

## **Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major Characters in *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Middlemarch***

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**ملخص:** تعتمد معظم دراسات التحليل النفسي على النظريات النفسية لفرويد و ما بعد فرويد لتحليل الأعمال الأدبية، و لكن تهدف هذه الورقة لاستخدام النظريات النفسية في القرن التاسع عشر او ما قبل فرويد لتحليل الشخصيات الرئيسية في ثلاث روايات معروفة لجورج ايليوت (ماري آن ايفانس) وهي *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Middlemarch* و حيث إن ماري ايفانس (جورج ايليوت) توفيت قبل أن ينشر فرويد أي من أعماله، فإن هذه الورقة تفترض و تدلل على معرفة ايليوت الكافية بالنظريات النفسية في القرن التاسع عشر بل و استخدامها لتلك النظريات في بناء الشخصيات في رواياتها الثلاثة المذكورة. تبدأ الورقة بتقديم النظريات النفسية في القرن التاسع عشر و المتعلقة بتحليل الروايات المذكورة بشكل مختصر قبل أن تبدأ الدراسة بالتحليل النفسي للشخصيات بناء على تلك النظريات.

### **استخدام النظريات النفسية في القرن التاسع عشر لتحليل الشخصيات**

#### **الرئيسية في ثلاث روايات لجورج ايليوت**

**Abstract:** While most contemporary psychoanalysts use the Freudian and post-Freudian psychological theories to analyze literary works, the focus of this article is using the pre-Freudian, nineteenth-century psychology to analyze George Eliot's (Mary Ann Evans) major characters in *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*. The article will attempt to explain Eliot's characters to the reader from within and without: their motives and impulses on one hand and the external forces shaping them on the other. The basic assumption of this article is that George Eliot utilized the nineteenth-century psychological theories known to her to construct her characters. She experimented some of the ideas of Association psychology to show her characters' psychological flaws, limitations, and to maintain their humanness. The article will, first and briefly, highlight the important nineteenth-century psychological theories relevant to Eliot's fiction in particular before moving to the analysis of the novels.

“A character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.” (*Middlemarch* 791)

### **Introduction**

Modern science and psychology started to thrive in the Victorian period, and had its great impact on the human life and literature. Victorian science has recently received substantial attention from literary critics. Much of the critical work on the contemporary Victorian science and its relation to the Victorian novel highlights the impact of Charles Darwin. George Levine, for example, in *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*, examines the ways in which evolutionary theory was assimilated or resisted by novelists like Dickens, Trollope and Conard. For Levine, the Victorian novel is the cultural twin to the project of Victorian science. Many other studies in the twentieth century have focused on the influence of science on George Eliot’s fiction. In one of the first, Bernard Paris traced the flaws in Eliot’s realism to the conflict between science and Eliot’s moral vision.

Three recent studies have looked more closely at both the nature of scientific theories that influenced Eliot and the nature of that influence. Tess Cosslett argues that the values of nineteenth-century science—among which she includes humility and unification—were not only in conflict with those of imaginative literature, but actually formed the basis of a myth useful to the artist. Sally Shuttleworth, noting that earlier critics such as Bernard Paris attributed to science a relatively fixed position in George Eliot’s work, posits that the radical change in Eliot’s social theory and narrative method can be correlated with changes in the scientific theories of the time. Gillian Beer explores the imaginative consequences of evolutionary theory for Eliot and others in *Darwin’s Plots*. She concludes that during the Victorian period there existed a shared discourse among Victorian intellectuals, which allowed ideas, metaphors, myths and narrative patterns to move “rapidly and freely to and fro between scientists and non-scientists” (7).

Only more recently has Victorian psychology begun to receive attention, mostly within the field of literary studies.<sup>(1)</sup> As for George Eliot and psychology, the most recent study is Michael Davis’s book *George Eliot*

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<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. Jenny Bourne’s *The Secret Theatre of Home: Wilki Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 1988), Sally Shuttleworth’s *Charlotte Bronte and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), and Nicholas Dames’s *Amnesiac selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001).

## **Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major**

*and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (2006). In this study, Davis highlights Eliot's interest in physiological psychology; the work of the mind and the body. He examines Eliot's interest in states of consciousness (instinctual, reflexive and unconscious) and their relation to the will and faith especially in *Daniel Deronda* and *Romola*.

Moving beyond these studies, my argument in this article traces Eliot's application of contemporary psychology to the construction of her characters to make them as natural and realistic as possible. I will focus on the pre-Freudian, nineteenth-century psychoanalysis to analyze Eliot's major characters in *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*. The focus will be on the psychological method that Eliot used to explain her characters from within and without: their motives and impulses on one hand and external forces shaping them on the other. I have limited myself to investigate that material which relates to the influence of psychology on Eliot's construction of characters. Yet, other significant studies and interpretations can be constructed in many other areas of influence: involuntary thoughts, problematic memory, volition, dreams, intoxication, and a number of others.

