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Novel Reading: Pedagogies of Form in George Eliot and Thomas Mann

by

Laura Day Wagner

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Lucey, Chair

Professor Dorothy Hale

Professor Niklaus Largier

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the intersection of novel form and questions of education in the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Mann. While each of the novels I consider structures its plot around the formative experiences of a young protagonist, whose development thereby constitutes both the arc of the story and the stakes of the novel, I argue that their concern with pedagogy extends beyond the diegetic representation of education to the form of the novel itself, in ways that are both continuous and in tension with some of their more obvious didactic workings. These novels put forth an implicit argument for the way that a novel can itself contribute to the formation of its readers: namely, by teaching them to be readers of novels, through a novelistic practice that sees form as pedagogical and pedagogy as formal. My first chapter traces the conjunction of form, formation, and the work of the novel in both the eighteenth-century German concept of *Bildung*, in which I locate the network of ideas that become crucial to my reading of Eliot and Mann's pedagogy of form, and in Christoph Martin Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon*, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, which I read as forerunners of the self-reflexive novelistic practice that Eliot and Mann exemplify. Chapters two and three examine the way Eliot's formal pedagogy informs and also challenges the explicitly stated realist projects of her novels. I argue that both *Felix Holt, the Radical* and *Middlemarch* displace the type of education that they initially seem to center—the political reform espoused by the eponymous Felix and the modes of book learning valued by *Middlemarch*'s scholars—in favor of modes of formation that they link to the novelistic, such as the sentimental and sympathetic lessons of their female protagonists, the novels' own plotting, and the work of recognition and interpretation that they demand of both their heroine and reader. In privileging such acts of readerly formation, the novels don't, however, put forth a monolithic definition of novel form but instead underscore the multiple, often contradictory modalities through which their own form moves and whose different demands they teach their reader to negotiate. In turning to Thomas Mann in chapter four, I examine *Der Zauberberg*'s explicit commentary on form in its meditation on the possibilities of *Bildung* in post-World War I Europe, and I argue that the "middle" way that its protagonist espouses serves as a description of both the novel's own form and the pedagogic practice it represents and seeks to enact. An afterword to the dissertation suggests that such a middle space becomes synonymous with a model of novel reading that grows out of this intersection of novel form and pedagogy in Eliot and Mann's work.

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Preface

In an 1880 review of Émile Zola's *Nana*, Henry James describes the novel form in general as "a composition that treats of life at large and helps us to *know*."¹ This dissertation concerns itself with novels that care deeply about what their reader comes to know by engaging with their pages, but it more importantly seeks to answer the question that we might hear hanging at the end of James's claim, asking not just what novels want their readers to know, but *how* they lead us to know it.

The novels at the heart of this study are obsessed with knowledge. While there's no clear indexical relationship directly linking their writing, the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Mann share an elective affinity with one another that is, I would argue, grounded in their central concern with the questions of education that this dissertation takes up. Both authors are well known for the scale of their work—not only in the sense of the page count of their novels, but also in the extent of what these massive tomes try to encompass within those pages. Beyond their detailed rendering of the social worlds they represent, novels like *Middlemarch* and *Der Zauberberg* detail their protagonists', their narrators', and their authors' prodigious knowledge of and interest in diverse disciplines of study, social trends, historical events, philosophical issues, and more. A reader might easily be intimidated or even put off by the seemingly unlimited number of ideas with which these novels are in conversation, and the readiness with which their narrators dispense this wisdom and cast judgment on the people and issues that move through their narratives.

Moreover, each of these novels in turn seeks to school the protagonist placed at the center of its story, and of the web of ideas with which that story is inextricably intertwined. In this, the novels are classic examples of the novel of formation, the origin of which I'll turn to in the first chapter, their plots structured around the formative experiences of a young protagonist whose development—intellectual, social, moral—constitutes both the formal design and the ultimate stakes of the novel.

But beyond these more obvious ways in which these novels are centrally concerned with questions of knowledge and pedagogy, I'll argue that these novels crucially imagine and enact a mode of education that extends beyond the plots of development in their story-worlds: they put forth an implicit argument for the way that the novel itself can contribute to the formation of its readers. In arguing for the outwardly directed pedagogical designs of these novels, I'm not referring primarily to an explicit content-based lesson that the novels seek to instill. While these texts may certainly have more open designs on their readers—seeking to produce new modes of sociological understanding, to effect sympathetic responses that in turn lead to good moral action, to outline proper political thought and action—what I propose to examine is the extent to which they also transfer their concern with knowledge and formation to the *form* of the novel itself, in ways that are both continuous and in tension with their more explicit didactic workings. A central way that these texts help their readers "to *know*" is by teaching them to be readers of novels: they stage through their formal design lessons in novel reading by which their pages produce the reader who can best engage with their narrative. It's out of this latter set of formal lessons that my understanding of novelistic pedagogy emerges—a pedagogy that only the novel can enact—and this formal education of the novel is in turn at the heart of the theory of and argument for the novel's value that these texts advance.

¹ Henry James, *Literary Criticism* Vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 869 (emphasis in original). This definition of the novel genre comes in a piece that strongly criticizes the particular instantiation of the novel that *Nana* itself represents.

In my introductory first chapter, “Form, Formation, and Novelistic Pedagogy,” I trace the conjunction between form, education, and the work of the novel. In particular, I examine the development of the concept of *Bildung* and locate within it the network of terms that I in turn argue are central to Eliot and Mann’s novelistic pedagogy: form (rooted in the semantic field of *bilden* and *Bild*, and its emphasis on representation and aesthetics), formation (grounded in *Bildung*’s emphasis on the education and successful development of its subject), and reform (located in the arguments that early theorists of *Bildung* make for the relationship between the individual and the collective, and for the role of aesthetic education in the political and public spheres). I also establish this dissertation’s own methodological commitment to close reading by examining the extent to which the novel traditions that Eliot and Mann inherit imagine the novel itself as a space for the form’s own theory and criticism. Through readings of Christoph Martin Wieland’s *Geschichte des Agathon*, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, I show that these earlier novels theorize the genre’s potential educational influence through a more plot- and theme-driven meta-novelistic commentary than we find in Eliot and Mann’s later texts while also exploring the multiplicity of narrative forms, and the tensions between them, that can define the novel and that their readers must be taught to negotiate in an incipient practice of formal pedagogy.

In chapters two and three, I trace the centrality of a formally enacted pedagogy to Eliot’s realist project. Chapter two, “Politics and Female Vision: The Aesthetic Education of *Felix Holt, the Radical*,” argues that the apparent failure of the complementary aims of working-class education and voting reform that seem to be at the heart of *Felix Holt, the Radical* in fact represents a displacement of formation, and its attendant reformist potential, to the private, domestic, feminine sphere of Esther Lyon’s development and to the forms of sentimental education that belong to the generic workings of the novel that represents it. In particular, the novel upholds as a primary agent of transformation a transformed vision of and corresponding feeling for the particulars of the world that it associates with its gendered revaluation of reform. However, in teaching both its protagonist and its reader to recognize and to interpret the series of likenesses and prophetic visions that structure its story, the novel also undermines the realist ethos that it otherwise seems to put forth, as the vision of reform that it seeks to enact through Esther’s education shows that there is, in fact, a didactic aim shaping this novel, and the reader’s relationship to it, all along. Both the novel’s form and the formation it seeks to enact rely on a contradictory back-and-forth between a realist representation of particulars and the overall pedagogical aim and intricate construction of the novel, its own formal pedagogic practice ultimately taking place in the space between them.

Chapter three, “The Web and the Heart: Form and Education in *Middlemarch*,” similarly traces the way Eliot displaces certain pedagogical models to which her characters explicitly give voice in favor of a mode of learning that it links to the practices of novel reading. I examine her use of the figure of the web for her multi-plot novel, arguing that it operates not only as a metaphor for the social world the novel represents and as a description of the novel’s own formal construction, but also as a figure for the type of plotting in which the novel is engaged and that it casts as central to its protagonist’s—and by extension its reader’s—ethical development. While I show that both the climactic scene of Dorothea’s education within the text and the interpretive work required of a reader of this novel involve learning to read the “web” that is continuous with the novel’s own form, I suggest that *Middlemarch*’s central emphasis on feeling also causes the novel to exceed this formal metaphor, as it also lays claim to a form of knowledge that emerges from the emotional experience of its characters and from its own textured, detailed account of the “beating hearts” of characters within this larger web. The education that *Middlemarch* ultimately offers is grounded in the seemingly contradictory impulses that define the novel’s form—namely, between the panoramic knowledge and abstract-interpretive work invited by its web metaphor and the intimate emotional experience

and sympathetic responses that it locates in the individual threads of its characters' stories— and in the way it teaches its reader, like Dorothea, to move between them and their demands.

In the type of shuttling that comes to define Eliot's texts and the interpretive work required of their reader, we can see that the novels are constituted by the different modalities of form through which they move and that they teach their reader to recognize and to navigate, and in chapter four, "The Pedagogic Urgency of *Der Zauberberg's* Middle Way," I locate in Mann's defense of a "middle" way an argument for the workings of novel fiction and the formal pedagogy I've been tracing. While Eliot's novels implicitly reflect on questions of form, *Der Zauberberg's* account of Hans Castorp's questionable education takes the shape of an explicit commentary on form— biological, social, moral, literary, and otherwise. Reading the novel's discourse on the possibilities and dangers inherent in both form and *Auflösung*, as an extended commentary on literary form itself, I examine how the novel's overarching attention to form shows its continued interest in the project of *Bildung*, even as it calls it, and its continued viability in the post-World War I context of the novel's publication, into question. I argue that the novel embodies through its own form the "middle" way that its protagonist ultimately espouses in rejecting the various opposing extremes that attempt to shape him throughout the novel, and that this middle space can be read as a figure for the type of pedagogy *Der Zauberberg* both represents and itself seeks to enact.

In an afterword to the dissertation, I reflect back on the theory and practice of the novel that emerges from this comparative study of Eliot and Mann. I ultimately argue that both novelists theorize a middle space that becomes synonymous with novel form and the work of novelistic pedagogy. In privileging the compromises, tensions, and discontinuities that characterize the middle, these novels, I suggest, invite a model of novel reading that neither locates the meaning of these works in a uniquely improving moral maxim or simple didactic lesson that they advance nor in the reader's own exegetical or participatory engagement with the text, but that instead imagines the novel as a space in which a reader can be shaped precisely because of the text's formal demands on her. In making their novel's form pedagogical and their pedagogy formal, Eliot and Mann cast the novel as a form that contains its own inductive critical reading practice and that sees questions of form and value as inextricable from one another.

Chapter 1

Form, Formation, and Novelistic Pedagogy

In an 1865 essay on Goethe, written on the occasion of the republication of Thomas Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels* in Boston, Henry James celebrates the new opportunity that English-language readers will have to encounter Goethe's masterpiece. As Jeremy Adler notes in a 2014 essay on the understudied relationship between James and Goethe, James's literary career takes off during a period of growing interest in Goethe and his works in both England and America, and his own literary production is profoundly indebted, both directly and indirectly, to the German author's influence: at key moments in his writing career, Adler claims, we see the young James turn to Goethe, echoing the German giant's ideas as he seeks to articulate his own project as a writer.¹ In his paean to *Wilhelm Meister*, James voices his hope that a new generation of readers will help to overturn calcified public opinion of this largely unknown text as one of "the great unreadables" of novel fiction.² As James goes on to outline what, in his eyes, makes this novel great, however, the essay's reader might be forgiven for secretly thinking that the novel under discussion deserves its spot in the class of eminently "unreadable" fiction: "We gladly admit, nay, we assert, that, unless seriously read, the book must be inexpressibly dull. It was written, not to entertain, but to edify [...] It exhibits, indeed, a sublime indifference to the reader, — the indifference of humanity in the aggregate to the individual observer" (945). In its attempt to "edify," the novel is, moreover, "eminently practical," so that it "might almost be called a treatise on moral economy, — a work intended to show how the experience of life may least be wasted, and best be turned to account" (948). In James's piece, the novel's greatness seems to derive from its moral weight and didactic efficacy: we should read and enjoy *Wilhelm Meister* because it has something to teach us, and might make us a better person than we were before encountering it. But even as he emphasizes these "practical" or "moral" effects of the novel, James's argument in favor of it and against its critics centrally revolves around an aesthetic issue, namely its allegedly "dull" nature.³ He ultimately turns this aspersion back on those critics who apply the term to Goethe's novel in the first place, and its supposed "dullness" becomes, in fact, its central virtue: it's only a good, serious reader who will experience the novel in the more positive terms that James describes; unless we belong to this seemingly elite class, we're destined to be bored by the work, and presumably its lessons will be lost on us.⁴ While James's description rejects a view of this particular novel as entertainment, his

¹ Jeremy Adler, "Just as I am," *Times Literary Supplement*, December 5, 2014, 14-15. Adler goes on to suggest that the Goethean *Bildungsroman* that we see take shape in *Wilhelm Meister* is, in fact, James's "major form" throughout his career, and that he is the most prolific English-language author of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman* (15). For more on Goethe's relationship to English-language literature—both Goethe's relationship to England, and English-language literature's reception of and engagement with Goethe—see Nicholas Boyle and John Guthrie, *Goethe and the English-Speaking World* (Rochester: Camden House, 2002).

² See James, *Literary Criticism* Vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 944. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.

³ As Adler also observes, James and Eliot both use their reviews of the *Lehrjahre*—hers was published two years before this one—to defend the novel, taking up a central term or value that its critics deploy against it to show the extent to which these same detractors have misread and misunderstood Goethe's project. While we might therefore read the two reviews as companion pieces of a sort, there's also a crucial distinction between their preoccupations, one that speaks to two different views of the novel form and arguments for its value: Eliot defends Goethe from critics who judge his work immoral, while James defends him from those who find the novel boring (14). I'll return to this distinction, and its significance to my argument, at the end of this chapter.

⁴ The strains of elitism here don't originate from James alone, but are already present in the ideal of *Bildung* that the novel under discussion seeks to instantiate. I'll take up this point in my discussion of *Bildung* below.

comment about the proper way to read it, with his implicit distinction between good and bad, serious and frivolous readers, does keep this category alive, and ultimately redefine it. Enjoyment and edification go hand in hand in his account of the *Lehrjahre*: those readers who can enjoy the text, and who can see beyond a “dull” superficial reading, will learn its lessons, and will presumably enjoy the education they undergo, while other readers will remain as indifferent to the novel as the novel is to them.⁵

James’s pronouncements about *Wilhelm Meister* leave unanswered the question of how the novel actually produces the effect for which he argues, of how the particulars of this text manage to draw at least certain readers into the didactic experience of its fictional world and to craft a narrative that we can, if we’re serious enough in our engagement with the text, ultimately experience as both edifying and transformative.⁶ He is, however, not alone in commenting on the novel’s powers of transformation vis-à-vis its readers. In a letter written to Goethe after first reading the book, Friedrich Schiller speaks of the novel in terms that are quite similar to James’s later characterization of it, noting those qualities that make it both a source of education and, ultimately, profound pleasure. Schiller attests not only to the vitality, truth, and fullness of the work (like James, he, too, seems to feel that the books and its figures “live,” noting “die Wahrheit, das schöne Leben, die einfache Fülle” of the work), but he also expresses his gratitude that he has been able to see the completion of this great work and to experience himself the improvement it offers to its readers: “Ohnehin gehört es zu dem schönsten Glück meines Daseins, daß ich die Vollendung dieses Produkts erlebte, daß sie noch in die Periode meiner strebenden Kräfte fällt, daß ich aus dieser reinen Quelle noch schöpfen kann.”⁷ Schiller positions himself here as a real-world reader who has been educated and improved through his encounter with this work of fiction, and, having brought this expectation of edification and commitment to “serious” reading to his encounter with the novel, has also managed to find pleasure within it. What Schiller emphasizes here is the extent to which the novel’s value—and the pleasure it provides—comes from its nurturing of the intellectual, moral, and other critical faculties of the reader who works through its pages.

⁵ James makes here an implicit distinction between different types of novels within the literary field, positing that there are those serious texts in which the true value of the novel can be seen, and others less worthy of the name, and that there are correspondingly serious readers who can appreciate the former and others who seek only the easier pleasures of the latter. The seriousness that James emphasizes is, importantly, unpleasurable, so that the reading of these texts becomes a duty, which, if properly fulfilled, might eventually lead the good reader back to pleasure, once she’s learned to enjoy the serious lessons that she so dutifully partakes in. James also considers the relationship between “good” novels and readerly enjoyment in the Prefaces to the New York editions. See, for example, the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, in which he disavows the significance of readerly amusement even as he keeps alive the idea of entertainment as a motivating factor of the actual structuring of the novel.

⁶ He does, however, make clear the extent to which *Wilhelm Meister* is both distinct from and exceeds the novel form as we’ve come to understand it. Goethe’s text is bound to frustrate readers looking for a certain type of pleasure associated with the realist novel: the entertaining details by which a more modern novelist would interest us in his portrait of a slice of life are nowhere to be found—“we know neither their costumes, nor their stature, not the indispensable color of their eyes”; the characters don’t conform to the figures captured by “our fashionable photographic heroes and heroines” (946). But in eschewing an interest in the “lifelike,” James argues, Goethe manages to arrive at a portrait of “life itself,” capturing an essence or truth that such details would only obscure. Here, too, the novel succeeds in its transformative educational capacity precisely to the extent that it refuses to satisfy certain readerly demands or expectations, and his account of the “living” character produced by Goethe’s protagonist—in the way Wilhelm’s character coheres, and the extent to which the novel’s events pass through and circulate around him—becomes the key feature of the novel.

⁷ See Schiller’s letter from July 2, 1796 in *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1984), 158. [It is, in any case, one of the best happinesses of my existence that I’ve lived to see the completion of this work, that it has taken place while my faculties are still capable of improvement, and that I can draw from this pure source. (Translation mine.)]

The project of edification and the type of pedagogical power that Schiller and James attribute to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is, of course, also central to the discourse surrounding the *Bildungsroman*, the novelistic sub-genre that Goethe's novel inaugurates and of which his novel is still the example *par excellence*.⁸ It is, by now, a critical commonplace to state that the *Bildungsroman* is involved in a meta-fictional attempt to promote readerly *Bildung*. From Karl Morgenstern's lectures (in which the term was first coined) onward, critics have noted the parallel between the genre's simultaneous attempt to both entertain and educate its readers. More recent, and more sophisticated, accounts of the genre continue this trend. Martin Swales's influential English-language account of the genre's German history emphasizes its central self-reflectiveness: *Bildung* is enacted not in the events that the protagonist experiences throughout the novel's plot, he argues, but in the narrator's discursive self-understanding, transferring the novel's project of education to the level of its discourse and to the reader who engages with it.⁹ Marc Redfield's discussion of Goethe's foundational text also focuses on this distinction between content and form, arguing that the novel is fundamentally concerned not only with representing the production of Wilhelm's self (the content of the *Bildungsroman*'s plot), but also with the production of its readers: by taking this process of *Bildung* as its subject matter and by enacting it through the form of the novel, *Wilhelm Meister* (and novels like it) extend the process of self-formation from the story-world to the world beyond its pages in an act of extra-textual education.¹⁰ Foregrounding questions of the reader in a more historical approach to the genre, Dennis Mahoney considers how Goethe and his Romantic contemporaries conceived of the ideal reader and how their innovations in narrative strategy attempted to bring this reader into being, while Todd Kontje examines how moments of literary self-consciousness in early *Bildungsromane* reflect on the transformation of the German literary institution in the late eighteenth century, reading the genre as a meta-fictional reflection on the emergence of the public sphere and literature's interaction with it.¹¹ In each of these accounts, these texts emerge as novelistic instantiations of the project of *Bildung* not only through their defining representation of a protagonist's education at the level of their plot, but crucially in the extent to which they also seek to extend a similarly formative experience for the readers they imagine.

My own study is not primarily concerned with the *Bildungsroman* as a form,¹² but I am acutely interested in the larger types of questions the above critics, from Schiller to James to more

⁸ Or, possibly, one of the only true examples. The most extreme version of such a position is perhaps an article by Jeffrey Sammons that emphatically, and polemically, pronounces that "we can, on inspection, admit only *Wilhelm Meister* and maybe two and a half other examples" into the genre. See "The Mystery of the Missing *Bildungsroman*, or: What Happened to Wilhelm Meister's Legacy?" *Genre* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 229-246. While the severity of this particular claim may seem exaggerated, Sammons's larger point about the retroactive scholarly construction of a non-existent *Bildungsroman* tradition in the service of constructing a national literary canon is an important one.

⁹ Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 4.

¹⁰ Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 54.

¹¹ Dennis Mahoney, "The Apprenticeship of the Reader: The *Bildungsroman* of the 'Age of Goethe,'" in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, ed. James Hardin (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Todd Kontje, *Private Lives in the Public Sphere: The German Bildungsroman as Metafiction* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

¹² While each of the novels I consider can be, and has been, read as an example of the genre, my own reading of these novels will decenter generic debates about the *Bildungsroman* itself. While Eliot is an indisputable heir of many Goethean ideas, including *Bildung*, her novels are of course removed—nationally, culturally, linguistically—from the German *Bildungsroman* tradition that Goethe instantiates. Mann, on the other hand, self-consciously positions his novel in relationship to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, suggesting that *Der Zauberberg* comes at the tail end of a lineage of literary texts and intellectual history that derives from it and thereby explicitly demanding that it be read in conversation with this form and the specifically German tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. I'm most interested in considering the way that ideas

contemporary scholars, raise about novels, their readers, and textual education: namely, how exactly do novels seek to edify their readers? Like these critical arguments about the *Bildungsroman*, it's my contention throughout this dissertation that Eliot and Mann's novelistic pedagogy occurs not—or not only—at the level of their plots of education and explicit intellectual or moral lessons, but at the level of their form, and in the way that they conceive of the relationship between the education that they represent and the reader who interacts with their pages. However, I also want to move beyond the above claims about the *Bildungsroman* specifically to consider how this pedagogical impulse comes to define the novelistic more generally for these two authors: in seeking to produce the reader capable of reading them, these novels are designed not just to educate that reader but to teach her to read novel form itself.

Before turning to the two authors at the heart of my study, I'd like to trace the conjunction of form, formation, and the work of the novel, first in the German concept of *Bildung* and then in a few of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels that we might read as forerunners of Eliot and Mann's work, concluding with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. In addition to providing a foundation for my dissertation's particular understanding of education and its link to questions of form, this turn to Goethe and the tradition of *Bildung* moreover helps to triangulate my interest in the two novelists at the heart of this study. While the novels of Eliot and Mann are of course separated by time, place, and language, there's more than an elective affinity between them: we can locate in the writings of each, and particularly in the intellectual work that their novels take up, knowledge of and an engagement with Goethean ideals of *Bildung*.¹³ This turn back to Goethe will not only allow me to trace a lineage of novelistic education from *Wilhelm Meister* forward, but will also crucially help me to distinguish between earlier examples of readerly edification via the developing novel genre and Eliot and Mann's later rewriting of such a pedagogical project from a later moment in its history, tracing the extent to which their claims for the novel as a space of formation are grounded in their theorization and use of novel form.

Form and Formation

My understanding of the novelistic education that I seek to trace in Eliot and Mann in the chapters that follow emerges from the difficult-to-translate eighteenth-century concept of *Bildung* that Goethe's novel takes up. Growing out of the term's theological origins—for the German mystics, *bilden* signified God's creation of human beings in his image¹⁴—the modern conception of *Bildung*, which emerged alongside Enlightenment thought, became linked with ideas of pedagogy in the eighteenth century, thanks, as Susan Cocalis explains, to the German reception of the Earl of Shaftesbury's 1737 *Characteristics of Men, Manner, Opinions, Times*—with its secular vision of self-

stemming from the history of *Bildung* come to inform a particular theory and practice of the novel for Eliot and Mann, and less in assessing whether or not their novels fall within the expected parameters of the *Bildungsroman* genre.

¹³ Eliot's connection to German thought, is of course, well documented, and we can therefore trace an indirect link between the two novelists to the extent that they engage with the same tradition of *Bildung*, if with varying degrees of proximity to it. For more on Eliot as a Germanist, see, for example, Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) on Eliot as a translator of Strauss and Feuerbach; Avrom Fleischman, *Gorge Eliot's Intellectual Life* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010) on Eliot as a reader of German thought and on her time in Germany; and Gerlinde Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot and Goethe: An Elective Affinity* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998) on Goethe's influence on Eliot.

