external to the character, nevertheless speaks for him, recounting his perspective) or by **showing** us, by employing techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, or indirect discourse. In the latter cases, the narrator's voice and the "inner voice" of the character merge into one. Chameleon-like, the omniscient narrator shifts perspective, narrating most commonly from an external position, sometimes panoramically, sometimes closely focused; but also narrating, on occasion, from an internal position (one might almost say ventriloquising), through the technique

of free indirect discourse.

Omniscient narration allows commentary on the fictive world at various levels and from a multiplicity of perspectives -- providing widely varying points of view which all clamour for attention, but which are confusing in their diversity. When focusing on the perspectives of individual characters, the reader is led into a greater understanding of, and sympathy for, less appealing characters as well as for those which are more readily likeable. The omniscient narrator can show the diversity of the points of view of various characters, and can also show us the broader picture, the panoramic view of society as a whole, a gestalt of its many individual parts. To borrow cinematic terminology, the wide-angled view is just as important as the close-up: indeed each expands our perception of the other. The general and the particular, the whole and the part -- each is indispensable, and each complements the other. As Lydgate puts it, "there must be a systole and a diastole in any inquiry...a man's mind must be continually shrinking between the whole human horizon and the horizon of an object-glass" (524).

In reality, of course, it is simply impossible to see from every angle, to be all-knowing, and even if it were possible, it would hardly exclude partiality. It may be "a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view" (54), but it is a superhuman one which can suppress its conviction of being in the right. Due to the existence of



ego, we all see ourselves as heroes at the centre of our own personal dramas, and are scarcely aware that that small drama is but part of a larger whole, in which we have bit parts, walk-on roles. Being human means that each one of us is, at one and the same time, uniquely individual and part of society. As part of the social fabric, our lives are inextricably interconnected and interdependent, socially and psychologically, like criss-crossing threads on a loom. Our smallest actions tend to cause ripples in the pool of other people's lives as well as in our own. In the "stealthy convergence of human lots, [there is] a slow preparation of effects from one life on another" (78). Though we know it to be impossible to be all-seeing, when reading, we accept the literary convention of the omniscient narrator, the God-like figure from whom nothing is hidden, who sees from every perspective knows everything, and who can therefore afford, sometimes, to be impartial.

A crucially important function of the narrator is to provide some stability for the reader in the fictional world (which in Realism is, of course, a mirror image of our own) where conflicting perspectives vie with each other, and characters strive (often in vain) to comprehend each other. There is irony in this narratorial function, however, as Eliot is profoundly aware of the labyrinthine complexities of life, and the inherent difficulties involved in making sense of it - indeed the novel again and again asserts that fact. Not only

do moral dilemmas occur, such as the one Lydgate is faced with in casting a vote for the new hospital chaplain, but time and time again we are shown the virtual impossibility of "knowing" other people, of assessing them and of second-guessing their estimation of us.

Our judgements are consistently shown to be faulty, composed much more of wishful thinking than of fact. Witness, as two examples out of many, Dorothea's misjudgement of Casaubon, and Lydgate's of Rosamond. Dorothea fervently wishes to dedicate her life to some higher purpose, and is convinced, because she wants to be, that she has found in Casaubon and his life's work a cause worthy of her devotion. In her "reading" of her prospective husband, Dorothea creates a misreading, "fill[ing] up all blanks with unmanifested perfections, interpreting him as she interpreted the works of Providence" (Middlemarch 61). Lydgate sees "an adorable kindness in Rosamond's eyes" (95) but narratorial comment has warned us that, in contrast to Mary Garth, this young beauty is a consummate actress, even deceiving herself, let alone admiring beholders of her charms: "she was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her *physique*: she even acted her own character, and so well that she did not know it to be precisely her own" (96, Eliot's italics). The attribute of "kindness" which Lydgate "sees" in her eyes is at best feigned, and at worst absent altogether. Either way, his is a misreading of the girl's true nature, a fact which the

narrator more than hints at with the comment that the eyes in question are "of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings *an ingenious beholder could put into them*, and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner if these should happen to be less exquisite" (91 my italics). This ironic comment, coming before Lydgate's assessment, alerts the reader in advance to Rosamond's innate power of dissemblance, her talent for seeming to be other than she really is, of masking her true nature. But most importantly, the comment stresses the myriad difficulties and perils inherent in the exercise of interpreting each other. The interpretation, or "meaning" that we discern in another is really of our own invention. Within the bounds of the fiction, Lydgate is the "ingenious beholder" and Rosamond's attributes are his invention -- she is, in a way, a *tabula rasa* onto which he projects and inscribes his own theory of her -- but by extension we are all, in our interpersonal relationships, "ingenious beholders" of each other, and our readings of each other are as likely to be inaccurate and erroneous as Lydgate's is of Rosamond.

To take another example from the text of Middlemarch, when Fred Vincy "fancied that he saw to the bottom of his uncle Featherstone's soul" (98) he is deluding himself. The reality is that "half of what he saw there was no more than the reflex of his own inclinations" (98). Extending the implications of this beyond the bounds of the text, the

narrator aphoristically remarks that "[t]he difficult task of knowing another soul is not for young gentlemen whose consciousness is chiefly made up of their own wishes" (98). The inference, of course, goes well beyond "young gentlemen" to embrace us all: it is indeed a "difficult task" to assess one another, and we do so, unbeknownst to ourselves, by constituting our image of the other person's character out of wishes, misconceptions, and ingenious invention, not out of what is really there, as the latter is unknowable. The best we can do is to make informed guesses, but even those are motivated by something within ourselves which prompts certain specific responses. We "fill in the gaps," so to speak, but our selection of linking material is rarely made with undiluted objectivity.

There is a very obvious correlation here between the task of interpreting or "reading" each other, and the textual activity of reading,<sup>27</sup> and sometimes Eliot makes the analogy explicit. Of Dorothea's "reading" of her future husband, Eliot tells us that her "...faith supplied all that Mr Casaubon's words seemed to leave unsaid...", and adds, in an observation which could have been written by many Reader-Response theorists, that "the text, whether of prophet or poet, expands for whatever we can put into it..." (41).

The difficulties and potential pitfalls inherent in the reading process make the role of the narrator all the more

crucial. The engaging<sup>28</sup> narrator aims for a closeness between him/herself and the reader; such a narrator must use every means at his/her disposal to ensure that there is a close "match" between the flesh-and-blood reader and the narratee (the imaginary "you" figure inscribed within the text, addressed by the narrator). The reader's emotions must be orchestrated by the narrator in such a way as to ensure (to the extent that that is possible) that the response desired (by the writer) is forthcoming from the reader. Our emotions are aroused and our feelings played upon, often by causing us to see in the character some reflection of ourselves, to perceive in his/her experience some echo from our past. Thus the interpretive exercise of reading is guided and directed by narratorial techniques which shape our responses. The medium by which we are guided is, of course, language -- but language used with the persuasive skill of a master of rhetoric, who realizes that "...the meaning we attach to words depends on our feeling" (Middlemarch 181).

"Signs are small, measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable" (21), so narratorial guidance is of paramount importance in helping the reader to interpret the "signs" properly, and find his/her way through the unfamiliar territory of the text. The narrator must provide clues and signposts to help the reader take the right direction. The omniscient narrator aids and abets the reader in the "difficult task of knowing another soul" when he/she permits

him/her to have the illusion of total knowledge of the character. As Carlyle once commented,

How inexpressibly comfortable to know our fellow-creature; to see into him, understand his goings-forth, decipher the whole heart of his mystery: nay, not only to see into him, **but even to see out of him, to view the world altogether as he views it**, so that we can theoretically construe him, and could almost practically personate him; and do now thoroughly discern both what manner of man he is, and what manner of thing he has got to work and live on!"<sup>29</sup>

This is an ideal situation, of course, and, as we have seen, one that is only possible in the relationship between text and reader, not in the interpersonal relationships of life, nor between fictional characters. But it is an effect which George Eliot mastered, and which greatly contributes to the reader's enjoyment of her characters.

This inability to 'see' another clearly<sup>30</sup> is stressed time and time again in Middlemarch, as in this sentence which demonstrates the blindness of Lydgate's vision of Rosamond, and her lack of perception towards him: "Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond! Each lived in a world of which the other knew nothing" (136).<sup>31</sup> As well as stressing the perceptual problems the lovers have in assessing each other, this exclamation, with its "or shall I say, Poor Rosamond" query, also draws attention to another problem: that of our perspective, as readers. As Eliot remarks, "our impartiality is kept for abstract merit and demerit, which none of us ever saw" (334), and it is well nigh impossible not to feel biased

towards particular characters, at the expense of others. The ironic "or shall I say, Poor Rosamond" reminds us that she too has a point of view, and that though we naturally feel more sympathetic towards Lydgate -- have been encouraged to do so, indeed -- we must see that Rosamond, though palpably shallow, and attractive only in appearance, is yet neither entirely to blame for the disastrous relationship which the two lovers have, nor exclusively guilty of the blindness which causes it. The phrase is also a dim foreshadowing of the pivotal question "But why always Dorothea?" (228-229) which ushers in our slow recognition of pitiable aspects of Casaubon.

If it is a "difficult task [to know] another soul" (98), it is perhaps even more difficult to assess what another person's perceptions of oneself are. Sir James Chettam is under the (self-generated) impression, despite her offhand and brusque treatment of him, that he has found favour in the eyes of Dorothea. He "thought it probable that Dorothea liked him" (18) because that is what he wants to believe, and as the narrator remarks, "...manners must be very marked indeed before they cease to be interpreted by preconceptions either confident or distrustful" (18). As an influential group of psychologists put it,

I may not actually be able to see myself as others see me, but I am constantly supposing them to be seeing me in particular ways, and I am constantly acting in the light of the actual or supposed attitudes, opinions, needs, and so on the other has in respect of me."<sup>32</sup>

Interpersonal relationships are endlessly complicated by these difficulties, and form a tangled web of great intricacy. When Eliot remarks that in the course of narration she has "much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven" (116), she is commenting not only on the interweaving of lives in the social fabric of *Middlemarch*, and on her role as narrator to disentangle the disparate threads and strands of plot so that we, as readers, may examine and comprehend them, but also, perhaps, on the inevitability, in so "unravelling," of disrupting the patterns previously formed in the reader's mind. For in the multi-plot novel, such as *Middlemarch*, many threads are taken up and laid down again, so that what has before been central, now becomes peripheral, and the character who has hitherto held centre-stage is now relegated to the wings.<sup>33</sup>

Where plot strands are severed or "continued in unexpected directions" (Iser 110), for example when focus on one character is halted by turning to other characters, Iser postulates that we are asked to respond to a "tacit invitation to find the missing link" (Iser 110). The question posed of the reader "Why always Dorothea?" (228-229) is a crucially important narratorial tactic, signalling that our attention, and to a certain extent, our allegiance, is about to be shifted. Dorothea is to lose the centre-stage position she has held, and to fade into the background while the spotlight is turned on another player in the drama. The initial question is



immediately followed by another: "Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?" and the unavoidable answer is "No." But bringing Casaubon forward at this point, thus decentring Dorothea, puts great demands upon the reader, who wishes to follow the heroine's story to its conclusion. The reader is destabilized, and must adjust his/her perspective, and is probably reluctant to do so; however, much earlier in the novel we have been reminded that "Mr Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own world" (69) and that "[any man's] lot is important in his own eyes" (69). We cannot ever really know another person<sup>34</sup>, but we must at least acknowledge that each one of us sees things differently, and make some attempt to take the perceptions of others into account. Our perspective is, inevitably, centred on the self, and our challenge is therefore to acknowledge the possibility of the existence of alternative perspectives, and to accommodate them into our own view of things. Recalling Carlyle's comment, quoted above, our task, as fellow-humans, is to try not only "to see into [another person], but even to see out of him, to view the world altogether as he views it, so that we can theoretically construe him" (Carlyle, Biography). Eliot has this in mind when she says

Suppose we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder, with keener interest, what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or capacity; with what hindrances he is carrying on his daily labours; what fading hopes, or what deeper fixity of self-delusion the years are marking off within him; and with what spirit he wrestles with universal pressure, which will one day be too heavy

for him, and bring his heart to its final pause.  
(Middlemarch 69).

Here Eliot is talking indirectly about Casaubon, but also, of course, about everyone. We all, inevitably, see things from our own perspective, and it is not easy to consider things from the angle from which someone else sees them. It is implied, however, that if we fail to accommodate our fellows in this way, the lack lies within ourselves. Still speaking of this Everyman who is and is not Casaubon, Eliot continues: "the chief reason that we think he asks to large a place in our consideration must be our want of room for him" (69). Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to suggest that we are reminded, in this phrase, of there having been no room at the inn<sup>35</sup>, and that we therefore feel appropriately chastened for our callous exclusion of Casaubon from the hospitality of "our consideration" -- shelter to which he, as a fellow human being, is entitled.

1. The narrator's presence in Eliot's novels has been disparaged by many critics of great stature, including Henry James, Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London: J. Cape, 1954) and T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods.

2. This phrase describes the flesh-and-blood person who holds the book in his/her hands and reads it: the "actual reader." This real person is distinguished by dint of his/her actuality, from such constructs as "narratee," or "implied reader," or "ideal reader." The latter are all concepts, fictive figures inscribed in the text. I'm aware that there are different kinds of reader, and that people read differently and belong, as Stanley Fish would say, to various "reading communities"; all this notwithstanding, the reader I refer to is a generalized figure, a sort of singular version of the reading public: someone who is physically reading the text.

3. Just as I argue that in Eliot's novels the addressee is the actual flesh-and-blood reader (and not an encoded construct), I also feel that there is a strong argument to be made for the narrator being Eliot herself. As I have said in the Introduction, Eliot has stated her views on the moral purpose of art, the "sacred task," or duty, of the artist, and our own duty to each other as fellow human beings, sufficiently often in essays and articles for us to be able to accept that when the same inferences and statements occur in her novels, they are Eliot's own precepts, and she, herself, is speaking.

4. Letters of Lord Acton to Mary, Daughter of the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone, ed. Herbert Paul (London, 1904), 57, 60-61, quoted by David Carroll in his Introduction to Middlemarch, The World's Classics Series, (Oxford and New York:Oxford UP), 1988, p. vii.

5. Keat's concept of the chameleon poet, who can achieve the state of "negative capability," is relevant here. Keats coined the phrase to describe the total receptivity necessary to the process of poetic creativity. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey (22 Nov. 1817) he wrote, "If a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel." Negative capability, then, implies the ability to identify utterly with whomever (or whatever, in the case of the sparrow) one is writing (or thinking) about, to the extent of being empathetically united with the object. Sensation, rather than thought, is paramount. Keats admired Shakespeare as the greatest exponent of negative capability, seeing in him an extraordinarily developed capacity to 'identify' totally with his characters, and therefore to write about them, one might say, 'from the inside,' with empathy and understanding (as I argue Eliot does).

In another letter, this time to his brothers, George and Thomas, Keats defined the concept: "*Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (22 Dec. 1817). Again, this seems to stress the level of sensation rather than verbally articulated thought. The "egotistical sublime," another phrase coined by Keats, describes the opposite creative stance to that of "negative capability."