According to *The Cambridge History of Philosophy*, psychology was an established subject throughout nineteenth-century Britain. It was the study of the mind that is conveyed in textbooks and lectures: "Standard topics included the senses, imagination, memory, intellect, will, bodily motion, the nature of the mind, and the question of mind-body interaction" (Hatfield 93). Early in the nineteenth century, psychology was a division of philosophy and was known under various titles including "moral science," "mental science," "theory of the mind," "physiology of the mind," and "theory of the soul" (93). Prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century, advances in the physiology of the nervous system, phrenology and what is currently called 'Association Psychology' took place in the fields of science and philosophy.

Through the introspection of the human behavior, Association psychologists tried to explain human cognition. They assumed that sequences of ideas are experienced during thinking; one idea leads to the next and one experience is associated to and affects another, due to a pairing process. Howard Warren, in his book *A History of the Association Psychology*, traces Associationism through four periods. He says that Aristotle provided an account of memory which holds images that resemble the things being memorized. Acts of recollection, for Aristotle, happen because one change is of nature to occur after another. Aristotle considered

three relationships between starting image and successor: similarity, opposition, and temporal contiguity. Aristotle developed these laws of association to account for memory, but the phrase ‘association of ideas’ was “first used by John Locke in his “Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (Warren 3).

While, George Berkeley (1685-1753), David Hume (1711-1776), and David Hartely (1705-1757) concentrated on developing the laws of association in the eighteenth-century, the nineteenth-century Associationism was a transition from philosophy to psychology. James Mill (1773-1836), the British philosopher and historian who published several articles in the *Westminster Review*<sup>(1)</sup>, published an important book in the field of studying the human mind in 1829. The *Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind* played a significant role in the history of psychology. In a chapter on “the association of ideas,” Mill, like John Locke, considered that human perception is phenomenal that is perceived by the five senses, but Mill emphasized that “sensations were one of the primary states of consciousness; ideas were the other” (Flugel 1964). In other words, ideas, which are the other state of the human consciousness, result from phenomenal sensations. Human beings have phenomenal cognition:

Our ideas spring up, or exist, in the order in which the sensations existed, of which they are the copies. This is the general law of the ‘Association of Ideas:’ by which term, let it be remembered, nothing is here meant to be expressed, but the order of occurrence. (qtd. in Boring 213)

Association is, therefore; a matter of concurrence or contiguity. Sensory contiguities are copied in a form of contiguities of ideas. Association psychology was developed later by psychologists like Alexander Bain and William Carpenter.

Alexander Bain (1818-1903), who corresponded in several letters with George Eliot and published some of his articles in *The Westminster Review*, was among the first distinguished psychologists in nineteenth-century Britain. He recorded his contribution to psychological thought in two books: *The Senses and the Intellect* appeared in 1855 and *The Emotions and the Will* in 1859. He believed that complex thought, emotions, and actions could be analyzed into simpler components, which were the result of associations formed by the human experience. He considered that human conscious thoughts are repetitions of unconscious states of mind that humans gained in the course of their experience. In his book, *The Emotions and the Will*, he said, “Conscience is the imitation within ourselves of the government

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(<sup>1</sup>) A journal that was co-edited by George Eliot.

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

without us. It is moulded upon external authority as its type; and the formative period is early childhood" (qtd. in Hearnshaw 10). In other words, the human unconscious is formed by memory by means of association.

One of Bain's important contributions to psychology was his stress on the role of memory in shaping the human character. He pointed out that as the nervous system is capable of spontaneous action at the presence of an external stimulus (reflex), human actions are stimulated by and associated with conscious and unconscious memory. In this fashion Bain explained that the human's present actions were not separated from his or her past, but consciously or unconsciously related to past experiences formed in "early childhood." He also considered that imagination is a conscious state of memory and stimulated by it: "ideas of memory have a place in the continuous chain of our remembered life; ideas of imagination are consciously combined from different ideas of memory taken out of their memory-setting and aggregated under special motive" (qtd. in Warren 110). This means that ideas of imagination are formed in a distinguished body by the direct influence of the memory which works as a motive for imagination to work.

William Carpenter (1813-1885) was also one of the leading figures in the field of psychology. He, along with a group of physiological psychologists, studied the mental physiology. He wrote several books in the field of physiological psychology, but his main contribution to psychology was his idea of the "unconscious cerebration," which refers to "the activity of the cortical neurons which are not associated with conscious changes" (Hearnshaw 21). This is a mental process by which people seem to do the right thing or come up with the right answer without conscious effort. It is a reasoning mechanism in the brain that is 'unconscious' to the person himself. He expressed his ideas of unconscious cerebration in his book *Mind and Brain* published in 1859; the same year in which Charles Darwin published his book *Origin of Species*.