¹⁴ See Reinhart Koselleck, "On the Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*," in *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). His discussion of *Bildung*'s religious origin also emphasizes the extended semantic field in which we can see these joint ideas about form and formation emerge: he describes the mystics' project as "To imagine (*einbilden*) God in oneself, to reform (*umbilden*) oneself through Christ in order to share in God while a human being, even more, to transform God into a living human being" (177).

development as a means of fulfilling one's larger social responsibility— and Johann Joachim Winkelmann and Christoph Martin Wieland's introduction of the term—as a formative process and ultimately an ideal state of being— into German intellectual life.¹⁵ As *Bildung* continued to be articulated by thinkers from Johann Gottfried von Herder to Friedrich Schiller to Wilhelm von Humboldt, the individual remained the crucial locus, even as the ideals of *Bildung* were tied to ideas of collective responsibility and the good of the state: while *Bildung* is always socially directed, taking place within various social, economic, and political conditions and shaped by these realities, it is ultimately concerned with self-determination, referring to the individual's need to form himself regardless of these outer forces.¹⁶ Indeed, as Goethe reportedly told his longtime interlocutor Johann Peter Eckermann, he believed he did more for the good of the world by developing his own personality in accordance with his unique set of skills and interests than he could have done by working more explicitly toward the greater good, the transformation of his individual self and interests serving the larger public welfare.¹⁷

Inherent in *Bildung*, then, is a dual emphasis on both form and the process of formation that gives rise to it— on, in Kontje's words, “the external form or appearance (*Gestalt*, Latin *forma*) of the individual [and] the process of giving form (*Gestaltung*, *formatio*)” to that individual.¹⁸ When Schiller articulates his ideal of aesthetic education in his 1794 *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, the crux of his definition of *Bildung* hinges on the connection between these two dimensions, as he outlines in the fourth letter: “Jeder individuelle Mensch, kann man sagen, trägt, der Anlage und Bestimmung nach, einen reinen idealischen Menschen in sich, mit dessen unveränderlicher Einheit in allen seinen Abwechslungen übereinzustimmen die grosse Aufgabe seines Daseins ist.”¹⁹ Within each of us lies already the archetype of what we must become, Schiller emphasizes, and *Bildung*'s task is therefore to form us into that ideal that we already carry within us.²⁰

¹⁵ Susan Cocalis, “The Transformation of Bildung from an Image to an Ideal,” *Monatshefte* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1978), 400-401. Cocalis's article offers English-language readers a wonderfully succinct but comprehensive account of the origins and development of *Bildung*.

¹⁶ Koselleck, “On the Anthropological and Semantic Structure of *Bildung*,” 181. This emphasis on the organic growth of the individual according to his innate principles is also indebted to eighteenth-century organicism: Goethe, of course, had close links to the natural sciences, and natural imagery is central to many descriptions of *Bildung*, which call on the figure of a seed transforming into fruit according to its genetic design. See, for example, Todd Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 2. Thomas Pfau also stresses the organicist roots of *Bildung* and the narrative forms that would come to be associated with it, as I'll discuss in my reading of Goethe below. “Of Ends and Endings: Teleological and Variational Models of Romantic Narrative,” *European Romantic Review* 18, no. 2 (April 2007), 238-239.

¹⁷ Quoted in W.H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 17. There is, of course, a disturbing threat of political disinterest, leading to a problematic strain of inwardness (of which the early Mann is a clear heir), and an expression of extreme bourgeois privilege inherent in such sentiments.

¹⁸ Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*, 1.

¹⁹ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man In a Series of Letters*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 16-19. [“Every individual human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal.”]

²⁰ As in Goethe's claims about the universal benefit of his own personal self-cultivation, we can see strains of a similar elitism in Schiller. As Redfield reminds us, the exemplary subject created by the disinterested aesthetic judgment of Kant and Schiller purports to represent universal humanity, but in fact validates the representativeness of those social groups that can achieve aesthetic education in the first place— a severely circumscribed set of individuals. *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, viii-ix. If we look, for example, at the list of names at the end of Schiller's 1794 “Ankündigung der Horen” indicating those writers whom he invited to participate in the journal— the same one in which he published these letters on aesthetic education— we see the formation of an intellectual aristocracy in an ostensibly egalitarian moment: the list is organized alphabetically, indicating that there is no hierarchy among the group,

As he goes on to describe the task of the pedagogical or political artist, as opposed to that of the sculptor, Schiller notes that his task is so difficult precisely because he must be concerned with both the material that he seeks to shape and the end product that will emerge from his endeavors: if the plastic artist can focus exclusively on the final work of art, ignoring entirely the block of stone except as the raw material that he can shape at will, the pedagogue has a much harder task, forced to think at every step of man as both the material on whom his efforts have a very real effect and as the ideal and universal end product of the trajectory of education he seeks to enact.

The focus of the pedagogical artist, then, is on both the form of the subject and the process of formation through which his ideal form will be brought into being, and in the move from *Bild* to *Bildung*, from form to formation, it's not hard to see *Bildung's* affinity for the aesthetic sphere more generally, and for the novel form to which it gives birth more specifically. What gets represented in the *Bildungsroman* is the coming into form that Schiller outlines above: as Bakhtin puts it, the *Bildungsroman* is the “novel of human *emergence*,” and it represents the “image of *man in the process of becoming*” its own form reflecting the formation—the emergence into form—of the subject at its center, its plot and its character continuous with one another.²¹ The novel's content, then, is always-already “instantly a question of form because the content is the forming-of-content.”²² Such a link between content—the formation that the novel represents—and form—the shape of the narrative that effects it—is of course most obvious at the level of the text's plot. As Franco Moretti describes the workings of the classical *Bildungsroman*, the (happy) ending and the aim of the narration coincide with one another, the shape of the novel reflecting the fulfillment of the protagonist, and through him of human nature more broadly speaking.²³ This didactic design of the story reflects what Joseph Slaughter calls the essentially tautological and teleological nature of the *Bildungsroman*, the plot of which he defines as that of “an individual who is socialized in the process of learning for oneself what everyone else (including the reader) presumably already knows.”²⁴ These descriptions of the *Bildungsroman* of course attribute to its narrative design exactly that principle of *Bildung* that is so central to Schiller's definition of it: like Schiller's pedagogical artist, the novelist takes man as both his material and his end, the form of the novel dictated by the forming of the ideal character inherent in him from the start and that the novel must bring into being through its narrative.²⁵

and yet, the names also represent a narrowly delineated portion of society—they are all men, all titled, all from cities recognizable as centers of intellectual production, and all deemed worthy of invitation by Schiller. See “Ankündigung der Horen” in Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke, Band V: Erzählungen und theoretische Schriften* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2004), 870-873. From its start, then, the “universal” humanist project of aesthetic education, and the intellectual circle that it views as the model for an ideal society, is born out of an act of simultaneous inclusion and elitist exclusion. My use of exclusively male pronouns throughout this section is therefore quite intentional: the universal subject of aesthetic education in its original form *is* male.

²¹ M. M. Bakhtin, “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel),” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 19 (emphasis in original).

²² Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, 42.

²³ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 2000), 55. See also his description of the classification principle (which he ascribes to the English family romance and the classical *Bildungsroman*), pages 7-8.

²⁴ Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 3. See also 26-28.

²⁵ And to the extent to which this biographical form helps to give the novel shape, representing the conflict between what is and what should be, we can begin to see the grounds for Lukács's suggestion that all novels are, in fact, *Bildungsromane*, the form of its character's formation helping to overcome the novel's potential bad infinity. See *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 80.

In addition to the mutually constitutive workings of form and formation, these eighteenth-century theorists of *Bildung* also lead us to a third term whose relationship to novelistic pedagogy the coming chapters will try to trace, namely, reform: the extent to which novel form and its representation of formation are bound up in projects of reform and politics. As Cocalis notes, the ideal of *Bildung* as articulated by Herder and Schiller posited that the aesthetic education of the individual, and the development of his individual talents, would produce a utopian society, one that would stand in opposition to the status quo and also serve as an alternative to revolution, marking German distaste for the violent political transformation occurring in France.²⁶ Indeed, the letter in which Schiller so famously lays out the itinerary of *Bildung* that I've discussed above goes on to outline the relationship between the individual and the state: the state itself also carries in it the "archetype" that Schiller locates in man himself, and represents "die objektive und gleichsam kanonische Form, in der sich die Mannigfaltigkeit der Subjekte zu vereinigen trachtet."²⁷ In proposing that the "steady, organic growth" of the individual through education and art can render obsolete the need for revolutionary politics,²⁸ the *Bildungsroman* posits that the pedagogic formation in which it's invested and the form that is its goal (as well as the form in which the story of formation is narratively represented) have real political implications and that the education of the individual via *Bildung*'s precepts is a socially motivated endeavor with ethical stakes, in spite of its apparent emphasis on the individual.

The Novel as Theory and Practice

In bringing together form and formation, I am suggesting that novelists like Eliot and Mann use the space of their novel to reflect on the genre's possibilities as an agent of readerly formation. By embedding within their novels clues as to how it might most properly be read, their narratives of education bring into being not only the newly educated protagonist who can serve as its hero but also the type of reader who can fully engage with the text. I'm thereby arguing that these two masters of the practice of novel writing also use their texts to advance a theory of the novel that we are in the process of reading, and of the novel form overall. My focus on novels that I see as offering their own novel criticism also explains this dissertation's methodological grounding in a

While I've chosen to focus here on *Bildung*, and the novels that grow out of it, from its specific German origin and context, rather than the way it is adapted and understood in the other literary traditions into which it travels, it's worth noting that its conventions can also be tied to those of other novelistic sub-genres with which it develops in tandem, such as the sentimental novel. In *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Margaret Cohen traces the extent to which the plot of the *Bildungsroman* derives from sentimental codes, particularly in the way it places the individual in relation to the collective, while she and Carolyn Dever, in their introduction to *The Literary Channel*, emphasize the sentimental novel's emphasis on a "normative humanness"—a phrase in which we might hear echoes of Schiller's vision of aesthetic education—that enables a renewed engagement with projects of education within the space of the novel. *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); *The Literary Channel: The International Invention of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 19. We can certainly see traces of sentimental fiction in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, as well as in Eliot's novels. The role of the sentimental will be important in my treatment of *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* in the next two chapters.

²⁶ Cocalis, "The Transformation of Bildung from an Image to an Ideal," 404.

²⁷ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man In a Series of Letters*, 18-19. ["the objective and, as it were, canonical form in which all the diversity of individual subjects strive to unite"]

²⁸ Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*, 5. It's this element of *Bildung* that conservative and nationalist nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers would take up in their embrace of the genre as celebrating a "totality of being" that affirmed the status quo and a conservative version of German identity. See, for example, Cocalis, "The Transformation of Bildung from an Image to an Ideal," 407. This reduction of the concept's original complexity is, I would argue, not dissimilar to the reduction of the openness, even strangeness, of early *Bildungsromane* like Wieland and Goethe's in the service of an overarching theory of the genre, as I'll discuss in the sections below.

close reading of the novels themselves, in an attempt to perform and illuminate the type of good reading that I'm suggesting these novels want to train their readers in.²⁹ It's also because of this marriage of novel theory and novelistic practice that this project takes so seriously the reactions of readers like Henry James: he, like Eliot and Mann, is a master novelist invested in theorizing the form and defining its values.

Eliot, Mann, and James of course aren't alone in combining these two strains. We might even say that the tradition of the Western novel begins with such a marriage of simultaneous practice and theory in *Don Quixote*, in which Cervantes's depiction of the misguided ways in which his book-loving protagonist attempts to live as though he were moving through the world of one of his beloved romances itself brings into being a new kind of fiction, one that is explicitly self-referential as it establishes the parameters of its project and that openly reflects on the uses to which this new textual object might be put by its readers. As Peter Brooks puts it, "one could argue with some plausibility that the novel as genre incorporates the antinovel—its critical reflection—from the earliest stages of its history: certainly in *Don Quixote*, perhaps even in earlier picaresque; and surely from Flaubert onward into Modernism, the self-reflexive ironies of the novelistic enterprise have been a major preoccupation."³⁰ The novel not only establishes itself by reflecting on its proximity to and distance from its literary predecessors, but it also embraces a self-reflexive stance by which it theorizes the form to which it is in turn giving birth. I'd like to turn now to an earlier text from each of the two national novel traditions with which I'm engaging—Christoph Martin Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*—to trace how these novels embed novelistic criticism, and a corresponding concern for their readers' understanding of and engagement with novelistic fiction, within their story-worlds and larger prefatory apparatus. Ultimately, I'll also underscore the difference between these earlier examples and the ways in which Eliot and Mann put such a joint novel theory and practice to work in their development of a novelistic pedagogy from their later standpoint in the history of the genre.

While *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is the indisputable father of the *Bildungsroman*, we might locate a first occurrence of the form several decades earlier with the publication of *Geschichte des Agathon* and the critical writings that it inspired. Even more than Goethe's novel, the nineteenth-century German-language *Bildungsromane* that follow in its footsteps, and the novels at the heart of this project, Wieland's text is a loose, baggy monster of a novel: composed of eleven books and over six hundred pages long in most editions (and in each of the three revisions it went through between 1766 and 1800), it is a sometimes incoherent amalgamation of popular eighteenth-century prose forms. In spite of its protagonist's numerous adventures and its own plot twists—from Agathon's enslavement by a band of pirates who appear out of the blue to the sustained chronicling of

²⁹ In this, I read in concert with Garrett Stewart's claim that "fictional reading is inductive," though my own inductive methodology and the inductive lessons of the novels I am considering extend beyond the ideology and cultural construction of Victorian literature from which he derives his claims about novel reading: "In every sense [fictional reading] leads you on. [...] Narrative fiction works up and out from the individual (language, plot, personal agents) the cultural totality, rather than dropping the particular into the general as its instance and its proof. The result is that criticism gets closest to its object when retracing just this inductive route. And such a procedure lays fewer traps for the critic than is often thought." *Dear Reader: The Conscribed Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 7.

"Inductive" is also a term that's important to Eliot's conception of art. In "The Natural History of German Life," she describes the "inductive" process by which one comes to understand the minutiae of lived experience in Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl's representations of the German peasantry, holding his work up as a model of the type of engagement by which a reader can be brought to true understanding and sympathy. In *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 127. I'll return to Eliot's account of such an inductive method, and its application to her own novelistic work, in the following chapter.

³⁰ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 317.

Daphne's attempts to seduce the upright young philosopher (before she herself turns ascetic) to a convenient final revelation about hidden family ties— *Geschichte des Agathon* could, even more readily than the *Lehrjahre*, be not unfairly grouped with the “great unreadables” of novel fiction.³¹

Though it would be several decades before the term was coined, the novel's preface announces that the text to follow will, essentially, be a *Bildungsroman* that traces the development of its protagonist: “Weil nach unserm Plan der Character unsers Helden auf verschiedene Proben gestellt werden sollte, durch welche seine Denkensart und seine Tugend erläutert.”³² We have, here, an early articulation of the plot design that would come to define the *Bildungsroman*, as Friedrich von Blanckenburg traces in his 1774 treatise *Versuch über den Roman*, which was largely inspired by Wieland's text: while the generic term doesn't yet exist, Blanckenburg anticipates the later critical discourse about it by emphasizing many of the features that would come to define the genre. Echoing Aristotle, he argues that the ultimate aim of the novelist should be both to entertain and to educate the reader (“Alle Dichter haben den allgemeinen Endzweck, durch das Vergnügen zu unterrichten”), ultimately leading the reader to begin to teach herself through the critical engagement the work demands of her (“wir werden desto sicherer und beßrer lernen, wenn wir Gelegenheit gehabt haben, durch sein Werk unsre eignen Lehrmeister zu werden”).³³ In tracing the shift from the epic to the novel, Blanckenburg also seems to anticipate much later theories of novelistic realism, shifting our attention away from what the novelist chooses to portray to the manner in which he chooses to portray it: from the mass of characters and events that can make up a novel, Blanckenburg observes, the novelist must choose and order his pieces in the service of a truthful representation, one that will “move” its reader through mimesis (26). He ultimately upholds Wieland's work as an absolute model of the incipient novel genre, and claims it is successful in its dual attempts to entertain and to edify because it is designed around the unfolding of its protagonist, all its events passing through and illuminating this central figure:

Wenn wir den Agathon untersuchen: so findet es sich so gleich, daß der Punkt, unter welchem alle Begebenheiten vereinigt sind, kein andrer ist, als das ganze jetzige moralische Seyn des Agathon, seine jetzige Denkungsart und Sitten, die durch alle diese Begebenheiten gebildet, gleichsam das Resultat, die Wirkung aller derselben sind, so daß diese Schrift ein vollkommen dichterisches Ganze, eine Kette von Ursach und Wirkung ausmacht (10).³⁴

Much as James would later claim of Goethe's *Lehrjahre*, this early novel of formation succeeds thanks largely to its treatment of character: it portrays a unified, truthful character whose being emerges over the course of the novel and determines the design of the story that unfolds from and passes through him.

³¹ In addition to providing a particular set of challenges to the reader of the modern novel, the text also assumes that its reader is quite well educated: in conversation with both classical and modern philosophy (the novel is set at the time of Plato), it employs a dense network of allusions and ideas.

³² Christoph Martin Wieland, *Geschichte des Agathon* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 10. [“Our plan required that our Hero should be represented under a variety of trials, which might make his turn of thought and his virtues conspicuous.” Translation from T. Cadell, *The History of Agathon* (London: 1773), xxiv.]

³³ Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg, *Versuch über den Roman* (Leipzig: Siebert, 1774), 249, 253.

³⁴ [When we examine Agathon we find that the point in which all events are unified is none other than the entire moral being of Agathon, his current mentality and mores, which are formed through all of these occurrences, and are almost the result or effect of them, so that the work makes up a fully poetic whole, a chain of cause and effect. (Translation mine.)] In Blanckenburg's description of a central protagonist through whom all the novel's events pass and are worked through, we might also hear intimations of Lukács's later theory of Scott's protagonist in *The Historical Novel*.

The Wieland of the preface would seem to agree with Blanckenburg's account of *Geschichte des Agathon's* design as he introduces the novel to come. For the story of its protagonist to be compelling, he claims, the novel needs to attain a new standard of truth, and he puts forth a call for a new type of psychological realism that will allow us to believe in and to be moved by the hero whose development we will follow:

Die Wahrheit, welche von einem Werke, wie dasjenige, so wir den Liebhabern hiemit vorlegen, gefodert werden kann und soll, bestehet darin, daß alles mit dem Lauf der Welt übereinstimme, daß die Character nicht willkürlich, und bloß nach der Phantasie, oder den Absichten des Verfassers gebildet, sondern aus dem unerschöpflichen Vorrat der Natur selbst hergenommen; in der Entwicklung derselben so wohl die innere als die relative Möglichkeit, die Beschaffenheit des menschlichen Herzens, die Natur einer jeden Leidenschaft, mit allen den besondern Farben und Schattierungen, welche sie durch den Individual-Character und die Umstände einer jeden Person bekommen, aufs genaueste beibehalten; daneben auch der eigene Character des Landes, des Orts, der Zeit, in welche die Geschichte gesetzt wird, niemals aus den Augen gesetzt; und also alles so gedichtet sei, das kein hinlänglicher Grund angegeben werden könne, warum es nicht eben so wie es erzählt wird, hätte geschehen können, oder noch einmal wirklich geschehen werde. Diese Wahrheit allein kann Werke von dieser Art nützlich machen, und diese Wahrheit getrauet sich der Herausgeber den Lesern der Geschichte des Agathons zu versprechen.³⁵

I quote the preface at length here because it sets up numerous ideas that come to be central to later descriptions of the novel. First, Wieland addresses the question of novelistic truth, and it's here that a seeming call for an incipient literary realism in the German novel emerges³⁶: characters and their experiences can't be arbitrary; their development has to demonstrate a psychological causality and necessity that readers will recognize as true to human experience. Wieland also places the individual as the focal point through which the multiplicity of the world can be viewed and its events ordered, and the novel's protagonist thereby becomes a type of proxy for the reader, who is able to watch this protagonist move through the story world and its contingencies much as she moves through her own. Finally, the claim that this truth is what makes the text "useful" suggests Wieland's awareness

³⁵ Wieland, 5-6. [The truth, indeed, of a work of this kind, which we here offer to the reader, must depend entirely upon its consistency with the general customs of the world: the characters, therefore, are not to be arbitrarily drawn according to the fancy and peculiar design of the author, but derived from the inexhaustible fund of nature itself. In the winding up of the several parts, the probability of the events in themselves, and in their relative circumstances, must be carefully preserved, the dispositions of the human heart laid open, the nature of each particular passion delineated, with its several lights and shades, when displayed in any particular character, or under the accidental circumstances in which any person happens to be placed. Besides this, the peculiar characteristic of the country, of the spot, and of the age in which the scene of the history is laid, should be constantly kept in view, and the whole narrative so put together, that no sufficient reason may be assigned, why the events should not have happened exactly as they are told, or why they might not happen again. Such an appearance of truth as this can only render a work of this kind useful, and this the author takes upon himself to promise to the readers of the *History of Agathon*. (xiii-xix)]

³⁶ Germany, of course, lacks the thriving realist tradition of the English or French novel, even into the nineteenth century. Lukács ascribes the absence of German realism to the lack of a unified nation, which causes Germany to be historically out of synch with its counterparts. The effect on the development of a national literature is two-fold: he believes German literature overemphasizes individualistic, provincial characters and that it tends toward an overly abstract cosmopolitanism or humanism, all of which, he notes, render impossible the emergence of a coherent realist movement. *German Realists in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 2.

of the relationship between his text and its reader, as well as the reader's sense of a connection between the represented fictional world and her own, presaging later claims about the *Bildungsroman*'s edifying influence on its readers.

However, the theory of the novel that the preface takes such care to set up (and that Blanckenburg takes at face value in his celebration of Wieland's achievement), is notably missing from much of the novel that follows. Instead of presenting us with a psychologically believable protagonist and realist narrative of his experience from the start, the novel takes the reader on a tour of disparate narrative forms, shifting from romance to philosophical dialogue to psychological analysis to a character's autobiography. But to the extent that it fails to deliver the novel it seems to promise, we might read *Geschichte des Agathon* as a meta-novel that stages the birth of the narrative form whose demands its preface articulates, simultaneously disavowing and performing the project it lays out. It's these ironic, or (less charitably) failed, aspects of the text that Blanckenburg's *Versuch über den Roman* ignores but that are so crucial to the theory of the novel actually birthed by this particular, if bizarre, example of what a novel can look like. In all of its peculiarities, Wieland's novel offers a much more interesting, and ultimately smarter, reflection on the novel and its possibilities than an account that sweeps its oddities under the rug, and it's arguably in the very contradictions and tensions that come to define the text—and not in an overly reductive account of the portrait of its hero's "ganze jetzige moralische Seyn"—that the novel extends its real lessons to its readers. The text makes us desire and then denies us the type of easy identification that its preface seems to promise, but it's precisely in the novel's refusal to provide a story grounded in psychological realism, and in the failure of the type of readerly recognition that would go along with it, that it reflects on the potential of different types of novel form in the first place. Much as it stages both the creation and failure of the type of novel its preface outlines, it also stages the creation of the reader who can read the strange, hybrid novel form that it develops, producing and educating her not, primarily, through her consumption of the simple content of Agathon's story, but rather by teaching her to navigate the various forms it contains and the different readerly demands, and relationships to the world, that they imply.

From a much different time and place and in a very different novelistic mode, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, first completed in 1803 but not published until 1817, also stages a reflection on the story and form it produces in a meta-novelistic narrative that openly engages with the conventions of competing novelistic forms. Austen of course stands squarely within the developing tradition of the English realist novel, and is therefore quite differently placed with regard to ideas about novel form and psychological realism than Wieland. However, from the very different locus of her writing, her novel is similarly invested in theorizing the effect and value of existing types of works within the literary field, namely, the field of the contemporary novel, and it shifts these concerns into the story-world and narrative voice of the novel itself. *Northanger Abbey* is, at its heart, the story of a reader, and from the start, its narrator offers a meta-fictional commentary on the different types of novelistic fiction its heroine consumes and that its own pages imitate, and on the various modes of reading that they invite.

In one such openly meta-fictional moment, the narrator interrupts her sarcastic chronicling of the rapid development of Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe's intimacy—the two girls are, conveniently, busy spending a rainy morning immersed in the pleasures of Gothic fiction in this early scene—to reflect on the status of the novel genre. Giving voice to novel readers, critics, reviewers, and writers, she runs through the many dismissive, and often openly critical, comments directed towards the genre, and decries the fact that writers refuse to stand behind the pleasure that they give to their readers, so that even the fictional novel readers whom they write into their stories end up disparaging those books to which they turn for amusement and whose pages they themselves inhabit:

“And what are you reading, Miss — ?” “Oh! It is only a novel!” replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. “It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda”; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.³⁷

Written as it is with a healthy dose of typically Austenian irony, we of course can’t quite take this reflection entirely at face value. If some novels are worthy of greater loyalty and praise than the dismissals she cites, others, we imagine, deserve much less, and given what we know so far of Catherine and her readerly predilections, we might expect examples of this latter category to be more prevalent in the novel than the former. Even while the narrator seems to be openly taking issue with that “ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers”—namely, that of panning their own medium—this is of course exactly what she is doing here: implicit in this apparent defense of the genre is the narrator’s own barbed attack on at least certain types of novels that are worthy of the “contemptuous censure” that she allegedly wants to avoid (36).