(Much of the above is drawn from The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 5th edition, ed. Margaret Drabble (Oxford:Oxford University Press), 1985, p. 689.)

6. The extent to which this applies, is of course dependent upon the skill of the writer, and on how narrow the 'gap' between reader and character is felt to be.

7. Georges Poulet, "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority," trans. Catherine and Richard Macksey, in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Structuralism, ed. Jane Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 43.
8. George Eliot, Westminster Review, 65 (April 1856), 626.
9. In her essay "The Natural History of German Life", Westminster Review, 66 (July 1856), 54, Eliot praises Riehl for his accurate record of the lives of German peasants, commenting that "The thing for mankind to know is, not what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks **ought** to act on the labourer or the artisan, but what are the motives and influences which **do** act on him."
10. George Eliot, Westminster Review 62, January 1852), 284.
11. "The Natural History of German Life", Westminster Review, July 1856, 54.
12. Scenes of Clerical Life: "Janet's Repentance", p.229.
13. Psychologist R.D. Laing has written extensively on the difficulties of interpersonal perception. See, for example, Interpersonal Perception, a Theory and Method of Research (New York, 1966), and The Politics of Experience (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 1968.
14. Attributing the analogy to Marcel Proust, Gerard Genette comments that "...the work [i.e. any narrative of fiction] is ultimately...only an optical instrument which the author offers the reader to help him read within himself." (Narrative Discourse, 261).
15. Because it is a blend of two voices (the narrator's and the character's), and of direct and indirect discourse, free indirect discourse displays "intra-textual polyphony" (Rimmon-Kenan 115); at the same time, the reflection/representation of the character's idiosyncratic linguistic expression, and of his/her thought patterns and "mode of experience" (Rimmon-Kenan 114) "orients the utterance toward previous ones" (116) -- there is a strong inference that this way of thinking, or "mode of experience," is profoundly typical of the character-- and this creates an "inter-textual polyphony" (116).
16. Of course, one could say the same thing of direct discourse, in which the narrator 'quotes' the speech of the character, creating the illusion of pure mimesis. The omniscient narrator is always 'there' in the narrative, telling us what a character said, felt, etc.
17. Banfield 1973; McHale 1978, quoted by Rimmon-Kenan, 114.

18. Ewen 1968; McHale 1978, quoted by Rimmon-Kenan, 114.

19. Eliot uses free indirect discourse frequently in The Mill on the Floss, to show the reader the working's of Maggie's mind as a child, for example. It is a mode which transmits the sensibilities of the character in a direct, seemingly unmediated, manner. Like a window into the psyche, it reveals feelings and attitudes in a verbally articulated version (the only means of communication possible in a narrative) of sensation, more than of thought.

20. That is to say that when a narrator tells us, for example, something like "George felt betrayed, and decided never to confide in Paul again," he/she is omnisciently divining and passing on George's thoughts to us. The narrator is still 'there' (though almost invisible), the medium through which we learn about George's state of mind. In the technique of 'free indirect speech,' however, the narrator disappears entirely, so that there is (apparently) no mediator between the character and the reader.

21. Eliot resorts to the present tense on occasions in many of her novels, creating "freeze-frame" moments of high drama in which the illusion is created that the reader is caught up in events as they unfold. If related in the past tense, a passage such as this would have the effect of a "fait accompli," as the narration would be retrospective, or "ulterior" as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan would put it (90); when the present tense is used, however, an illusion of immediacy results -- the temporal gap between the events and the act of reading about them closes as the narration is simultaneous to the action, and the reader has the illusion that he/she might be able to forestall the inevitable.

22. Use of the present tense contrasts with the retrospective quality of most narration, in which the events described have happened some time before. The present tense introduces a theatrical quality, by creating the illusion that events are unfolding as one reads/sees them. The dramatic potential of this effect can all too easily spill over into melodrama, as, for example, in "Mr Gilfil's Love Story," when Caterina finds the body of her deceiver in the shrubbery. In the passage quoted from Adam Bede, however, the dramatic tension is, in my opinion, much more controlled and effective.

23. Rimmon-Kenan would ask, Who is the "focalizer" here?

24. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan observes that there is a definite element of the habitual in free indirect discourse.

25. There are places in Adam Bede where the narrator has not been as sympathetic to Hetty Sorrel, of course.

26. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, 3.

27. Psychiatrist R.D. Laing, and Reader-Response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser use the terminology of filling in blanks and gaps to describe the processes whereby we make sense of our world, and the texts we read. See, for example, Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction Between Text and Reader" pp. 106-119, in The Reader in the Text, and R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson, A.R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and a Method of Research (New York, 1966).

28. In Robyn Warhol's discussion of narrative interventions she uses the terms "engaging" and "distancing" to differentiate between two types of narrator, and the effects of their narrative interventions on the reader. See Robyn Warhol, Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel (New Brunswick and London:Rutgers UP), 1989.

29. Thomas Carlyle, "Biography" (1832), quoted by David Carroll in his introduction to the World's Classics edition of Middlemarch, (Oxford and New York:Oxford UP), 1988. (Emphasis added).

30. Eliot defined her writing as "a set of experiments in life" and avowed that "...if I help others to see at all it must be through the medium of art" (Letters VI, p.216, my emphasis). She is using the verb 'see,' of course, to refer to insight rather than to ocular vision, but in Middlemarch she uses the latter (specifically optical analogies) to illustrate the problems involved in the former.

31. Views that we form of each other are not "'pure' perception; they are the result of interpretation, and this need for interpretation arises from the structure of interpersonal experience...your experience of me is invisible to me, and my experience of you is invisible to you. I cannot experience your experience and you cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. Experience is man's invisibility to man" (R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience, (Harmondsworth, 1968), p 16, quoted by Iser, 108).

32. R.D. Laing, H. Phillipson, A. R. Lee, Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and a Method of Research (N.Y., 1966), quoted by Wolfgang Iser in his article "Interaction Between Text and Reader" pp 106-119 of The Reader in the Text.

33. Speaking about various critical theories, Susan R. Suleiman uses similar terminology to emphasize how some theories stress the role of the text, and some the role of the

reader. Drawing attention to the radical changes of focus which differing perspectives on reading entail, she comments that "...the peripheral becomes central, the walk-on becomes the hero..." depending on whether it is text or reader that the critic sees as being more important. ("Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," p.3, in The Reader in the Text).

34. Elsewhere in Middlemarch, Eliot remarks that a man may be considered in various ways -- envied, praised, etc, and "yet remain virtually unknown -- known merely as a cluster of signs for his neighbours' false suppositions" (116).

35. Christ's birth took place in a stable because there was no room at the inn to accomodate the Holy Family. See Luke, chapter 2, verse 7:

And [Mary] gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

## Chapter four

### Instances of Distancing

Narrative interventions in 19th C. realist novels<sup>1</sup> are commonplace, and any one novel usually contains distancing as well as engaging narrative strategies. However, Robyn Warhol<sup>2</sup> argues that the proportion of engaging to distancing strategies within the same novel may well be influenced by the gender of the writer.

Warhol suggests that distancing strategies are, in general, employed by male authors such as Fielding, Thackeray and Trollope<sup>3</sup> who, amongst other techniques, often use heavy irony in their addresses to readers, and who frequently dabble in the metafictional,<sup>4</sup> drawing attention to the fact that the reader is, in fact, reading a story, and that the author of that story is in control of what happens -- that the characters are his invention and his puppets, as it were. An extreme example is Thackeray's satirical novel, Vanity Fair (1847-8), in which the narrator is at pains to remind the reader of this precise fact. As Warhol observes, such ironic narrative interventions "seek to distance the actual reader from the fiction, by addressing a narratee with whom the reader should be reluctant to identify or by drawing attention to the fictionality of the text" (17).

In contrast to this, "earnest interventions...attempt to engage the actual reader, to encourage him or her to take the



narrative commentary seriously and to take the novel's story to heart" (17), and Warhol suggests that it is female writers of Realist novels, wishing to influence the reading public toward some constructive moral or political purpose,<sup>5</sup> that tend to use engaging strategies precisely to draw the reader in, thereby attempting to elicit from him/her maximum emotional involvement with the text.<sup>6</sup>

These women writers, furthermore, frequently insist on the factual status of their novels. The "true" rather than imaginary nature of the work is urged through such techniques as the narrator's purporting to be reminiscing about people and situations which occurred in his/her past, or by claiming acquaintanceship with the characters -- the narrative then becomes (at least partly) anecdotal, a memory or testimony rather than an invention -- and the verisimilitude of the work may thereby be heightened. (In her earlier work, Eliot uses both techniques). The inference is that such a work is to be taken seriously, "taken to heart," believed in: the author's hope is that readers will respond viscerally to it, "experiencing" the incidents within it, feeling them as sensations, one might say, as well as comprehending them intellectually. Denied the exposure of pulpit<sup>7</sup> or Parliament, the only public<sup>8</sup> option left women who wanted to be an influence for the good was to write (their female identity often still hidden), and "the challenge was to find a mode of writing that could wield the kind of power that public

speaking represented for men. Realistic fiction became that mode" (Warhol 166).

Although Eliot's narrator is occasionally distancing, (particularly in Scenes from Clerical Life, somewhat in Adam Bede, and again in the later Impressions of Theophrastus Such), this effect is not consistent: the narratorial voice she deploys in most of her writing, including parts of the above works, is by and large almost exclusively an engaging one.

If Warhol is correct in her assumptions about narrative interventions being to a large extent gender-specific, it is no coincidence that works which Eliot wrote "as a man" have a higher incidence of distancing effects than do subsequent works written when she has established (with the public) her identity as a woman, and is therefore able to write in her own voice. The voice of Scenes is, of course, that of the pseudonym<sup>9</sup>: a woman writer masquerading as a man, concealing her identity behind the mask of a masculine persona, and the effect is rather strained and unnatural, sometimes arch and even strident. In the much later written Theophrastus Such (1879) (which, of course, isn't a novel, but a compilation of essays) Eliot again assumes a masculine identity, adopting the stock persona of the essayist (male, of course), and the tone reverts to being mannered, preachy and arch.<sup>10</sup> Whether we are to assume that the narrator in Adam Bede is male or female<sup>11</sup>, the voice is much less mannered and more natural; it is

Eliot's voice unmediated by artificiality -- and yet there are notable instances of ambiguous narratorial strategies within the novel as well, some of which I will discuss below. Considering the novel as a whole, however, the tone seems, if anything, maternal rather than paternal, displaying a "brooding solicitude" (Hardy 163) for the characters.<sup>12</sup> The presence in this, and subsequent novels, of a narratorial voice whose tone and strategies foster closeness with the reader, and which seeks to teach him or her to feel (and put into action) the compassion and tolerance which it preaches, is, as I have said elsewhere, the cornerstone of Eliot's art, an art which (in my estimation), reached its pinnacle in Middlemarch (1871-2).

Having so far concentrated mainly on Eliot's successfully engaging narrative strategies, I would like now to turn to some instances in which her tactics may not be as successful, but rather may irritate and possibly distance us as readers, and in some cases puzzle us because of their ambiguity. I shall look first at some of the direct addresses, or asides to the reader.

As I made clear in my Introduction, and as Warhol points out, "[s]tudying narrative structures, such as interventions and addresses to the reader, is clearly not the same activity as studying "reader response," though in many ways the two approaches have converged in the critical imagination...theorists tend to identify the study of the

narratee in fiction with the study of actual reading audiences or the reading process" (26); however, "the study of the narratee, like studies of narrators, restricts its attention to the text, without reference to what happens when an actual person reads it" (26-27). Because engaging narrative strategies<sup>13</sup> close the gap between narratee and reader, the distinction between the two (the first a construct inscribed within the text, the second a flesh-and-blood person) becomes blurred. Since female mid-Victorian realist novelists wanted to influence their readers politically or morally, it is reasonable to infer that they therefore hoped for certain specific reader-response to their narratives.<sup>14</sup>

Given this fact, and taking into consideration her careful use of personal pronouns as tools of persuasion (see, especially, chapter two) we can assume, as I have asserted all along, that in direct addresses to the reader, Eliot, the realist novelist, almost always intends and desires the reader to identify with the "you" in the text.<sup>15</sup> It is not possible, however, to identify with the "you" in the text (the narratee) if the "you" is perceived by the reader to be unlike him/her. A distancing narrator will often address readers who are made specific, and therefore impossible to identify with -- Flaubert's reader with the white hands, sitting in his padded armchair, for instance, or the "correspondent" in the case of epistolary novels such as Samuel Richardson's.<sup>16</sup> Eliot rarely specifies the reader whom she addresses, but on the few

occasions that she does do so, she does run the risk of distancing others, though that would certainly not be her intention. There is a particularly awkward example in chapter five of "Amos Barton," where the narrator, uneasy about his success in eliciting sympathy for the unremarkable Amos, puts words into a particular balking narratee/reader's mouth, and then even **names** the individual whose utterance he "overhears," and reports it to us, the other readers, presumably as an object lesson in how **not** to respond:

"An utterly uninteresting character!" I think I hear a lady reader exclaim -- Mrs Farthingale, for example, who prefers the ideal in fiction; to whom tragedy means ermine tippets, adultery, and murder; and comedy, the adventures of some personage who is quite a 'character.' (36)

The fact that this particular reader is referred to in the third person allows us to stand at a remove from her, but the intention, no doubt, is to shame the rest of us -- who secretly (Eliot suspects) might tend to share the unfortunate and deluded Mrs Farthingale's feelings -- into seeing the error of our ways, as we would not wish to be included in the category of those who enjoy "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"<sup>17</sup> of the "mind and millinery species" (142) -- this type of fiction being implied as being more to Mrs Farthingale's untutored taste. The narrator proceeds to tutor her/us, by explaining "But, my dear madam, it is so very large a majority of your fellow-countrymen that are of this insignificant stamp,"<sup>18</sup> and this opening remark modulates into an unusually heavy-handed plea (still ostensibly addressed to the

particular reader, but really, of course, aimed at us all) to empathize with the common man (and therefore to learn to appreciate realism rather than "silly novels" peopled with unrealistic characters and far-fetched events):

Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones. (37)

The rhetoric of this passage seems too weighty and earnest, though its message is valid<sup>19</sup>; furthermore, the tone is somewhat grating: there lurks an undercurrent of narratorial superiority which, coming directly after the condescending and patronizing asides to "Mrs Farthingale," does little to draw the reader in. Perhaps we are meant to feel more on a plane with the "me" of the narrator rather than the "you" which (ostensibly) signifies Mrs Farthingale -- certainly, as Barbara Hardy has remarked, "[i]n the earlier novels, George Eliot's narrator may imagine a reader below the reasonable level of expectation, flattering the sympathetic response by singling out an exemplary unexemplary reader in the manner of Sterne and Thackeray..." (Forms of Feeling 155). Perhaps our possibly "sympathetic response" is being flattered here, but if so, the flattery (if such it be) is unconvincing, and the style awkward.