Darwin's idea of heredity and evolution gave rise to the evolutionary associationism in psychology, which had its supporters and theoreticians at that time such as Herbert Spenser and George Lewes. Charles Darwin, like both Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), believed that animals' traits are transmitted to offspring (heredity), but he added that characteristics acquired, modified or developed during an animal's lifetime are also passed to offspring. This means that variations in animals due to evolution are also inheritable. Darwin's theory of heredity, known as pangenesis, attempted to account for both the process of heredity and for the variety of traits seen among offspring.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), one of George Eliot's friends who introduced her to George Henry Lewes, was an evolutionary psychologist. In his book *Principles of Psychology* (1855), he maintained that "mind can be understood only by showing how mind is evolved" (129). He assumed that the human cognition is associated with "psychological causation" there is no separate, independent case of psychological illness without a causal relation to other conscious or unconscious cases:

As we cannot isolate a single organ of a living body, and deal with it as though it had a life independent of the rest, so, from the organized structure of our cognitions, we cannot cut out one, and proceed as though it had survived the separation. (137)

The cogitative mental processes have an organized structure and cannot be separated from each other. Spencer also regarded the mind as "a means of adjusting or adapting the organism [the individual both body and mind] to environmental circumstances" (Hatfield 95). Spencer defined life as "the continuous adjustment of internal relations to outer relations" and intelligence as "the adjustment of inner to outer relations" (*Principles of Psychology* 374, 486).

Similarly, George Henry Lewes believed in the adaptation of the organism to the environmental conditions, but he further analyzed the human mental phenomena. In his book *The Problems of Life and Mind II* (1875), he considered that perception is the synthesis of all the sensation of human beings; this includes secondary elements (images) as well as primary (sensation). He also considered that memory differs from perception: memory is a grouping of image elements as they occurred in the past. Imagination, on the other hand, has reference to the present or the future, not to the past.<sup>(1)</sup> More importantly is Lewes's hint to the unconscious thought of the human beings. He used the image of a web to express his theory that the mind does not always follow the logical process of conscious thought: "the attitude of Sensorium is a fluctuating attitude which successively. . . brings now one and the other point into daylight, leaving others momentarily obscured though still impressing the sentient organism" (qtd. in Shuttleworth 298). In Lewes's view, there is a ceaseless action of unconscious mental activity beneath the surface of consciousness that determines the human behavior.

Prior to George Henry Lewes, the notion of unconscious thought appeared in the writings of the nineteenth century by the German

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<sup>(1)</sup> For further information, see Howard Warren's *History of Association Psychology*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967. 137-153.

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

Philosopher Eduard Von Hartmann (1842-1906), who published a book, the *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), that "was read by George Lewes when it first appeared" (Shuttleworth 287). In this work Hartmann focused on the phenomenon of the human unconscious, in which both reason and will, or rationalism and irrationalism are united inside the human organism. He considered that the struggle between reason and will leads to consciousness.

### Eliot and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Psychology

George Eliot's knowledge and understanding of contemporary science allowed her to speak with familiarity and authority about most of the important scientific theorists of her time. As a co-editor of the *Westminster Review*, she had the task of finding contributors on issues of current intellectual interest, which brought her in direct contact with contemporary scientific writing. Her relationship with George Henry Lewes, Spencer, and Bain further assured her exposure throughout her life to contemporary science, especially psychology. Alexander Welsh, one of the modern critics to emphasize the importance of psychology in Eliot's works, argues that her attention is "on the possible or partial awareness of what is still hidden, and the passage from unconscious to conscious thought" (343). In other words, Eliot's attention is not only focused on the unconscious responses of characters, but also on what is possibly or partially known to them, and how that moves to become completely conscious actions.

Throughout her career, George Eliot emphasized psychology as a determinant of characters as well as other elements of novelistic form to explain her novels. In 1857 she wrote to her publisher John Blackwood on *Scenes of Clerical Life*,

I am unable to alter anything in relation to the delineation or development of character, as my stories always grow out of psychological conception of dramatis personae. For example the behavior of Caterina in the gallery is essential to my conception of her nature and to the development of that nature in the plot. (*Letters* 2: 299)

The psychological aspects of any character are, then, essential to the realistic development of both the character itself and the plot. Similarly, in 1860 Eliot wrote of *The Mill on the Floss*, "if the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble but liable to great error . . . then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology" (3: 318). Ethics of art, according to Eliot, should not contradict the realistic representation of characters, which requires the artist to show them as subject to errors;

otherwise, they will not be psychologically realistic. Moreover, in 1863, she wrote to R. H. Hutton, on *Romola*,

It is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself. The psychological causes which prompted me to give such details of Florentine life and history as I have given, are precisely the same as those which determined me in giving the details of English village life in ‘*Silas Marner*,’ or the ‘*Dodson*’ life.” (4: 97)

Eliot most clearly adapts a psychological approach to construct her characters and show their humaneness, errors, and limitations. She does not introduce her characters as products of heredity only, but as an outcome of a collaboration between both the inside qualities of the human beings and the outside conditions surrounding them. Eliot gives a profound sense of the inner life of the characters, which determines their outward actions. To portray the inner life of her characters, Eliot uses an analytic technique; she usually suggests psychological issues through the dramatic presentation of character’s speech or action, but adds to them a large element of explanation: She shows her characters’ minds in action and uses the epistemological function of her narration to add interpretive comments. The following section will attempt to illustrate Eliot’s usage of the principles of Association psychology of the nineteenth century to construct realistic characters of her novels. The analysis will use the psychological terms used by James Mill, Alexander Bain, William Carpenter, Herbert Spencer, George Lewes, and Edward Von Hartman, to analyze the major characters in *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*.