The novel certainly does its fair share of censuring: from its open imitation and mockery of Gothic and sentimental fiction to its deflation of such novelistic tropes as heroes and heroines, tyrannical fathers, and murdered or imprisoned wives, from its characters’ many conversations about books and their value to its narrative shifts between the real world its protagonist inhabits and the ideal world she imagines, the text presents readers with a striking example of how a certain type of novel reading, if unchecked, can bleed over into real life with disastrous consequences. Within the novel’s diegetic world, it’s hard to find an example of a work of fiction, or of a means of engaging it, that would support the narrator’s defense of the genre. It’s certainly not in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or one of the other Gothic novels preferred by Austen’s heroine that the narrator would locate “the greatest powers of mind” or “the most thorough knowledge of human nature” supposedly displayed by novels.³⁸ Nor, moreover, will *Udolpho*’s representation of the world and human nature serve to nurture and edify the powers of the mind that consumes it. In fact, it does precisely the opposite. The Gothic novel does exert a great influence on its reader: it isn’t quietly consumed and quickly forgotten, but instead acts on and excites Catherine’s mind—it “moves” her, to call on one of Blanckenburg’s central terms—in dangerous ways. *Udolpho* and other such novels extend to Catherine lessons in reading that have a real effect on how she views and interacts with the larger world, but *Northanger Abbey* demonstrates the extent to which these are lessons in *misreading* and *misapprehension*. As the narrator begins to cede control of the story to Catherine, who seems to be increasingly capable of reading herself and her surroundings, both protagonist and reader quickly become trapped in a false Gothic tale, as she reads and interprets the world of the Abbey not by means of its real cues but instead as she would one of her favorite texts. If *Northanger Abbey* suggests that the novel extends real influence on its readers precisely through the pleasure it offers, this influence is the opposite of a “useful” one, instead offering a miseducation that can only be

³⁷ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 36-37. Subsequent page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

³⁸ If “the greatest powers of mind” and “most thorough knowledge of human nature” seem only to find ironic or negative representation in *Northanger Abbey* (except as Austen herself displays them), this is an element of the novel’s value that will take center stage in both Eliot and Mann: one important thing that these two novelists have in common is the seriousness of their intellectual and philosophical interests, and the extent to which they take seriously the novel as a space in which to examine and explore the “greatest powers of mind” that they value so highly.

corrected by Catherine's very real experience of shame when her bad reading practices lead her too far astray.

While the events of the story-world would seem to seriously call into question, if not to discount entirely, the value of novels and the narrator's early assertion that they should be taken more seriously, what *Northanger Abbey* in fact proposes through Catherine's cautionary tale is that all novels aren't created equal. Austen uses the fictional space of the novel to stage a comparison between the different, competing types of novel fiction vying for readers' attention, ultimately making the case for the type of novel that meets the criteria she outlines above. If the narrator's commentary and the outcome of Catherine's story deny such value to Gothic fiction, there is at least one novel to which this complimentary portrait of the genre and its powers presumably applies: namely, to Austen's own novel. As *Northanger Abbey* criticizes certain prevailing trends in novel fiction, it implicitly holds up its author's own mode of realist, domestic fiction as a positive counterexample to the detrimental reading material on display in its pages. And yet, even the conventions of Austen's own text don't escape entirely from the narrator's critical commentary: she pokes fun at the marriage plot that ties together the conclusion of the novel at both its Gothic and realist levels by ironically noting the way that readers and characters are "all hastening together to perfect felicity" in the novel's final pages (233), as the narrator almost tyrannically inserts herself and her commentary back into the story in a mode that's distinctly at odds with its earlier focalization through Catherine (a prime example of the psychological realism that was missing in Wieland). If it seems safe to assume that the reader who engages with the "knowledge," "wit," and "style" of Austen's fictional text will learn to read and respond in quite a different manner than Catherine Morland does in consuming Gothic tales, the novel also forces its readers to reckon with the source of the pleasure they take in it, noting the constructedness of the fictional world that we are consuming and the artificial conventions that her novel is following. In this way, *Northanger Abbey*, like *Geschichte des Agathon*, shows novel form to be many things at once: a seemingly silly or satirical text, in comparison to a novel like *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in fact becomes one with a serious and self-referential lesson about reading; a narrative that seeks to produce insight through its realist story and style also relies on utterly artificial and conventional plot devices, and the readerly pleasure we derive from the novel grows out of the way these competing impulses work with and against each other. As in Wieland's *Agathon*, the novel seeks to produce a certain awareness in its reader through the self-reflexive stance of the novel as a whole, all of which is aimed at producing a reader who, unlike Catherine, is capable of engaging with and evaluating its mimetic world, meta-fictional commentary, and the generic pleasures that define it.

Different as these two novels and novelists are, the examples of Wieland and Austen both reveal a certain need on the part of their authors to be explicit about the novel's project and potential within the space of the novel itself. This represents an important difference between the joint theory and practice of these earlier exemplars of the genre and that of Eliot and Mann from their later moment in its history. While it examines a different dynamic than the one I'm explicitly tracing here, Catherine Gallagher's account of the eighteenth-century novel's relationship to fictionality—its need to conceptualize the category even as it seemed to narrow it in practice, to distinguish itself from other forms through a newly understood and articulated relationship to fictionality—helps to illustrate this impulse of the early novel.³⁹ In *Geschichte des Agathon* and the discourse surrounding it, we see Wieland and his contemporaries openly seeking to differentiate the novel from other genres and to account for its particular form and value through this contrast. While Austen of course writes from a much more firmly established generic tradition than Wieland

³⁹ Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, Volume 1, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 337-340.

and the mid eighteenth-century narratives Gallagher addresses explicitly, and without the same need to distinguish her work from other dominant literary forms, she nevertheless engages in an open discussion of what the novel form is, where its value lies, how her work fits into a larger body of novels with which a reading public is engaging, and the relationship between fiction and the reality it purports to represent.⁴⁰ In contrast, Eliot and Mann's arguments in favor of the novel, its value, and the education it offers readers are no longer as explicit or openly meta-fictional: from their later moment in the history of the genre, in which the novel is firmly established as, to quote Margaret Cohen, an "authoritative form for social and cultural analysis,"⁴¹ their theorizing of their novels' projects becomes more subtly embedded in the novels' form itself.

Wilhelm Meister's Readerly Education

If, as the examples of Wieland and Austen suggest, the novel is always-already involved in theorizing itself and its others, then we might profitably turn to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* itself for an initial theory about how the project of *Bildung* and the form of the novel come together in ways that Eliot and Mann later take up. In so doing, we'd also be following Friedrich Schlegel's advice about how to interact with this unique novel: in his account, the text is so different from other works that it can only be understood in itself, and any ultimate generic conception of it can only grow out of our engagement with this textual object in all of its particularity.⁴² If, for Schlegel, the text ultimately fails to adequately account for itself—he contends that after performing the act of aesthetic judgment that the novel invites us to perform, readers are bound to find the text wanting—implicit in his review of Goethe's work is the claim that the novel stages its own lessons for readers in how it should be read, so that engaging with the *Lehrjahre* is a necessarily inductive process through which the reader comes to recognize the theory of this particular novel as articulated by the novel itself and is invited to judge it based on a standard of value that the novel proposes.

While *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in its entirety is concerned with questions of education, I'd suggest that the scenes in which its characters engage in acts of reading and writing are particularly important loci of the text's larger reflection on not only the educational experiences of its characters but also on its own enactment of the education it seeks to extend to its readers.⁴³ Wilhelm and the

⁴⁰ In *Northanger Abbey*'s concern with the status of different types of novels and James's claiming of *Wilhelm Meister* for the elite class of readers who can appreciate its difference from more popular and pleasurable forms, we see a consistent, if increasingly subtle, concern with a larger perception of the novel as a genre, a concern that also has an important influence on the perceived status of the *Bildungsroman* as a dominant fictional form in the German canon. As Swales, Kontje, and others explain about the retroactive claiming of the *Bildungsroman* as the novel of the German literary tradition, the seriousness of plots of education and socialization offered an easy way to rehabilitate and legitimize the novel, answering both concerns about its value and redeeming the prosaic nature of its social world by relating its mundanities to the inner world of the hero placed at its center—an inward turn that Mann termed the "Sublimierung" (sublimation) of the novel. See Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, 20-23; Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a Genre*, 14-17; Mann, "Die Kunst des Romans," in *Essays. Band 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977), 350.

⁴¹ Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 3.

⁴² Quoted in Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, 60.

⁴³ Scenes of reading are a well-known topos in the *Bildungsroman*, from its inception onward. Kontje describes in *Private Lives in the Public Sphere* the extent to which early *Bildungshelden* are all avid readers, developing via their identification with fictional heroes while also engaged in artistic production themselves (8), and Slaughter notes in *Human Rights, Inc.* the extent to which this "vision of *Bildung* as both a writing and reading practice" (28) persists as the form travels and is rewritten in more recent post-colonial novels, even as the spaces and terms under which such reading practices happen are radically changed. While a novel like Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* harks back to, and ultimately makes visible the limitations and ideological underpinnings of, earlier conventions of the *Bildungsheld* as auto-didact and reader in its school-centered narrative, other texts hang on to the idea of the *Bildungsheld* as autobiographer while radically

reader are aligned in these scenes of textual transmission in their parallel roles as readers, both positioned in relation to a written text that the novel casts as crucial to its hero's ongoing development, and it's in the way these scenes conceive of reading and textual experience that we might begin to articulate the processes of edification in which the novel engages.

At the end of the fifth book of the *Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm accepts the dying Aurelie's commission to deliver a letter to her former lover Lothario and prepares to leave the theater troupe with which he has spent the better part of his travels thus far. His departure signals the final dissolution of this community of artists, whose unraveling social fabric has become clear in the chapters since the triumph of their *Hamlet* performance, and it marks an important turning point in the novel: Wilhelm's apprenticeship with the theater, and his resulting introduction to a bohemian life so distinctly at odds with the bourgeois family sphere he has left behind, is at an end, and it's unclear to both Wilhelm and the reader what future course his development will take, now that he's indulged his love of the theater and found that, natural inclinations aside, he's a lousy actor. With the seeming telos of his artistic development suddenly rejected, the assumed course of the novel is abruptly shifted. But oddly enough, at just the moment when Wilhelm's story takes such a decisive turn, the novel interrupts it. Instead of following Wilhelm, we are greeted by a new and unknown first-person narrator, whose novella-length autobiographical confession replaces Wilhelm's travels, in the narrative's first departure from its eponymous protagonist and the sole subject, to this point, of its reflections on education and growth.

Wilhelm's own *Bildungsroman* is interrupted here by another *Bildungsroman* in the form of the "Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele." Unexpected as this embedded narrative might at first seem in the context of Wilhelm's story, it has both diegetic significance and extra-diegetic implications for our understanding of the story of Wilhelm's own formation. The autobiographical tale that is inserted here into Wilhelm's travels is the manuscript that Aurelie has had time to read and bequeath to him before her death. Even if Wilhelm's own experience of the manuscript and the time of its telling in the novel don't quite line up, we are placed here in a parallel position as readers of the Beautiful Soul's life story; the novel interrupts its main storyline to allow us to share in a textual experience that will prove important for him. When we later learn of the complex web of connections that ties this manuscript and its protagonist to the Tower Society, to Wilhelm's love interests, and to the theories of education expounded in the novel's final two books, the initial mystery of this text is retroactively explained, but this revelation of the text's significance doesn't quite account for the fact that we've spent about sixty pages following what we experience in the moment as a narrative digression.

What both Wilhelm and the reader consume in this sixth book is a self-told story of female formation, of the Beautiful Soul who gives this section its title. The *schöne Seele's* developmental trajectory is in many ways opposed to Wilhelm's own: whereas Wilhelm's inner formation happens by means of his journey out into the world and the various encounters that occur in it, the Beautiful Soul, whose possibilities are circumscribed by her gender, is necessarily forced to turn inward, to assert and develop her selfhood by withdrawing from the constraints of the social world and by instead embracing a life of spiritual practice and self-reflection.⁴⁴ While these pages seem to

revising the spaces in which such novelistic production can happen. Slaughter notes the extent to which the texts of such writers as Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Omar Rivabella, and Mario Roberto Morales—"literally written in the margins of the dominant social text"—"displace the scene of novelistic activity from a room of one's own to modernity's disavowed spaces: an Islamic *zenana*, a prison cell, a secret torture chamber, a paralegal military encampment, an ad hoc forensic laboratory" (28).

⁴⁴ As Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland argue in the introduction to *The Voyage In, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and "Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele" inaugurate two gendered traditions of the *Bildungsroman* that follow inverse trajectories as they develop over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century: the male

elaborate a narrative of personal cultivation and fulfillment—one that must be eminently worth telling, as a whole book is given over to the narrative—the novel also manages to call this story into question by its position within the larger text. The novel ultimately casts the story of the *schöne Seele* as other to Wilhelm’s developmental trajectory, suggesting that it is a negative example of self-cultivation gone too far. It even deprives the author of these pages of the title initially given to her and to her confession—that of the “Beautiful Soul”—ultimately concluding that Natalie, whose self-formation hasn’t led her to a solipsistic rejection of the social world and its attendant responsibilities, is the woman truly worthy of this name, and not her aunt. The skepticism that is voiced in the story-world about the success of this female *Bildungsroman* is implicitly supported by the formal organization of the novel: as Marianne Hirsch argues, the Beautiful Soul is ultimately a victim of the text’s economy and ethic of masculine *Bildung*. Her narrative, weighted as it is toward a subversive self-involvement that threatens the stability of social roles, has to be isolated and contained, kept separate from the telling of Wilhelm’s life so as to ultimately serve as an example of *Bildung* gone wrong.⁴⁵

What both *Bildungsromane* have in common, however, is the influence that they ascribe to the textual encounters with which their protagonists’ *Bildungswege* are punctuated. From the first page of her story, the Beautiful Soul stresses the importance of narrative to her development: from her desire to be told stories as a child to the role of fiction in her first experience of love, from her mother’s fear of the seductive power of books to her own sense of participation in fictional worlds that is both “lebhaft und vollkommen,”⁴⁶ a belief in the formative power of stories permeates her confessions.⁴⁷ Moreover, the reader comes to locate this power not only in the receptive experiences described within the narrative but also in the production of the very text that we, like Wilhelm, are reading. The *schöne Seele* gets to write her own *Bildungsroman*, to explore her developing sense of self in a narrative that will ultimately be passed on to others. And the fact that the novel has to cordon her story off from Wilhelm’s own narrative for fear of infection seems to underscore the extent to which such narratives not only recount the formation of their protagonists but might also serve to form their readers. The Beautiful Soul’s story has to be contained precisely because it could act on its reader in ways the novel can’t condone if it were allowed to circulate more freely within the *Bildungsroman* proper. We, like Wilhelm, can’t be allowed to view these confessions as a narrative example of successful self-fulfillment or else we might be prompted to view its model of self-isolation and involvement as a paradigm for our own life-story; the novel has to ensure that we read this text properly, teaching us to do so by its placement of the Beautiful Soul’s story within the larger

Bildungsroman that begins with *Wilhelm Meister* emphasizes its protagonist’s encounters with and integration into the outside world, while the female *Bildungsroman* is necessarily figured as a “voyage in,” a journey of introspection like the Beautiful Soul’s. As the form develops, however, the female *Bildungsroman*, whether it follows the model of a narrative of apprenticeship or awakening, becomes increasingly concerned with the world without and its heroine’s negotiation of her place within it, while the male tradition moves inward, as we see, for example, in Rilke’s *Malte Laurids Brigge*. See *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), 12-13.

⁴⁵ Marianne Hirsch, “Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm,” in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, 27-32.

⁴⁶ [lively and complete] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lebrjahre* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 2006), 350. All subsequent page references are given parenthetically in the text. Translations from Goethe’s novel are my own.

⁴⁷ Given the emphasis on religion in the type of *Bildung* modeled by the Beautiful Soul’s narrative, we could perhaps read the formative relationship with texts that it details as at least in part stemming from a mode of spiritual practice. The novel would then set its own model of *Bildung* in the person of Wilhelm apart from these confessions not only on the gendered grounds I’ve suggested above, but would also break with an earlier model of religious *Bildung*, offering instead a version of secular and aesthetic *Bildung* grounded in a different model of reading.

developmental narrative that we are following.⁴⁸ In so doing, this novel, like Wieland and Austen's, also asks its reader to recognize and to negotiate the division and interaction between the multiple forms that comprise its narrative, its overarching reflection on *Bildung* and its textual enactment emerging from the interplay between these different forms.

When we finally return to Wilhelm's story, we can't help but read his reflections in the first paragraph following this narrative excursus into a parallel account of self-formation as support for the *schöne Seele's* belief that textual encounters can play an important role in the development of the individual who experiences them. In reflecting with a typically youthful passion upon the spring day and the paradoxically beautiful rainbow that can only arise from the darkness of a storm, he considers why we are moved by works of art, linking aesthetic experience to the congruence of beauty and virtue and suggesting the extent to which it can help us to realize our own inner potential: "Uns rührt die Erzählung jeder guten Tat, uns rührt das Anschauen jedes harmonischen Gegenstandes; wir fühlen dabei, daß wir nicht ganz in der Fremde sind, wir wännen einer Heimat näher zu sein, nach der unser Bestes, Innerstes ungeduldig hinstrebt" (377).⁴⁹ Wilhelm seems to voice a version of the program of aesthetic education here,⁵⁰ but we're not quite sure how seriously we should take him. It's tempting to dismiss Wilhelm's reflections as mere *Schwärmerei* on the part of the still naïve protagonist, and in fact, there are plenty of other voices within the story—including Therese, the Abbé, and the Beautiful Soul's uncle—who would discourage us from too literally concluding that there's something to be gained from the textual representation of virtue and harmony that couldn't be better gleaned directly from the world itself. And yet, even as the novel explicitly voices disapproval and distrust of the potentially deleterious effect of an overly naïve relationship to stories, at almost every crucial moment of his development Wilhelm works through his expanding understanding of himself and the world by means of aesthetic representation, from his childhood puppet shows to *Hamlet*, from extended critical discussions of drama and the novel to the manuscript in the Tower that contains the story of his life (and that bears the same name as the novel we are reading). Whatever doubts the novel might throw at us along the way about the value of such narrative and textual encounters, the novel continues to align both the reader and Wilhelm in an attempt to understand life by these very means.

When the Tower Society's influence over Wilhelm's life and their written record of his formative experiences are finally revealed, Wilhelm responds with an exclamation of surprise that the seemingly random and coincidental occurrences that have constituted his life to this point could actually contain an overarching meaning: "Sonderbar! sagte er bei sich selbst, sollten zufällige Ereignisse einen Zusammenhang haben?" (442).⁵¹ If it's hard to imagine such a meaningful "Zusammenhang" becoming visible in real life, as it does for Wilhelm here, there is a forum in which we do expect exactly the experience that Wilhelm describes: in the novel that contains a life

⁴⁸ We might think, here, of the role that the Gothic plays in *Northanger Abbey* and of later accusations that would be launched against the novel as a genre for its deleterious effects on readers, particularly women. For example, writing of novels produced in a very different time and place, Nina Baym explains antebellum American culture's fear of the social instability that could come from the sense of self promoted by novel reading in terms that are nevertheless similar to the *Lehrjahre's* discomfort with the Beautiful Soul's narrative: "In gratifying the self, novels foster self-love and a tendency to self-assertion that make the mind ungovernable and thus jeopardize the agencies of social and psychological control." *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 39.

⁴⁹ [The story of a noble action moves us; the sight of any harmonious object moves us; we thereby feel as if we weren't entirely in a foreign place; we imagine that we're nearer a home toward which our best, most inner self is impatiently striving.]

⁵⁰ Many of his terms echo Schiller's, including the correlation of beauty and morality, the contemplation of a harmonious object, and the implication that the inner, ideal potential toward which the subject strives is actually familiar, the actualization of a state that is already his by right.

⁵¹ ["Strange!" he said to himself, "might random events be connected?"]

story. What the Tower and its documentation of his education provide to Wilhelm is the chance to see his life as if it is a novel, a work of art that he can contemplate—which it is, in a sense, given the extent to which the outside force of the Tower, an author of sorts, has shaped it—and to respond to it as a reader—which Wilhelm does, in fact, literally become, in being presented with the written document of his *Lehrjahre*. The *Bildungsroman* with which the Tower provides him reveals the form and meaning of his life's course in a way that is strange to think of experiencing while actually moving through the chaos of the daily “zufällige Ereignisse” of an ongoing life. We might think here of Walter Benjamin's “Der Erzähler”: Wilhelm has the strange chance to confront the “meaning of his life” in written form, a meaning that is normally foreclosed to us because it only becomes visible upon death. He doesn't have to “[warm] his shivering life” by reading about a stranger's fate in the novel; he is able to draw actual warmth and meaning from his own, and the conclusion of his written *Lehrjahre* isn't the absolute “Finis” of the novel as Benjamin describes it, but rather the beginning of a new stage of life, one in which he will be able to put into effect the “counsel” he's drawn from reading his own story.⁵² Benjamin's distinction between positively-valued story and negatively-valued novel seems to break down in this novel that is so concerned with the transferal of wisdom to its characters and readers: the very structure of *Bildung* that is so constitutive of this novel's project suggests a more story-like temporality to both the textual version of his life that Wilhelm encounters and the novel that contains his life-story.

The strange, even creepy, intervention of the Tower in the novel also invites a much more critical reading of the novel, à la Foucault or D.A. Miller. Wilhelm's education appears not far from indoctrination in light of the surveillance and guidance to which he is unknowingly subjected throughout his young life. If we read the Tower as a type of novelistic agent, shaping/writing the life of this young protagonist and then making his story available to be consumed, then we're also forced to reckon with the novel form's own implication in the disciplinary conditioning of its characters, and to conclude that the *Bildungsroman* doesn't seek the free growth of its subjects, but rather works to shape them into the socially acceptable subject it requires.⁵³ To use Franco Moretti's terms in *The Way of the World*, the demands of socialization and normality win out here, even if we, like Wilhelm, think we've been reading a story of self-determination: Wilhelm's story ends when its intentional design is finally realized, making the hero's development and the novel's end a strange combination of “homeland” and “prison.”⁵⁴ In this case, Hegel's mocking summary of the *Bildungsroman*'s typical plotline, as exemplified in Goethe—the hero “in the end usually gets his girl and some kind of position, marries and becomes a philistine just like the others”⁵⁵—becomes a formal necessity for the novel precisely to the extent that it is also a social and political necessity, one that maintains the conservative order of the world with an almost god-like degree of power.⁵⁶

⁵² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 101, 100, 86.

⁵³ On the novel as a form of social control, see D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁵⁴ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 16, 55. And as Tobias Boes notes, we might trace this confluence between self-development/self-determination and the universal telos toward which the individual is shown to have been working all along to the normative strain inherent in German idealism and that carries forward into modern *Bildungsroman* theory. See *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁵⁵ In *Lectures on Aesthetics*, quoted in Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, 30. Hegel's criticism of the *Bildungsroman*'s pragmatic nature is also echoed by Novalis's dislike of the *Lehrjahre* and his rewriting of its conventions in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*'s narrative of its protagonist's *Entbildung*, in direct opposition to the Goethean model.

⁵⁶ Fredric Jameson observes that this revelation of the Society of the Tower's influence on Wilhelm's education casts the Tower as “a better pedagogue than God, and far more self-conscious and theoretical about its teaching method” in a moment that turns “inside out” our understanding of the novel's plot, which transforms from an unordered sequence of chance events into a plan with “a deliberately providential design.” “The Experiments of Time: Providence and

And yet, this twist at the end of the text also suggests the novel's self-awareness about its own interweaving of the project of *Bildung* and the form of the *Roman*, and not only because the entrance into the text of a secret aristocratic society that has mysteriously been orchestrating everything that Wilhelm has experienced up to this moment is so strange that it could only happen in fiction. What Wilhelm achieves here is, as Thomas Pfau describes it, a "reflexive perspective" on his own development, one that forces him into new forms of awareness and responsiveness to the contingencies and unknowns of reality.⁵⁷ The novel's wager seems to be that the subject who is properly *gebildet*—understood not simply as indoctrinated in good bourgeois values, but as trained in the practices of reading that the *Bildungsroman* requires—could come not just to view but also to analyze his life as the meaningful whole described above while also being critically aware of the interpretive stance he is taking towards it, precisely as we are as readers of the lives of novelistic characters. The novel helps Wilhelm to come into knowledge—to learn something of his own life course, to see the extent to which it is bound up in a larger social fabric, to evaluate moral action, to grow intellectually and emotionally—by providing him with a fundamentally readerly experience. By literalizing the trope of life as text, making Wilhelm into an actual reader at the culmination of his apprenticeship and education, the novel proposes that the *Bildung* represented in the text is best brought to fulfillment through a type of vision and experience that properly belongs to the analytical and interpretive work required by a novel of the type we are reading.