A similar aside occurs in "Mr Gilfil's Love Story,"<sup>20</sup> when the narrator interjects the comment, "Here I am aware that I have run the risk of alienating all my refined lady

readers, and utterly annihilating any curiosity they may have felt to know the details of Mr Gilfil's love-story" (74). Again, the reference to "refined lady readers" perhaps identifies them with those who eschew realism for more purple prose, and again words are put into their mouths.<sup>21</sup> Again the tone (especially in the ensuing paragraph where these women are addressed as "dear ladies") is patronizing and condescending. Fortunately, Eliot is not guilty of many such lapses, and it must be remembered that in Scenes she is posing as a male writer, and that the male persona therefore affects the tone and tenor of her remarks. Furthermore, her general tone usually saves the day, and she drops the technique of specifying readers early in her fiction.<sup>22</sup>

I turn now to asides to the reader which fall into a specific category -- they seem to offer the reader some degree of participation within the story itself, and not always merely at the textual level.

Asides such as "But I, dear reader, am quite as communicative as Mrs Patten, and much better informed; so that if you care to know more about the Vicar's courtship and marriage, you need only carry your imagination back to the latter end of the last century, and your attention forward into the next chapter" ("Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" 77) act as a "bridge" between parts of the narrative, and encourage the reader to read on.<sup>23</sup> There are also similar, friendly, asides like "...you shall hear, if you will accompany me to Cross

Farm..." ("Amos Barton" 8), or "...we will leave Cross Farm without waiting..." (13) which also serve as links between "scenes," or bridges between events, moving the reader and the narrative along: the reader plays along with the narrator's pretence that the two of them are side by side. Nevertheless, these invitations do hover on the border of metalepsis, as they imply (by using the pronoun "we") that the narrator and the narratee/reader are on the same diegetic plane, as the story, playing as they do, with temporal and spatial aspects of the narrative "...as if the narrating were contemporaneous with the story and had to fill up the latter's dead spaces" (Genette 235). A "chummy," "hand-on-elbow" sort of ambience is strived for<sup>24</sup>, but probably largely misses the mark with modern readers, though this technique was, no doubt, more acceptable to Victorian reading audiences than it is today, and therefore more successful then.

Eliot remarks that "imagination is a licensed trespasser: it has no fear of dogs but may climb over walls and peep in at windows with impunity" (Adam Bede 115-6). Though it is clear from the following sentence ("Put your face to one of the glass panes in the right-hand window: what do you see?") that it is the reader's imagination that is the "licensed trespasser," the phrase could equally apply to the narrator -- attention is drawn both to the act of reading **and** to the act of writing, as the latter activity creates what is perceived by the reader. Though some would say that the suggestion "Put



your face to one of the glass panes in the right-hand window" and the question "what do you see?" distances the reader by heightening his/her awareness of the fact that he/she is reading words on a page and cannot **really** peer through the window, Eliot's intention would have been to draw the reader **into** the story, rendering its textuality as invisible as the glass through which the scene is to be viewed.

In these forays into narrative metalepsis, in which there is deliberate tampering with the boundaries of reality and fiction, the reader is addressed somewhat in the same mode as the reader/listener of Browning's dramatic monologues (Hardy 157) -- as an assumed presence on the same plane of reality as the narrator, and (sometimes) on the same plane as the characters -- a passive (or at least silent and impotent) participant in the scene, a sort of "watcher on the threshold" -- a voyeur who, with the narrator, eavesdrops and spies on scenes, characters and tableaux. In a strange passage in Adam Bede, for example, the narrator "invites" the narratee/reader to accompany him/her to the Rectory of the Reverend Mr Irwine:

Let me take you into that diningroom....We will enter very softly, and stand still in the open doorway...the walls, you see, are new....He will perhaps turn round by-and-by, and in the mean time we can look at that stately old lady.... (Adam Bede, 98)

It is as if the narratee is actually present in the room with the narrator, who then proceeds to interpret the scene for him/her, commenting on aspects of it much as a guide might

comment on the exhibits in an art gallery.<sup>25</sup> The intention, presumably, is to make the scene acutely visible to the reader, but the effect is a strange one. Gerard Genette<sup>26</sup> quite rightly observes that "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe...produces an effect of strangeness" (Narrative Discourse 235). Here, however, the "strangeness" is compounded by the fact that the narrator seems to be suggesting that he/she has no more control over the situation than the reader, but is just as much a passive observer. As Barbara Hardy comments, "[t]he polite pretence is that neither reader nor author knows whether that character is going to turn round, nor what will happen if he does" (The Novels of George Eliot 157).

It is undeniable that "[metaleptic] games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude -- a boundary **that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself**: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" (Genette 236). There is perhaps no more extreme example of narrative metalepsis in Eliot's novels than when, in Adam Bede, the narrator purports to have had a conversation with Adam himself, and reports its dialogue. Up till then, the narrator has been extradiegetic<sup>27</sup>, and the abrupt switch jolts the reader.

From the outset, in Adam Bede as in Scenes, the illusion has been set up of the narrator's personal knowledge of, and familiarity with, the characters. If the narrator's voice is "the voice of memory" (Hardy 156), this implies that he/she is (partially or peripherally) a character in (or in the wings of) the story being narrated, but by actually entering the diegesis (story) as a character, the narrator unexpectedly takes a "walk-on role"<sup>28</sup> in the story, crossing the diegetic boundary. Transition from one narrative level to another is achieved, but at the cost of a jolt to the reader, as the narrative metalepsis "play[s] on the double temporality of the story and the narrating" (Genette 235).

"The effect of metalepsis in distancing narrative is usually to affirm the fictionality of the story" (Warhol 35), but in the case of Adam Bede (which is, overall, an engaging narrative, and which we are asked to consider as a history rather than a story), Eliot strives to consolidate our acceptance of its "reality" by reporting the conversation between narrator and character, a circumstance that "proves" that Adam really existed.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, if the narrator is (albeit temporarily) homodiegetic -- just another character (capable of conversing with Adam) -- how can he/she also and simultaneously be an omniscient narrator, capable of seeing into the hearts and souls of her creations?

The opening lines of Adam Bede are extraordinary in many ways, not the least of which being that Eliot draws attention

to to the creative art of writing itself<sup>30</sup> -- and this in a realist novel which is supposedly a "history" rather than a fiction. The narrator tells the reader that, like an "Egyptian sorcerer," she is going to conjure up "far-reaching visions of the past" for him/her (41). Her pen becomes the magic wand which with she creates the illusion of reality, bringing scenes from the past before our mesmerized eyes; the ink is the "mirror" which reflects those scenes and into which we are invited to gaze, spellbound, as the magician plies her art, revealing "men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind" (221). The ink mirrors the images mirrored in her mind -- a double mirroring. Thus, in this most direct address to the reader, the authorial<sup>31</sup> presence is declared right away, and our attention is drawn to its creative (and selective) power. This presence, in its role of narrator, remains with us all along, guiding, cajoling, correcting, directing our understanding and our responses. We observe what she<sup>32</sup> points out to us; she directs our gaze and our reactions -- from the outset, that is to say, we see through her eyes: "with this drop of ink at the end of my pen I will show you..." she declares. Always at the reader's elbow, she is not only the omniscient (all-knowing) author/narrator, but also a close friend and mentor, a "knowable" entity.<sup>33</sup> In this dual role, she presents to us "far-reaching visions of the past" -- a story set about sixty years earlier (see 221), presented as fact, not fiction, but

yet with the constant presence of its narrator, who once, as we have seen, even enters the story as a sort of character-participant (225) (quite apart from the many narratorial interventions which utilize the first person pronouns "I", "me", and "my"). By "establishing [her] own presence and the reader's presence through direct address, [she] eras[es] the ironies of narration to inscribe the 'truth' of [her] realist fiction" (Warhol 103).

The narrator's insistence upon the "truth" of the story, and her personal acquaintance with Adam, is undermined, however, by chapter 17, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," in which Eliot is at great pains to offer justification for her plain portraits, and an explanation of her methods in writing. In this metafictional intrusion she draws attention to the "untruth" of the narrative by revealing to us the choices she, as its creator, is faced with. In speaking candidly of her aims and of the aesthetics of her art, she contradicts the illusion of reality which any fiction sets up, and particularly the assertion of "truth" that she has made, and continues to insist upon. The novel oscillates between the insistence that it is "true" and the assertion that it is fiction, and it does this right from the opening sentences. The effect of the "manifesto's" insertion into the narrative of Adam Bede is complex. It certainly **does** make the story pause a little, in fact it halts it peremptorily, forcing the reader to "stand back from the fiction" (Warhol 130) and

consider, instead, the ethics involved in writing. But this happens after the reader has, as it were, "suspended his/her disbelief," and allowed him/herself to accept the illusion that the world of the novel is "real." The essay breaks abruptly into the narrative, tearing the reader away from the story in which he/she has become involved, forcing attention on just how it is related to reality (Warhol 130). We are jarringly confronted with the fact that, after all (and despite narrative strategies aimed at convincing us of the contrary), the "fiction is really only fictional" (Warhol 130). It also seems to be the author's voice which addresses the reader (rather than the narrator's voice addressing the narratee) because we have stepped out of the realm of fiction, and into the "real" world. In the act of narration, interventions in which the personal pronouns (*I* for the narrator, *you* for the narratee/reader, and *we* signifying a sort of composite or amalgam of the two) are used, establish the presence and relationship of the narrator and the reader, and also work to establish a relationship between the reader and the characters. Now, in this lengthy and didactic narrative intervention, in which the author rather than the narrator intrudes, we (readers) are earnestly and confidingly addressed as "you" (after the initial distancing address to "one of my lady readers"). We are engaged in a "conversation" which is not inscribed in the narrative of make-believe, but is taking place "in reality," between two actual people in the

extra-textual world: the writer and the reader of the "manifesto."

In rebuttal to an imagined plea from "one of [her] lady readers"<sup>34</sup> (221) to make the tale more edifying by "improv[ing] the facts a little" (221), Eliot defends her "faithful account" (221), declining to take artistic liberties with the truth. This inventive and dishonest tampering with depiction of "...the very world which is the world/Of all of us..." (Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805), Bk X, II, 725-6) would, she says, only be possible if she "were a clever novelist, not obliged to creep servilely after nature and fact, but able to represent things as they never have been and never will be... [with] ...characters...entirely of [her] own choosing" (221). Denying that her role is that of a "clever novelist," she insists that she is, rather, the recorder of facts as seen in the mirror of her mind, and she defends her honest portrayal and justifies it: we must learn to "tolerate, pity and love" our fellows, imperfect as they are (222). As we know, her hope is that the extension of our sympathy toward such ordinary, unexceptional mortals may be taught by example -- we learn to practice what she preaches in the realm of the novel<sup>35</sup> (which she denies is a novel), sympathizing with the characters, and, by extension, it is hoped that we will extend our sympathies also to those we meet in life.<sup>36</sup> She eschews the stance of inventor: "I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so

much better than this..." (222). For this reason, she says, "I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult" (222).

The writer's pen and ink are, of course, like the artist's brush and paint -- the tools by which the art is plied -- and, as we have seen, Eliot demands that the painter record accurately what he sees, without deviating into the realms of artistic untruth by portraying objects in picturesque or sentimental fashion, or indulging in 'touch-ups' made with a "tasteful pencil" (222). Similarly, an instructive reality must be created by the pen, providing scenes which the reader will interpret correctly, unseduced by "prettying up", or by rendering black and white into shades of grey. She depicts "everyday fellow-men" (222), those offshoots of "...nature's unambitious underwood," those "...flowers that prosper in the shade" (Wordsworth, The Excursion), and she depicts them truly, to be "accepted as they are" (222).

Taking the responsibility of the artist with the utmost seriousness, Eliot purports to eschew the role of novelist. But of course she is a supreme novelist -- Adam Bede's world is her creation: her spirit infuses it and her presence hovers over it, communing with the reader, leading him or her by the hand through it. Yet this fictive world is grounded solidly in



the reality of the history of a specific period and by accurate details pertaining to that era. This meticulous attention to detail and verisimilitude, coupled with her insistence that she is relating facts, and not inventing them (except, of course, when she turns this on its head in chapter 17), adds to the reader's impression of realism and veracity; at the same time, her skill in guiding the reader's responses to characters and situations, through both overt and subtle means, creates a potently "engaging" and persuasive mixture which lends great force and power to her agenda: to influence people to be more tolerant of their fellows. As Eliot herself put it, "[t]he only effect [she] ardently long[s] to produce by [her] writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures" (5 July 1859).<sup>37</sup>

Adam Bede displays some incongruous narrative strategies, which tend to be unsettling, and puzzling to the attentive reader, sometimes placing him/her in an "ambiguous position vis-a-vis the text" (Warhol 44). For example, our glimpse (in chapter seventeen) of the artist at work does not sit well with the narrator's previous claim to have conversed with Adam. The novel's narrator seems to slip in and out of contradictory and mutually exclusive narratorial roles -- heterodiegetic and homodiegetic -- though the ethics of artistic representation really seem to be presented by the

author (in the sense of creator) of the work rather than by its narrator, or, at least by a composite figure.

The positioning of the extended commentary of "In Which the Story Pauses a Little" is, as I have said, disruptive and interesting. If it had been placed at the beginning of the first book, instead of at the beginning of the second, the reader would perhaps have read the ensuing narrative with a greater *intellectual* appreciation of what the writer was trying to accomplish, but his/her *emotional* involvement with the characters might have been compromised somewhat. Instead, the first image of the narrative conflates the creatively imaginative figures of author and sorcerer in a telling analogy, and the magic is quickly spun as the master illusionist conjures forth the fantasy which we will accept as reality -- the novel.

The "shifting but sacred frontiers between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" (Genette 236) are breached each time the diegetic levels are tampered with, but in addition to this, chapter seventeen, by abruptly inserting an essay-like passage into the midst of the novel, radically disrupts the narrative line, forcing the reader to disengage from the story which has begun to possess his/her imagination, and to assume a much more distanced position, as if looking down (with its creator) on the fictive world, examining it for what it really is -- a fiction -- no longer accepting its illusion of reality. The reader's

illusion (of the reality of the world he/she has imaginatively entered as a "licensed trespasser") is shattered: the stage lights go up to reveal the puppeteer behind the scenes; suspended disbelief is reinstated. It's as if Eliot momentarily mistrusts, or feels too constrained by, the limitations of the didactic realist novel to preach her humanistic message of tolerance and sympathy in a forceful enough manner. She seeks recourse in the male domain of rhetoric, and places it in the midst of her carefully crafted fiction, clearing a space for enunciation, making a "public address" in the only way acceptable for a woman. You could perhaps say that Eliot, assuming the "male" role of essayist and critic<sup>38</sup>, briefly takes over from Mary Ann Evans, the female novelist (whose female identity is, of course, concealed by her pseudonym), as her conception of the purpose of art is spelled out lest we should fail to recognize it within the narrative.

1. Warhol points out that Realism can mean many things. As well as being "the dominant mode of Victorian fiction," it can mean "a philosophical stance, a critical construct, or a genre of fiction that seeks to be representational by employing strategies of verisimilitude." (Warhol 22).