#### **Adam Bede’s Character**

At the heart of *Adam Bede* Eliot employs psychology to interpret the thought and behavior of characters. Adam Bede represents Eliot’s first experiments in the application of association psychology in the creation of the novel. The characters of both Adam and Hetty remind me of her criticism of Dickens’ characters:

If he could give us their psychological character—their conceptions of life, and their emotions—with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies. (“Natural History” 271)

It is just that “psychological character” that is subject to ethical errors, psychological flaws, and cognitive limitations which Eliot attempts to explore in *Adam Bede*.

George Eliot constructed Adam’s character around the principles of association psychology. She constructed him with an internal struggle

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

between his will and reason. Throughout the course of his character's development, Adam, the carpenter, suffers a state of what William Carpenter called "unconscious cerebration" a mental mechanism that makes him feel doing the right thing without conscious effort. This cerebration, unconscious to him, makes him lack the sound judgment and involves him in self-deception. Adam, at the end of the struggle, achieves a state of consciousness that enables him understand things by his reason more than by his will.

At the beginning of the novel, Eliot constructed Adam with partially phenomenal thinking; he believes in the outside appearances of objects and measures them precisely like a scientist or a painter. Before Adam encounters captain Donnithorne and Hetty kissing in the woods, he is described as follows:

Adam's perceptions were more at home with trees than-with other objects. He kept them in his memory, as a painter does, with all the flecks and knots in their bark, all the curves and angles of their boughs; and had often calculated the height and contents of a trunk to a nicety, as he stood looking at it. (341)

But Adam is less confident of his accuracy when he turns from objects to human beings. Adam tells his mother about the beauty of Dinah, "the figures tell us a fine deal, and we couldn't go far without'em, but they don't tell us about folks's feelings. It's a nicer job to calculate them" (185). He admits that he is good at calculating or reading objects, but not the "print" of Dinah's face. In a conversation with Rev. Irwin, Adam struggles with the complexity of psychological causality: "I know there's a deal in a man's inward life as you can't measure by the square, and say, 'do this and that'll follow,' and, 'do that and this'll follow'" (226). George Eliot gives a direct commentary on Adam's character saying that he is a man who is "happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves" (557).

Eliot makes Adam, who believes in the outward signs, to take Hetty literally at the face value: "the deep love he had for that sweet, rounded, blossom-like, dark-eyed Hetty, of whose inward self he was really very ignorant, came out of the very strength of his nature" (399). The "very strength of" Adam's nature is constructed to be deceived by the outward appearances of things. Only at the dance in Arthur's birthday-feast, when Hetty's hidden necklace breaks and the expensive locket which Arthur has given her falls to the floor, does Adam begin to suspect the inadequacy of his interpretations: "A puzzled alarm had taken possession of him. . . . He could only feel with

a terrible pang that there was something in Hetty's life unknown to him"(332).

Despite this concrete evidence of Hetty's secret life that is unknown to him, Eliot shows Adam's internal conflict; his reason compels him to realize that Hetty has a secret life of her own, while his will that loves Hetty, justifies Hetty's actions and makes them acceptable to his mind:

After all, he might be a fool, making a great misery out of a trifle. Hetty, fond of finery as she was, might have bought the thing herself. It looked too expensive for that - it looked like the things on white satin in the great jeweller's shop at Rosseter. But Adam had very imperfect notions of the value of such things, and he thought it could certainly not cost more than a guinea. Perhaps Hetty had had as much as that in Christmas-boxes, and there was no knowing but she might have been childish enough to spend it in that way; she was such a young thing, and she couldn't help loving finery ! But then, why had she been so frightened about it at first, and changed colour so, and afterwards pretended not to care? O, that was because she was ashamed of his seeing that she had such a smart thing - she was conscious that it was wrong for her to spend her money on it, and she knew that Adam disapproved of finery. It was a proof she cared about what he liked and disliked. . . . And so Adam went to bed comforted, having woven for himself an ingenious web of probabilities - the surest screen a wise man can place between himself and the truth. (333- 34)

Here, self-deception takes the form of rationalization. The passage itself is a mental debate in which Eliot makes Adam move back and forth from argument to counter argument. But the debate is not really genuine because Adam's will has unconsciously predetermined the outcome of the conflict in favor of his will and comforting illusions. His "unconscious cerebration" makes him a fool's paradise in which he does not need to see the truth just as he does not see the obvious implications of the obvious evidence.

As Hetty's child and secret grow inside her, those close to her notice signs of change in her character, yet fail to know the reasons of change: "Mrs Poyser thought she noticed a surprising improvement in Hetty. . . . She thought much less about her dress, and went after the work quite eagerly, without any telling. And it was wonderful how she never wanted to go out now" (397).

Adam, despite his knowledge of Hetty's affair with Captain Donnithorne, is equally ignorant; he perceives signs of "a change: the cheeks were as pink as ever, and she smiled as much as she had ever done of late, but there was something different in her eyes, in the expression of her face, in all her movements, Adam thought - something harder, older, less child-like" (398).

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

Adam, as Eliot says of him later, "was not at all sagacious in his interpretations" (399). His will deceives his reason again by giving false interpretation of facts: "'Poor thing!' he said to himself, that's allays likely. It's because she's had her first heart-ache. . . . Thank God for that!"