If it's unusual that the protagonist of a novel encounters in the story-world such a near version of the text in which we find him, and is given the opportunity to read and respond to his life story much as we do, this self-reflexive turn at the end of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* closely aligns Wilhelm and the novel's real-world reader. Having posited texts like the *Lehrjahre* as a central means of aesthetic, affective, and moral edification, and having united us with its protagonist in the consumption of them, the novel ultimately asks us to consider how all of its readers, and not just Wilhelm, might learn something from the pages of the texts they read—and how novels might actively seek to teach those readers through their own critical stance toward novel form.

Eliot and Mann's Novelistic Pedagogy

I read Eliot and Mann as inheritors of both Goethe's investment in the project of *Bildung* that the *Lehrjahre* seeks to enact and the self-consciousness that its narrative brings into being: first in its increasingly self-aware protagonist, then in the reader whom the novel seeks to shape through its

Realism," in *The Novel*, Volume 2, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 106. This observation supports a reading of this strange twist as a reflection on novelistic plotting itself: the novel inscribes within its story the very design and plotting that is the work of the novelist who writes Wilhelm's story and that we would expect to be accessible only to the reader of his work.

⁵⁷ Thomas Pfau, "Of Ends and Endings," 238. Pfau's understanding of the *Bildungsroman*'s openness is rooted in his account of *Bildung* as fundamentally grounded in eighteenth-century organicist thought. Development, whether organic or narrative, is in his account a "quest for progressively more sophisticated self-awareness" (235), and even if a notion of intrinsic purposiveness inheres within the consciously developing subject, the open-ended growth of this model prevents any objective and authoritative meta-narrative from emerging (237-239). In other words, there's no final, stable point from which the subject—or the novel—can look back on the totality of his development. This account not only notes the unease of the *Bildungsroman* with finality and closure, but also suggests that the type of totalizing view implied by more teleological models of *Bildungsroman* criticism is impossible, rendered obsolete by the very novels that such criticism claims to describe. Central to Jürgen Jacobs's thesis about the *Bildungsroman* is a similar claim that the novel's failure to fulfill the teleological model it sets up is, in fact, a constitutive element of the genre. See *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder. Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman* (München: W. Fink, 1972). The *Bildungsroman* is then also an example of what Robert Alter terms a "self-conscious novel": one that "flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality." *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), x.

inclusion of codes for how it should be read, and finally in its meta-reflection on the work and uses of novels themselves. Indeed, for Mann, such a distinctive awareness of and reflection on the operation and aims of the form is constitutive of the novel as a genre: “Der Roman repräsentiert als modernes Kunstwerk die Stufe der ‘Kritik’ nach derjenigen der ‘Poesie.’ Sein Verhältnis zum Epos ist das Verhältnis des ‘schöpferischen Bewußtseins’ zum ‘unbewußten Schaffen’.”⁵⁸ Mann’s distinction between the categories of “Kritik” and “Poesie,” “Roman” and “Epos,” “schöpferischen Bewußtsein” and “unbewußten Schaffen”—the latter of which echoes Friedrich Schiller’s distinction between the sentimental and the naive in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*—implies that integral to the novel is its development beyond a naive and unknowing relationship to its own mimetic project; the form instead undertakes a knowing representation of fictional worlds for its own critical ends. What the subsequent chapters suggest is that one of the critical ends to which the novels under consideration put their “schöpferischen Bewußtsein” is that of the formation of their readers: they self-consciously enact their central concern with readerly *Bildung* in the form of their novels themselves, in the interplay of story and discourse and the way they structure the reader’s engagement with these intertwined levels of the text, ultimately creating in her a similar critical awareness as that of the novel itself.

In training their readers in this way, Eliot and Mann’s novels don’t descend into a type of endless textual decipherment or play. In the formal lessons that they enact, these novels reveal that they have designs on their reader beyond mere exegesis, and in this regard they seek to enact a critical awareness via the formal education of their readers in a very different way than a modernist work like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which Leo Bersani characterizes as “more than any other work of literature [...] a guidebook to how it should be read.” In Bersani’s negative account of the project with which *Ulysses* tasks its reader, the novel continually offers up lessons in how to read itself, but there isn’t anything for the reader to learn beyond how to better become the “exegetical machine necessary to complete its sense”; there’s no larger meaning or purpose toward which our reading guides us.⁵⁹ If *Ulysses*’ lessons are solely about *Ulysses*, the guiding frame of Eliot and Mann’s fiction ultimately directs us back outward onto the world.

This claim on the reader and her world is one important way in which, different as Eliot and Mann’s texts are in some regards—we might take Eliot’s apparent sincerity and Mann’s characteristic irony as just one example of seemingly opposite tendencies in their work—the novels I consider here are more closely aligned with the worldview of the nineteenth-century realist novel than with the modernist novel that was contemporaneous with much of Mann’s writing career. Separated by a period in which novelists like James were attempting to define the novel as a high art endeavor, Eliot and Mann both parallel formal questions with the value questions that those novels take up, their central concern with education in turn leading to real questions about the moral, political, and social stakes of the narratives they represent and our engagement with them.⁶⁰ While I’ll consider Eliot’s review of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* at greater length in the following chapter on

⁵⁸ Mann, “Die Kunst des Romans,” 352. Mann is borrowing here Dmitri Mereschkowski’s terms for the transition between the writing of Pushkin and Gogol. [“The novel as a modern work of art represents that stage of ‘criticism’ following the stage of ‘poetry.’ Its relation to the epic is the relation of the ‘creative consciousness’ to ‘unconscious creativity.’” Translation in Haskell M. Block and Herman Salinger, eds., *The Creative Vision: Modern European Writers on Their Art* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 94.]

⁵⁹ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 163, 175.

⁶⁰ The questions I am asking and my approach to the novels in question are continuous with Jesse Rosenthal’s work in the very recently published *Good Form: The Ethical Experience of the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). While his study is historically grounded in the particulars of Victorian writing and reading and while his particular focus is on nineteenth-century ideas of the moral (as opposed to my primary conceptual lens of *Bildung*/education across two national novelistic traditions), we are both fundamentally interested in the interpenetration of novel form and the values put forth by their authors, arguing that the form of the novels teaches us to read those values, and vice versa.

Felix Holt, it's worth considering here the fundamental difference between her defense of the novel and James's, with which I opened this chapter. While both of their reviews vehemently argue for the novel's value, there's a striking difference between the chief complaint about the text that they each choose to place at the center of their reparative readings: while James chooses a largely aesthetic category in his focus on the novel's alleged "dullness," turning this complaint back on those who voice it by suggesting that the reader who finds the novel boring is in fact just a "dull" reader who can't appreciate its true aesthetic value, Eliot emphasizes a more moral reading of the novel, arguing that those elements of the novel that its critics cite as evidence of its immorality are in fact where its true morality lies, and that this exemplary morality is, in fact, the novel's true locus of value. For Eliot, it's precisely the way that the novel recounts both the moral formation of its characters and enables the potentially parallel formation or reform of its reader—rather than simply speaking to a rarefied reader—that makes the novel a paragon of the genre.

In arguing for a version of novel writing and reading that sees itself acting on the reader and intervening in the world in real ways, I also don't mean to reduce these novels, or their reflection on and enactment of education, to a simplistic set of didactic lessons or moral maxims. Indeed, while it's indisputable that a book like *Middlemarch* advances certain moral truths in explicit ways and *Der Zauberberg* a clear political aim, I don't want to suggest that we define their, or the genre's, value in such simple terms, nor does my interest in these novels' conception of and relationship to their readers imagine that this relationship is one of simple moral improvement, that the mere fact of reading *Felix Holt* or being exposed to the cast of characters who populate *Der Zauberberg* makes us somehow better people or ethical actors. The type of readerly formation I seek to trace here lies between Bersani's description of an endless textual play of machine-like exegesis and an overly sincere account of literature's ability to reflect back to us an improving human truth: it's in the confluence of, and sometimes tension between, the visions of form and value that these novels enact that I locate their fundamental concern with and faith in readerly formation.

To this end, I find Amanda Claybaugh's definition of the novel of purpose particularly helpful in understanding Eliot and Mann. In tracing the extent to which nineteenth-century novelists borrowed elements of reformist writing in their "earnest" attempts to engage seriously with the world and its problems—and thereby to help remake that world—through fiction, Claybaugh explains that these novelists "were united in their conviction that purposes were what novels did and should have, even if they sometimes disagreed about what these purposes should be. As a consequence, they thought of novels not as self-contained aesthetic objects but rather as active interventions into social and political life."⁶¹ My readings seek to treat these novels—and to think about the way they envision themselves—both as "aesthetic objects" and as "active interventions" into life, and the novelistic pedagogy that I ascribe to them is equally indebted to both impulses, as they posit that the "purpose" toward which they work can best be carried out by the workings of novel fiction and is deeply embedded in the novel's form.

My argument also seeks to guard against the type of false wholeness that is, as we've seen above, too readily ascribed to *Bildung* or the *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, the coming chapters will show that these novels' concern with education, far from unifying the text into a coherently articulated project, in fact causes these texts, and in turn their readers, to shuttle back and forth between various levels and tensions: between the realization of form and the contingencies of formation, between the demands of form and content, between realism and didacticism. In this, we might say that novelistic pedagogy is itself an "antinomy of realism,"⁶² one by which these novels come into

⁶¹ Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 36.

⁶² Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013).

their own self-awareness and that positions the novel form as one that inhabits the middle ground between the constitutive tensions it teaches its reader to negotiate.

Chapter 2

Politics and Female Vision: The Aesthetic Education of *Felix Holt, the Radical*

“Pooh, my dear,” said Sir Maximus, “women think so much of those minutiae. In the present state of the country, it is our duty to look at a man’s position and politics.”¹

In his lukewarm writings on *Felix Holt, the Radical*, Henry James praises the powers of observation that allowed George Eliot to craft such a full portrait of English life in the wake of the Reform Bill while denigrating what he saw as the novel’s severe plot and character flaws. If, on the one hand, the novel is an “admirable tissue of details,” as he concedes in his 1866 “George Eliot’s Novels,” it is, on the other, “without character as a composition,” “leav[ing] upon the mind no single impression” and lacking discernible form.² What Eliot does well is to observe and record details, but this acute vision quickly turns from a virtue to a liability in James’s eyes— she sees so much that her works are unable to step back from these observed details and synthesize the minutiae they’ve recorded into a dramatically interesting whole: “if, on the one hand, her reflection never flags, so, on the other, her observation never ceases to supply it with material. Her observation, I think, is decidedly of the feminine kind: it deals, in preference, with small things. This fact may be held to explain the excellence of what I have called her pictures, and the comparative feebleness of her dramatic movement” (926). While Eliot’s observing eye is clear and discerning enough to make out those small details essential to her recreation of life in England over thirty years past, her attention is drawn in too many different directions for these details to add up to more than a sequence of well-drawn “pictures,” as she is attracted and distracted by the myriad calls of the otherwise overlooked and forgotten “small things” on which she trains her novelist’s eye. Even something as central to *Felix Holt* as its protagonist’s titular Radicalism falls victim to this unflagging authorial observation, never allowed to develop convincingly, “choked” as it is “amidst a mass of subordinate interests” (927) to which she so resolutely gives equal attention.

What Eliot’s work lacks in this description is the overarching form that would bring the novel’s discrete “small things” together in a coherent whole shaped by a unified authorial vision. In his review of *Felix Holt* itself, published a few months before the essay on her novels, James brings together her success as an observer and “picture”-maker and her parallel failure as a composer of a complete novelistic work in a gendered dismissal of the novel:

With a certain masculine comprehensiveness which [Edgeworth and Austen] lack, she is eventually a feminine— a delightfully feminine— writer. She has the microscopic observation, not a myriad of whose keen notations are worth a single one of those great synthetic guesses with which a real master attacks the truth and which, by their occasional occurrence in the stories of Mr. Charles Reade (the much abused “Griffith Gaunt” included), make him, to our mind, the most readable of living English novelists, and prove him a distant kinsman of Shakespeare. George Eliot has the exquisitely good taste on a small scale, the absence of taste on a large (the vulgar plot of “Felix Holt” exemplifies this deficiency), the unbroken current of

¹ George Eliot, *Felix Holt* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 95. Subsequent page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

² In Henry James, *Literary Criticism* Vol. 1 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 927. Subsequent page references for James’s essays will be given parenthetically in the text.

feeling, and, we may add, of expression, which distinguish the feminine mind. (911-912)

Here again, James emphasizes the smallness of Eliot's sensibilities as an observer of life, and it is precisely this limitation of scale that comes to separate the "feminine mind" from that of the truly great writers. If the "dramatic movement" he failed to see in her novels is implicitly gendered male in the quotation from his later essay, opposed as it is to the "feminine" obsession with "small things" and the "pictures" that grow out of them, the "synthetic" power that makes great novels cohere in this passage evaluating *Felix Holt* is much more openly aligned with masculine value, and indeed most of the first sentence is hijacked by his praise of the male writer who allegedly succeeds where Eliot fails.³ It is once again the overall shape and movement of the novel—its "vulgar plot," its lack of a large-scale sensibility—that James censures. In place of the unifying synthetic force of the great masters is the lesser, distinctly feminized "unbroken current of feeling" that holds together the "small things" of the drawing room, the minutiae of daily life, and the figures who populate it.

Questions of size and scale also figure prominently in Virginia Woolf's similarly ambivalent comments on Eliot's work, and James's suggestion that there is a "masculine comprehensiveness" to Eliot's writing—a comment that the rest of the passage, and indeed the rest of the review, fails to take up—seems to anticipate Woolf's account of Eliot's overly masculine sensibilities. As she argues in *A Room of One's Own*, if a woman's taste and vision appear circumscribed beside a man's, this is the inevitable outcome of her material circumstances, and those of generations of her kinswomen: "all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion. Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room."⁴ Woolf mentions here many of the terms that James uses in his characterization of Eliot's writing, but instead of casting observation, emotion, and domestic sensibility as defining features of the essentially limited "feminine mind," she shows them to be the direct result of her inherited place in the world. As Woolf goes on to argue, if Tolstoy had been similarly confined to the drawing-room, the world of *War and Peace* would have been as small as that of any novel by a woman.⁵ She, like James, characterizes Eliot's flaws as a writer by means of a gendered notion of scale, but she reverses James's assessment of Eliot's gendered sensibilities: far from being overly concerned with the "small things," Woolf argues, Eliot's tastes and aspirations as a writer are too capacious for her woman's life and experience; she has too masculine of a sensibility

³ And this is, of course, not the first time that Eliot's novel has been compared, in not entirely favorable terms, to Reade's work: the author of the *Times* review of *Felix Holt* at the time of the novel's publication suggested that Esther's testimony at Felix's trial had "probably been suggested by a similar situation which Mr. Charles Reade has introduced into his last novel and which he has handled with exceeding delicacy," suggesting that this climactic scene in *Felix Holt*—which the reviewer considers to be the novel's best—in fact derives from the existing success of James's "real master." See review of *Felix Holt*, *Times*, June 26, 1866.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Mariner Books, 1989), 67. Subsequent page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵ In Woolf's attempt to correct the male blindness to the material facts that determine a woman's experience, and thus her writing, we might not only read a challenge to the great master's easy dismissal of the female author's talent in an assertion of masculine superiority but also a retroactive defense of the *Schöne Seele* of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. The novel's implicit criticism of the Beautiful Soul's story, which it formally enacts by embedding her text within the masculine *Bildungsroman*, is also ultimately about the "smallness" of this female subject's vision and growth: what it casts as dangerous is the *Bekennnisse's* emphasis on a version of female selfhood that turns back on itself, lacking the great act of "synthesis" or movement out into the world that would give it a larger meaning within the masculine ethic of *Bildung*. Woolf reminds us that it's precisely the structure of the world in which this masculine ethic reigns supreme that has dictated the sphere in which the *Schöne Seele's* development can actually occur in the first place and that then faults her for inhabiting and making the most of it.

and drive for her novels to fully cohere and would have been more successful had she been free to pursue the male-dominated genres of history and biography (67). This rupture between the novelistic form available to her and the scope of her mind and expression is, to Woolf, evident even in the shape of her prose: she is stuck trying to force her woman's observations and experiences, necessarily smaller in scale, into the length and form of a "man's sentence," "committ[ing] atrocities with it that beggar description" (77).⁶ Confined by the circumstances of a nineteenth century woman but with the ambition and intellect to rival that of any "real master," the struggle between the microscopic and synthetic, the small and large, the feminine and masculine is, for Woolf, inscribed in the novels themselves.

The tension between such differing scales of vision and ambition is, I would argue, at the heart of *Felix Holt*. The novel quite consciously plays with the possibilities and limitations of gendered modes of observing and structuring the world in its diegetic exploration of politics, reform, and education, and it ultimately revalues them in its own attempt to model reform through its own novelistic practice. Indeed, what makes James's account of the novel so questionable when read alongside the text he's discussing is its "Pooh, my dear" quality: his gendered dismissal of Eliot's novel—which echoes, astonishingly closely, Sir Maximus's easy rejection of his wife's powers of observation in the epigraph above⁷—deploys against *Felix Holt*, seemingly without realizing it, those very terms and categories that are in fact centrally at work within the text and that play such an important role in the way that the novel conceives of its own form and project. This dismissal may seem quite strange to readers of James, given the careful attention that his own novels give to the "small things" of the drawing room and to women's experience, and I certainly don't mean to suggest that the young James's reaction to *Felix Holt* should be taken as a synecdochic example of

⁶ The question of Eliot's style is an interesting one, and continues to be a live one for her readers. Grappling with the fact that Eliot is, in some ways, a "bad writer," Jenny Davidson, for example, observes that "*Middlemarch* is both unparalleled in its greatness and full of sentences that make me cringe," echoing Woolf's assessment of the "atrocities" of Eliot's sentences and attempting to reconcile her stylistic infelicities with her virtues as a novelist. See Davidson's *Reading Style: A Life in Sentences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 23.

For Woolf, novelistic style is as much a question of gender as is novelistic content, as the popular forms and styles thought worthy of imitation—overwhelmingly influenced by "great men writers"—circumscribed the work of aspiring women writers as much as material circumstances and discouraging criticism. If Thackeray and Dickens were easily able to turn to existing writing to find a style that at once befit their individual voices and was also "common property" on which they could readily draw, there was no such easy inheritance for a woman, who found "no common sentence ready for her use" (76). It's here that Woolf draws a sharp distinction between Austen and Eliot, seeing Austen as the one woman writer who refused to imitate male writing and instead "devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use" (77). Austen's role as literary forebear is another point on which James and Woolf depart: it's the "smallness" of Eliot's writerly sensibilities that he uses as evidence for her direct descent from Austen, whereas for Woolf, the small, shapely, crystalline woman's form is precisely what Eliot didn't learn from her. This distinction between gendered styles and forms is once again a question of size, with particular emphasis on the necessary correspondence between the scale of a work of art and the mind and body that produces or consumes it: "The book has somehow to be adapted to the body, and at a venture one would say that women's books should be shorter, more concentrated, than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and interrupted work" (78). In her insistence on this strange correspondence between writing and the body, we can see that Woolf's delineation of a women's vision and prose is, in its own way, as strictly gendered as James's, and equally dependent on the question of size and scale.

⁷ It doesn't take a particularly discerning reader to recognize that Lady Debarry's observations about the "minutiae" dismissed by her husband—which clearly stem from a sensibility trained "by the influences of the common sitting-room," as Woolf would have it, and which are thus attuned to its nuances—come much closer to the true state of affairs in the Transome household than her husband's meaningless generalization about the male prerogative of "position and politics." I'll return to this scene at greater length in the discussion to follow. For now, it suffices to note that whatever real flaws James notices in this novel, one can't help but wonder, given his parroting of Sir Maximus's position, how closely he actually read it.

his larger views as a novelist and critic, as his later work amply contradicts his more questionable statements here.⁸ However, I am interested in them as a readerly response to this particular novel—a novel that is, as I will argue, particularly concerned with the cultivation of certain readerly responses in both its characters and readers—insofar as they represent a localized failure to read *Felix Holt* on the terms that the novel itself lays out.

As its title suggests, *Felix Holt, the Radical* is ostensibly concerned, like Sir Maximus, with “a man’s position and politics,” with a larger “truth” about this traditionally masculine sphere that we might expect the novel to explore with one of the “synthetic” gestures praised by James. Set in the wake of the 1832 Reform Bill, written during the debates leading up to the 1867 passage of the Second Reform Bill, and following the course of a parliamentary election in North Loamshire county, the story would seem to center on politics and political reform. And yet, if the title promises the story of a radical reformist and his political activism—indeed, the majority of Felix Holt’s appearances in the novel are accompanied by speeches advocating his vision of reform based on the education and improvement of the working man—it ultimately proves surprisingly uninterested in politics in its overall narrative shape. Felix’s character and his political concerns are displaced, for long segments of the novel, by characters in whose private fate the novel seems much more intimately invested. In following the domestic stories of Mrs. Transome, Esther Lyon, and the strangely complicated and coincidence-laden inheritance plot that connects them, we might be tempted to wonder, like James, why Felix’s name and political affiliation are affixed to the text if his politics are of such seemingly little concern to his author and can be so easily sidelined in favor of the happy (and to many readers unsatisfying) resolution of the novel’s marriage plot. In short, the novel proves much more interested in the “minutiae” of the private lives and experiences of its women than in the “position and politics” of Felix Holt and the working men he champions.

My first contention is that *Felix Holt* asserts the significance of the “small things” in which Eliot’s realist—and ultimately her reformist—project is grounded through this sidelining of Felix Holt himself. Contra James and Sir Maximus, who might agree that the novel’s true (read: male) subject is “choked” by the “subordinate interests” of the domestic plotlines of the novel’s women, I’ll argue that it’s precisely in this seeming inconsistency in the novel—in its formal displacement of its alleged protagonist and his political agenda—that the novel lays out an alternate model of, and makes its strongest case for, “reform.” Like its protagonist, *Felix Holt* understands reform to be a matter of education,⁹ but the novel is ultimately concerned less with the public elections, laws, and transformation of working class consciousness in which its representation of Felix’s reformist efforts are grounded than in the enactment of a transformed attention to and understanding of the “small things” on which the realist novel itself focuses and by which it effects the individual reform of its heroine Esther. In particular, the novel upholds as a primary agent of transformation the very vice/virtue for which James takes its author to task: a transformed vision of, and corresponding feeling for, the particulars that surround its characters—a mode of “observation” of the “feminine

⁸ In noting the contradictions that underlie James’s response to *Felix Holt* and the harshness of his evaluation of the novel in this initial (unsigned) review, Christine Richards suggests that James’s focus on the novel’s flaws derives from both his need to distinguish his own voice as a young critic and from the relative freedom offered by anonymity. “Towards a Critical Reputation: Henry James on *Felix Holt, the Radical*,” *The George Eliot Review* 31 (2000), 51–52.

⁹ While reform and education are not entirely synonymous, this chapter’s movement between the two terms is grounded both in the novel’s own historical argument for a particular vision of reform (Felix’s claim that the proper education of prospective voters has to precede any decision to enfranchise the working class) and my own understanding of the way these two terms interact in the project of *Bildung*, as discussed in the previous chapter. My own use of the term “education” throughout this chapter is therefore not entirely synonymous with Felix’s: when I speak of the “education” imagined and offered by Eliot’s novel, I mean something much closer to *Bildung* than to the less capacious conventional meaning of the English term.

kind.” In its displacement of the political by the domestic, the synthetic by the small, Eliot reclaims the work of reform both for the “feminine mind” and for the novel itself.