2. Robyn Warhol, Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP), 1989.

3. Warhol (1989) cites Henry Fielding (1707-54), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63), and Anthony Trollope (1815-82) as examples of male writers who rely heavily on distancing narrative interventions. (Interestingly, Eliot mentions Fielding with reverence and affection in chapter XV of Middlemarch, where she refers to him as a "great historian"

who "glories in his copious remarks and digressions...where he seems to bring his arm-chair to the proscenium and chat with us..." (116). She remarks that these "copious remarks and digressions" are "the least imitable part of his work" (116), and continues to assert that if "We, belated historians" attempted so to imitate his "arm-chair [at] the proscenium" chats, "our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a camp-stool in a parrot-house." Perhaps Eliot is modestly saying that she does not have Fielding's scope (the analogy of the parrot suggests unassimilated knowledge); however, she may also be (to a certain extent) questioning the convention of omniscient narration, or drawing attention to the fact that Fielding lived in a bygone age in which generalities "dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe" were more easily accepted, whereas she (and her contemporaries) writing in a different and more questioning age, must reflect on the "particular web" of "certain human lots" (116) upon which she focuses.

4. Metafiction is "self-conscious self-reference in fiction that is explicitly 'about' fiction, and that draws attention to its own structures of artifice" (Warhol 22).

5. Men could exert influence over the public by being politicians, clergymen, and so on; however, women were denied such 'forums' and for them "the realist novel provided one of the few socially acceptable and effectual outlets for their reforming impulses" (18). Because of this, women writers "strove for a heightened realism in their novels," hoping thereby to "exert some political or moral influence on the 'real world'" (Warhol 23).

6. As should be obvious, Warhol does not mean to suggest that male writers never indulge in engaging interventions and narrative strategies, or that female writers never distance their readers: but she does suggest that a male writer such as Dickens, for example, 'cross dresses' (18) when he relies heavily on engaging techniques, and that a female writer such as Eliot also 'cross dresses' on the (rare) occasions when her narratorial voice is distancing rather than engaging. Instances of 'cross dressing' would be employed by the writer for "specific rhetorical purposes" (18).

7. Dinah's (in Adam Bede) and Mrs Samuel Evans' Evangelical outdoor preaching notwithstanding, women were still barred from the pulpits of Established religion, and those who, like Dinah and George Eliot's aunt, preached to any who would listen, tended to be disapproved of, even vilified. As Stephen Gill points out in his notes to Adam Bede, "Women preachers were a distinctive part of early Methodism, but were prohibited by the Wesleyan Methodists after 1803" (p. 594, note 9).

It is interesting to note that many of the rhetorical devices that Dinah uses in her preaching are similar to those used by Eliot in her works: direct appeals to audience/reader, highly charged, emotive language, frequent use of the personal pronouns (especially 'you') to lend immediacy and drama, and to maximize emotional impact, and so on.

8. Woman as the "Angel in the House" was, of course, considered to be an influence for the good in the domestic sphere.

9. The pseudonym was first used in a letter from Eliot to William Blackwood (Haight, ii, p.292) and was adopted formally upon publication of Scenes in volume form (Jan. 1858).

10. Chapter One, "Looking Inward," purports to record the introspective musings of a bachelor who has been an "attentive companion" to himself and now decides to write. The narrator's tone is old-maidish and idiosyncratic, and bears a striking resemblance to that of the narrator of "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton."

11. Here I differ from Robyn Warhol who explains that she "call[s] the Adam Bede narrator 'she' partly by default and partly because her engaging strategies dominate the text, marking its discourse as feminine." (Warhol 115). She concedes, however, that "masculine moves are also present in the novel..." (115). I feel that the gender of the narrator is ambiguous, but though I acknowledge that there are many more engaging strategies in the novel than there are distancing ones, I don't think that's the point. To me (as to Barbara Hardy The Novels of George Eliot 157), we are meant to assume that the narrator of Adam Bede is male. Referring to the conversation, the narrator reports having held with Adam, (Adam Bede 225-228), Warhol sees "no reason to doubt that a female narrator could 'hold' such a conversation" (Warhol 215-216, note 17); this, however, seems highly unlikely to me.

12. Rarely judgemental or critical, the tone is tolerant, wise, compassionate, and personal. As Barbara Hardy remarks, "it is the tone of voice in which the author tells a story about remembered people. It is also the tone in which she addresses a living reader" (Novels of George Eliot 158).

13. Strategies such as "friendly" narrative interventions which address the reader in such a way as to make him/her feel "welcome" in the text, by flattering or confiding in him/her, in contrast to "hostile" addresses which alienate the reader by making him/her feel guilty or offended -- often through the use of narratorial irony.

14. Eliot, for one, makes her intentions explicit, in essays and articles as well as in the famous chapter 17 in Adam Bede, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little."

15. As I have been at pains to point out, Eliot's "you" is, in modern critical terminology, the "you" of the narratee, inscribed within the text, but I think one could make a case for the "you" standing (in her eyes) for her actual readers. It is also interesting to note that in correspondence with each other, Eliot, Gaskell and Harriet Beecher Stowe seemed to "conflate the narrative persona of a novel with its author's identity" (Warhol 174) apparently seeing no distinction between them: "Each claimed an intimate acquaintance with the others through having read their novels, and each appears to have believed that the narrator was identical to the woman who had created it, and that the novels of the earnestly engaging type genuinely expressed their authors' individual subjectivity" (Warhol 174). "Evidently Gaskell, Stowe and Eliot felt that they were present in their fictional texts. When they looked at one another, they saw their novels' narrators; to identify another woman with her narrative voice was to declare one's identification with the narrators in one's own novels" (Warhol 190).

16. On the subject of specifying readers, Marcel Proust remarked that "...it is only out of habit, a habit contracted from the insincere language of prefaces and dedications, that the writer speaks of 'my reader.' In reality, every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self" (RH II, 1031-1032/P III, 910-911. (quoted by Genette, Narrative Discourse, 261).

17. Eliot's essay, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" appeared first in the Westminster Review, October 1856. Reprinted in George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren, (Harmondsworth:Penguin), 1990. 140-163.

18. As Robyn Warhol observes, "Eliot persisted in her intentions in Scenes of Clerical Life to ask the narratee to consider how much more George Eliot's characters resemble the people in one's own life than they do the figures in other novelists' fictions" (Warhol 117), and Eliot, like Wordsworth, delineates and seeks compassion for "...nature's unambitious underwood" (The Excursion).

19. There is an unusually high density of authorial commentary in Scenes, partly necessitated by the fact that the characters with whom we are to sympathize are so ordinary, to the point of being somewhat unappealing; furthermore, they are not shown to us in a way that would naturally arouse our compassion and identification without outside help from Eliot -- help which

takes the form of frequent direct appeals to us on their behalf, as the characters themselves tend to lack sufficient eloquence to plead their own cases, as Barbara Hardy has noted. As Eliot's first work of fiction, Scenes also reflects the early attempts of a novelist with little self-confidence.

20. This story really consists of a series of portraits or "scenes" peopled by characters which are more like *objets d'art* than flesh-and-blood people; we view all of this like stage sets, but we are never really drawn into it. We observe from a distance, and are only in a limited sense engaged by the text.

21. "Gin-and-water! foh! you may as well ask us to interest ourselves in the romance of a tallow-chandler, who mingles the image of his beloved with short dips and moulds." (74) Of course it is precisely the commonfolk such as "tallow-chandlers" that interest Eliot, as they did Wordsworth, and not the people about whose exploits one would read in the Society pages of a newspaper, or in the proliferation of popular romances, those "many remarkable novels, full of striking situations, thrilling incidents, and eloquent writing, [that] have appeared only within the last season." (17).

22. It may be the case that, even when the sex of the narratee/reader is specified, usually as female, there is nevertheless the implication that the opinions attributed to that sex, or to particular "groups" (such as those who are "refined"), are not, in fact, gender-specific (see Warhol 112), but could also be held by pretty well anyone -- although it is, of course, true that women would largely make up the vast readership of pulp fiction of the type that Eliot despised. Perhaps, nevertheless, Eliot sometimes finds it a more tactful approach to suggest that women may be misled into false premises, rather than to imply directly that men's thinking may be similarly skewed. Consider, for example, the ironic narratorial comment from Middlemarch directed (ostensibly) to female readers, but surely equally applicable to male:

Let any lady who is inclined to be hard on Mrs Cadwallader inquire into the comprehensiveness of her own beautiful views, and be quite sure that they afford accommodation for all the lives which have the honour to coexist with hers" (49).

23. Another "bridging" aside to the reader in "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" occurs at the beginning of chapter III, when the narrator reminds the reader of what has happened already, and encourages him/her to continue reading: "The last chapter has given the discerning reader sufficient insight into the state

of things at Cheverel Manor in the summer of 1788... Meanwhile, if, as I hope, you feel some interest in Caterina and her friends at Cheverel Manor, you are perhaps asking, How came she to be there?" (89)

24. Asides in this tone remind me of the BBC's "Listen With Mother" radio broadcasts for very young children, which always began with the words "Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin".

25. A similar effect is achieved in "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story," when the narrator again insinuates the reader into a room invisibly, and proceeds to tell the trespasser what he/she feels: "She...now turns round, so that you may have a full view of her...You are at once arrested by her large dark eyes...you notice the absence of bloom on her young cheek..." (78)

26. Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Ithaca, N.Y.:Cornell UP), 1980.

27. Both narrator and narratee are extradiegetic; the former is inside the novel though not the diegesis (story), the latter is clearly outside both story and novel (though occasionally treated as partially intradiegetic -- when invited, for example, to join the narrator in the diningroom at the Rectory, or to peer through a window at the scene inside).

28. In a homodiegetic narrative, the narrator is present as a character in the story he tells. (Genette 244-245). Genette remarks however, that "Absence is absolute, but presence has degrees" (245), and though Adam Bede does not fall into the category of homodiegetic narration, the narrator **is** (temporarily) present as a participating character in chapter 17. Genette may have overlooked this when he commented that "[i]t's as if the narrator cannot be an ordinary walk-on in his narrative: he can only be the star, or else a mere bystander" 245).

29. As Genette points out, "[t]he contemporary novel...does not hesitate to establish between narrator and character(s) a variable or floating relationship, a pronominal vertigo in tune with a freer logic and a more complex conception of 'personality'" (246). (By "personality", Genette refers, of course, to the "persons" signalled by "personal" pronouns: I, we, you, he/she, they, and the "subjectivity" implied by their use.

30. And therefore, by implication, to **reading**, as well.



31. This seems to me one of the times when the word "authorial" is more appropriate than "narratorial," as what we are talking about here is the role of the creator (not the teller) of the tale.

32. I have adopted the feminine pronoun here because it seems pointless to continue to use the gender-neutral "it" or the clumsy doubling of "he/she." In addition, as discussed elsewhere, the gender of the narrator of Adam Bede is questionable, though the tone is, in my opinion, more female than male.

33. This is Stephen Gill's phrase (Introduction to Adam Bede, p.23).

34. Another gender-specific reference to a particular group of readers, but which is surely actually imputing the biases of such readers to any of us, regardless of gender.

35. Robyn Warhol remarks that "For the purposes of didactic realism, engaging interventions can both raise readers' questions about the connections between the real and fictional worlds and gesture toward answering them" (Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel, 44).

36. Writers and critics as diverse as Tolstoy, D.H. Lawrence, Iris Murdoch, Patricia Donovan, John Gardner, Kenneth Burke, Walter Ong and Eliot herself believed that literature could influence people.

37. This is quoted by Stephen Gill in his Introduction to Adam Bede, (Harmondsworth:Penguin), 1980, p.39.

38. Literary roles which she fulfilled to great effect for years prior to taking up the art of fiction, in the Westminster Review.

## Chapter Five

### The told life and the lived tale

As Theophrastus Such<sup>1</sup> says, "[o]ne cannot give a recipe for wise judgement: it resembles appropriate muscular action, which is attained by the myriad lessons in nicety of balance and of aim that only practice can give" (107). While reading Eliot's novels, we learn, by dint of "myriad lessons in nicety of balance," to practise what she, through the narrator, preaches: tolerance, born of sympathy. It is then up to us to apply the lessons to our daily lives as well.

Many of her narrative interventions attempt to bolster the reader's dawning realization that there exist basic similarities between him/her and the narrator, and therefore, by implication, amongst us all. I now wish to scrutinize more closely one particularly effective means of manipulating our readerly response, by which the narrator elicits from us some half-buried memory, some deeply-felt aspect of our past, which, having been recalled, vividly points up the similarity between our own emotional experience and the character's. As a result of this, the reader perceives a common bond between him/her and the character, a sympathetic response is engendered, and the demarcation between fiction and actual lived experience dissolves.

In Middlemarch, the narrator, referring to radical changes that occur in our lives or perceptions, sagely

comments that "...we all remember epochs in our experience when some dear expectation dies, or some new motive is born" (173). The universality of such monumentally significant episodes is emphasised by the inclusive pronouns "we" and "our," and doubly stressed by "all." Few people, if any, would deny having experienced periods of transition in their lives, with the concomitant emotional reactions and readjustments that such changes bring. The causes may differ, but the results, in terms of emotional experience, are the same for all of us. If "some dear expectation dies" we are more than merely disappointed: the wording implies a reaction akin to mourning; a loss (almost of a part of ourselves) which causes us great emotional pain. The phrase "some new motive is born" is not as emotionally laden, but the verb "born" indicates new beginnings, altered perspectives. By scattering narratorial comments such as this throughout her texts, Eliot seeks to make us acknowledge the commonality of human nature. In her realistic novels, characters feel emotions which are bound to be part of our lived experience, too, in "...the very world which is the world/Of all of us..." as Wordsworth put it.

In the particular instances which I now wish to consider, the emotions which are simultaneously being read about and recalled by the reader are universal -- the basic emotions (such as fear, dread, humiliation, acute embarrassment, jealousy, sadness, hope) which are common to us all as human beings; though the specific circumstances under which each of

us experiences them may vary fairly widely, "...amid all differences there will be a certain correspondence" (Theophrastus Such 106). Thus, I want to stress, it is not that we have experienced exactly the same incident, but rather that we have experienced the self-same emotion as the character feels. The memory of our own experience, but more significantly the recollection of the emotion that accompanied it, now triggers the emotional response (empathetic compassion) that we feel for the character, and unites us (reader and character) at the textual level. It seems that "...pain must enter into its glorified life of memory before it can turn into compassion" (Middlemarch 638).