After Eliot makes Adam pass through many actions of misinterpretations, self illusions, and misunderstandings that are products of his internal conflict and "unconscious cerebration," she brings him nearer to understand Hetty's reality: "He saw the whole history now by that terrible illumination which the present sheds back upon the past" (453). The growth of Adam's nature and the lessons of his experience have given him a new perspective from which to view what is external to him. His will gets weaker and his reason wins the battle; while Adam is on the way to meet Dinah on the hill near the end of the novel, Eliot says,

No story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather, we who read it are no longer the same interpreters; and Adam this morning brought with him new thoughts through that grey country - thoughts which gave an altered significance to its story of the past.

Adam's new thoughts are the thoughts of his reason rather than his will. Adam sees the past, in which his will urged him love Hetty blindly, in a different manner. The new consciousness he gains is the view of his reason that liberates him from the pressure of his misleading will.

### Hetty Sorrel's Character

The narcissistic Hetty Sorrel is Eliot's chief experimentation in the field of human consciousness. Hetty's narcissism is the product of both her self-consciousness and the external forces, unconscious to her, that shaped her personality. Eliot constructed Hetty's character in accordance with James Mill's ideas of phenomenal cognition. Hetty's tragedy lies in her phenomenal<sup>(1)</sup> or sensational consciousness of herself as well as the way she was brought up which unconsciously formed her narcissism.

George Eliot constructed Hetty's character with a sensational consciousness that is composed of a blending of sensory impressions, mental images, and physical responses to her own wants. For example, as Hetty daydreams of

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<sup>(1)</sup> In addition to what James Mill explained in his *Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind*, Phenomena are appearances. A characterization of phenomenal content is a characterization of sensory appearance: how things look, seem, feel, or appear. We have phenomenal conscious states when we see, hear, smell, taste, and have pains. Phenomenal conscious properties include the properties of sensations, feelings, and perceptions, but I would also include thoughts, wants, and emotions. (Block 230)

Arthur, recalling the sensations with which she heard his voice outside the house, and saw him enter, and became conscious that his eyes were fixed on her, and then became conscious that a tall figure, looking down on her with eyes that seemed to touch her, was coming nearer in clothes of beautiful texture, with an odour like that of a flower-garden borne on the evening breeze(145),

she pictures her thought into sensual images that parallels her hopes. She hears a voice, sees him enter, feels his touch and smells his odour like the smell of “a flower-garden borne on the evening breeze.”

The sensual texture of Hetty’s consciousness increases most in Eliot’s description of Hetty’s mind as she struggles through the dark fields in her “Journey of Despair.” Hetty’s consciousness at that moment is composed of sound, touch, and smell:

There were sheep in the next field, . . . and the sound of their movement comforted her, . . . her hand encountered the pricking of the gorsy wall. Delicious sensation! She had found the shelter. . . . It was an ill-smelling close place, but warm. . . . The very consciousness of her own limbs was a delight to her: she turned up her sleeves, and kissed her arms with the passionate love of life. (432-33)

Although multiple feelings and sensations can be felt in such a moment of distress, only a part of it is conscious to Hetty and comprises the physical sensation of things around her.

Hetty’s concept of herself is sensational; something she wants to see, feel and be. The reflection of her physical beauty in the mirror is the most important to her because it makes her look like the picture of the lady in Miss Lydia Donnithorne’s dressing-room:

It was into this small glass that she chose to look first after seating herself. She looked into it, smiling . . . she was going to let down her hair, and make herself look like that picture of a lady in Miss Lydia Donnithorne’s dressing-room. . . . But she pushed it [her hair] all backward, to look like the picture . . . Then she put down her brush and comb, and looked at herself, folding her arms before her, still like the picture. (195)

The physical image of herself as a picture is the only image she is conscious of because her consciousness is only phenomenal. This phenomenal consciousness of Hetty increases her interest in her physical beauty and turns up to be a form of narcissism.

Hetty’s world is one in which the unconscious plays a vital role as well. George Eliot constructed Hetty’s character with narcissistic symptoms,

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

some of which were well-known long before Eliot.<sup>(1)</sup> American Psychiatric Association gives five diagnostic criteria for the Narcissistic Personality Disorder, two of them are found in Hetty's character:

- Preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance or beauty.

- Exhibitionism: the person requiring constant attention and admiration.(317) Eliot does not only show the symptoms of narcissism in Hetty's characters, but also shows the reader the reasons -unconscious to Hetty- that led to the formation of such a character. Following Herbert Spencer's "psychological causation," George Eliot gives a psychological justification for Hetty's narcissism and confirms that there is no separate, independent case of psychological illness without a causal relation to other conscious or unconscious cases.

Hetty grows up hated and unwanted by the Poysers. Mr Poyser's father and Hetty's grandfather, never forgives his daughter, Hetty's mother, for marrying a poor man against his will: "A long unextinguished resentment, which always made the grandfather more indifferent to Hetty than to his son's children. Her mother's fortune had been spent by that good-for-naught Sorrel, and Hetty had Sorrel's blood in her veins" (383). Mrs. Poyser treats Hetty well, but often scolds her vehemently along with the servants. She never treats the orphan niece as an equal to her own children. Though they wish the best for Hetty in marriage, the Poysers do not see her as "a daughter of their own," but as a "penniless niece. For what could Hetty have been but a servant elsewhere, if her uncle had not taken her in and brought her up as a domestic help to her aunt" (143). Hetty occupies a position below the Poysers' children. Therefore, her narcissism works as a self-defense strategy.