Following Peter Brooks, we could, in fact, think of this displacement of Felix and the foregrounding of Esther’s experience and expanding consciousness as the heart of the “novelistic” itself, as identifying something central to the novel as a genre—at least as Eliot practices it. In his reading of *Daniel Deronda* in *Realist Vision*, Brooks argues that Gwendolen’s final letter—one of the novel’s “small things”—belongs squarely in the realm of “the novelistic,” while the much grander scale of Daniel’s mission and Mordecai’s stance as prophet breaks the frame of the novel. If we were to replace Daniel’s name and project with Felix’s, Brooks’s description of Eliot’s later novel, and the definition of the “novelness” that grows out of it, applies equally to *Felix Holt*:

This novel asks, in several registers, how can a woman lead her life? It explores that question with great complexity and tentativeness. And it is a question that from Samuel Richardson onward has been crucial to the novel—especially the English novel, but I think also the novel as genre. To the extent that novels exist to inquire into the history of private life, and the subjective consciousness of life, women’s experience has rarely been far from the center of attention, though often inadequately filtered through a male observer. That ‘slender’ consciousness of a girl is first and last the stuff of novelness; whereas Daniel’s entry into his future messianic world cannot be contained within the novelistic.”¹⁰

By extension, we might then say that *Felix Holt*’s sidelining of its title character and his political project implicitly argues that Esther’s consciousness, and the educative transformation of it that the novel traces, is “first and last the stuff of novelness,” and that any novelistic portrait or enactment of reform will be grounded in its realist representation of the minutiae of Esther’s quotidian experiences, and the growing sympathies that her story represents and inspires, and not in its recounting of Felix’s grand reformist plans and politics.

And yet, while I’ll suggest that Eliot’s redefinition of reform as essentially novelistic is grounded in the tools and ethos of her realist vision of “novelness,” I’ll also argue that it’s precisely Eliot’s concern with reform and education that reveals a defining tension in this realist novel of reform in particular, and perhaps in the realist novel more generally. If my above description of *Felix Holt*’s commitment to representing the quotidian details of the world as it is would seem to place it squarely in the tradition of the realist novel as we’re accustomed to hearing it described—we could think, for example, of Ian Watt’s focus on the documentary element of formal realism in comparing the novel’s imitation of reality and investment in the circumstantial evidence of “all the particulars” to the jury in a court of law or Erich Auerbach’s description of the tradition’s culmination in Virginia Woolf’s privileging of the “minor, unimpressive, random events” that make up the narrative of *To the Lighthouse*¹¹—*Felix Holt* also works against its own argument for the primacy of such realist particulars precisely by claiming the work of reform for itself. However strongly it may refute Sir Maximus’s explicit argument for the easily legible and unified meaning of “position and politics,” work against the “synthetic guesses” of James’s “real masters,” and reject the moralistic mode of preaching favored by the eponymous Felix, Eliot’s novel is, in the end, fundamentally concerned with an act of synthesis, one that is an ineluctable part of its own “novelness”: namely, the successful education of its protagonist, and the “right” choice that its story is intent on preparing her

¹⁰ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 109-110.

¹¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 31-32, and Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 546-549.

to make. It's precisely the novel's investment in education and reform that reveals the didactic intention shaping Esther's plotline, and the novel overall, from the start.

Eliot's pedagogical novel therefore also involves its readers in a parallel form of education: just as Esther is prompted to correctly "read" and respond to the various lessons in sympathy that the novel stages for her, the novel teaches readers, by means of its own careful plotting and formal clues, to read itself. In so doing, it asks us to read at multiple levels: to move back and forth between the experience of realist detail/story and the acts of interpretive abstraction and synthesis by which their significance becomes clear.¹² The novelistic reform that the text imagines and enacts for its heroine is ultimately tied to the very reading practices that *Felix Holt* itself requires, and that it sets to work in the service of its pedagogical aims. Eliot's novelistic pedagogy takes place in the middle space—between *Felix Holt* as realist exemplar and as didactic lesson—created by this reading practice, thereby redefining its own "novelness" in the process.

Before turning to a reading of the novel itself, I'll examine the foundation for such a mode of novelistic education in some of Eliot's essayistic writing and in the way this model of novelistic pedagogy comes to replace Felix's failed attempts to enact the political education of the working men. I'll then consider how *Felix Holt* mobilizes the tropes of observation and attention in its various plotlines in defense of an inductive model of reading that challenges the type of synthetic vision championed by James and Sir Maximus. In linking the novel's meditation on vision to its own construction, however, I'll show that it undercuts its own argument in favor of the particular through its didactic aims on its heroine and the careful plotting by which this education is realized. I ultimately hope to trace the type of reading that *Felix Holt* requires of its heroine and reader both, by which Eliot embeds within her novel an argument for the pedagogic potential of novel form.

¹² This dynamic shuttling back and forth that comes to characterize the novel's operation, and by extension the reader's position vis-à-vis the narrative, is formally similar to the shuttling that Barbara Johnson describes in her reading of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), especially 162-164 and 170-171. The content of the two novels and of the shuttling itself is of course quite different, and I don't think that *Felix Holt* invites its readers or characters to become deconstructive critics the way Johnson suggests Janie does in her embracing of "self-difference," but the formal operation—and the privileging of a middle space in which meaning is made—is analogous.

This tension that I'm suggesting is constitutive of the novel might be read as another example, at the formal level, of what Hilda Hollis terms *Felix Holt*'s essential dialogization. For Hollis, the novel's dialogism is central to its treatment of politics: Eliot tests conflicting ideas in the space of the narrative and its competing plots, and the novel is thereby rescued from becoming a simple conservative-radical sermon like the type to which Felix gives voice. "Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or Eliot's Mouthpiece?" *ELH* 68, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 163-164. But politics isn't the only realm in which we might see such a dialogue between opposing positions at work in, and indeed as constitutive of, Eliot's novels. Ulrich Knoepfelmacher characterizes her fiction as mediating between the two levels of the actual and the ideal, in an attempt at equilibrium that he sees as reaching its peak in *Middlemarch*'s "epic which questioned the possibility of an epic life in a world of motion and change." *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 1, 10. In her account of the complex position of Eliot's narrators, Susan Sniader Lanser suggests that one central project of the realist novel is "to accommodate the contradictions between knowing and judging, or representation and ideology"—hence the need for a heterodiegetic voice. *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 85. In her reading of *Felix Holt*, Kristin Brady notes the way that such tensions play out at the level of the novel's plotting: she suggests that the novel unconsciously subverts its own plots and claims, for example in the contradiction between Felix's professed plans for improving the working class and the lack of any allusion to real social progress in the novel's conclusion, in the narrator's early account of the horrors of oppressive poverty and the novel's celebration of the happy poverty chosen by Felix and Esther at its conclusion. *George Eliot* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 136; also quoted in Hollis, 163. *Felix Holt*—and the novel form more generally—ultimately says, and asks readers to notice, much more than any one of its characters, plotlines, or explicit articulations of its novelistic project can encompass alone, its form coming into being in the space and play between them.

Felix Holt's Failed Education

The novel's most explicit meditation on education comes from Felix Holt himself, who has, to the dismay of his mother, given up the promise of "all his learning" (56) to join his lot with that of the working class whose interests he champions, apprenticing himself as a watchmaker and taking upon himself the education of a number of young boys. Felix turns almost any location into a schoolroom or pulpit from which his teaching can be shared: the sitting-room in which he unleashes his "strong denunciatory and pedagogic intention" (69) toward Esther's vanity and self-involvement in a series of "sermons" (121), the local alehouse where he finds a "congregation" of working class "pupils" to exhort to improvement over their evening pint (73), and the stone from which he addresses those gathered on nomination-day in Duffield (291) all become important loci of his "preaching," as the novel terms his pedagogic mode. In adapting this teacherly and preacherly role, the message that Felix seeks to further is itself one of the importance of education: in his view, the primary obstacle to the betterment of the working man is ignorance, and his attempts to educate the working class men with whom he aligns himself, whether in trying to broaden the moral horizons of the men themselves or in encouraging them to send their sons to school, are all motivated by his belief in the dangers of enfranchising the uneducated. Political reform is, for Felix, necessarily a matter of education, and it's to this end that his political activity is directed.

Felix promotes this agenda in his various appearances throughout the novel, but we might turn to an extra-novelistic appearance of this protagonist for a self-contained and synthetic account of his teachings, and for an example of how Felix the pedagogue attempts to transmit the lessons that he sees as so crucial to the working man's education and the future of reform. Eliot's "Address to Working-Men, by Felix Holt," published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in early 1868 and written as an appeal by Felix himself to his "fellow-workmen," takes up the state of English reform in the wake of the Second Reform Bill's passage.¹³ Expanding on the ideas in his nomination-day speech in the novel, Felix casts ignorance as the true enemy to political reform and public order. No matter how promising or persuasive reformist measures might appear in theory, he argues, they are bound to fail unless they include steps to first "put knowledge in the place of ignorance, and fellow-feeling in the place of selfishness" (491). In order for large-scale political reform to work, it has to first enact a personal reform in its subjects, one that is grounded in education, both intellectual (replacing ignorance with knowledge) and sentimental/moral (replacing selfishness with fellow-feeling). In the context of the novel's fictional world and the political situation of the moment in which the novel and this subsequent address are published, the reform whose success or failure Felix has in mind is of course the extension of political representation and the franchise, and he goes on to outline why the vote cannot be an end in itself but must be preceded by other, more pressing changes: "Our getting the franchise will greatly hasten that good end in proportion only as every one of us has the knowledge, the foresight, the conscience, that will make him well-judging and scrupulous in the use of it" (491). Here again, what Felix casts as the basis of true reform isn't the larger political change itself but instead an act of individual transformation and improvement:

¹³ Eliot wrote this piece in 1867, in the wake of the Second Reform Act, at the request of John Blackwood for publication in his magazine, the readership of which was conservative and middle-class. For a fuller account of the circumstances under which the "Address" was written and published, and the difference between the Felix of the novel and the Felix of this later text, see Helen Kingstone, "The Two Felixes: Narratorial Irony and the Question of Radicalism in *Felix Holt* and 'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,'" *The George Eliot Review* 44 (2013), 42-49. For an account of Eliot's political inspiration for *Felix Holt* and the larger context informing the novel, see Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 225-237. On *Felix Holt* and the "Address" in the larger context of Eliot's life and politics, see Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 280-287, 291.

working class franchise will only be a worthwhile achievement if the working men are first formed into deserving subjects, with the knowledge and moral acuity to use their vote well.¹⁴

As we've seen above, the education for which Felix advocates is not— or not only— concerned with the intellectual improvement of its subjects, and while his program of education locates the work of reform as happening first and foremost within the individual, his project is not ultimately an individualistic one. The end goal of this education is to turn the subject's attention out onto the larger world and its affairs, so that he begins to "consider the general good as well as [his] own" (488), and to vote accordingly. Ignorance begets selfishness, Felix argues, and so it's silly to expect a sense of responsibility for the collective welfare to arise spontaneously upon enfranchisement. Education, which has clear ethical stakes for Felix (and by extension Eliot), has to intervene so that men stop "trying to adapt the world to their desire." (498). In the context of the political debate to which Felix adds his voice here, the improvement heralded by the Second Reform Bill will only be achieved once new voters have been taught to vote with the greater good in mind: instead of supporting the candidate whose agent provides the most free drinks in the ale-house, as we see in *Felix Holt*, new voters must learn to support politicians who will in turn act for the collective welfare rather than out of selfish interest. This desired change won't come about, however, through voters' blind adherence to moral principle. Felix's emphasis on "fellow-feeling" suggests that the heart is as involved in this process as the mind: his brand of reformist education seeks to inculcate in voters a sympathy for others, turning simple "obedience" to the dictates of what's right and wise into a "corresponding love" (498). The true reforming power of education lies in its power to allow the subject to experience moral duty as emotional response, so that he comes to consider the "general good" not simply out of a sense of necessary obedience but out of an emotional impulse by which the self sees that its own welfare is tied to that of those towards whom he acts out of love.

This conception of reform as first and foremost a personal transformation grounded in the creation of sympathetic "fellow-feeling"¹⁵— a shift in the individual that will in turn make possible the larger political change and social improvement intended by the acts and bills of Reform— resembles the nineteenth-century Anglo-American vision of reform through literature. As Amanda Claybaugh explains in her account of the "novel of purpose," what has to be reformed first in canonical reform novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "is not so much the slave or factory system but rather the individuals who profit from those systems, however remotely. Once these individuals come to feel sympathy the systems themselves will wither away."¹⁶ Just as Felix argues that enfranchisement must be preceded by the education of potential new voters to transform them into men worthy of this political act, so must reform in this account of its literature first occur "within an individual's

¹⁴ One might certainly read into Felix's definition of reform through education less a concern with the rights and liberation of the working man than, à la Foucault, a disturbing program of indoctrination, a desire to create a controlled subject who is worthy of the vote because he'll use it to uphold the social order that is controlling him. We also see in Felix's speeches evidence of his author's conservative streak, which makes itself apparent in the novel's direct attempts to engage synthetically, and sometimes even coercively, with questions of "position and politics" and stands in tension with its approach to its "smaller" interests and professed realist intentions.

¹⁵ Rae Greiner uses the term "fellow-feeling," and not the more emotionally-laden "feeling," for what she sees as the most important conceptual category of sympathetic realism: "Long designated a genre littered with things and stuff that, simply by being there, produce a reality effect, the nineteenth-century realist novel differs most from novels of the previous century in granting to fellow-feeling— not objects— the task of maintaining reality. By depicting social reality as a product of "fellow-feeling," the realist novel portrays the real as both fictive and sympathetic. Fellow-feeling, sympathy's most sustained and important fiction, underwrites reality, decides what gains significance, and what does not." *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 10.

¹⁶ Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 24.

own heart and mind” before any larger political or social change becomes visible, or indeed possible.¹⁷ In other words, these novels must work first on their readers, and then through their transformed readers on the world itself. Just as Felix argues that enfranchisement must be preceded by the education of potential new voters to transform them into men worthy of this political act, so must reform via literature occur first “within an individual’s own heart and mind” before any larger political or social change becomes visible, or indeed possible. In both accounts, this transformation is rooted in the sympathy produced in the reader/voter: much as the newly educated voter will be prompted to consider the general good in addition to his own needs and desires by means of the “fellow-feeling” that Felix emphasizes as the corrective to voterly selfishness, the newly transformed, sympathetic reader will be inspired to turn her attention onto the outside world and its plight, having come to identify, in the space of the novel, with previously distant people and problems.¹⁸

In Claybaugh’s account, the novel becomes important to reformist writing precisely because it is so good at producing the type of readerly identification and emotional investment that such a concept of political reform via individual transformation requires. If it’s not particularly surprising to hear the novel’s operation on its readers described in terms of identification and sympathy, there’s an important emphasis here on the importance of emotion to effective reform in the larger political sphere: rather than piling up facts and figures, the novel is a successful agent of reform because of its strong appeal to, and its ability to create, emotion in its readers, which Felix also casts as central to his project of educating voters. And yet, if we look to Felix’s, and by extension Eliot’s, explicit reformist teachings within the novel, we’d be hard-pressed to find a successful example of the education he outlines in the Address and whose importance he preaches throughout the novel. In the scenes devoted to Felix’s pedagogic efforts, the working men of the novel prove eminently unteachable, and the model of reform-through-education in which the text is so overtly interested, and which it would seem to champion in its emphasis on its title character, remains entirely unrealized in the novel’s diegetic world—at least in the sphere in which Felix advocates for it. Felix’s failure to reform the working men with whose welfare he is so concerned lies less in a problem with the content of the lessons he seeks to impart than in the form of his pedagogy: for all of the passion behind his preaching, his sermons are an ineffective teaching tool. Exhorting his listeners to improvement and espousing the benefits of education aren’t enough to enact the type of

¹⁷ Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose*, 25.

¹⁸ On the connection between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies of sympathy and the novel, see especially Catherine Gallagher on David Hume and novelistic sympathy in *Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 167-175, and Rae Greiner on Adam Smith and the distinction between sympathy and feeling in *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth Century Fiction*, especially Chapter 1, “Going Along with Others: *Adam Smith and the Realists*.” On Eliot’s conception of sympathy more specifically, and the thinkers who influenced her, see Ellen Argyros, “*Without Any Check of Proud Reserve*”: *Sympathy and Its Limits in George Eliot’s Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), especially Chapter 1, “Sympathy and Its Limits: Eliot’s Reading of Wordsworth, Rousseau, Feuerbach, and Stowe.”

The belief that novels can create such readerly understanding of and feeling for the plight of others persists to the present day in certain strands of critical discourse. Martha Nussbaum’s articulation of the power of literature to open the eyes of readers to the plight of marginalized groups shares certain similarities with the above description of reform via literature: “But it is also very valuable to extend this literary understanding by seeking out literary experiences in which we do identify sympathetically with individual members of marginalized or oppressed groups within our society, learning both to see the world, for a time, through their eyes and then reflecting as spectators on the meaning of what we have seen.” *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 92. While I find this a reductive critical description of “literary understanding” when applied to literature in the abstract, divorced from the specific historical projects of a particular body of texts like those Claybaugh considers, I’m struck by the echoes of the dynamics I’m describing here: new vision of previously unknown persons or experiences leads to new forms of identification and sympathy that in turn have real effects in the world.

change for which he argues: they don't serve to create the sympathetic "fellow-feeling" on which his wished-for reform rests.

It's also worth noting here that Felix's failed education is also Eliot's, at least insofar as her novel views itself as an instrument of reform in the political sphere. If the fictional apparatus of the novel provides a space in which Felix can, at least within the text's diegetic world, directly address the working-class audience with whose welfare he is concerned, the "Address" makes patently clear what is also implicit in *Felix Holt*: "Felix's" ideas are, in reality, not intended for "working-men" at all; the vision of education and enfranchisement that he champions is directed at Eliot's readers.¹⁹ As Claybaugh argues in parsing the relationship between realism and reform in this novel, Felix's speeches—unconvincing from the mouth of a supposed radical²⁰—in fact represent Eliot at her most anti-reformist, and least realist: in these moments, she's not attempting to describe workers as they actually are or to portray the debates in which they are themselves participate, but rather to shape middle-class views about them.²¹ The much flimsier fictional pretense of the "Address" strips away the illusion of presenting reform advocacy at work in its real-world context and instead shows this "Address" to be, like its analogs in the novel, an ideologically-driven work of persuasion, by an author championing the same political and moral education as her fictional mouthpiece—a mouthpiece whose project never comes to successful fruition in the space of the novel itself precisely because of its overly didactic nature.

Eliot's critical writings help to suggest why her protagonist's preaching is bound to fail in its pedagogic aim. In "The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*," her 1855 essay on Goethe's *Bildungsroman*, Eliot distinguishes between the moral work of art and the moralistic, arguing that in spite of the latter's much more open profession of its moral bias and influence, it's in fact the former category of work—to which, she asserts, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, contra its many critics, belongs—that will invite its reader to undergo a true moral education through its pages. To illustrate this point, she uses the example of telling a story to a child: while the child will listen with rapt attention to a story that seems to be told for its own sake, she'll immediately lose interest if the storyteller reveals an overt intention to moralize or to impose too didactic a meaning on the tale. "One grand reason of this," Eliot claims, "is that the child is aware you are talking *for it* instead of *from yourself*, so that instead of carrying it along in a stream of sympathy with your own interest in the story, you give it the impression of contriving coldly and talking artificially."²² The story loses its integrity as a story when such an external, artificial motivation becomes clear, driven less by its own internal logic and the movement of its plot, in which both the storyteller and listener are carried along together, than by the desire to educate the listener. The novel reader can be expected to respond similarly to the stories she consumes. The all-too-common misconception that leads to overly moralistic novels, and

¹⁹ Contra the many readings of Felix as Eliot's fictional spokesperson and evidence of her essential conservatism, Hilda Hollis suggests that we should read *Felix Holt* as essentially dialogic, the novel offering Eliot a testing ground for exploring complex political questions. See "Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or Eliot's Mouthpiece?," 155. While I think this is an astute description of the novel, I'm less convinced that we can see the same signature "doubleness" at work in the "Address": without the fictional frame of the narrative, the interruptions and challenges offered by other characters with competing views, and the novel's many tensions, the "Address," even if its fictional speaker isn't entirely continuous with its real-world author, seems an example of a more monolithic form of "preaching."

²⁰ On the limits of Felix's ostensible Radicalism, see, for example, Evan Horowitz, "George Eliot, the Conservative," *Victorian Studies* 49, no. 1 (Autumn 2006), especially 15-18; Arnold Kettle, "Felix Holt the Radical," in *Literature and Liberation: Selected Essays*, ed. Graham Martin and W.R. Owens (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), especially 191-194; and Linda Bamber, "Self Defeating Politics in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*," *Victorian Studies* 18, no. 4 (June 1975), especially 422-426.

²¹ Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose*, 123-4.

²² George Eliot, "The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*," in *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (New York: Penguin, 1990), 308 (emphasis in original).

their subsequent infantilization of the reader, is that the content of the work has to clearly reflect a rigid set of moral beliefs and judgments in order to be viewed as a salutary text, but Eliot believes that we're wrong to think that easy moral outcomes—for example, the death of the villain—are any indication of a work's essential morality. On the contrary, the novelist should be free to take on any aspect of life in her work so long as it serves to “call forth our best sympathies” (309), and given the example of the child hearing a story, the moralistic fable is precisely what will shut this sympathy down.

We should instead look to the form of the work in assessing its moral stakes, and it's precisely in its form that *Wilhelm Meister* reveals its morality:

And his *mode of treatment* seems to us precisely what is really moral in its influence. It is without exaggeration; he is in no haste to alarm readers into virtue by melodramatic consequences; he quietly follows the stream of fact and of life; and waits patiently for the moral processes of nature as we all do for her material processes. The large tolerance of Goethe, which is markedly exhibited in *Wilhelm Meister*, is precisely that to which we point as the element of moral superiority. (309, my emphasis)

What Eliot praises here is the realist tendency of Goethe's work, its faithfulness to “the stream of fact and life” and the moral processes that emerge organically from it. In other words, Goethe presents things “as they are” and relies on the truth of his portrait to act on those who consume it, rather than imposing a moral reading from the top down in an act of didactic authorial intervention. This description of *Wilhelm Meister* is admittedly very strange. I, at least, find it hard to fathom Eliot's claim that the novel is “without exaggeration” or “melodramatic consequences”: Mignon's death and burial, for example, seem dramatically opposed to a realist “mode of treatment” that “quietly follows the stream of fact and of life.”²³ But flawed as her account of the novel may be as a description of the text as it is, her defense of it clearly translates into a larger defense of the novel genre as she wants it to be, and of the moral work that she believes realist fiction might do.

Eliot expands on the influence that such a portrait of life as it is might have on its reader in an 1856 essay on Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, “The Natural History of German Life.”²⁴ In this piece, she contrasts the social novel that purports to enact change with those novels that might actually inspire it, casting the “inductive” processes of the latter as more effective than the moralistic lessons of the former:

²³ The exaggerated melodrama of Goethe's novel suggests that his *Bildungsroman* is closely tied to the tradition of the sentimental novel. (As mentioned in Chapter 1, see Margaret Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* on the shared DNA of these two novelistic sub-genres.) Eliot's argument about Goethe seems to engage in a revisionist reading of *Wilhelm Meister* in order to use it as the foundation for the literary project she wants to champion here.

²⁴ Eliot's piece, published in the *Westminster Review*, is a review of the German sociologist's work, including *Die Naturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Sozialpolitik*, but most of its first half ignores Riehl's texts, offering instead her defense of realism and thereby earning its place as an oft-cited, compact account of the origins of Eliot's theory of fiction. In her examination of the review as the product of the pragmatic demands and expectations of periodical writing, Fionnuala Dillane suggests that the equivocations and contradictions in Eliot's treatment of Riehl show the young Marian Evans's discomfort with sweeping cultural commentary and argues that it's in the various tensions of this essay—rather than in her programmatic statements about art—that we see the roots of the mature Eliot's novels. “Re-reading George Eliot's ‘Natural History’: Marian Evans, ‘the People,’ and the Periodical,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 244-266. While I am interested in the review's manifesto-like claims about realist art in what follows, as well as the essay's link to German thought, Dillane's point is an important one, and isn't entirely dissimilar from the larger point I am making about Felix's failed pedagogy: she, too, is suggesting that we privilege the “mode of treatment” over the take-away message.

But our social novels profess to represent the people as they are, and the unreality of their representations is a grave evil. The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity, but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment. [...] Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experiences and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.²⁵

This account of art's impact is quite similar to Felix's description of the change that will be wrought in the subjects of his hoped-for education: the end goal in both cases is an emotional response in the reader or the working man, the creation of sympathetic feeling which will in turn realign the reader's relationship with the world around her: the "extension of our sympathies" here parallels the "love" and "fellow-feeling" that education creates in Felix's "Address," and both involve a mode of "attention to what is apart from ourselves" that recognizes the world "beyond the bounds of our personal lot," or that thinks of the "general good," as Felix would have it.²⁶ But in spite of these similarities, what Eliot explicitly argues against in her defense of true, and truly moral, art is a form of moral education through preaching that would resemble Felix's pedagogy, since it's precisely an intention to moralize and impose lessons via "generalizations" and "statistics," to champion clear moral goals without first inspiring a correspondent understanding of and desire for them, that shuts off the sympathetic impulse that such an education requires. If Felix is astute enough to note that a shift in the working man's voting rights won't necessarily entail his readiness for the responsibilities of the vote, his own pedagogical mode seems to ignore a parallel insight: just as reform's good intentions won't necessarily educate, the good intentions of his preaching won't necessarily induce sympathy where it doesn't already exist. Only one with "a sympathy ready-made" might be spurred to action by Felix's words; the majority of his listeners need to have this faculty put "into activity"—and his mode of preaching won't prove capable of such subject-shaping, since it doesn't work to activate the sympathetic attention of truly "moral sentiment."