The narratorial 'sleight of hand' which conjures forth such an acutely felt emotion from our past, bringing it vividly (if momentarily) to life in our present, and aligning it with the emotional experience of a character in the narrative which we are reading, can, I think, be examined in the light of some aspects of narrative theory propounded by Mieke Bal.<sup>2</sup>

Bal, who is interested in "narrative as a mode of cultural expression" (Preface p.xi), sets forth a theory of narrative which seeks to provide "a set of tools" with which to "express and specify one's interpretive reactions to a text," and she stresses that the tools proposed can be put to varied uses" (Preface, x). She suggests that "a three-layer distinction -- text, story, fabula -- is a reasonable basis

for a further study of narrative texts" (6), emphasizing that though the three layers can be analyzed separately, they do not exist independently of each other. Though it is "only the text layer, embodied in the sign system of language, [that is] directly accessible" (i.e. concrete, tangible), "[t]he researcher distinguishes different layers of a text in order to account for particular effects which the text has upon its readers" (6). Any theory requires the definition of key concepts, and the concept central to my application of Bal's theory to certain aspects of Eliot's narratorial interventions is that of the *fabula*<sup>3</sup> which Bal defines as "material that is worked into a story" (6) and as "a series of...events that are caused or experienced by actors" (5). Bal observes that "[e]vents, actors, time and location together constitute the material of a fabula" (7), and notes that the narrator will ensure that "...their arrangement in relation to one another is such that they can produce the effect desired...." (7). As the *fabula* exists at the 'meta' level, time and space (location) have a "hypothetical status"<sup>4</sup>(6). Bearing all this in mind, I wish to consider some of the instances which I have described above, in which what we might call the 'virtual dimension' of the text is augmented by the reader's memory which provides his/her own building blocks of unwritten text to add to the written structure before his eyes.<sup>5</sup> (Iser 1974, 31).

I contend that when, at certain points in the narrative,

the reader is asked by the narrator to conjure up from his/her past an event or experience parallel to that being described within the text, he or she is being asked, in effect, to superimpose his/her own narrative of a similar *fabula* (a sort of 'freeze-frame *fabula*', or tableau) upon that of the story. A vignette from the story of his/her life is temporarily brought into focus, allowing the reader to have a fuller vision of the story related in the narrative text. Reality and text merge momentarily, creating a forceful response in the reader.

By participating to this extent, one might almost say that the reader momentarily enters the text as an actor, before withdrawing again slightly to resume his role as a spectator -- though 'spectator' perhaps implies a stance too far removed from the text to take into account the intricacies and intimacy involved in the act of reading.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, when text and reality are aligned through the experience and memory of the reader (prompted by the solicitation of the narrator), the reader's emotional response is maximized, and his/her imaginative participation is extended and enriched. He/she is asked not only to follow the story presented in the text, with the appropriate intellectual and emotional responses, but to use his/her imaginative powers to create (or recreate through memory) another segment of *fabula*, featuring him/herself.

By superimposing this image of him/herself<sup>7</sup> onto the

text, a palimpsest effect is achieved. Moreover, though this image of the self is in itself fleeting, occurring like a "lightning-flash through the dark and unfrequented chambers of memory" ("Janet's Repentance," 246), it gives way to a lasting effect: the text has been embroidered by a thread drawn from the reader's own life, and this thread continues to be present for the reader, less noticeable as he/she reads on, but still there by virtue of the fact that it has been brought into play and has thereby caused adjustments in the reader's response to the text. In other words, the fabric of the text (for this particular reader) has been subtly altered and embellished. His/her "emotions recollected in tranquillity"<sup>8</sup> have been woven into the narrative text, becoming (for that particular reader) part of its tissue.

"I carry in myself the key to other men's experience," so says Theophrastus Such<sup>9</sup> who also remarks that "To judge of others by one's self is in its most innocent meaning the briefest expression for our only method of knowing mankind..." (107). By calling up from the mists of memory the partial narrative of our own fabula, and by superimposing this image of our own experience over the experience of the character in the text, we authenticate the fiction and feel its truth; by recognizing emotional kinship we validate the emotion felt by the character and establish a bond with him/her. Memory is the key that opens the doors of perception so that we may truly appreciate "other men's experience" by recognizing it as our

own; "one's self" (which implies one's accumulated experience) is the only yardstick we have against which to measure and "judge of others." As we are reminded elsewhere, "the only true knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him...."<sup>10</sup> And as Ludwig Feuerbach said, "sympathy does not exist without suffering in common....Sympathy presupposes a like nature."<sup>11</sup> That our own "fabula" event may have happened long ago, and that it occurred on a different plain of reality, is irrelevant: as Bal asserts, the dimensions of time and space in a fabula have a "hypothetical status" anyway (Bal 6). Moreover, as Bal argues, it is the role of the narrator to ensure that the elements which "together constitute the material of a fabula" (that is, the "[e]vents, actors, time and location") are arranged "in relation to one another is such that they can produce the effect desired...." (7). I wish to examine what happens when the narrator enlists the help of the reader's memory to maximize "the effect desired." I turn first to The Mill on the Floss, in which the narrator ponders

These bitter sorrows of childhood! -- when sorrow is all new and strange, when hope has not yet got wings to fly beyond the days and weeks, and the space from summer to summer seems measureless. (89)

This exclamation appeals to our universal experience of childhood's keenly-felt emotions and its different sense of time. The language is emotive,<sup>12</sup> so that the narrator, uttering the remark, becomes a real presence readily perceptible to the reader, addressing him/her obliquely about experience which is



undeniably common to them both, and to everyone old enough to look back on his/her childhood from the vantage point of adulthood. Although the reader acknowledges that the experience of childhood expressed by the narrator largely matches his/her own, the comment is couched in general terms and so he/she remains 'separate' from the text, capable of objectivity in assessing the narrator's remarks. In contrast to this, however, let us compare the following passage from the same novel:

We have all of us sobbed...piteously standing with tiny bare legs above our little socks, when we lost sight of our mother or nurse in some strange place, but we can no longer recall the poignancy of that moment till we weep over it, as we do over the remembered sufferings of five or ten years ago.  
(122)

Whereas the first passage establishes the common ground of shared experience, this passage does far more than merely that. Here, I suggest, the narrator 'invites the reader into the text' by eliciting from him/her not just a response to what has been related<sup>13</sup>, but an actual vignette from his/her own life. This 'fabula moment' of his/her own produced, at the time at which it occurred, an emotion similar to that experienced 'now' by the character in the narrative that the reader is reading. Through memory, the emotion is reborn in the imagination of the reader, and re-experienced. Whether or not we have all, as very young children, "lost sight of our mother or nurse," we can all recall some terrifying experience, from that age, in which we suddenly realized we

were alone, or lost. As the narrator comments, "Every one of these keen moments has left its trace and lives in us still..." (122). The "poignancy of that moment" was indeed great, and, though buried in our subconscious, can be resurrected and felt again, if, for example, we are reminded of it by seeing (or reading about) someone else suffering similarly. At such moments, we 'identify' with the character suffering the emotion, or, more accurately, we identify with the emotion, because it is one we have experienced ourselves: as we are reminded elsewhere, "sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form"<sup>14</sup>. For a split second, we bring our own vivid memory (released from the past) to bear on the present, and "memory, in a single moment, sees the drama acted over again" ("Janet's Repentance" 246). The narrator asks the question

Is there any one who can recover the experience of his childhood, not merely with a memory of what he did and what happened to him...but **with an intimate penetration, a revived consciousness of what he felt then...?** (122, emphasis added)

and the answer, I suggest, is that perhaps under certain circumstances it is just possible, if only momentarily. In "recover[ing] the experience," we merge with the text: we are no longer able to remain objective and detached, 'separate' from the text -- rather we become one with it, bound together with it psychologically, with no aesthetic separation<sup>15</sup> between it and us.

Louise M. Rosenblatt<sup>16</sup> describes this mystic process

(which is part of reading) when she talks of "a coming-together, a compenetration of a reader and a text," and of how "[t]he reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality." Continuing her explanation of the reading process, Rosenblatt states that "[u]nder the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, [the reader] marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought and feeling a new order, a new experience..." (Rosenblatt 12). In my example, the reader does indeed create "a new experience" from "the stuff of memory, thought and feeling" -- in fact more than one experience. Memory and imagination recreate an experience drawn from the past, so that the reader "experiences" it again in shadow form, and grafts this emotionally-charged image onto the text<sup>17</sup>. This in turn creates "a new experience" of the text itself -- an enhanced and more viscerally felt reading of it. This "transaction"<sup>18</sup> with the text happens more at the emotional level than the rational: the bond is one of intensely sympathetic feeling, and as far as the reader is concerned, the dictum "Je sens, donc je suis" seems more apposite than "Cogito, ergo sum," as it does in all instances in which the sensibilities of the reader are deliberately played upon by the narrator<sup>19</sup> in order to achieve a specific purpose. In Eliot's case, as we know, the purpose is "the extension of our sympathies" within the fiction, and beyond it the development of "the raw material of moral sentiment."<sup>20</sup>

As the narrator comments in Middlemarch, "a man's past is not simply a dead history, an outworn preparation of the present...it is a still quivering part of himself" (502), and that is why it is relatively easy for the reader to retrieve, in a flashback, a piece of past emotional experience (a fragment of his/her own fabula) which may have lain dormant until the moment when the narrator, drawing on the bank of "the reader's presumed experience of emotions" (Warhol 114) prompts him/her to re-live it, in order to "render more immediately present the feelings attributed to the characters in the fiction" (114), and to awaken our faculty of compassion in general. We should not forget that "pain must enter into its glorified life of memory before it can turn into compassion" (Middlemarch 638).

Similar to the narratorial comment "...we all remember epochs in our experience when some dear expectation dies, or some new motive is born" (173), the following excerpt is somewhat more emotionally charged:

We mortals, men and women, devour many a disappointment between breakfast and dinner-time; keep back the tears and look a little pale about the lips, and in answer to inquiries say, 'oh, nothing!' (Middlemarch 51)

This comment ensures by its rhetoric that the reader will see him/herself in the description of the embattled soul for whom "disappointment" is, it is implied, ingested more frequently than food during the course of the day. The pronoun "we" includes us all, and the situation is presented as

commonplace, even normal. The addition of "oh, nothing!" further actualizes the scene, and we are sure to recall many such occasions of our own, in which we have bravely 'soldiered on,' giving the self-same response. Because of the generality of the comment, however, our emotional reaction to it is not as visceral as it would be if we were coerced into the recollection of some particularly significant incident which had really left its mark on us -- the terror of being lost as a child for example, or the horror and grief which the death of a loved one forces us to cope with.

When, in "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," the narrator, describing Amos's grief over his wife's death, and his regrets over not having done all that he could to show his love while she lived, speaks of "that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives" (60-61), all who have suffered the inevitable heart-wrenching regrets and self-blame which accompany such a loss understand exactly the mental agony described. We feel for Amos all the more because we remember ourselves in his position, and we re-live the pain we experienced then, aided by our own "keenness of memory and imagination". Again, we have dredged up from the past a memory, achieving a "revived consciousness of what [we] felt then" (The Mill on the Floss 122), superimposing our own 'fabula-fragment' onto the text. The palimpsest effect which results resembles that evocative description in Middlemarch of how Bulstrode's past intrudes into his present, as

when we look through a window from a lighted room, the objects we turn our backs on are still before us, instead of the grass and the trees. The successive events inward and outward were there in one view: though each might be dwelt on in turn, the rest still kept their hold in the consciousness" (502)

Here, for the duration of that moment of memory when we feel acutely once again the pain we once lived through, we 'see' simultaneously both the textual situation (Amos's anguish) and a glimpse of our past pain, the two superimposed upon each other. Our personal memory, or fabula fragment, though one of the "objects we turn our backs on" as we gradually adjust to life again, is now before the eyes of our imagination once more, reclaiming its "hold in [our] consciousness," in tandem with what we are reading about. Truly, the "events inward and outward [are] there in one view," and "though each might be dwelt on in turn" the double exposure creates a powerful psychological effect.

What prompts the reader to resurrect a piece of his/her past, a 'fabula fragment' of his/her own and bring it to his/her reading of the text is something more complex than language alone, though, of course, it is encoded in language. Remembering, however, that "...the meaning we attach to words depends on our feeling" (Middlemarch 181) it might be close to the truth to say that Eliot uses language as the tool to stir up feeling, by tapping into the realm of the psyche. The primary contact between text and reader is on the level of

sensation and emotion.<sup>21</sup>

According to Bal, the fact that emotional reactions are evoked whether the story is read (by, or to, someone), or "related" to them as a film (which is a different sign system) "demonstrates that something happens with the fabula which is not exclusively language-related" (6). Bal uses the example of the bas relief depicting wise man Arjuna meditating, a cat assuming a yogic posture, and some amused mice (102ff), to illustrate that "the relation between the sign (the relief) and its contents (the fabula) can only be established by mediation of an interjacent layer, the view of events" (Bal 104). That is to say, unless the spectator (viewing the events) interprets the signs, the image is strange, the parts seemingly without narrative coherence. The spectator sees the "whole picture" and laughs because he/she identifies with the mice, seeing what they see (a cat rendered a non-threat because it is either meditating like Arunja or pretending to). The spectator "sees more" than any of the 'actors' depicted do -- the man, the cat and the mice -- and laughs at the cat (for being ridiculous), and with the mice (in identification and sympathy with them) (103). This example illustrates the theory of focalization, which is, as Bal explains, "the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story part of the narrative text" (104), and therefore, Bal argues, "...focalization belongs in the story, the layer in between

the linguistic text and the fabula" (104).

By analogy, the reader involved in the process of "recovering" a fabula fragment from his/her past and superimposing it onto the text also sees more than the 'actors' (characters in the text), being granted by the narrator a sort of (spurious) omniscience (and omnipresence, as he/she becomes a 'spectator' and even participant) -- he/she, at any rate, has the illusion of seeing and knowing all, and even, to a degree, of 'being there.' The reader, recalling part of the 'story' of his/her own life, is the focalizer -- "the point from which the elements are viewed" (Bal 104) -- of his/her own fabula, and, as Bal tells us, "a story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner" (5). The reader has been coerced into a moment of introspection which is akin to voyeurism (if it's possible to be a voyeur of one's self). By bringing to the present, by means of memory, a vision of one's past self, one becomes a 'spectator' of that past self, a self-voyeur. But simultaneously, as a reader one is also a 'spectator' of the story unfolding in the text, operating in "the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula" (104) to make sense of what one is reading. In addition to this, the reader is, to some degree, a participant as well, having grafted onto the fabula-moment of the text, a "revived consciousness" of the "poignancy of that [comparable] moment" (The Mill on the Floss 122) drawn from his/her own hoard of memories. Perhaps (though he speaks of metalepsis)



Genette's suggestion that "the extradiegetic is...always diegetic, and...the narrator and his narratees -- you and I -- perhaps belong to some narrative" (Genette 236), has an even broader application than one might at first attribute to it. Perhaps, too, resurrecting a fragment of the narrative of our own fabula and superimposing it onto the text so that "events inward and outward [are] there in one view" (Middlemarch 502) does, in fact, interpolate us into the text in a form of pseudo-metalepsis.

In Eliot's novels, the verity of narratorial gnomic utterances is, I contend, frequently validated by the reader's own experience. The narrator manoeuvres the reader into the position of agreeing with the comments in various ways, one of which, as we have seen, is to elicit from him/her some corroborating piece of 'evidence' from his/her store of memories, a fragment of past experience (of great emotional import) from the 'fabula' of the narrative of his/her own life. This psychological transference of personal emotional experience to the text brings a truly personal perspective to our interpretation of the events therein, and can be instrumental in influencing our reaction and response to the particular character who is experiencing the emotion which has triggered the unarticulated recollection of our own emotional experience.<sup>22</sup>

I now wish to discuss the concept of perspective, relating it to my hypothesis that the imaginative recreation,

through memory, of a moment of the reader's lived experience will, when applied to the narrative events of the novel, greatly influence the reader's response to what he/she is reading.