Hetty's narcissism is caused by inequality: having lost her own position as daughter, she hates the Poysers' children as rivals and does not care much for the parents who produced them. She has no "loving thought of her second parents—of the children she had helped to tend—of any youthful companion, any pet animal, any relic of her own childhood even" and "did not understand how anybody could be very fond of middle-aged people"(199). Her feelings for Arthur are just a "Cinderella- fantasy in which he plays a god like handsome prince who will magically elevate her above all rivals especially Mary Burge" (Hardy 54).

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<sup>(1)</sup> The term 'narcissism' is adopted from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, which was written in the first century A.D.

Hetty is a psychological realistic portrayal of a dark aspect of an orphaned child's experience. This experience is fostered in the unconscious of Hetty, and she behaves accordingly. Her narcissism is not a product of heredity, but an outcome of the external forces that affected the formation of her character.

#### **Maggie Tulliver's Character**

In *Adam Bede*, Eliot emphasizes the inaccuracy of interpretation on the basis of external appearances. She recalls this inadequacy of interpretation in painting the "physiognomy" of her hero and heroine in *The Mill on the Floss*, Tom and Maggie Tulliver. The narrator says of both of them in the first chapter, "but that same nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness, so that simple people think they can see through her quite well, and all the while she is secretly preparing a refutation of their confident prophecies" (84-85). Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss*, applies Alexander Bain's ideas of the unconscious memory; human present actions are not separated from his past, but consciously or unconsciously related to past experiences formed in the "early childhood." Eliot also tests both Lamarck's and Darwin's ideas of heredity as a factor that determines the human character and behavior.

Eliot, in the novel, is not only interested in what her characters are, but also in what they will become. In *Adam Bede*, readers are introduced to characters while they are physically (but not always mentally) mature while *the Mill* presents the development of Maggie from childhood on. Both Maggie and Tom are placed in a context of past and future, heredity and development. Eliot in *The Mill* explores the role of the memory of the past on shaping the individual consciousness in the future within a social heredity context.

*The Mill on the Floss* is the only one of Eliot's novels in which heredity plays a significant role in defining character. Before we are introduced to Tom and Maggie, they are placed in the context of a Tulliver/ Dodson dichotomy. Mr. Tulliver says to his wife:

[Tom] "is a bit slowish. He takes after your family, Bessy." "Yes, that he does," said Mrs Tulliver, accepting the last proposition entirely on its own merits, "he's wonderful for liking a deal o' salt in his broth. That was my brother's way and my father's before him." "It seems a bit of a pity, though," said Mr Tulliver, "as the lad should take after the mother's side instead o' the little wench [Maggie]. That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't. The little un takes after my side, now." (59-60).

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

Mrs Tulliver, the “merest epitome of the family habits and traditions,” is a “though but mild Dodson” (97). She clearly exists as an individual apart from her hereditary characteristics. Tom is a hardier version of his mother's family: literal and slow-witted. He has the “congenital deficiency of being born with deficient power of apprehending signs and abstractions” (242). Tom's Eton Grammar is incomprehensible to him; it is nothing but “abstractions hideously symbolized” (208). His difficulties with Latin are indicative of his type of thinking: “he was not given to hypothesis and experiment” (210). Tom is also external and stubborn, who does not change his first impressions:

he was a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received: as with all minds in which mere perception predominates over thought and emotion, the external remained to him rigidly what it was in the first instance.

“mere perceptions,” which are direct reflections of the external world, are inadequate without the imaginative abstraction.

Maggie, in contrast, is a warm-hearted, imaginative, and quick-witted Tulliver, who likes metaphors and abstractions. Maggie's mind works antithetically to Tom's. Without knowing any Latin, she grasps the metaphoric meaning of language hidden from him. When Tom informs her that “bonus” means “good,” not “gift,” she replies: “it may mean several things—almost every word does” (214). This what makes her live in literature books than in reality.

Despite the strong influence of heredity on the characteristics of the human being, Eliot does not consider it as the only absolute factor that shapes character. Philip Wakem is a good example; “Tom didn't see how a bad man's son could be very good” (232). Maggie, like Eliot, has a rich sense of complexities of heredity: “I've read of very bad men who had good sons, as well as good parents who had bad children,” (252) she tells Tom. Therefore, our understanding of the factors that determine Maggie's and Tom's identities should go beyond the influence of heredity to reach the psychological influences of experience and environment.

Again, *The Mill* is unique among Eliot's novels because it is the only one to present fully characters' development from child to adult. Philip Wakem is fond of sketching Maggie's portrait. He reveals two pictures, side-by-side, to his father: ““they are the same person,’ said Philip, with calm promptness, “at different ages” (540). Eliot achieves the same function of showing development in the character of Maggie stressing similarity and difference, continuity and change, not in the physical characteristics, but the psychological aspects of Maggie's personality.