But if her protagonist fails in this regard, Eliot does seem to claim this same power for the type of novel that he inhabits. It's instead the "small things" of realist art—Eliot opposes Scott's description of Luckie Mucklebackit's cottage with the "hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations" that more closely mirror Felix's style (110)²⁷—that prove the foundation for the type

²⁵ George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*, 127, 110.

²⁶ Just as Felix's speeches cast the production of knowledge and emotional response as the main tasks of education, Eliot's articulation of realism relies on a similar conjunction: as Caroline Levine describes Eliot's early articulations of realism, realist representation derives its value from its power to prompt both knowledge and sympathy as responses in the reader. "Surprising Realism," *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed. Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 63-64. Here, and throughout Eliot's novel, however, the causal link between the increased knowledge brought about by "attention to what is apart from ourselves" and "the extension of our sympathies" isn't entirely clear. While Claybaugh's description of the reformist novel's operation, for example, suggests that it's in attending to a particular set of circumstances, in this case, those delineated by the novel, that we develop a newfound sympathy to something hitherto unknown to us and Levine describes the way that Eliot believes "knowledge can itself provoke and expand sympathy" (63), the reverse also proves true of many of Eliot's characters: they attend to otherwise unnoticed details precisely because they have a sympathetic leaning towards the person involved in them in the first place. We might see this as evidence of what Levine terms the inevitable, morally-neutral "selfishness" of the imagination that leads us to this knowledge and sympathy and that is the prerequisite for sympathy (66-67).

²⁷ Eliot's defense of realism in this essay— "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 the influences which *do*

of reform for which both Felix and Eliot argue: the particulars of “minutiae” or the “small things” and the larger artistic structure that holds them together, Eliot suggests, produce more “real knowledge” (112) and real feeling than the generalizations and theorizing of a synthetic vision of “position and politics.”²⁸ In short, the prominence given to Felix’s political project, and its seemingly strange nonfulfillment in light of the novel’s apparent interests, functions to underscore the education that the novel wants to enact—only it locates this education elsewhere than the place that it initially seems to indicate, and suggests that it needs to take a different form than that of Felix’s sermons and political activism. The type of reformist education for which Felix so ineffectually advocates, Eliot implicitly argues, belongs properly to the sphere of the novel, and most specifically to the type of novel that he comes to inhabit when his own political “radicalism” is sidelined: in the domestic drama and intimate details of Esther Lyon’s story. Felix’s mission serves as a foil to Eliot’s own project, and *Felix Holt* picks up where Felix Holt himself falls short, using its novelistic form to stage the type of lessons in attention and sympathy in which its conception of education and reform is ultimately grounded.

“Ears to Hear It”

The introduction to *Felix Holt* begins with a stage-coach journey through English life “five-and-thirty years ago” (3). The past described here is indeed a foreign country: the narrator’s explanatory list of the goods and evils that are no more suggests a present-day audience that is not intimately familiar with the world being introduced (and also signals the novel’s interest in politics and political change by drawing all of its examples of past oddities from the realm of pocket-boroughs, unrepealed corn-laws, and Parliamentary representation, delineating the political reality of that unfamiliar past), while the opening paragraph’s emphasis on those aspects of a stage-coach culture that have “not yet” passed away and were “still” known at the time described suggests how much things have changed in the thirty-five years that have elapsed since. (A sense of the accelerated pace at which such changes might still be occurring is further signaled by the narrator’s comparison of the stage-coach to a future mode of transportation in which “Posterity might be shot, like a bullet through a tube, by atmospheric pressure from Winchester to Newcastle” (3).) In keeping with the

act on him. We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness” (111)—is strikingly similar to her articulation of the realist project in such novels as *Adam Bede*. See the author’s oft-cited defense of her flawed but realistic character in Chapter XVII. The hypothetical reader whose attack she gives voice to here complains that the book would have been much more “edifying”—“quite as good as reading a sermon”—had Eliot put “beautiful things” into the mouth of her rector. This debate again comes down to the question of the moral vs. the moralistic work of art, and whether its morality is to be found in its content or in its form. The narrator argues that only art that resists the temptation to idealize and instead attends to what is real will “edify” us, as it will teach us to sympathize with the real, flawed characters who surround us in everyday life. See *Adam Bede* (London: William Blackwood and Sons), 149.

²⁸ In a letter to John Blackwood dated November 12, 1873, in response to a proposal to excerpt notable “Sayings” from her work, Eliot explicitly states that novels must guard against “preaching.” Their efficacy, she argues, lies in their unity as a novelistic whole; they cannot be separated into “‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ teaching”: “Unless my readers are more moved towards the ends I seek by my works as wholes than by an assemblage of extracts, my writings are a mistake. I have always exercised a severe watch against anything that could be called preaching, and if I have ever allowed myself in dissertation or in dialogue [anything] which is not part of the *structure* of my books, I have there sinned against my own laws.” In *George Eliot Letters* Volume V, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 458-459 (emphasis in original). As we’ve seen in the “Address” and as we’ll see in *Felix Holt*, Eliot isn’t always successful in guarding against her tendency towards intrusive, “preacherly” authorial commentary that readers might be tempted to excerpt in precisely the way she objects to here, but the view of art that she articulates here supports the distinction between Felix’s pedagogical mode and the novelist’s. It also suggests that Eliot, at least, sees her novels as engaged in an act of synthesis of the type that James finds wanting in them.

narrator's interest in the politics of this past moment, this image of the stage-coach also establishes us within the larger political and social system of the nation: as the shepherd who watches the stage-coach pass might observe, such vehicles belong "to that mysterious distant system of things called Government" (4), suggesting the various operations by which the country is held together as a unified network of interests and by which its extremities are connected to its center.²⁹

While the stage-coach begins as an image by which to mark a particular moment in English history and to reflect on the larger status of a country held together by the movement of mail, currency, trade goods, and travelers, all of which pass along the network of the coach-roads, the narrator soon uses it to transport the reader in space, as well as time, taking her on a hypothetical journey through England's past life and landscape, through a world that might seem almost willfully quaint and isolated to the visitor from the future who is seated atop this "slow old-fashioned" conveyance (3). As much as the narrator notices larger national networks and their import, initially providing the traveler with a wider view of the multiple, complex processes by which the nation coheres, she constantly invites us to focus on the details of seemingly unrelated scenes, so that it's hard to obtain a singular, synthetic view of this world as we move through it, or to keep our focus on the distant workings of "Government" and London. We move "rapidly from one phase of English life to another," passing through different worlds and epochs in moving from town to country (7).³⁰ While such discrete spheres might ultimately be held together by the invisible ties of commerce and politics, these bonds seem to weaken as our distance from London grows; those systems that belong "to the trading and less solid part of the nation" (5), ignored or denigrated as they are by the farmers and villagers who observe the stage-coach's passing, become less visible, and the details and stories that make up life in these remote places—that tangible, solid part of the nation as experienced by its inhabitants—take shape.

As this journey away from the present and the center continues, the landscape and lives that surround the stage-coach require that the viewer shift the terms by which she observes and narrates what passes. Contrary to its initial seeming promise, this trope of stage-coach travel does not, in the end, offer an easy overarching view of the country and its affairs, but forces the viewer to move through it at the slow pace of narrative. Even if the hypothetical stage-coach driver is tempted to discourse on politics and Reform, irate as he is about the coming of the railway, the narrator notes that he "would soon relapse from the high prophetic strain to the familiar one of narrative" (8) as the vehicle moves deeper into a world in which the stories of everyday life are of singular import and the distant doings of the government and nation mere phantasms. What makes the coachman such a compelling guide is his detailed knowledge of the landscape's particulars: he knows the names of the

²⁹ This opening image of the stage-coach also recalls Sir Walter Scott's use of the post-chaise in an early chapter of *Waverley* to describe the project of his historical novel and its particular brand of realism: "I do not invite my fair readers, whose sex and impatience give them the greatest right to complain of these circumstances, into a flying chariot drawn by hippogriffs, or moved by enchantment. Mine is an humble English post-chaise, drawn upon four wheels, and keeping his Majesty's highway. Such as dislike the vehicle may leave it at the next halt, and wait for the conveyance of Prince Hussein's tapestry, or Malek the Weaver's flying sentry-box. Those who are contented to remain with me will be occasionally exposed to the dulness inseparable from heavy roads, steep hills, sloughs, and other terrestrial retardations; but with tolerable horses and a civil driver (as the advertisements have it), I engage to get as soon as possible into a more picturesque and romantic country, if my passengers incline to have some patience with me during my first stages." Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 63. The "dulness" of Scott's realist journey through the countryside, as opposed to the fantastical flights promised by the conveyances he contrasts to the post-chaise, parallels the view from Eliot's "stage-coach," but the two journeys have quite different end goals: Eliot's novel will keep us in prosaic, everyday England, whereas Scott's story ultimately promises to transport its readers to a more "picturesque and romantic" historical moment and place in its romantic-realist treatment of the Scottish highlands and Jacobite Rebellion.

³⁰ For a discussion of the internal border and noncontemporaneity in the historical novel, see Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (New York: Verso, 1999), 33-40.

sites and people his coach passes by, can tell stories of each parish and its members, and is well-versed in the history of the land, recalling those specific histories of marriage, financial ruin, and farming practices that have shaped each individual piece of countryside and the lives of its inhabitants (8). Indeed, the stage-coach offers such a compelling vehicle for the story's opening because of the way it privileges "picture and narrative" (3), allowing us access to stories that would remain invisible and inaccessible were we to be shot like a bullet through the narrator's imagined futuristic tube. The synthetic view of the nation that the journey first seems to privilege doesn't help to account for any of these individual stories; the images of which the journey is composed only derive a larger meaning when one notices and lingers over the details of the scene long enough that its history begins to emerge.³¹

Just as the coachman reins in his "prophetic" pronouncements about the state of the nation in favor of the localized stories that explain the actual reality through which his vehicle moves, the introduction as a whole undergoes a narrowing of focus, leaving behind the larger concerns of national politics with which it begins and giving increasing space to the particular sights and histories of the land through which it passes. The coach-road, and the narrative itself, ultimately lead to Little Treby, where we've left the doings of the nation far enough behind that the narrative is entirely given over to gossip about its residents. While the introduction's growing focus on the minutiae of daily life has been signaled by the increasing specificity of its details—the vaguer collectives of farmers or Dissenters or Reformers replaced with specific individuals and brief snippets of their experience, such as the innovating farmer driven out of town for his threatening views or the parson whose apoplectic stroke seems a divine sign about the wisdom of fallow fields (7)—it's in Little Treby that the narrative finally begins to put names to people and places, and to linger over the details of the personal stories that make up Little Treby's history. The narrator signals this shift by taking on the coachman's voice in moments of free indirect discourse that introduce the place—"That?—oh, that was Transome Court, a place there had been a fine sight of lawsuits about"—and family—"but *she* was master, had come of a high family, and had a spirit—you might see it in her eye and the way she sat her horse. Forty years ago, when she came into this country, they said she was a pictur'; but her family was poor, and so she took up with that hatchet-faced fellow like this 'Transome'"—on which the narrative is coming to rest (9). The narrator no longer mediates the coach-man's observations about the lives and landscapes he knows so well, connecting them to the larger questions with which the opening of the introduction is concerned, but lets his gossipy account of the Transomes' checkered past unfold in his own language and pacing, fully giving the text over, for a time, to "narrative and pictures" as viewed from the stage-coach.

It's of course with the Transomes and the larger population of Little Treby that the narrative will remain as the novel takes up the story begun by Mr. Sampson.³² By staging this arrival at Transome Court, both the progression of the coachman's story and the structure of the introduction as a whole perform a shift in attention that will be central to the novel's ultimate project. The introduction stages a lesson in what we might call an "inductive" model of knowledge, to use Eliot's term for Riehl, shifting its attention from general observations on the state of England to the

³¹ Harry Shaw reminds us that Eliot would want us to be skeptical of too "easy" a view or understanding of this scene, and notes the way that the narrative undercuts some of the coach traveler's assumptions and conclusions, inviting its readers both to attach some degree of reasonable meaning to them and to recognize them as the historically-limited view of an individual who may be proven wrong—who is at once a "socially detached observer" and a "consciousness endowed with a deep and problematic interiority." *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 223-225, 231.

³² The coachman is finally named after giving his account of the Transome's questionable past: "everybody in North Loamshire knew Sampson's coach" (10). This more specific identification of the coachman through the perspective of the local residents further indicates that we're fully entering into this particular world and its concerns.

individual stories that can be found in the seemingly insignificant details of English life. The introduction doesn't entirely eschew its interest in the social and political structures of the country, but it suggests that we might arrive at a better understanding of them through an inductive reading of its minor parts: the fate of the innovating farmer of a small, unnamed village tells us more about the state of English agricultural practices and its controversies than Sir Humphry Davy's writing or legislative debates (7). By the time we arrive at Transome Court, we've been primed to take note of the seemingly unrelated details of these newly-named individuals' affairs—the nebulous Durfey claim to the estate, Mrs. Transome's preference of her younger son, the nice oak doors of Lawyer Jermyn's house (9)—and to ask what they might add up to, distant as they seem from the starting point of our coach journey.

Having thus introduced the Transomes, the narrator picks up their story where Mr. Sampson leaves off, but she doesn't continue his account in exactly the same vein. The coachman has laid out a number of observations for us, but he refuses to provide the "further knowledge" or interpretations that would tie them together. This refusal is, in the end, a credit to Mr. Sampson, since the narrator observes that the common desire to delve into the Transomes' tale stems from a local sense that "fine stories—meaning, ironically, stories not altogether creditable to the parties concerned" (10) lies behind it. The curious outsider's or local gossip's wish to rehearse such "fine stories" stems not from a desire for true knowledge of the details themselves but from the pleasure that goes along with telling and hearing of past secrets and scandals, motivated by curiosity and Schadenfreude rather than sympathy. While the narrator's story will fill in the coachman's silence, she intends her approach as a corrective to local gossip, and she begins with a redefinition of what makes a tale "fine":

And such stories often come to be fine in a sense that is not ironical. For there is seldom any wrong-doing which does not carry along with it some downfall of blindly-climbing hopes, some hard entail of suffering, some quickly-satiated desire that survives, with the life in death of old paralytic vice, to see itself cursed by its woeful progeny – some tragic mark of kinship in the one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny. But these things are often unknown to the world; for there is much pain that is quite noiseless; and vibrations that make human agonies are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence. There are glances of hatred that stab and raise no cry of murder; robberies that leave man or woman for ever beggared of peace and joy, yet kept secret by the sufferer – committed to no sound except that of low moans in the night, seen in no writing except that made on the face by the slow months of suppressed anguish and early morning tears. Many an inherited sorrow that has marred a life has been breathed into no human ear. (10)

In recasting the story as one that demands a sympathetic response from the person who encounters it, the narrator underscores the "kinship" between the subjects of these "fine stories" and their recipients, a connection that the gossip's approach would entirely erase. This emphasis on kinship not only calls to mind the process of identification that, as we saw in *Claybaugh*, allows a reader to enter into a foreign character's travails and the process by which the reformed subject, according to Felix, comes to recognize that the "general good" is also his own, but it introduces an important strategy that the novel itself will use in its own tale of education—namely the play of likenesses that will structure it. Both characters and readers will be challenged to make sense of the literal likenesses at work in the diegetic world and the structures of kinship between stories that its narrative form

suggests. The paragraph also makes clear why seemingly insignificant details are so worthy of the type of attention the introduction has been moving towards in its slow narrowing of focus: we have to train ourselves to open our ears and direct our gaze to what would otherwise go unnoticed, and to what other approaches to the Transomes' past have left unexplored, in order to gain knowledge of and sympathy for these characters and their experiences.

In his *Life of Goethe*, George Henry Lewes concludes his chapter on *Wilhelm Meister* with a defense of the novel's ability to instruct and better its readers. His account of its underlying morality parallels Eliot's own account of Goethe's text in many ways, and he, too, believes that it's the "artist's, not the preacher's way" that will best bring about the educative end for which they both argue.³³ In defending the novel's lessons, he claims that "deep and healthy moral meaning lies in it, pulses through it, speaking in many tones *to him who hath ears to hear it*" (171, my emphasis). Much as Felix might argue that working class voters can't be expected to vote wisely simply because they've been enfranchised, Lewes implies here that not all readers will be able to hear the underlying wisdom that the novel transmits; they may have to be taught to hear what it has to say. Eliot's introduction literalizes this idea that there are truths to which our ears and eyes might be closed, but growing as it does out of Mr. Sampson's introduction of the Transomes, this observation also implies that the "low moans in the night" and the anguished writing on the face haven't gone unnoticed by the narrator who advocates for their importance. The novel's opening wager is that it will itself shape its readers into those with "ears to hear" the signs that are there to be read in this opening history.

Eliot's marked authorial intervention—such a common occurrence in her fiction—at the end of the introduction certainly runs counter to her injunction against overt moralizing: there's something paradoxical in this paragraph's general, theoretical defense of the close attention to detail that ethical reading and relationships require. If the process she describes here is an inductive one, by which we're invited to open our eyes and ears to largely unremarkable details and to draw meaning from them, there's nothing inductive about this particular paragraph. Her subsequent reference to the poets in whose works we also find an interest in hidden suffering also provides a strange introduction to the type of novel we've been set up to expect by the introduction, as she calls on the realm of allegory to conclude her theoretical meditation on the attention that such "fine stories" demand of us. She describes the underworlds of Virgil and Dante as places where "the thorn-bushes[,] and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them, the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams," tracing a landscape that is, like her own, one of "no sound," its human truths hidden in the concrete features of the world. She ultimately concludes that "these things are a parable" (10-11). As different from her self-professed realist project as the parables of Virgil and Dante might be in execution, this passage suggests that there is also something parabolic about her method in *Felix Holt*. In "Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*," J. Hillis Miller describes the parable's function as enabling us to see the world in the "light" of another: "The parabola creates that line in the empty air, just as the parables of Jesus remedy a defect of vision, give sight to the blind, and make the invisible visible."³⁴ It is, of course, precisely this—making the invisible visible, the unheard heard—that the narrator proposes to do in this introduction, and that Eliot and Lewes cast as so central to the educative moral workings of the novel. Moreover, the common features of Eliot's parabolic landscape with those of the parables she cites betray the didactic intention and guiding hand that is directing our view of the

³³ George Henry Lewes, *The Life of Goethe*, *The Life of Goethe*, ed. Nathan Haskell Dole (Boston: F.A. Niccolls & Company, 1902), 172.

³⁴ J. Hillis Miller, "Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*," in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 139.

“minutiae” or things “as they are” upon which the narrator intends to train her vision: while the narrator seems to uphold the tenets of realism throughout this opening section, the novel reveals here that it wants us to see its details in a particular way, to correct a “defect in vision.” The introduction thereby sets up the tension between Eliot’s professed theory of realism and the guiding pedagogic principle that wants us to see something very specific in its pages, and the tension between the two will govern the education that unfolds in the remainder of the text.

When we turn the page to the first chapter, the novel takes its distance from the allegorical realm of the enchanted forest that it has used to signal how we should read the story to come. The rhetorically dense concluding passages of the introduction are followed by our abrupt return to earth in the first sentence of the novel proper. We enter directly into the particular case in which we’ll be invited to hear the cries and read the histories hinted at in the introduction. If the larger structure of the introduction and the transition into the novel proper remind us that, as Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth notes, “the story about to commence is the tributary of a wider life”³⁵ and should continue to be read as such, the first sentence emphasizes the realist dimensions of a specific character and the particularities of her world: “On the 1st of September, in the memorable year 1832, someone was expected at Transome Court” (12). Who that someone is will become clear over the course of the chapter, but we’re invited to begin piecing together his relationship to the lady anxiously keeping watch by the narrative’s attention to what she, Mrs. Transome, sees and hears while she waits. The landscape of Transome Court is a largely silent one (“no sound” but a quiet hum is audible) as she watches and listens, and her movements seem “prompted by some sudden thought or by some sound” that remains inaudible to us as we follow her through the house and observe with her the family portraits on the wall (14). When at last the sound of the church bell and then the sound of wheels on the gravel announce her son’s arrival, we meet a man whose simultaneous strangeness and likeness to other faces arrests his mother’s attention, and provokes “silent tears” whose traces she assiduously hides, tears which will be discernible only to “a very careful observer,” which Harold Transome is not (17).³⁶

In introducing us to the Mrs. Transome of whom we’ve heard rumors from the coachman, the narrator makes use, in the space of just a few pages, of the many signs to which she has suggested that one might pay attention in the introduction. If it’s not yet clear to us what these signs mean, it is clear to the discerning reader that, while we may have left the realm of parable and general moral theorizing in favor of realist narrative, its lessons continue to apply: there is a very real history in front of us that demands just the type of careful reading and interpretation of which the narrator is earlier an advocate, and which is so seldom granted to the silent tears and hidden histories contained in this opening scene. It’s to this specific case that we’ll have to open our ears and eyes, and learn, along with the novel’s characters, to read the truth that is implicit in the signs marked out for us here.

³⁵ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 239.

³⁶ David Kurnick describes this first scene of the novel as a “veritable orgy of inwardness,” one that “makes the novel a startlingly thorough— even gloating— assertion of penetrative power on the part of Eliot’s narrator.” *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 79-80. I’d suggest that the beginning of the novel is structured in such a way that we are being trained in this same “penetrative power” and invited to exercise it in reading the story to come. And Ermarth’s reading of the scene suggests that something more than inwardness is being stressed here: the opening of the novel includes a “constellation” of both voices and minds that inflects the novel’s representation, and the reader’s understanding, of the narrowing of focus on the singular character and story.

“A Good Strong Terrible Vision”: Esther’s Apprenticeship

The novel provides us with a diegetic example of this type of attentive, sympathetic reading in an early, seemingly unimportant conversation between two minor characters: the exchange between Sir Maximus and Lady Debarry following their visit to Transome Court to hear news of Mrs. Transome’s recently returned son. The visit is hastily brought to a close when Mrs. Transome’s newly discovered grandson bites her in the arm and sends the secretly scandalized visitors packing, thus saving his grandmother from having to disclose the even more scandalous news that her son has declared himself a Radical. As they drive away from Transome Court, the husband and wife reflect on the state of affairs that they have observed in the newly reconfigured Transome household:

‘That poor creature is not happy, Sir Maximus,’ said Lady Debarry as they drove along. ‘Something annoys her about her son. I hope there is nothing unpleasant in his character. Either he kept his marriage a secret from her, or she was ashamed of it. He is thirty-four at least by this time. After living in the East so long he may have become a sort of person one would not care to be intimate with; and that savage boy – he doesn’t look like a lady’s child.’

‘Pooh, my dear,’ said Sir Maximus, ‘women think so much of those minutiae. In the present state of the country it is our duty to look at a man’s position and politics. Philip and my brother are both of that opinion, and I think they know what’s right, if any man does. [...] All we have to ask is, whether a man’s a Tory, and will make a stand for the good of the country? – that’s the plain English of the matter. And I do beg of you, my dear, to set aside all these gossiping niceties, and exert yourself, like a woman of sense and spirit as you are, to bring the right people together.’ (95)

However imperfect Lady Debarry’s knowledge of Mrs. Transome’s affairs is, her attention to the sights and sounds of her friend’s home, her ability to pick up on the small signs there to be read in the minor interactions that make up domestic life, gets quite close to the truth that readers are, by this point, well aware of: something about her son *does* annoy Mrs. Transome (and is very soon to annoy the as-yet cheerfully ignorant Sir Maximus, too, once he is told of Harold’s newfound Radicalism just one page later), and each of Lady Debarry’s observations about Harold’s marriage and time away from England rings true. On the surface, she fails to evince the farther-reaching, more sweeping vision that Sir Maximus ascribes to himself, his son, and his brother, focused as she is on the small details of family life and Mrs. Transome’s private travails. But the “minutiae” she has listed here, which Sir Maximus is so quick to wave aside with his “Pooh, my dear” dismissal, actually provide a much truer portrait of Harold’s past and character and a truer answer to her husband’s question— whether Harold is a Tory and “will make a stand for the good of the country” in the way that Sir Maximus expects him to— than his assumption that Harold’s “position and politics” speak for themselves, her allegedly limited female vision discerning more about this masculine realm than her husband’s synthetic guesses do.