"Perspective," Bal tells us, is "the placing of the point of view in a specific agent" (50). This "agent" is usually a character within the diegesis, but could also include the narrator<sup>23</sup>, who, in Eliot's novels is (apart from briefly sustained exceptions noted elsewhere) extradiegetic. But what if the perspective is manipulated by the narrator in such a way as to place the point of view neither in him/herself exclusively, nor in a "specific agent" within the narrative, but in the reader? By ensuring that the reader interpolates his/her own experience into/onto the text, I suggest that the narrator (fleetinglly) might be said to shift the perspective out of the hands of the character, giving it instead to the reader him/herself. Because this happens during a narrative intervention, in which the narrator is expressing his/her perspective on the events he/she is narrating, the reader is coerced by the narrator into adopting the latter's perspective, which may not be shared by any particular character. To pursue this line of argument, it is necessary to look, for a moment, at the question of "characters" in fiction, and how readers respond to them.

Bal, distinguishing, as we have noted, within the narrative text a "three-layer distinction -- text, story,

fabula" (Bal 6), reminds us that

On the level of the story, characters differ from each other. In that sense they are individual. On the basis of the characteristics they have been allotted, they each function in a different way with respect to the reader. The latter gets to know them more or less than other characters, finds them more or less appealing, identifies more or less easily with them. (80)

Art imitates life; characters resemble people, but at the same time are not real but "paper people," creatures fashioned by the author, not human beings but yet possessing human aspects. Bal clarifies the tantalizing correspondence (a co-existing difference and similarity) between "flesh-and-blood" and "paper people" by pointing out that though the character "has no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act...it does possess characteristics which make psychological and ideological description possible" (80).

As readers, we respond to these "psychological and ideological" aspects of the character, though justifying our reactions is sometimes difficult, and often subjective. As Bal points out, it is difficult to distinguish between the character and the human person when we are trying to account for the "character-effect" as "the resemblance between the two is too great...; we even go so far as to identify with the character, to cry, to laugh, or to search for or with it" (80). It goes without saying that the aspects assigned to the character by the narrator -- the character portrait -- "create" the character for the reader (80), but in addition to this "portrait" other information in the story, less directly

connected to the character, also contributes to how the reader views him or her (80). This being so, it is all the more likely that "information" supplied by the reader in conjunction with the narrator (when the reader is coerced by the narrator into personal reflection which leads to a strong empathetic response to the character or to his/her state of mind) should help form a lasting, if shadowy, impression on the reader. Under these circumstances, an added nuance materializes and is bound to affect the reader's future response to the character, just as seeing a previously unglimped facet of a friend's personality adds to our overall appreciation of him/her. The recognition and admission of a striking similarity (in experience or emotional response to a given set of circumstances) between ourselves and another human being gives us an increased perception and understanding of the other person's behaviour or state of mind. In exactly the same way, it is a moment of epiphany for the reader when this flash of recognition occurs in him/her with regard to a character, engendering an immediate empathetic response. As in the "real world" the impact of this new insight is bound to fade, but nevertheless a residue of it remains, from then on colouring the reader's perception of the character.

Moments of readerly identification are central to the way Eliot's characters are created, how they achieve their "realism": we invest them with our emotional life, and thus (to a certain extent) we create them in our own image, under

the guidance of the narrator. One might say that fundamentally, to a large extent, it is the reader's own input that shapes his/her image of a character. That is to say that in assessing a character (or, indeed, a narrative) "...something happens with the fabula which is not exclusively language-related" (Bal 6), and that "something," which is not entirely attributable solely to the words on the page, happens in the mind of the reader, and is prompted by what the reader brings with him/her -- his or her own experience, knowledge, and "emotional baggage," to borrow a popular phrase. The "virtual dimension" of the text is augmented by another dimension (the reader's memory of emotional experience) which provides his/her own building blocks of unwritten text to add to the written structure before his/her eyes.<sup>24</sup> (Iser 1974, 31).

During this process of fusion, when the fabula-moment from the reader's past joins the "present" moment of the text as it is being read, a sort of alchemy takes place in the reader's mind whereby the base metal of the text is transformed to gold. The fascinating thing is that the "alchemist"<sup>25</sup> is, in this instance, a plural being, a composite of reader and narrator, for it is precisely through the "words on the page" (the text) that the narrator can manipulate the reader's response, and yet this response is also determined by the latter's own psychology. To create a perfect transmutation, there are several necessary criteria:

the first is that the "material" must be "sound" -- by which I mean that the emotional experience (the sensation), narrated by the narrator and suffered by the character, must be one which is common to all human beings -- a "generic" psychological experience such as fear, humiliation, sorrow, anger, and so on, which the reader is sure to have experienced. The second criterion is that there has to be a perfect "match" of narrator's intention and reader's response<sup>26</sup>, and this in turn depends upon the reader's seeing part of him/herself in the character<sup>27</sup>, and upon the narrator's ability to project his/her attitude concerning the character to the reader.<sup>28</sup> All three elements in the transaction -- narrator, character, and reader, must operate by the same psychological rules, so to speak. The reader must recognize something of him/herself in the character, and the narrator must bring this recognition about by communicating (and ultimately inducing the reader to share) his/her response to the character, a response that he/she elicits from the reader by encouraging him/her to re-live, in the realm of sensation, a key moment, to re-experience a deeply felt emotion from the past. One could say, perhaps, if one dared risk being fanciful, that the whole process is (to borrow Eliot's own metaphor)<sup>29</sup> ideally like a balancing act, performed by narrator and reader almost in unison, with the character's psyche as a sort of springboard: the "wise judgement" (a more tolerant and sympathetic attitude) that we come to have of the

character is brought into existence as a reflection, or, we might even say a reflex, of the narrator's own.

Bal, referring to the relationship between text and context, talks about "the so-called extra-textual situation" - the "influence of reality on the story, in so far as reality plays a part in it"<sup>30</sup> (81). Though she is specifically referring to instances in which writers have made a fictionalized recreation of a real person, "reality" nevertheless also intrudes in any textual situation by providing the context against which the reader assesses the 'truth' of the fiction, perhaps particularly in the case of realist narrative. When the reader applies his/her past emotional experience to the text, superimposing onto it his/her patch of personal fabula, the text is certainly augmented by context, and the reader 'sees' the character anew (in an altered context) based on the reader's own context of emotional experience. This is particularly desirable if the reader's opinion of the character has, till then, been unsympathetic, as in the case of Casaubon, until we are shown his vulnerability.

Talking about how we, as readers, assess characters, Mieke Bal remarks that

On the basis of certain data the character becomes more or less predictable. These data determine him or her. To begin with, the data concern information that relates to the non-textual situation, in so far as the reader is acquainted with it. (Bal 82)

She continues by proposing that "[w]e shall treat that section

of reality to which the information about the person refers as a frame of reference," and having acknowledged that though "[t]he latter is never entirely the same for each reader, or for reader and writer" she nevertheless states that "[b]y frame of reference we here mean information that may with some certainty be called communal." (Bal 82). I contend, of course, that our emotional "frames of reference" are, indeed "communal," part of our human psychology.<sup>31</sup>

To make sense of a text, or to assess a character, the reader attempts an interpretation in the light of what is familiar to him/her already either in reality or in literature, to "naturalize" it, as Jonathan Culler<sup>32</sup> would say. Rimmon-Kenan refers to these interpretive references as "deja-vu models of coherence" (123), Iser (1971a) calls them "Gestalten," Eco (1979) calls them "inter-textual frames," and Barthes (1970) calls them "codes," describing them thus:

The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures...so many fragments of something that has always been **already** read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that **already**.  
(1974, p. 20. Orig. publ. in French 1970)

Thus, as Rimmon-Kenan points out, the process of reading involves not only the development and testing of hypotheses, but also of "codes" or "frames" (124) upon which to build.<sup>33</sup> If the "frame of reference" or "model of coherence," or whatever we choose to call it, is drawn from reality, it "help[s] naturalize elements by reference to some concept (or structure) which governs our perception of the world" (Rimmon-



Kenan 124).<sup>34</sup> Nothing, I submit, "governs our perception of the world" so much as our own past experiences, and when these are brought to bear on the text in the manner which I have described, their impact upon the reader's interpretation is bound to be significant.

In this regard, I should like, once more, to refer briefly to Casaubon. In chapter one, I discussed how the reader is brought to sympathize with him, after the jolting narratorial query "But Why always Dorothea?" (Middlemarch 228-9), in his struggle with fast-approaching death. Perhaps we see something of our own experiences in his dashed hopes and dreams, as most of us have unfulfilled aspirations. His, centred round his life's work, are all the more pathetic because he has too little time left, and insufficient ability, for their realization. His life has been wasted in pursuit of a chimera; his brainchild, the basic precept of which is flawed, has been gestated over his whole adult life, remains in embryonic form and will never see the light of day. We see in the image of "a small hungry shivering self" (Middlemarch 230) a metaphor for our own insecurities, a glimpse of that vulnerable part of ourselves which, as adults, we learn for the most part to shield from view -- sometimes even from our own view. As I noted in passing in chapter one, the image of this waif-like "self" is consolidated by the words "our poor little eyes peeping as usual and our timorous lips more or less under anxious control" (Middlemarch 231), phrases which

tug at the heart strings for several reasons. The inclusive "our" implies communality, reinforcing the message that the sensations of timid and fearful uncertainty, even of terror, are known to us all. These basic emotional reactions vary in their intensity from person to person, and are triggered by diverse causes, but the fundamental truth is that we have all, at some time or another, been the "small, hungry, shivering self" who is psychologically dwarfed by events beyond our control and starved of whatever nourishment our heart or soul required, and who feels alone, cast out and helpless in a cold and unsheltering world. The words "our poor little eyes peeping as usual and our timorous lips more or less under anxious control" add to the pathos already conjured up by the image of the "small, hungry, shivering self" by contributing more emotional as well as visual detail: we can picture the "small" figure with its "poor little eyes peeping" and its trembling lips, and we are therefore witness to the anxiety, the timidity, the spiritual chill and hunger, which manifest themselves physically. When we recall ourselves suffering in this way, we focus on a segment of fabula from the narrative of our own lives, re-living the mental experience at the level of sensation, and visualizing ourselves as that waif-like figure. The recreated sensation of suffering, in conjunction with the image of ourselves enduring it, produces in us a self-pity which is translated into pity and sympathy for Casaubon. The image of the "small, hungry, shivering self" is

the stuff of legend and myth, a symbolic representation of emotions, an idea made incarnate<sup>35</sup> in a metaphoric shorthand recognizable to any of us, deserving, even demanding, a compassionate response. When we see ourselves in that figure, we experience "that unfair advantage possessed by us all when we are in a pathetic situation and see our own past as if it were simply part of the pathos" (Middlemarch 464). Here, we bring into the present a "pathetic situation" which is part of "our own past" and see it "as if it were simply part of the pathos" produced by the text. Our perspective on Casaubon is altered because we see him through new eyes, eyes that see him as a reflection of ourselves. We have accepted the narrator's invitation to create our own mirror-text (in fabula form) with ourselves as principal actor, to help us interpret and respond to the narrator's text.

Thus the reader becomes a "specific agent" located at one and the same time "outside" the text and "within" it, too. He/she crosses the thin line between fiction and reality as he/she retrieves from memory and recreates in imagination a fragment torn from his/her own "life-story," and briefly enters the text to merge emotionally with the fictitious character, whose tribulations are thus validated by the reader's own. At the moment of "compenetration" (Rosenblatt 12), the 'fourth wall' which exists between reader/spectator and the fictitious world dissolves, becoming not merely transparent, but non-existent. The boundaries of reality and

fiction are violated as the threshold between the two "realities" disappears and the reader hovers, ghost-like, over the world created by the writer. The "watcher on the threshold" crosses that threshold, becoming part of the fictitious world, merging his consciousness with that (supposed consciousness) of the character. The real presence of the reader gives way to some phantasmagoria of himself, a recreated self brought to life by memory and emotion. This shadowy echo of the self joins hands (so to speak) with the imaginative creation of the writer (the character) and together they affirm and validate each other. Perspective, or focus, alters as the two worlds merge -- as when one looks through binoculars and has to adjust the separate vision of each eye to accommodate the conjoined, shared, and therefore greater vision of both eyes together, used in tandem. The "point of view" already "placed" in the "specific agent" within the narrative text is now more sharply focused for the reader whose own personal perspective is brought into play, augmenting and enlarging, affirming and validating the character's, so that -- at least for the moment -- a bond of fellowship is forged in the reader's mind between himself and the character towards whom his empathetic response is drawn. This fellow-feeling, summoned urgently by a narrative technique designed to influence the reader in a certain direction, will fade as the reader reads on and encounters other shifts in perspective. Nevertheless, though the

emotional response in its acute form fades (or, conceivably, changes), a lasting "echo" effect endures, perhaps as "...subtle as the twentieth echo of an echo, or as the memory of hyacinths which once scented the darkness" (Middlemarch 356), but present nonetheless.

A narrative technique for "the shaping of meaning" (50) has worked its magic in the text itself; from that point onward, the reader's appreciation and acceptance of the character is broadened, and the text itself has been illuminated for the reader so that he sees a new facet of it which contributes to his total, panoramic view of it. Furthermore, some of the magic spills over, hopefully, into reality, too. This realignment of attitude and adjustment of response to character and text may, as Eliot hoped, also serve a didactic purpose outside the bounds of the text, encouraging a similar adjustment in life, so that we may feel more tolerant towards our fellows -- more prone to accept their foibles as we recognise in them the reflection of ourselves. Thus, the reading experience will have 'shaped the meaning' of life itself by teaching us to interpret and read it with greater sensitivity and with greater compassion for our fellows, and a fuller recognition of our similarities.

1. Theophrastus Such is the narrator of Eliot's Impressions of Theophrastus Such (1879), chapter XIII, "How We Come to Give Ourselves False Testimonials, and Believe in Them," in Impressions of Theophrastus Such, Essays and Leaves from a Notebook (Toronto:George N. Morang and Company), 1911, p. 107.

2. Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, trans. Christine van Boheemen, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 1985.

3. In Bal's own words, a **fabula** consists of "material [a series of logically or chronologically related events] that is worked into the story" (6), while a **story** is a **fabula** that is presented in a certain manner (5). The **text** is "a finite, structured whole composed of language signs [and a] **narrative text** is a text in which an agent relates a narrative" (5).

4. Events always take up time in reality, but in the **fabula**, though "often important for the continuation of the fabula [time] has a hypothetical status: in a **fabula** the events have not 'actually' occurred" (6). Similarly, in reality, events occur somewhere, but in a **fabula** the location is also hypothetical.

5. Apart from my inclusion of the word "memory," this will be recognized as being close to Iser's (and other reading theorists') formulation of "how" we read, or make sense of a text.