In *The Mill*, Eliot's developmental psychology is not only influenced by Alexander Bain's ideas, but also by William Wordsworth,<sup>(1)</sup> who emphasized that the child is the father of man. By depicting her hero and heroine as children, Eliot seeks to enrich our understanding of their adult behavior. Maggie's personality is formed at an early age: in a leap towards "clearness and freedom," Maggie cuts off her locks in front of her brother Tom then feels that "bitter sense of the irrevocable which was almost an everyday experience of her small soul" (121). Later, "she could see clearly enough ... that it was very foolish, and that she should have to hear and think more about her hair than ever" (121). Readers are prepared for a future cutting loose from the social norms, with tragic consequences.

In her investigation of Maggie's consciousness and its development, Eliot stresses the unity between child and adult personalities. Essential to this unity is memory, which Eliot calls, "the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them" (94).

Maggie's and Tom's early years were secure; they lived in a warm protective universe. There was no agonizing external reality presented or "outer world" to disturb the psychological construction of her mind. Both the external reality of the present and the memory of the past were united and in harmony inside them. When Tom happily goes back home from school for Christmas at the end of the half-year, Eliot explains, through his mind, the psychology of a child who lives in a secure environment:

There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only an extension of our own personality: we accepted and loved it as we accepted our own sense of existence and our own limbs. (222)

The child's perspective of the world fails to distinguish between the self and the external reality, the subject and the object outside, the self and the other: the other or the object is an extension of the self or the subject; both are inseparably associated. Any separation between both of them involves a partial loss of the self. By the time object (peaceful outer world) is separated from the subject (self), the object becomes a memory to which the subject yearns to re-associate to. The passage of time, for Maggie, brings with it dissociation, discontinuity. Mr. Tulliver's business failure brings a complete change in the family's way of life. As Maggie looks at her childhood home,

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<sup>(1)</sup> I refer to Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up."

## **Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major**

she feels that "everything is going away from us-- the end of our lives will have nothing in it like the beginning" (325).

Mr. Tulliver's mind cannot stand the pressure of discontinuity. "Unconscious" of those around him, he "submerges in a wave of memory" (277). Mr. Tulliver's breakdown consists of a complete disjunction between the object and the subject; he slips into the world of his memories of the past, which has no resemblance to the actualities of the present.

Maggie's character is true to its hereditary characteristics. From early childhood, she suffers discontinuity which finally overcomes her father. She is filled "with nothing but the memory of her child's feelings - a memory that was always strong in her" (394). Maggie is unable to accept the fact that as she grows out of childhood her "outer world" is no longer an extension of her personality. The incompatibility between the internal and the external, the subject and the object will later grow more serious to be a "conflict between the inward impulse and the outward fact" (367). The conflict becomes more violent and Maggie is haunted by "a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it" (321). The only link available is memory; it is the only unifying element between the good past and a better future which is able to give "her soul a sense of home" and gets her out of the agonizing present.

In a passionate moment of her adulthood, Maggie cuts off her memory as savior from an agonizing present and replaces it by a momentary passionate love with Stephen Guest. It is similar to the irrational moment in which she cut off her locks in the past: a moment that she will regret later. She goes on a journey that estranges her from her own past and present: "Memory was excluded" (589), Eliot states explicitly. Maggie loses part of her identity in such a moment, she turns back and returns to St. Ogg's, but too late. The damage has been done. She is tormented by what Eliot calls "the sense of contradiction with her past self" (648). In the concluding chapter of the novel, "the Last Conflict," Maggie is not able to reconstruct the identity she lost on her trip with Stephen, and the only resolution is destruction.

### **Dorothea Brooks' Character**

Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is an experiment in the psychological influence of both memory and heredity on the development of characters' identity. Unlike *The Mill on the Floss*, psychological fields of experimentation in *Middlemarch* have nothing to do with heredity. George Eliot, through the Character of Dorothea Brooks, experiments with the ideas of both Spencer and Lewes, who regarded the mind as means of adjusting or adapting the organism to environmental circumstances. Life, to Spencer, is the

continuous adjustment of internal relations to outer relations, and intelligence is measured to the degree of adapting the inner relations to outer relations. To put this in modern psychological terms, Calvin A. Colarusso and Robert A. Nemiroff, in their description of the healthy adult self, point out that the attainment of “psychological authenticity” is the “central, dynamic task of adulthood” (86). By “authenticity” they mean “a sense of recognition that one is singular... yet interdependent... capable of making and accepting a realistic appraisal of life including suffering and limitation” (86). This appraisal “entails one’s capacity to assess and accept what is real in both the external and inner world regardless of the narcissistic injury involved” (86). Then, they point out that an acceptance of the real requires that one moves from one’s own world “in which the self is characterized as special, unique, and qualitatively superior to all others, to an acceptance of the self as special but not unique, a part of the mosaic of humanity” (86). In *Middlemarch*, Eliot demonstrates the importance of the adaptation of the organism to environmental circumstances, or psychological authenticity to the human psychological growth through Dorothea Brooks and her husband Edward Casaubon, who lack the adaptation of their inner relations to the outer relations of life and society because they have perceptions of being different.