Moreover, in dismissing his wife’s interpretation of events, Sir Maximus conflates two types of interest in the “small things” of others’ lives that the novel has already taken pains to distinguish between in its introduction, namely between actual sympathetic attention to the details of another’s life and more selfishly-minded gossip: he assumes that because Lady Debarry’s observations deal with Mrs. Transome’s private troubles, they must be no more than “gossiping niceties,” while they in fact show her recognition of and “fellow-feeling” for her friend’s pain. In a novel that is minutely

aware of what and how its characters see,³⁷ this seemingly minor marital dispute between two peripheral characters suggests not only a tension between two modes of (gendered) vision, but it also underscores the extent to which the novel ties together seeing and feeling in a multi-directional relationship: Lady Debarry's attention to the "small things" of Mrs. Transome's life emerges from the "fellow-feeling" of their friendship in the first place, but this observation of details and this reflection on the unhappy truth that she reads in them in turn produces in Lady Debarry increased sympathy for her friend's plight.

This scene also lays out in miniature the type of transformation that the novel will require of the heroine of its plot of reform: Esther needs to be taught to see to foster the sympathy on which Eliot and Felix both claim that moral action is based, and she needs to be taught to care so that she can recognize and understand the sights with which she is confronted. Indeed, the novel signals the development and ultimate moral realization of Esther Lyon almost entirely in terms of a reconfiguration of her sight, and correspondingly of her capacity for sympathy.³⁸ The transformation of Esther's vision echoes, in a more circumscribed sphere, the type of transformed vision that Felix claims is necessary for political reform. Just as he argued in his "Address" that the working-man needs to be trained in a mode of double vision by which he can recognize and reconcile his own personal needs and those of the larger world, so must Esther, whose attention is initially turned entirely inward on her own small wants, learn to perceive what is outside herself. In both cases, the end result of this dual vision is an emotional response, the "love," to quote Felix, or sympathy by which duty is transformed and on which moral action is based.

Esther is a distinctly self-interested figure when Felix and readers are first introduced to her in the novel, a "nice-stepping, long-necked peacock" (69) and "squirrel-headed thing" (71) whom Felix finds easy to dismiss with scorn and a lady of "too many airs and graces" whom her father's congregation roundly condemns. The novel first signals that she might undergo an education of the type Felix and the novel have proposed, and thus become the subject of the novel's plot of reform,

³⁷ Descriptions of characters' visual acuity, whether by the narrator herself or voiced through another character, consistently serve as a shorthand for their sympathetic tendencies and their place on the novel's moral continuum: Esther's characterization of Felix as "clear-sighted" applies as much to his overall role as the novel's most vocal pedagogue and energetic reformer as it does to her momentary worry about whether he'll misinterpret her visit to his home (227); Rufus's "shortsightedness" extends beyond his ignorance of the "small facts and petty impulses" of those who titter about his shabby appearance to a general inability to see what's right before him, perennially obsessed as he is with the weighty questions of divine will on which his "clear and bright" eyes are always fixed (52); and Rufus's observation that Mrs. Holt is "blind as a heathen" is a clear indication that we should expect nothing but frustration and some amusement from this severely limited character, lacking as she does all traces of the perceptiveness or generosity of spirit that the narrator so prizes in her favored characters. (And in a departure from its normal encouragement of close, sympathetic attention to what might lie below the surface, the novel also warns us that we won't need to read too much into Mrs. Holt's story, since she, "unlike Mrs. Transome, was much disposed to reveal her troubles, and was not without a counselor into whose ear she could pour them" (51).) In his study of the effect of external fact on characters in *Middlemarch*, David Carroll suggests that perception and seeing are centrally at work in Eliot's works more generally. See "Middlemarch and the Externality of Fact," in *This Particular Web: Essays on Middlemarch*, ed. Ian Adam (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 74.

³⁸ Audrey Jaffe describes the extent to which the Victorian novel is preoccupied with the visual and with spectatorship, tying this trait to "modern sympathy's inseparability from representation: both from the fact of representation, in a text's swerve toward the visual when the topic is sympathy, and from issues that surround representation, such as the relation between identity and its visible signs." *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 2-3. Rachel Ablow's description of sympathy in the Victorian novel casts it in terms that are commensurable with the type novelistic education I'm tracing: rather than focusing on sympathy as pity or as a feeling, she understands it as "a psychic structure through which the subject is produced, consolidated, or redefined" and as a "mode of relating to others and of defining a self." *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2. In other words, it involves a forming and transforming of the subject.

in a notable, and uncharacteristic, moment of self-reflection on the part of its future heroine at the beginning of Volume II:

Did [Felix] want her to be heroic? That seemed impossible without some great occasion. Her life was a heap of fragments, and so were her thoughts: some great energy was needed to bind them together. Esther was beginning to lose her complacency at her own wit and criticism; to lose the sense of superiority in an awakening need for reliance on one whose vision was wider, whose nature was purer and stronger than her own. (173)

Esther gives voice here to her growing sense of the limitations of her own position and perspective. She can as yet only note this change in terms of loss: if her “complacency” and “sense of superiority” are slipping away, she has no new sense of self yet with which to replace them. The catalyst for this change is of course Felix, the implied superior “one” whose “wider vision” and “great energy” will in turn help her to see beyond the narrow scope of her own interests and experience. Esther’s self-criticism interestingly resembles James’s gendered criticism of her author: in both cases, the woman is censured for being, or producing, a “heap of fragments” that fail to cohere, and it’s suggested that a greater male energy and vision is required to transform these disconnected minutiae into a coherent and meaningful whole.³⁹ However, if Felix is the inspiration for Esther’s path of reform, pushing her to make new meaning of the “fragments” she just begins to recognize here, the “greater energy” needed to bind them together in an act of synthesis proves not to be Felix himself, but instead the interpretive and sympathetic powers that the novel’s own pedagogical structure will effect in its heroine and reader both.

The novel signals the need for such interpretive abstraction through its formal construction of this moment of self-awareness, which occurs within a larger scene of daydreaming in which the images of two possible suitors conflict with one another in her mind: “the image of Felix Holt’s indifference and contempt” and “the vaguer image of a possible somebody who would admire her hands and feet, and delight in looking at their beauty” (173). In this act of imagination, Esther constructs for herself the same pair of contrasting images that the novel itself will use to construct her story, and if the latter image is as yet an abstract Prince Charming for Esther, the novel immediately conjures up exactly such a figure in concrete form. Esther’s daydream concludes with her reflection on Felix’s faults, and after an intervening chapter break, a knock on the door signals the arrival of a visitor who in fact proves full of admiration for Esther’s hands and feet: “the shaggy-haired, cravatless image of Felix Holt, which was just then full in the mirror of Esther’s mind, was displaced by the highly contrasted appearance of a personage whose name she guessed before Mr Jermyn had announced it” (174)— a personage whose perfect morning costume and gallantry indicate that the “possible somebody” to oppose Felix’s indifference has in fact materialized, in the form of Harold Transome. The novel makes quite clear here in its formal use of the chapter break exactly how Esther’s education will proceed: the narrator first underscores Felix’s importance in Esther’s awakening consciousness by giving us Esther’s own musings on Felix and then reaffirms his primacy in her thoughts in the narratorial view of what is “full in the mirror of Esther’s mind” after

³⁹ If Felix encourages Esther to move beyond the petty concerns that prevent her from turning a wider vision and greater energy towards the larger good, he also warns against a dangerous sense of a false whole that he sees embodied in her favorite books. The Byronic gentlemen whom Esther reads with such passion seem to open up a world beyond the minutiae of the everyday, but there’s more truth in these minutiae than in the “infinite” for which they yearn. Characters like René, who “have no particular talent for the finite, but a general sense that the infinite is the right thing for them,” are in fact as, if not more, guilty of a smallness and selfishness of vision as those who lack the “great energy” to bind together the finite fragments (258, see also 123).

the chapter break, explicitly commenting on the realist details in which we, along with Esther, were just immersed. The formal feature of the chapter break primes readers, unlike Esther, to recognize the structural significance of the figure it goes on to introduce in the almost magical conjuring up of the other half of her daydream. Having prefigured in Esther's musings the type of education that it, like Felix, intends to enact for its heroine, it then presents her with the figure who will challenge her newfound sense of the heroics of which she might be capable.⁴⁰

As Esther begins to articulate her sense of the lessons she's learning, she herself uses metaphors of sight and vision to describe the development she undergoes. Much as she voices her initial sense of internal change through the negative terms of the "complacency" and "superiority" that she loses, she at first describes the new mode of seeing to which she is being led in terms of loss: "once-clear images were gradually melting into new forms and new colors. The favorite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night's decorations seen in the sober dawn" (228).⁴¹ Whereas such "once-clear images" were previously called into question only by the power of an external disruptive force like Felix, she has now internalized his challenge to the extent that her inner vision has been reconfigured enough to make space for the "new forms" and "new colors" that are beginning to take shape.

The "sober dawn" introduced by Esther's new sense of what is visually legible and emotionally compelling does eventually bring with it not only loss but new forms of knowledge, in her newfound attention to and feeling for the pain of those around her. When Rufus shares with her the story of her mother and her childhood, his "revelation" provides her with "a vision of passion and struggle, of delight and renunciation"—not of her own trials and sufferings, for once, but of his—and she immediately notes the educative effects of this new vision: she feels her mind "suddenly enlarged" and her father becomes "the object of a new sympathy in which Esther felt herself exalted" (252). Esther moves here from new knowledge to understanding to feelings of love and sympathy, emotions which in turn inspire a renewed, but no longer onerous, sense of her daughterly duty—exactly following the trajectory of development that Felix laid out in the "Address" in describing the necessary education of his fellow workmen. In developing the type of attention and expanded vision for which the novel has argued, Esther begins to fulfill its hero's vision of education, albeit at a very different scale than the one he imagines.

Shortly after Mr. Lyon's confession, Esther attempts to share with Felix the feeling that this story has inspired in her. Once again, this feeling is so new that Esther is unable to articulate it except in terms of her own uncertainty about it; she doesn't know "whether it is pain, or something better than pleasure." She is, however, able to articulate its result, namely the way it has made her "see things [she] was blind to before—depths in [her] father's nature" (256). She can finally account more exactly for the "new forms and new colors" she is seeing as she begins to recognize depths below the surface of her visual field, and she feels a "new demand on her to see things in a light that

⁴⁰ The choice between Felix and Harold is, I'm suggesting, not only central to the novel's romance plot but also to its moral/pedagogical aims, and as Edward Harcourt argues, part of the novel's essential work is to produce in readers the conviction that Felix is the only right choice, creating a necessary "complicity" between author and reader in order to effect its education qua happy ending. See "Truth and the 'Work' of Literary Fiction," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 1 (January 2010), 95-96. Crucial to my reading of Eliot's novelistic pedagogy is the fact that this "complicity" isn't, or at least isn't only, secured by means of didactic content, or by a top-down insistence on the part of the narrator about the relative rightness or wrongness of such choices, but rather by means of the novel's formal workings and the interpretive activity that it invites.

⁴¹ Esther explicitly connects the change she is experiencing to images that are at once visual and literary, and the novel draws a frequent parallel between the visual register of Esther's development and her engagement with actual or metaphorical texts. The overwhelming image of Felix Holt, and the challenge he places on her to see the world in new ways, leaves her "unable to read" her favorite books (172), while Felix himself seems to present a "roughly written page" to be read (60). The novel's meditation on visual attention is thus also figured as a reflection on modes of reading.

was not easy or soothing” (256). As Esther casts her growing knowledge and sympathy in terms of sight, the narrator also reinforces throughout this conversation the role that vision is playing in her education by constantly noting where and at what the two characters are looking: their eyes meet in moments of understanding and compassion (256); Esther looks at Felix’s face in an attempt to come to a better “interpretation” of his words (260); Felix looks at Esther as “a reverential Protestant might look at a picture of the Virgin” (261)⁴²; Esther often imagines what Felix would see were he to gaze at her and how he would interpret that visual image. While this emphasis on sight and observation is present throughout the novel, a remarkable number of ideas of vision are at work in the few pages that compose this scene, signaling its importance in the trajectory of Esther’s developing powers of attention.

Toward the end of this same scene, the novel shifts its use of this key term, introducing a new definition of “vision” as the ultimate force of reform. If Esther first imagines Felix as the “great” energy that will enable her successful reform, Felix himself seems to relinquish this responsibility and to hand it over to the operations of the novel itself. Felix explains to Esther why they will likely never again walk and converse together as they are at this moment:

“Because I am a man who am warned by visions. Those old stories of visions and dreams guiding men have their truth: we are saved by making the future present to ourselves.”

“I wish I could get visions, then,” said Esther, smiling at him, with an effort at playfulness, in resistance to something vaguely mournful within her.

“That is what I want,” said Felix, looking at her very earnestly. “Don’t turn your head. Do look at me, and then I shall know if I may go on speaking. I do believe in you; but I want you to have such a vision of the future that you may never lose your best self. Some charm or other may be flung about you— some of your *atta-of-rose* fascinations— and nothing but a good strong terrible vision will save you.” (262)

The visions that act with such educative force on the individual are cast here as images that are temporally out of place, confronting the viewer with the future and teaching her precisely through the otherness of this image in her present. The novel significantly redefines “vision” in this scene: while the narrative previously aligned Esther’s education with a newly transformed vision of and sympathy for the particular details of the lives around her, it introduces a new form of prophetic “vision” that requires an act of interpretation: the viewer must both attend to the particular image and engage in a larger act of abstraction to arrive at its meaning and significance. It is such a vision of the future, and the ability to read it, that Felix posits as necessary for Esther’s successful education, for her permanent transformation into the “best self” that he wishes her to become.

This is a type of vision that Felix himself can’t provide for Esther, but in casting himself as a prophet here—a title that he already claimed in explaining to Esther his desire that she would change earlier in the story: “I’m not given to prophesy smooth things— to prophesy deceit” (121)—he also becomes a prophetic voice for the novel itself. Both the “*atta-of-rose* fascinations” that he marks as dangerous temptations⁴³ and the “good strong terrible vision” that he wishes on Esther are precisely what the remainder of the novel sets about confronting its heroine with as she is welcomed

⁴² While this description is in keeping with the scene’s overall emphasis on vision, it is distinctly different from the type of seeing/interpreting that Eliot otherwise privileges here.

⁴³ The attentive reader will remember from Esther and Felix’s first meeting in the Lyon home that “*atta-of-rose*” symbolizes all of the indulgences of the former Esther of whom Felix was so scornful: when Felix knocks over her sewing basket in this early scene, a bottle of *atta-of-rose* and a volume of Byron’s poems tumble out of it, hidden among her thimbles and other implements of industry.

into the luxury of Transome Court, and her movement through these fascinations and their deceptions to a confrontation with an edifying vision of a future made present is what structures the continuing narrative of her development and forces the choice between Felix and Harold that the text has set up as inevitable. What Felix unconsciously speaks for here is the novel's plot: as Gillian Beer defines it, plot "projects the future and then gives real form to its own predictions. It is to that extent self-verifying: its solution confirms the validity of the clues proposed."⁴⁴ By baring its own structure and intention, at roughly the novel's middle-point, through the character most explicitly concerned with a project of education, the text suggests that the type of formative experience that Felix's wished-for education requires is one that is intimately bound up with the work of fiction, perhaps even necessarily so. In having him shed his familiar mode of preaching in order to voice a wish that Esther will have a novelistic experience, Eliot has Felix cede pedagogic authority to the novel in this moment, suggesting that his attempts at education will only get its object so far. Not only is the "revolutionary struggle" (464) of reform displaced in the novel from the public, political sphere to Esther's own personal development, but this scene uses Felix as a mouthpiece to suggest that the novel—the one force with the power to structure the coincidences and to construct the images necessary for the final "vision" that will save its heroine and deliver her "best self" back to Felix—is its best agent.

There is, however, a strange slippage here in the way that Felix imagines the terms of Esther's reform. At the diegetic level, Felix's wish for Esther predicts, with no prior knowledge, the type of temptations and choices with which she'll be challenged in the near future within the fictional world of the story. But at the narratorial level, the scene suggests that the novel will require Esther to engage in acts of interpretation that more properly belong to the reader of the novel: to recognize the structural significance and synthetic meaning of those "visions" with which she'll be confronted and which have already been repeatedly suggested to the reader of *Felix Holt*, blurring the distinction between Esther and the reader of the novel of which she is a part. As the novel begins to draw together the seemingly disparate threads of its coincidentally connected plots to enact the vision that Felix calls for, the field for this final stage of Esther's "inward revolution" (464) is exactly the one that Eliot sets up in its opening parable of hidden histories and silenced cries. It is of course Mrs. Transome, whose role as an older parallel to the youthful Esther has been emphasized throughout the story, who is the key to Esther's training in sympathetic reading; she must learn to see this figure with visionary eyes. Both Esther and the reader are aligned in this undertaking, though we approach the task from different perspectives and levels of knowledge: we both have to learn to read the structurally significant role that Mrs. Transome plays as a double to Esther. If Esther's sympathetic awakening serves as an analog for the moral training Eliot seems to want to impart to both her characters and her readers, the reader also serves as an analog for Esther: it's the "great energy" of the reader's tasks of recognition, interpretation, and abstraction that prove the necessary corollary to Esther's developing sympathy in binding together her own, and the novel's, "heap of fragments" in an act of synthetic and sympathetic understanding.

The news of Esther's inheritance and her subsequent removal to Transome Court makes possible an encounter between Esther and Mrs. Transome and the fulfillment of the novel's prophesied "vision." In entering this new world, Esther is once again thrown into a type of visual confusion: she is forced to recognize that her previous images of luxury were mere "daydreams" (360), while the realized fairy tale of her inheritance in fact "made a picture, not for her own tastes and fancies to float in with Elysian indulgence, but in which she was compelled to gaze on the degrading hard experience of other human beings" (361). In describing the way that this actual

⁴⁴ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 151.

image of life forces her to see, we can almost hear an echo of Eliot's description of realist representation in the Riehl essay: what Esther gets at Transome Court is a true "picture of human life," of things "as they are," one that she is now prepared to read as such. Just as she was earlier moved to sympathy after hearing her father's confession, she must now achieve this same response towards people and stories with which she herself is much less intimately connected.

The novel not only continues to link the visual with the emotional in the build-up to its visionary climax, but also to the textual, further emphasizing the extent to which the final lessons in Esther's "inner revolution" are predicated on a new form of readerly interpretation and synthesis. Just as she did when she was first thrown into confusion by the challenge of Felix and his principles, she once again finds it impossible to read, but she now has the further sense that she herself has become a type of text that she at once has to decipher and produce: "her life was a book which she seemed herself to be constructing—trying to make clear before her, and looking into the way of destiny" (383). The novel introduces and throws out a number of different generic possibilities for Esther's unfolding story, as she considers the suitability of such terms as "ballad heroine," "genteel comedy," and "romance" in the space of just a few pages. The novel literalizes in this Transome Court interlude the connection between the visual images confronting Esther and the work of reading/interpretation, further aligning the work of her education with the work the reader is doing in reading it.

Back at Transome Court following the turmoil of Felix's trial, Esther has her own prophetic moment, sensing that she will "soon see strong visions" just as Felix wished (460). In the inner crisis caused by Harold's implicit marriage proposal, she desires "to see with undisturbed clearness" things that are "not present" (464). Having learned to see so much, Esther has become almost too open to the resulting sympathetic response: she feels that she is unable to distinguish her moral duty from within the morass of "contending sympathies" under whose competing demands she feels "helpless" (463), and she requires the external force of a vision of the type foretold by Felix to set her straight. The way is paved for this vision during her late-night watch when she catches a "sound within—slight but sudden" (465), reminding the reader of those silences and sounds whose importance the narrative emphasized in the Introduction, and opens her door to see Mrs. Transome's unhappy figure. (In a formal cue whose didactic import is available to the reader, if not Esther, the novel once again makes use of the chapter break to emphasize the lesson that it is staging for its heroine: after the chapter break following Esther's view of the wandering figure in the hallway, we are brought back in time to Mrs. Transome's "silent endurance of some agony" in the privacy of her room before dinner on this same evening (467).) The "low moans in the night" that have always gone unnoticed are now finally heard by Esther, and her newfound attention to this "image of restless misery" is precisely what paves the way for the subsequent climax of her education.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ While the novel takes such great care to structure Esther's moral-sentimental education by teaching her to read this ultimate scene of Mrs. Transome's tragedy, there is, interestingly, a peripheral figure hovering on the edge of the novel's Transome Court plotline whose brief appearances reveal her as a model of the type of attention to Mrs. Transome in which the novel has to train us and its heroine over the course of so many pages. Denner is, from the start, an astute observer of the silenced cries and traces of tears in which Mrs. Transome's hidden history is contained, a skilled inductive reader of the details that go unnoticed by everyone else (though she of course also has intimate knowledge of the reasons for it that other characters lack). In this particular scene, too, she is the one individual privy to the silent portrait of agony that Esther only later comes to know when she catches the sounds of Mrs. Transome's nocturnal ramblings. In her study of women's roles in negotiating class power and upholding middle-class ideology, Elizabeth Langland emphasizes the importance of servants to women's lives and to Victorian households. See "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel" *PMLA* 107, no. 2 (March 1992), 290-304. While the specific contours of Langland's examples are of course quite different from the case of Mrs. Transome, she reminds us of the ubiquitous presence of servants in the lives of certain classes of Victorian women, and we see here that their

Prior to this encounter, the two women mirror each other in their nocturnal contemplation of private troubles, adding to the long list of echoes and parallels the novel has taken pains to establish between them up to this point. While Esther's attention is ultimately directed outward, as she hears and responds to the sounds and images in which the older woman's suffering is contained, Mrs. Transome's auditory landscape is inwardly directed: hers is once again a scene of "no sound," but she listens not for sounds of another's suffering but for a hoped-for "comfort"—an imagined "footfall, and a hand upon the door" (468). When she finally does materialize as the comfort Mrs. Transome has been seeking, Esther is able to divine in a "rapid flash" that the traces of suffering she sees are intimately bound up in the new troubles afflicting Harold and whose effects have prompted her own sleepless night. What is ultimately revealed to her here is a deep kinship between her own lot and that of the woman before her: "The dimly suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love. But all the more she longed to still the pain of this heart against hers" (470).⁴⁶ This "last vision" is precisely the type of prophetic vision described by Felix: in a true moment of double vision in which she sees both another's suffering in front of her and interprets it as a simultaneous cautionary image of herself, Esther recognizes in the present Mrs. Transome a version of her own future if she marries Harold. The text's play on the likeness between the two women is complete as Esther herself recognizes that Mrs. Transome is a mirror of her own possible future, in a moment of critical abstraction that in turn mirrors the novelistic act of interpretation of this image required of the novel reader.⁴⁷ This moment is simultaneously the climax of the novel's sympathetic education—Esther feels morally bound to "still the pain of this heart against hers," a heart whose need calls out not only because of a particular likeness between the two women but because of the simply proximity between this other human heart and her own, a "moral duty" transformed into "emotional response," as it were—and of its formal pedagogy—Esther and the reader both read this vision "correctly" in recognizing and interpreting this likeness and its implications. Esther's ultimate moral lesson coincides with the interpretive climax of the novel itself for the reader, bring together the novel's pedagogical aims in a moment of simultaneous moral and readerly fulfillment.

Exercises in Authorship: Writing Sympathy

I'd like to turn to one last scene that takes up the concerns I've been tracing thus far but whose implications challenge the neatness of Esther's "right" choice and the novel's happy conclusion: namely, Felix Holt's trial. I've suggested that *Felix Holt* claims for itself the task of

involvement is limited not just to external household affairs but can extend to intimate knowledge of the interior life of their mistresses.

⁴⁶ Ellen Argyros notes a structural similarity between *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* in the way that both novels use a mother-figure as "catalytic agents effecting the resolution of the marriage plot," helping the protagonists in each text to choose the "right" spouse. "*Without Any Check of Proud Reserve*": *Sympathy and Its Limits in George Eliot's Novels*, 218.