6. The reader, after all, participates in any text by virtue of his reading -- processing the words, establishing relationships, finding meaning -- and is therefore something more than a mere spectator as narrative events unfold.

7. This "image" is, in a way, more particularly of the inner self, the psyche. We recall, vividly, our emotional reaction to an experience from our past which, at the time, was acutely felt, and which even now lives on in our memory. Our present selves are, after all, composites of our accumulated past. In recalling such an episode we may visualize ourselves experiencing it (as if we were watching a movie), but we are, I think, more likely to look again through the eyes through which we saw the event as it actually happened. In any case, the crucial aspect of the memory is not so much the actual incident itself, as the emotional reaction it set off in us.

8. Wordsworth, Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1800).

9. Theophrastus Such, ch. 1, "Looking Inward," 9.)

10. "Janet's Repentance," p.229.

11. Ludwig Feuerbach, Das Wesen des Christentums (1841), translated by Marian Evans (George Eliot), as The Essence of Christianity (1854). This quotation is from chapter 4. Feuerbachian precepts inform much of Eliot's work. In a letter to her friend Sarah Hennell, Eliot wrote "With the principles of Feuerbach I everywhere agree" (Letters Vol. II, p. 153).

12. Emotive language is "language which aims at self-expression of the speaker with regard to that about which it speaks" (Bal 134). Bal notes that "the exclamation mark is a graphic representation of an emotionally laden intonation" (134), so that in making this remark, the narrator becomes a real presence readily perceptible to the reader, addressing him/her obliquely. "If in a statement the feelings of the speaker are expressed, the statement is about the speaker....Even if the narrator does not explicitly refer to itself [sic], still, the 'I' narrates about itself. This means that an actor with the same identity as the narrator forms part of the fabula. Signs of emotive functioning are, therefore, also signs of self-reference" (137).

13. In this case, Maggie has, by an impetuous act (cutting off her hair) put herself in a difficult position in which she feels she cannot reintegrate into the family group downstairs for fear of their condemnation and ridicule. Even her beloved Tom is unsympathetic, and she is desolate. The narrator's intervention, however, is not so much directly a comment on this situation as it is on the painful acuity with which children experience their emotions, suffering anguish over things which are frequently trivialized by adults who have forgotten the acuteness of their own childish reactions.

14. Scenes of Clerical Life, 258.

15. Northrop Frye, in his article "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility", in Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), discusses two views of literature: the Aristotelian (aesthetic) view, which stresses literature as **product**, and the Longinian (psychological) view, which stresses literature as **process**. In the former, there exists a sense of the detachment of emotions from the spectator/reader who, according to Aristotle's theory of catharsis, feels pity and fear, but 'detaches' the emotions from him/herself by directing them towards objects (characters). He notes, however, that "**Where there is a sense of literature as process, pity and fear become states of mind without objects, moods which are common to the work of art and the reader, and which bind them together psychologically instead of separating them aesthetically.**" Though Eliot does not write Sentimental Novels, some of her narratorial strategies, such as the one under discussion, do perhaps seek similar emotional response from readers, responses that are, in this instance, based more on sensation than on our rational faculties.

16. Louise M. Rosenblatt, The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional Theory of the Literary Work. Rosenblatt is discussing how we make sense of texts, specifically poems, and

the passage reads:

The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being. (12)

17. In doing so, the reader, to some extent, is creating the text, and his/her creative activity parallels that of the writer. In Abinger Harvest, E.M.Forster describes the "memory-snatching habits" of "...an author, rummaging in his past, disinterring forgotten facts, facts which exist again for an instant before they crumble and are lost forever." Forster comments that "That instant is the artist's instant; he must simultaneously recollect and create..." (101).

18. Rosenblatt's term, borrowed from behavioral psychologist John Dewey.

19. An emotional response involving the senses (the body's response such as is elicited by Sentimental novels) rather than the intellect is called out; real feelings translated into physical responses (such as a lump in the throat, or mistiness of the eyes) may be engendered, in much the same way as a poignantly worded sermon may move a congregation. The reader is genuinely moved by seeing him/herself in the position of the character -- doubly so if he/she has really lived through the same experience, or felt the same depth of emotion.

20. "The Natural History of German Life," Westminster Review 66, (July 1856), 54.

21. In this respect, Eliot is a profoundly sentimental novelist, as those reactions validate everything for her.

22. Our changing reactions to Mr Casuabon, as discussed in chapter one, is a case in point. The reader has little affection and less sympathy until the narrator skilfully manipulates the reader's sentiments to the point that he/she is forced into seeing the hollow pedant as a fellow human being beset by the same doubts and fears as the rest of us (Middlemarch ch. XXIX), a realization which forces him/her, reluctantly at first, to pity and sympathize with him -- to change perspective, in fact.



23. Because of the personal nature of many of Eliot's narratorial interventions, the narrator, who often uses the first person singular pronouns ("I," "me," "my") in direct addresses to the reader and in more general commentary, offers the narratorial perspective on matters, events and characters quite frequently. Speaking of the Reverend Casaubon, for example, the narrator states categorically, "For my part I am very sorry for him," before expanding on this statement by supplying reasons. The ensuing observations, though perhaps mildly ironic, paint a sympathetic portrait of the "scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted" man (Middlemarch 230), and encourage us to see him from the same sympathetic perspective.

24. See note number 6.

25. One thinks of the first paragraph of Adam Bede, in which an analogy between an "Egyptian sorcerer," and the writer/narrator is drawn. Mysticism and sleight-of-hand figure in the metaphorical comparison between the magic visions conjured up by the sorcerer by means of "a single drop of ink for a mirror," and the narrator's promises to perform like illusions "with this drop of ink at the end of [his/her] pen." The introduction of the word "pen" seems to me to lend credence to the notion that this is the writer, just as much as the narrator, talking.

26. There can be no "gap" between the "narratee" and the flesh-and-blood reader; the latter has to identify with the former, something that an "engaging narrator" (Warhol) strives to ensure.

27. Keat's concept of the egotistical sublime (the extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience) is, I think, relevant here. The reader identifies with the emotion or sensation experienced by the character because he/she has also experienced it. Acknowledging, "Ah, yes, I know what that feels like," the reader, for a split second, recalls the sensation retained at the meta level of unarticulated memory.

28. It is likely, I think, that the very emotion now elicited from the reader by the narrator may actually have been experienced at one time by the writer him/herself, as we are here discussing emotions common to humankind. It would then be a communication, an emotion transmitted to the reader by the writer via the narrator, with the character's suffering as the catalyst. In What is Art?, trans. Maude Aylmer, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill), 1960, Tolstoy remarks on the subject of art that,

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once

experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling -- that is the activity of art. Art is a human activity in this, that one...hands on to others feelings...lived through, and that other people are infected by those feelings and also experience them. (51)

This is close to Wordsworth's "recollection in tranquillity," and seems an apt description of what Eliot often accomplishes.

29. As noted previously, Theophrastus Such, speaking of "wise judgement," remarks that it "resembles appropriate muscular action, which is attained by the myriad lessons in nicety of balance and of aim that only practice can give" (Impressions of Theophrastus Such 107).

30. Bal continues by saying that "we cannot ignore the fact that direct or indirect knowledge of the context of certain characters contributes significantly to their meaning" (81). She is discussing fictionalized recreations of real persons, such as President Eisenhower, but her remarks regarding text and context are, I think, still relevant to my argument.

Acknowledging what I've rather carelessly termed "emotional baggage," Bal notes that "the influence of data from reality is all the more difficult to determine since the personal situation, knowledge, background, historical moment, and so on of the reader are...involved" (81). Though it is true, of course, that in each individual these elements are particularized, it is also true (not to belabour the point) that some human aspects are held in common and transcend such arbitrary boundaries as race, class, gender, and historical time -- certain psychological responses are shared, constituting the essence of our humanity.

31. In attempting to answer the question, How do we make sense of a text (or, by extension, life), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes that to "integrate the various elements of a text together, the reader must often fall back on what Hrushovski (1976) calls 'frames of reference.'"

32. Culler states that "to naturalize a text is to bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible" (Culler 1975, p. 138), quoted by Rimmon-Kenan, p. 123.

33. As Perry puts it:

Any reading of a text is a process of constructing

a system of hypotheses or frames which can create maximal relevancy among the various data of the text -- which can motivate their "co-presence" in the text according to models derived from "reality," from literary or cultural conventions, and the like. Each of these hypotheses is a sort of "label" constituting an answer to questions such as: What is happening? What is the state of affairs? What is the situation? Where is this happening? What are the motives? What is the purpose? What is the speaker's position? What is the argument or the idea reflected in the text? And so on. (Perry 1979, p. 43, quoted in Rimmon-Kenan 124).

34. These concepts or structures could include contiguity, chronology, causality, and so on (Rimmon-Kenan 124), or they could be "a body of maxims and prejudices which constitute a vision of the world and a system of values" (Genette 1969, pp. 73-75, trans. by Culler 1975, p. 144, quoted by Rimmon-Kenan 124). In her narrative interventions, Eliot, of course, makes great use of epigrammatic utterances which are often comparable to proverbs or maxims, to influence the reader's response to the narrative.

35. In a letter to her friend Frederic Harrison (1866), Eliot talks of "the severe effort of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to [her] first in the flesh, and not in the spirit." (quoted by Q.D. Leavis, in her Introduction to Silas Marner, (Harmondsworth:Penguin), 1967, p. 9.

## Conclusion

### The Quiet Hand

In Gendered Interventions, Robyn Warhol remarks that

Earnest direct address has been both vilified and defended in commentaries on particular realist novels, but in theories of literature and theories of reading it has, for the most part, been suppressed.

(Warhol 192)

Attempting to explain why this should be so, she suggests that there may be several reasons for "critical discomfort" with the trope (192). Warhol "situate[s] the problem at the intersection of three locations of anxiety" (192). The first of these "centers on literary-theoretical disagreements about whether 'literary' and 'non-literary' language must necessarily occupy separate realms"<sup>1</sup> (192). The second "location of anxiety" that confronts theorists and critics concerns the "moments of intensified presence"<sup>2</sup> which are created by direct address, and with which they feel ill at ease. Thirdly, Warhol suggests that "these anxieties are aggravated when that presence is coded as feminine"<sup>3</sup> (192).

Restraints of time and space prevent me from tracing fully the development of Warhol's arguments to support her theories concerning the possible reasons for critical dislike, and theoretical avoidance, of much discussion of direct address, but critic Jane Tompkins suggests that considering texts as repositories of meaning awaiting interpretation has perpetuated the tendency to deny the category of literature to

any text that attempts to *do something*<sup>4</sup> as, of course, didactic realist texts attempt. Warhol points out that "a primary feature of Victorian novels by women is the urgent need for the novel to do something, to break the barrier between literature and rhetoric, to become a platform from which the woman [denied the opportunity of public speech] could speak" (206).

It has been the tendency of critics not to view texts as "authors' instruments for provoking real-world action" (Warhol 195), though "the belief that literature is above politics and does not act directly to bring about results" (Tompkins 210) was not always held; Tompkins reminds us that "in the Renaissance, literature's effects [were] often conceived in socio-political terms -- effects on the dispositions of princes, on the national self-image, on the moral climate of the age" (210). More recently, however, critics have tended to valorize aesthetics, rather than the coercive, rhetorical, transactional<sup>5</sup> elements of writing, and when the latter are considered, it is from the point of view of individual response, not social influence.

I suggest that in Eliot's hands, direct address, as an aspect of engaging narration, reconciles literature and rhetoric in an attempt to persuade the individual reader to a certain point of view *vis-a-vis* aspects of the novel, and to carry forth the lessons learned therein -- tolerance and sympathy -- to the world beyond the novel. Only through her

writing could she hope to influence society. Denied every sphere of public influence save writing, she "enters readers' minds and consciences"<sup>6</sup> in an effort to encourage what she termed "the human sanctities."<sup>7</sup> The engaging narratorial interventions of her didactic art sometimes take the form of prudential discursive generalizations about the human condition which "creat[e] pauses, punctuating the novel with gravely reflective meditation" (Isobel Armstrong 117); during such pauses in the narrative, the reader focuses with the narrator on matters which have relevance to more than merely the world of the novel: guided to do so by the sage-like comments of the narrator, the reader reflects on what it means to be human. On other occasions the narratorial comment is made in language which leaves no doubt that someone (the "you" in the text) is being addressed directly. But who is "you"? Is it the textual construct which the word "reader" tends to imply in recent criticism and theory, or can we fly in the face of critics and theorists and risk suggesting that "you" can signify the actual reader? Most critics maintain that "authorial 'intrusions' are flaws in the fabric of the fictional illusion, and hence are offensive on aesthetic grounds"<sup>8</sup> (Warhol 196). As Warhol puts it,

Each of these generations of critics [who condemn direct address] has turned its collective back upon the implied presence of actual readers in authorial intrusions. They all presumably consider such a presence inappropriate in a text that could be upheld as belonging to the category of literature. (196)

Warhol argues, as I do, that the "you" posited by an engaging narrator can be identified with by the actual reader who holds the book in his/her hand, feeling "in complete sympathy with the characters and the narrator's assertions about them" (199), and that winning readers over is the goal of such narrators, in contrast to those who employ distancing strategies such as ironic tone. Far from being aesthetical flaws, instances of direct address are integral strategies in the artistic achievement of didactic realists.

As Emile Benevise has shown, the personal pronouns "I" and "you" are "shifters", with no fixed referents, their referential meaning being fixed only at the moment of discourse (Warhol 253). "I" stands for the speaking subject, the narrator, and creates the illusion of a presence speaking. A homodiegetic narrator, as a character/participant in the diegesis, is legitimately the "I" of the text, literally the speaking subject; a heterodiegetic narrator, however, is "a creature in and out of the text. No 'real person' speaks in such a literary transaction; in a serious sense, it is the text itself which speaks. But unless a real person picks up the text and reads it, no interaction can occur" (199). This is true of any text, of course, but in the case of those containing the trope of direct address, "you" stands for the addressee, who could either be the narratee encoded in the text, or the actual reader. Warhol's argument that "novels with engaging narrators point to a difference between two

possible and distinct referents for 'you': the 'you' that is utterly the product of the text's internal structures, and that other 'you,' the one that is inextricably tied to systems of signification outside the text, to real persons who find their social beings engaged by the narrator's address" (199) is a valid one, and is crucial to the appreciation of the art of didactic realism.