At the beginning of the novel, Eliot describes Dorothea as shortsighted. Figuratively speaking, this defect refers to Dorothea’s lack of self-knowledge and her inability to distinguish illusion from reality. In other words, she has not gained the psychological authenticity yet. Dorothea does not have the same interests of other women and girls. She is described as beautiful, “remarkably clever,” yet unique and different from her sister Celia and other girls in that

Her mind was theoretic, and *yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world . . .* she was enamored of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing *whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom* [emphasis added] (30).

Her sense of uniqueness made her different, which is an unrealistic perception of herself. Her embracing of martyr-like actions is a form of focusing more light on personality because her lofty ideals were not appreciated by those who around her. For example, Celia denounces her cottage plan drawings as being a “fad” (60).

Dorothea’s pre-marital hopes provide further evidence of her lack of adaptation and a realistic conception of the world. Eliot says; “Dorothea, with all her eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas about marriage” (32). Dorothea indulges in daydreams in which she marries

## **Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major**

such historical personages or great scholars. Casaubon does not exist for her as a human husband but rather as a manifestation of her lofty idealized conception of a great scholar.

Her marriage to Casaubon is the first test in her psychological journey of initiation and the first lesson that leads her to adjust her romantic world to the real world around her. Rather than finding marriage enlightening, Dorothea finds it stifling, even suffocating. In Rome she is left alone while Casaubon is absorbed in his scholarship. Moreover, he becomes cold towards her affections and unsympathetic to her womanly feelings. Dorothea realizes that her only possible use to Casaubon is in being his amanuensis, and Eliot states that Dorothea is "a personification of that shallow world which surrounds the ill-appreciated or desponding author" (233). This is the first step of Dorothea's developing capability to accept a realistic appraisal of life that includes suffering and limitation. Dorothea's unhappy marriage makes her start realizing the fake illusions of her previous daydreams and romantic conception of marriage. Her depression affected a change in perspective; she began to pity her husband in his endless scholarly pursuit, for she realizes the futility of it.

Casaubon's distrust of his wife is the second lesson that brings her nearer to acquire the psychological authenticity. Dorothea, despite the attention given to her by Will Ladislaw and her feelings towards him, remains loyal and sympathetic to her husband. Moreover, she aided and comforted him following his heart attack and subsequent illness. Following his death, she receives the news of his will which removes his inheritance from Dorothea in the event that she marries Ladislaw. Dorothea was innocent of infidelity; nevertheless, this painful shock to her identity and personal convictions. She starts to realize that she is not special, unique, or different from any other woman.

The climax of Dorothea's adjustment of her inner relation to outer relations takes place when she goes to visit Rosamond to discover Will Ladislaw alone with her. Dorothea misreads the situation as indicative of a love affair between the two. That night, Dorothea comes to acknowledge her feelings and change of perspective:

"Oh, I did love him!"

Then came the hour in which the waves of suffering shook her too thoroughly to leave any power of thought. She could only cry in loud whispers, between her sobs, after her lost belief... (844)

She looks from her window where she sees at a distance a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby. At that moment, she feels that she is a part of the mosaic of humanity:

She felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (846)

Dorothea is no longer having unrealistic perceptions of the world and herself. She moves from the narcissistic position to accept the real despite the psychological injury she encountered.

To conclude, George Eliot did not intend to perfect the subjects of her novels. On the contrary, she attempted to show their limitations and maintained that they are psychologically human. Eliot explained people and made them knowable by showing their motivations and focusing on the factors that influence their lives, whether external or internal. For this purpose, Eliot experimented some of the ideas of Association psychology that she was familiar with through her readings, reviews and friends to mold the characters of her novels and to explain their motives and impulses on one hand and the external forces shaping them on the other. Through the dramatic presentation of characters' speech and actions, Eliot suggested psychological issues that can be related to the nineteenth century psychological views of James Mill, Alexander Bain, John Locke, William Carpenter, Herbert Spencer, George Lewes and Charles Darwin.

In *Adam Bede*, Eliot applied William carpenter's psychological ideas of "unconscious cerebration" to construct Adam's character while the narcissistic Hetty Sorrels' character, in the same novel, was framed around James Mill's psychological ideas of "phenomenal cognition," Lock's "sensational consciousness," and Spencer's "psychological causation." In *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot applied Alexander Bain's ideas of the unconscious memory on the character of Maggie Tulliver, whose adulthood actions were consciously or unconsciously related to her past experiences in her early childhood. Eliot also experimented Darwin's ideas of heredity as a factor that determines the behavior and characters of both Tom and Maggie. Unlike *The Mill on the Floss*, psychological fields of experimentation in *Middlemarch* have nothing to do with heredity. George Eliot, through the Character of Dorothea Brooks, experimented with the ideas of both Spencer and Lewes, who regarded the mind as means of adjusting or adapting the organism to environmental circumstances. Dorothea accepts the reality herself and others after a long struggle with her perceptions of being different.

George Eliot had a rich scientific background that she utilized to write her novels. Of specific concern to her was psychology that she expressed in many aspects of her literary discourse. One of these aspects is reflecting the psychology of characters to humanize them and make them knowable to the reader.

## Nineteenth-Century Psychoanalysis of George Eliot's Major

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