Direct address intervenes in the narrative, causing the reader to disengage temporarily from the story and pay attention to what is being said to him/her. Warhol makes the perceptive suggestion (based on Jonathan Culler's work on apostrophe)<sup>9</sup> that direct address is parallel to apostrophe "in its status as an event, a trope that 'makes something happen' in real time" (Warhol 202). By "real time" she means the time of discourse -- writing, or for that matter, reading -- as opposed to narrative time, the latter being disrupted by the narrative intervention (201). As happens with the trope of apostrophe, direct address "shifts a text's emphasis from the time of story to the time of discourse, if only momentarily. For the duration of a narrator's address to 'you,'...the reader's attention is necessarily drawn away from the fictive events being narrated and toward the real situation of narration" (204). Neither apostrophe nor direct address is a "representation of events" -- they are events in themselves. In direct address, the reader is 'present' (not absent as in apostrophe), and direct address is potentially also a catalyst



for another event: the consequence which may result from the exchange of ideas. This consequence, as I have suggested throughout this study, is two-fold: applied to the text, it takes the form of altered perception; applied to life it may translate into action and deeds.<sup>10</sup>

Warhol asserts that the reader, reading a passage of direct address, and having therefore disengaged him/herself from the story, is bound to recognize the story's fictionality; she argues that "to be reminded that a given story is embedded in discourse is to be reminded that it is 'only a story'" (204). I am not entirely convinced, however, that this is necessarily so.<sup>11</sup> It might be more accurate to say that because the time-frame changes (from that of narrative to that of discourse), the reader momentarily switches illusions, stepping from the illusion of reality, conjured up by the story, into the illusion of dialogue with the narrator, conjured up by the text: what he/she is reminded of is that he/she is, in fact, reading. Theoretically, however, the narrative might not necessarily be fiction.<sup>12</sup>

Associated, in critics' minds, with the feminine (even when used by male writers), direct address is 'sensational' in so far as it deliberately appeals to the senses of the reader in order to achieve its didactic purpose. It does not, however, have to be sensational in the pejorative sense that we have come to associate with the word, though in less skilled hands than Eliot's it can be.<sup>13</sup>

Warhol argues that male writers' use of direct address tends to differ in style from that used by female writers, whose narrators use engaging strategies, seeking to form a bond with the reader. In general, she suggests, the narrators of novels written by male writers eschew the intersubjective, conversational tone of female direct address, preferring a more ironic, detached tone. Taking Dickens and Trollope as examples, and implying that they are typically "male" in their use of the trope, Warhol asserts that they "for the most part resisted the intimate relation between the narrative "I" and "you," the implied dynamic of actual readers' presence, the insistent and earnest 'special pleading' that constitute the engaging narrator's characteristic moves"<sup>14</sup> (134). She makes the interesting point that direct address, in male hands, usually addresses the reader obliquely, in the third-person, as "the reader" or "my reader" rather than directly, as "you." This third-person address is similar to that of apostrophe<sup>15</sup> (203), and imbues the discourse with a tone of emotional detachment; in addition to this, by avoiding calling the reader "you" (which implies presence), and by choosing instead the oblique third-person mode of address,<sup>16</sup> the narrator denies the physical presence of "the reader," stressing, in fact, his or her *absence* from the "narrative transaction" (137).

Distancing narrators go to great lengths to avoid the intimate tone, and, as it were, personal contact, which is

implicit in calling the reader "you," frequently "construct[ing] passive sentences to avoid speaking directly to "you"" (138). Warhol suggests that "we can recognize a significant difference in stance" between the narrators created by female and male writers, by contrasting the frequency of third-person references with their relative scarcity in female authored texts which are didactic in purpose.<sup>17</sup> (138). Warhol considers several examples of passive construction and oblique address taken from Trollope, but two will here suffice to illustrate how the reader is "written out" of such addresses (138). She suggests, for example, that Trollope's "I think that she may be forgiven" (Can You Forgive Her? 730) and "It need hardly be explained to the reader" (632) would have been likely to have been expressed, if written by Eliot or Gaskell, as "I think you may forgive her" and "I need hardly explain to you" (138), which would create a closeness, rather than a distance, between narrator and reader. In my own opinion, had Eliot written the first example, she would probably have phrased it "I think we may forgive her," side-stepping the second-person "you" in favour of the inclusive first-person plural, "we," to forge an even stronger bond between reader and narrator.

It cannot be denied that many readers today are ill at ease when confronted by narrative interventions which contain direct address, and this may partly be because of the

"twentieth century appropriation of direct address by the media" (Warhol 206). We are bombarded by hypocritical advertising, for example, which purports to care about the "you" it addresses. Hortatory messages of television evangelists speak directly to "you" as well, as do "sensational" programmes which are more genuinely interested in ratings and market share than they would have "you" believe. These instances of the use of direct address are exploitive, condescending or even patronizing in attitude, and 'confessional' or admonitory in tone -- examples of verbal chicanery: shallow manipulative discourse masquerading as sincerity and concern. Direct address of this sort is "discourse that attempts to spark action" (197), just as the direct address of narrative interventions is, but the difference lies in the level of sincerity behind the address. While the trope is always used as a means, quite literally, to get the attention of the reader/listener, and usually to "engage" the addressee, when Eliot and her ilk employ it to this end it is because of a genuine desire to do good. Not so with the media of today, which all too often use the trope for dubious purposes inspired by questionable motives. Such 'rhetorical quackery relies on the addressee's taking the message to heart, or, as Warhol punningly puts it, taking "the pronoun personally" (197).

A good book is "the precious life-blood of a master

spirit,"<sup>18</sup> and Eliot's spirit lives on in her work, guiding each new generation of readers, by means of narrative interventions and commentary, through the text, and in the lessons of life.

In The Mill on the Floss, Maggie reads a book<sup>19</sup> which has been held and marked by "some hand, now forever quiet" (382), and she reads "where the quiet hand pointed" accepting the direction of the absent guide. In scattering her texts not with "strong pen and ink marks" but with narratorial interventions in which she offers the reader direction, and with judicious comments on the human condition, Eliot stretches her own "quiet hand" toward us, as if inviting us to accept her guidance, to join her in a narrative journey of companionable partnership. Maggie reads "where the quiet hand seemed to point, hardly conscious that she was reading -- seeming rather to listen" (383), and so it is with us. We read Eliot's novels and feel included in an ongoing narrative conversation which interpolates us into the text by addressing us directly. The "quiet hand" which has marked passages in Thomas a Kempis "speaks" to Maggie, not in words, but in signs left by someone who felt inspired by the sayings of the saint, and she absorbs the wisdom to which her attention has been drawn. Reading Eliot, our attention is drawn and held by comments which encourage us to reflect on the narrative and meditate on its relevance to life. The book Maggie reads was "written down by a hand that waited for the heart's

prompting...and so it remains to all time, a lasting record of human needs and human consolations" (384-5). So, too, do Eliot's novels "remain to all time," and for the same reason. Like Wordsworth's Poet, she "binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time..."<sup>20</sup>, and her words strike us like the silent voice which comes to Maggie, as "the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience" (384). This is the secret of her art.

1. Warhol argues that there exists in critics' minds a split between "literature" and "rhetoric", "the first being language that functions entirely for art's sake, the second being language with designs upon the extratextual world" (Warhol 194). Perhaps this attitude has its foundation in Aristotle's Poetics, in which he distinguishes between poetry, which he defines as a mode of imitation, and rhetorical discourse, which he sees in terms of the art of persuasion. Whatever the reason for the split, direct address, once regarded as a legitimate means of "gain[ing] access to an audience's emotional or intellectual response" (194) (perhaps Horace's influence can be felt here), has been out of favour with critics for two centuries. It is interesting to speculate upon why this should be so, and there are probably many reasons. Critic Lionel Gossman suggests that the split between the realms of literature and rhetoric had its origin in the "mystification" (as Warhol calls it) of poetry that began towards the end of the neoclassic period in the eighteenth century (194).

It occurs to me that Wordsworth subverted neoclassical principles concerning decorum, diction and poetic language when he made a strong argument, in Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802), for the Poet's being "a man speaking to men" of "incidents and situations from common life" in language that articulated what Keats was to call "the true voice of feeling." According to Wordsworth, the language of poetry should be close to the language "really spoken by men." Emotion is the key, rather than vocabulary and syntax; the language used by the ordinary man and the Poet alike should express "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." This is exactly what direct address strives to do, in my view.

Warhol points out that the perceived opposition between

literary and non-literary language has been "exploded" (192) by Stanley Fish who argues that "there is no such thing as ordinary language, at least in the naive sense often intended by that term" (Is There a Text in this Class? (Cambridge:Harvard UP), 1980, 106). Semioticians and other theorists would agree that "no use of language enjoys the direct, unproblematically representational relation to reality that nonliterary language has been presumed to have" (Warhol 193).

2. As I have discussed elsewhere, some instances of direct address are metaleptic, playing with levels of diegesis. Others, however, merely signal the "intensified presence" of the narrator by using "I" and "you," creating an intimate, conversational pause in the narrative.

3. Though male, as well as female, writers use direct address, Warhol contends that the way in which the trope is used differs, depending on the gender of the writer, female writers tending to produce novels with engaging narrators who draw the reader in; male writers' narrators usually achieving a distancing effect which holds the reader at bay.

4. "The Reader in History," p.210, in Jane P. Tompkins, ed. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore and London:Johns Hopkins University Press), 1980.

5. Louise M. Rosenblatt describes reading as a transactional process in The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional Theory of the Literary Work, defining "transaction" as "an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are...aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (Rosenblatt 17). She differentiates between two types of reading, "efferent" and "aesthetic." In the former, the reader reads for information, his/her attention directed outward toward concepts which have relevance in the "real" world, or to actions which will take place after reading. Examples would include reading a recipe, or a history book. In "aesthetic" reading, the "reader's primary concern is with what happens during the actual reading event" (Rosenblatt 24). In this type of reading, "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (25). As Warhol points out, in making these distinctions, Rosenblatt "shifts the emphasis from dividing up literary and non-literary texts to distinguishing between literary and non-literary reading" (note 3, p. 220). I contend that the two types of reading are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that a blend of "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading is called for in reading George Eliot, and indeed any didactic realist novel, as "what [the reader] is living through during his [or her] relationship with that particular text" is supposed to

influence how he/she actually lives, and his/her attention is directed by the narratorial interventions to concepts which extend beyond the pages of the book, and to "actions" (emotional responses and attitudes) which constitute moral choices.

6. Robert A. Colby, Fiction with a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels (Bloomington: Indiana UP), 1967, p.19. Quoted by Warhol, p.170. The comment would apply also to other female didactic realist novelists, such as Mrs Gaskell and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

7. The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol.IV, p. 301.

8. These include critics such as "Percy Lubbock, his Impressionist contemporaries, and his New Critical heirs" (Warhol 196). Even Barbara Hardy and Wayne Booth, who concede that authorial intervention is "essential to certain novelists' 'art'...[nevertheless] treat authorial address as something the novelist must regulate, something that can hurt a text if it is allowed to get out of control" (Warhol 196). It is interesting to note that some contemporary or modern writers (such as Andre Gide and Thomas Mann), and critics (such as Jane Tompkins and Bina Freiwald), and poets (such as Bronwen Wallace) occasionally use direct address, and to great effect.

Warhol makes the interesting suggestion that "if 'legitimate art' must be kept separate from "discourse that attempts to spark action" (197) -- advertisement, oratory, propaganda or preaching -- one way to maintain that separation is to insist that the "you" in truly literary texts has no extra-literary referent" (197).

. By transforming the reader who is hailed in literature into a fictional construct, something whose existence is strictly circumscribed within art, reader-centred critics and structuralists-- from Booth to Iser to Genette to Riffaterre--have developed sophisticated ways of talking about the "you" in texts by deflecting any implication that the pronoun might ever be a signifier for real persons. The race of readers they have spawned serve as models for the way in which actual people might read, but in the critical discourse where they are born, they do not represent actual readers. (Warhol 197-8).

Warhol provides a selection of names coined for readers who are textual constructs, remarking that the

textual reader may be conceived as an Implied



Reader (Booth and Iser), a Model Reader (Eco), an Average Reader/Superreader (Riffaterre), an Informed Reader (Fish), a Competent Reader (Culler), a Strong Reader/Misreader (Bloom), a Perverse Reader (Barthes), a Deconstructive Reader (Derrida), a Feasting Reader (Hartman), a Resisting Reader (Fetterley), a Created Reader (Preston), a Determined Reader (Peterson), or, as Robert Rogers (whose witty list of 'readers' [she has] incorporated into this catalogue) calls it, the Amazing Reader.

None of these appellations, as Warhol stresses, "stands for the person who holds the book and reads." (198)

9. Jonathan Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1981.

10. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, hoped that if she could move enough people to feel compassion for slaves, abolition of slavery might be a possible consequence. Mrs Gaskell hoped that readers would be sufficiently affected by her novels to bring about social reform, and George Eliot hoped that a consequence of reading her novels might be "the extension of our sympathies."

11. If I may use the analogy of television, one might be engaged in watching a factual programme, a documentary for example, which is interrupted by the obligatory advertisements which assuredly make use of direct address in the hope of manipulating the viewer's response. As in narrative interventions, when the reader is removed from narrative time to that of discourse, the television viewer is similarly wrenched from the time of the documentary's "narrative," and confronted with the discursive time of the advertising hiatus, before being restored once more to the narrative time of the documentary. The fact that the "time" changes, and one's focus shifts does not, however, in itself result in one doubting the veracity of the programme's content.

12. Although it is rare to encounter direct address in non-fictional texts, it is not impossible. Jane P. Tompkin's essay "Me and My Shadow" is a case in point, as is Bina Freiwald's "'This isn't one to be told/in the third person': Wallace's Life-Stories," though in these cases the direct address frames, rather than intervenes in, their essays.

13. Even Eliot, herself, can mishandle direct address (though rarely, and only early in her career), as in the overly melodramatic scene (which is a somewhat unhappy blend of free indirect discourse and direct address) when Caterina finds her

lover dead ("Mr Gilfil's Love Story," Scenes of Clerical Life, chapter XIII). Similarly, Mrs Gaskell's earlier writing contains examples of arch direct address. Harriet Beecher Stowe is, arguably, guilty sometimes of being too melodramatic in overtly manipulating readers' sentiments in the justifiable cause of propaganda. Nor are these faults exclusively the property of female writers; Warhol refers to instances of "oratorical sentimentality [in] Dickens and Thackeray, [and] the 'intrusive' chattiness of Kingsley and Trollope" (205-206).

14. One would have to concede, as Warhol does, that Dickens sometimes did, in fact, use engaging intervention, as in the emotionally charged death scene of Jo, the crossing-sweeper, in Bleak House (Warhol 153), and also in the death scene of Little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop.

15. Warhol explains that "Apostrophe is a 'fictive,' 'fictionalized' manipulation of address. The "you" to whom it speaks, whether the West Wind, the Muse, a deceased and honored poet...is indisputably a literary construct" (202).

16. This mode of "third-person" address (for example, "the reader" or "my reader,") was, of course, "a firmly entrenched convention of nineteenth century prose style" (Warhol 140), but this fact notwithstanding, female novelists seem, for the most part, to have adapted the style of direct address to their own ends, choosing second-person address ("you") to foster the sense of conversation, rather than third-person address which smacks more of the lecture circuit.

17. Adam Bede, for example, refers to "the reader" only twice, whereas Trollope's Can You Forgive Her? has twenty-one references to "the reader," despite the fact that the title alone would lead the reader to expect a conversational style of direct address to be sustained within the text in the same way as it is evoked in the title (Warhol 138).

18. John Milton, Areopagitica (1644).

19. Thomas a Kempis.

20. Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802).

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