⁴⁷ This moment is also prepared by the larger network of likenesses and mirroring at work in the novel. The revelation of Esther's status as heiress of course relies on a complicated series of recognitions that lead her to be installed at Transome Court, but a particular realization of likeness and kinship directly precedes and results in this night of turmoil. The nighttime troubles of both women occur in, and are spurred by, the aftermath of Harold's discovery of his true parentage. When Jermyn asserts that he is Harold's father, Harold accepts this truth only after seeing the likeness between them immediately reflected in a mirror: "He turned [his eyes] on the same face in the glass with his own beside it, and saw the hated fatherhood reasserted" (456). Ties of non-biological kinship also structure the resolution to this scene: Sir Maximus banishes Jermyn from this meeting of "gentlemen" but reasserts Harold's position in this world, denying the significance of blood ties over the kinship structures of the gentlemanly class.

shaping perception and sympathy, aligning the emotional-moral transformation of both characters and readers, and the reform that ensues, with the work of novel form and the readerly practices it requires. The text temporarily hands this task over to its characters towards the end of the novel, leaving it up to them, as witnesses and attendees at the trial, to unravel the truth of Felix's role in and fate following the election-day riots. Felix is accused of inciting the drunken crowd that rampaged through Treby Magna and pillaged a nearby estate, and he is charged with manslaughter for the death of a constable. While we as readers are privy to the novel's master narrative of this chaotic event, sharing both the narrator's birds-eye view of the riot and her access to Felix's interior thoughts—we know that he was sincerely, if somewhat foolishly, attempting to harness the crowd's energy and to turn them away from town in the hopes of preventing further damage—there's of course no character in the novel with such an omniscient, or impartial, view. Following Ian Watt, we could say that this courtroom scene dramatizes the work of the realist novel: it's up to the characters who populate *Felix Holt* to work through “all the particulars” of the circumstantial evidence to arrive at the “truth” of the riot that the novel has depicted.

The truth about the riot is so hard to reconstruct precisely because it is contained in a chaotic mass of impressions, memories, and acts. As the narrator reflects, it's difficult even for one positioned within and moving with the crowd to understand its direction and motivations. Much as Felix earlier emerged as the “great energy” to bring together the “heap of fragments” to which his challenging presence had reduced Esther, his “definite will and energetic personality acts as a sort of flag to draw and bind together the foolish units of a mob” (317). As he works to move the angry crowd away from the town and the havoc they might wreak there, the mere hint of a purpose in Felix is enough to make the fragmentary units of the mob feel united in a common cause. The crowd, however, of course has no idea with what motive or to what end this energetic will is directing them, and Felix soon becomes just another unit in the mass, as other, stronger energies take over the mob's movements and redirect them towards destruction. Even Felix himself, clear as he is about the initial motives for his own acts, finds it hard to understand what is happening from his position within the riot: “his very movements seemed to him only an image of the day's fatalities, in which the multitudinous small wickednesses of small selfish ends, really undirected towards any larger result, had issued in widely-shared mischief that might yet be hideous” (320). In attempting to piece together the narrative of that riot after the fact, its observers, who of course aren't aware of the multiple “small wickednesses” and ends that were at work in any given instant, nor of any individual intentions that might have sought to mitigate them, are forced to take a synthetic view of the riot's “larger result,” guessing from the larger picture of the day's events of what its particular actors might have been guilty.

In the days following Felix's arrest, Mr. Lyon gives voice to the difficulty of this task. Finding that even his own congregation has turned against the accused—they conclude that Felix has been “no great credit to Liberalism” (354) and must therefore be guilty now, since it's unclear how he ever could have hoped to influence the success of their candidate or cause—Mr. Lyon acknowledges that his own attempts to direct attention to the details of the case have no effect: he “would have liked events to speak for [his opinions] in a sort of picture-writing that everybody could understand,” but “the enthusiasms of the world are not to be stimulated by a commentary in small and subtle characters which alone can tell the whole truth; and the picture-writing in Felix Holt's troubles was of an entirely puzzling kind” (354).⁴⁸ Mr. Lyon seems to bring us back to the conflict

⁴⁸ Mr. Lyon's language here suggests that the trial is fundamentally about a disagreement over the meaning of certain signs. While this debate is most explicit in the trial scene, Catherine Gallagher notes that the novel as a whole is concerned with the nature of signs, with the first conversation between Mr. Lyon and Felix introducing the difficulty of

between minutiae and “a man’s position and politics” here, and if it’s only in the “small and subtle” details that we can hope to access the whole truth, they are inevitably drowned out by the larger assumptions and preconceptions to which everyone clings. Even Mr. Lyon himself isn’t immune to the temptation of easy synthesis—his desire for a readily legible “picture-writing” that would confirm his own opinion belongs to the same impulse that leads to his congregation’s quick condemnation of Felix; his is just based on a more measured and informed view of the affair.

Felix’s trial offers the greatest opportunity for would-be authors of his story to narrate their own version of his case, and as the prosecution brings witnesses against Felix to recount their view of the day’s events, the narrator seems to stress that attention to the “small and subtle characters” she champions will prove as elusive in the court’s search for truth as it did among the gossiping Dissenters of Rufus’s church. Before reporting on the various victims of the riot who take the stand and share their first-person perspective of Felix’s involvement in it, the narrator emphasizes that the prosecution’s case involves “nothing more than a reproduction, with irrelevancies added by witnesses, of the facts already known to us” (440), and we soon come to see none of these testimonies can come close to the novel’s own reproduction of the event: each witness has only a partial view of the riot to recount, one that leaves out details that we, privy to the narrative’s larger view of the riot, know to be of crucial importance, and each witness’s character and interests comes to color the story he or she embellishes with “irrelevancies.” Moreover, the narrator quite explicitly draws our attention to the way in which individual memories and motivations are determined by outside forces and interests we may never recognize: no one, not even the witnesses themselves, knows to what extent their memories of Felix’s destructive tendencies are due to Mr. Johnson’s intervention. Facts and details, the narrator reminds us, are rarely able to be seen as such, as larger influences and interests intervene to shape our perception of them: “Man cannot be defined as an evidence-giving animal; and in the difficulty of getting up evidence on any subject, there is room for much unrecognized action of diligent persons who have the extra stimulus of some private motive” (440-441). The version of storytelling we see in the court relies more on “picture-writing” than it does on the “small and subtle characters” that would seem to comprise evidence and verdict, and only the narrator and the novel are able to see the way that such larger interests intervene.

In “The Failure of Realism: *Felix Holt*,” Catherine Gallagher draws our attention to the way that this type of “picture-writing” centers on Felix more generally throughout the novel, not only on the part of his fellow characters, but also on that of the narrator herself: if she often insists on attending to the ambiguous “small and subtle” signs through which we have to work to get at truth, and to privilege those characters who do so, she also persists in representing her title character through the “picture-writing” that she condemns in others—he is always immediately legible; his outer characteristics perfectly mirror his inner qualities; the “essence” of Felix Holt is never in doubt.⁴⁹ In other words, in the novel’s own eyes, Felix Holt *is* a character who can be known simply by his “position and politics,” as long as he’s viewed from the privileged position of the narrator herself.

It’s also on “picture-writing” that Felix’s defense rests. Felix insists on speaking in his own defense, and opens his testimony by positioning himself as a realist narrator who will depict things as they really were, giving a “concise narrative of his mode of conduct” and committing himself to “truthful speech” (442). He is seemingly convinced that an accurate account of the day’s events, one that will surpass the “superficial observation” of the witnesses to this point in the trial (441), is all that will be needed to set the record straight about his involvement in the riot and to clear his name.

the relationship between signs and their significance, between facts and values. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, 237-238.

⁴⁹ Catherine Gallagher, “The Failure of Realism: *Felix Holt*,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (December 1980): 383.

As much as Felix professes his intention to represent things as they were, and denies any type of stylistic embellishment in promising to give his testimony “in as few words as [he] can,” the premise of his defense is in fact to convince the Court of his character: to convince them to see his “statement of [his] own motives, and the testimony that certain witnesses will give to [his] character and purposes as being inconsistent with [his] willingly abetting disorder” (441). Felix seems to share the narrator’s belief, as Gallagher characterizes it, that his character can speak for itself, that his essence will shine through in this representation of things as they are and convince his audience of the truth of Felix Holt. And true to form, Felix can’t help but do here what his character has done throughout the novel: departing from both his initial realist intentions and his character-portrait through “picture-writing,” he tacks a sermon onto the end of his testimony. Instead of sticking to an account of the riot and his actions, as he first intends, he falls back into the preacherly mode that has alienated so many of his audiences throughout the novel, speaking out about an honest man’s right to fight against dishonest or unjust authority. In shifting to this mode of didactic persuasion, he closes the Court’s ears to any truth they might otherwise have found in his version of events, and his testimony fails in its attempt at win over his listeners.

Each of the witnesses who take the stand on his behalf attempts to convince the court that Felix’s character and the crime of which he is accused are incommensurate, offering a portrait of Felix’s character. Moreover, these witnesses themselves act on the audience as a type of “picture-writing.” In spite of the directness of Mr. Lyon’s testimony, his “quaint appearance and manner” make him a particular target of the cross-examiner’s wit, and the narrator notes that it would take “a larger power of comparison than was possessed by any of that audience to appreciate the moral elevation” of his words (444). By contrast, Harold’s good looks and self-command make a favorable impression on the ladies present, and there seems to be truth in his words both because he presents them so “gracefully” (444) and because of his “position and politics”—as the owner of Transome Court, with the gentlemanly bearing to prove it, or as a traitor to the Tory cause, depending on whom in the courtroom one asks.

It’s Esther, whose developing powers of observation and sympathy the novel has been charting all along, who realizes that the case for Felix is failing:

Meanwhile Esther had been looking on and listening with growing misery, in the sense that all had not been said which might have been said on behalf of Felix. If it was the jury who were to be acted on, she argued to herself, there might have been an impression made on their feeling which would determine their verdict. Was it not constantly said and seen that juries pronounced Guilty or Not Guilty from sympathy for or against the accused? She was too inexperienced to check her own argument by thoroughly representing to herself the course of things: how the counsel for the prosecution would reply, and how the judge would sum up, with the object of cooling down sympathy into deliberation. What she had painfully pressing on her inward vision was, that the trial was coming to an end, and that the voice of right and truth had not been strong enough. (447)

Esther’s move to insert herself into the trial—inappropriate and ultimately ineffective as this intervention might be—grows out of her sense that “right and truth” can be arrived at only through feeling, through the creation of sympathy for Felix and his plight. Esther has in fact been consumed by emotion from the beginning of the trial: she is unaware of the interest generated by her presence in the courtroom because of the “supreme feelings” by which she is absorbed (437). Ignoring the many ways by which the structure of the trial is intended to keep this sympathetic impulse in check by reasserting the rule of fact and rationality, she believes that someone needs to act on the jury the

same way that she has been acted on in the novel, with the end goal of prompting the “feeling” or “sympathy” on which any verdict will be based.

Intent as she is on producing this emotional response, Esther’s testimony has little to do with logical reasoning or rational proof. Her plea is described as an aesthetic event that interrupts the trial and temporarily transports its proceedings into a different realm— to one of aesthetic experience: “This bright, delicate, beautiful-shaped thing that seemed most like a toy or ornament— some hand had touched the chords, and there came forth music that brought tears” (449). Her representation of Felix is figured as a work of art that moves its listeners to an overflow of feelings expressed in their tears. Esther might seem in this instance to be temporarily aligned with a type of novelistic work: she engages in a similar project of image-making in an attempt to widen her listeners’ vision of Felix, and the production of sympathy is central to her persuasive project.⁵⁰ And yet, in spite of its successful production of sympathetic feeling, this ultimate attempt to represent Felix Holt also runs against the narrative ethos that the novel has been so careful to lay out and to enact elsewhere: the “small and subtle characters” of realist particulars and the interpretive synthesis of readerly education entirely cease to matter in Esther’s moment of transcendence, and in the novel’s ultimate diegetic attempt to “write” the character of Felix Holt.⁵¹

Esther’s courtroom appearance is a simultaneous success and failure: her ultimate plea has no effect on the outcome of the trial itself; the machinery of the legal system kicks back in and convicts Felix. Its effects, however, continue to live on in some of the county gentlemen who hear it, and who are prompted by the “stirring of heart” that her portrait of Felix inspires to undertake an extra-legal campaign by which Felix is eventually freed through an appeal to the king (451). If these subsequent backroom dealings of the upper class seem to problematically deny the due political process of the legal system in a way that might be in tension with the novel’s overall reformist political interests, the strange failure and success of Esther’s testimony also simultaneously supports and undercuts— and it’s hard to say exactly how knowingly the novel constructs this irony— the division between the two types of vision that the novel has been playing off of each other all along, and the novel’s own movement back and forth between them.

On the one hand, we might say that the novel knowingly uses the ironic political message of this appeal to the monarch to stage a victory for the women’s view of “minutiae.” It is, notably, Sir Maximus Debarry who is most moved by Esther: whatever his earlier opinions of Felix, he is “wrought to a state of sympathetic ardour that needed no fanning” by Esther’s speech, and in

⁵⁰ In her reading of the way that the novel enacts its own persuasive project through aesthetic judgment, Michelle Weinroth reads Esther’s rhetorical force, which arises from the “(beautiful) lyricism and (sublime) noble spirit” that she displays in the trial scene, as both countering the much rougher rhetoric of Felix (and thereby making his politics more palatable) and as corresponding to Eliot’s larger novelistic aesthetic, in which “the terse and often abstract precepts of theology and political science are abandoned in favor of artistic narrative form.” “Engendering Consent: The Voice of Persuasion in *Felix Holt, the Radical*,” *Victorians Institute Journal* 33 (2005), 34. While I agree that there is a basic structural similarity between Esther and Eliot’s aims and methods here, their two “artistic narrative forms” are in fact substantially at odds with one another.

⁵¹ David Kurnick and J. Jeffrey Franklin read the overflow of emotion in this scene in terms of the text’s stance on interiority, as characters gather to debate the least inward of the novel’s characters and to attempt to litigate the continuity between his private and public self. For Kurnick, this scene most clearly reveals “the ideological nature of the novel’s linkage of interiority and mass agitation,” inwardness functioning as a type of “crowd control” as Esther’s performance of her own interiority overrides evidence of Felix’s guilt. *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel*, 80. For Franklin, what is ultimately on trial in this scene is “the novel itself and the form of interiority that its form represents” (78). “The Victorian Novel’s Performance of Interiority: Felix Holt on Trial,” *Victorians Institute Journal* 26 (1998), 78. Both of these readings helpfully note the disconnection between external evidence and internal emotion/conviction, pointing both to the ways in which the trial notably fails and to the way that this climactic scene comments on the project of the novel we are reading.

exhorting his fellow gentlemen to support the campaign in favor of Felix, he testifies to the power and truth of her account by simply recounting its effect on him as a listener: “That girl made me cry” (452). As imperfect as Esther’s appeal might be, and as exaggerated as its efficacy might appear, her woman’s vision of Felix and her power of aesthetic expression overturns here all concern with Felix’s “position and politics,” precisely in the sphere where we’d expect them to matter most. Sir Maximus is entirely overcome by Esther’s feelings, her own “ardour” and tears transferred to him. In the end, Esther gets the last word in the debate over Felix Holt and his Radicalism, and her most significant convert proves to be the very man who dismissed a woman’s powers of observation, sympathy, and persuasion so openly in the novel’s early set-up of its political plotline.

But however tempting it might be to read this as Sir Maximus’s well-deserved comeuppance at the hands of the novel, Esther’s success is also a striking failure. Even if she ultimately makes the “right” choice in accepting Felix over Harold, she doesn’t in fact come into her own as a narrator of Felix Holt in the way we might expect of the novel’s chosen heroine. Esther’s testimony succeeds by means of its problematic performance of femininity, one that stands in tension with the novel’s larger reclaiming of the female sphere as the space of true reform. What’s strangest about this scene is not that Esther acts as she does, but that the narrator doesn’t seem to recognize her performance as such, as we see in the apparently sincere (and didactically intrusive) description of the crescendo of womanly impulses and feelings that culminates in Esther’s address to the court:

When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardour of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes one of her most precious influences: she is the added impulse that shatters the stiffening crust of cautious experience. Her inspired ignorance gives a sublimity to actions so incongruously simple, that otherwise they would make men smile. Some of that ardour which has flashed out and illuminated all poetry and history was burning to-day in the bosom of sweet Esther Lyon. In this, at least, her woman’s lot was perfect: that the man she loved was her hero; that her woman’s passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current. And to-day they were making one danger, one terror, one irresistible impulse for her heart. (447)

Esther is entirely reduced to the realm of emotion here: that “unbroken current of feeling” that served as evidence of Eliot’s “feminine mind” for James is literalized in the “undivided current” of “ardour,” “impulse,” “passion,” “reverence,” and “terror” of which Esther is composed in the passage. Moreover, the scene entirely deflates the seriousness with which the novel has to this point treated Esther’s growing knowledge and sense of self. She is reduced to an “ignorance” and simplicity that escape being laughable because they correspond to the image of womanhood that men want to see, that of “sweet Esther Lyon.”⁵² When Sir Maximus is ultimately moved to tears by her testimony, it’s not because Esther has succeeded in engaging him as a reader, in the way that the novel has engaged her (and us) at other moments, but because she has worked on his gendered feelings of attraction toward a pretty young woman. Esther does produce sympathy in Sir Maximus, but this feeling doesn’t lead him to a transformed understanding of and relationship to things as they

⁵² This strange narratorial endorsement of Esther’s emotion-filled testimony would seem to cast this scene as a counterexample to David Kurnick’s observation that, with the exception of *The Spanish Gypsy*, “the notion that feminine love of performance requires a painful moral correction is a veritable law of Eliot’s fictional universe.” *Empty Houses*, 73. *Felix Holt*, like its protagonist, finds ample opportunities to painfully correct Esther and her love of performance at other moments. However, the novel not only celebrates this particular performance, but moreover fails to recognize its most exaggerated aspects. The conclusion to both the novel’s political-legal and marriage plots relies on a caricature of femininity entirely at odds with its otherwise nuanced reflection on gender and its possibilities and limitations.

are in the world (as we could, following Claybaugh, define the work of novelistic reform); it instead allows him the satisfaction of performing a gallant gesture for a woman in need. It's ironically in an upholding of conservative, patriarchal power—the power of the county gentlemen to circumvent the court's ruling, of a gracious and “graceful” gentleman to satisfy the wish of a beautiful woman—that the novel allows Felix Holt, the Radical, to go free—a strikingly conservative end for the novel's most democratically committed character. While this strange conclusion to Felix Holt's legal troubles undercuts not only the reformist principles for which its title character advocates (and the extent to which it imagines reform to be possible in the public, political sphere), but also the novel's otherwise serious treatment of Esther's growth and self, it also paradoxically reinforces Esther's plotline—and the interpretive-sympathetic work that it requires of her—as the true space of reform in the novel.

Given this tension, it's important that the culmination of Esther's narrative of development lies not in her testimony at the trial but in her final visionary encounter with Mrs. Transome. Esther may fail to write Felix Holt in a way the novel could, or should, support, but she does succeed as a reader, and it's in this larger arc of Esther's developing attention to the details of the world and its stories that the novel presents its portrait of true reform at work, a reform rooted in the education of the individual and her sensibilities. In granting this moment of success to Esther, and not to Felix, the novel claims the work of reform for itself. The ultimate “wider vision” and “great energy” that is celebrated in *Felix Holt*, and that is ultimately responsible for the education we see modeled in the text, is, in the end, not that of its eponymous hero but that of the narrator/novelist herself—and of the reader who becomes part of this project by learning to read the pages in which she lays it out. In stepping in as a successful pedagogue where Felix fails, Eliot suggests that it's the vocation and lessons of fiction, with its simultaneous emphasis on the “minutiae” that contain meaning and the synthetic-interpretive challenges of its formal construction, that hold the keys to a form of education and reform that politics and preaching will never realize.

Chapter 3

The Web and the Heart: Form and Education in *Middlemarch*

No man's nerves tingle when he hears the name of Aristotle. But to think of Fielding, Scott, and Dickens, is like grasping a warm hand or leaning against a beating heart.¹

An early review of *Middlemarch* in the *Saturday Review* proclaimed: "If we are to call *Middlemarch* a novel at all, we may say that as a didactic novel it has scarcely been equalled."² This achievement is, in the reviewer's eyes, an ambivalent one: if the breadth and depth of Eliot's characters, observations, descriptions, and ideas are notable not only in and of themselves but also for the way they work together to present the author's "moral and social views" through the medium of fiction, as he goes on to say, the novel's constant display of these views is also its greatest shortcoming. Its "inherent defect" consists of the "conspicuous, constantly prominent lesson" that it continually holds before us. Whereas an "ideal storyteller" would use the novel to represent "human nature as he sees it," Eliot can't help but use it to portray "human nature as supporting a theory," one that taxes the reader at every turn and forces her into "attitudes of mind altogether alien from that relaxation which it is the assumed office of fiction to provide for its votaries." It's to Eliot's credit that her readers go along with the demands of her novel and its didactic aim: were it a lesser work of fiction, we wouldn't have the same patience for the "real exercise of mind" that it demands and might seek out easier amusement elsewhere. *Middlemarch* blurs the line between delight and instruction in a way that doesn't entirely cancel out the former but that certainly renders difficult a casual reader's engagement with the text.

Middlemarch is of course not alone in using the space of the novel to support a "theory": indeed, this review's larger account of *Middlemarch* as a pre-eminent example of the didactic novel implicitly places Eliot within the long history of didacticism in English fiction. We can see in her didactic forebears, and in eighteenth-century debates about the novel, two important and related tensions that emerge in accounts of the genre's central project and that are echoed in the reviewer's discussion of this later novel. The first involves the novel's relationship to its readers and follows from the dual imperatives of the Aristotelian literary ideal: the tension between the novel's need to provide pleasure and instruction for its reader. If eighteenth-century moralists, including Samuel Johnson, took seriously the novel's power to corrupt and argued that it was the duty of fiction to instruct its reader through properly moral exemplars, other novelists and readers recognized fiction's powers of instruction while increasingly emphasizing and prioritizing the pleasure it could offer.³ The second grows out of the novel's choice of content, and the form it uses to present this content:

¹ From *Harper's* "Easy Chair," February 1860, quoted in Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 36.

² *Saturday Review*, December 7, 1872, 733-734.

³ Patricia Myers Spacks's summary of this debate not only provides a helpful introduction to its animating concerns but also emphasizes the extent to which these moral questions often revolved around women's increasing role as writers and readers of novels. See *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 2-9. For a further discussion of didacticism in the early English novel, particularly as it relates to readerly pleasure (and the historically contingent nature of the entertainment—or lack thereof—that readers ascribed to didactic texts), see J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), especially 248-273.

namely, between the choice to represent “what is” and “what ought to be.”⁴ The latter is a tension that we’ve already seen at work in Eliot’s seemingly contradictory claims about novel form and its pedagogic potential in *Felix Holt*: if her fiction proclaims, on the one hand, its realist intention to represent “human nature as she sees it,” it can, on the other, only pretend to work realistically through the particulars of its story and world, as the reader is constantly reminded that there is in fact an overarching synthetic view and didactic intention—a “theory” that its portrait of human nature supports—that structures the novel all along.

In this regard, then, *Middlemarch* works in a familiar novelistic mode, its generic features and mode of operation legible to contemporaries like the above reviewer, even if they might not satisfy certainly readerly preferences. And yet, even as the novel is cast as a pre-eminent example of a certain type of novelistic fiction, there is also something about the novel that sets it apart from this tradition: indeed, as we’ve seen above, its success as a didactic novel can only be praised if we grant that it is “a novel at all,” the review calling into question the text’s very claim to the genre. Given that the reviewer describes even what he considers the novel’s most trying defects in terms that are more widely applicable to familiar novelistic forms and debates, we have to look elsewhere for the defining feature that sets Eliot’s novel apart, and I would locate the novel’s singularity in a particular phrase that lies outside of the established categories of entertainment and instruction that the reviewer otherwise engages: namely, the “real exercise of mind” by which we might “read such writing and thinking as they ought to be read.” Particular to *Middlemarch* and the “real exercise of mind” that it requires of us, I would propose, is the novel’s central concern with the intellect, with forms of book learning and knowledge that threaten to exceed the parameters of the novelistic. Therefore, while I am interested in the way *Middlemarch* negotiates the above tensions that I’ve suggested grow out of its didactic propensities, I’m especially interested in the way these tensions revolve centrally around the novel’s reflection on education, in ways that set it apart from other examples of didactic fiction and that connect Eliot’s moral/didactic project and her novel theory with serious intellectual endeavor, on the part of the novelist and reader both.

Middlemarch is a novel that is consistently concerned with knowledge and learning. David Kurnick describes the novel as “perhaps the single most important document of the nineteenth-century English novel’s aspiration to intellectual seriousness,” and indeed, for many readers, from its initial reviewers onward, the novel’s title is synonymous with an intellectual and moral weight that grows out of its preoccupation with knowledge of all kinds.⁵ From the youthful Lydgate’s transformative encounter with the scientific texts that spark his vocation as a doctor to the unhappy Casaubon’s laborious pursuit of his “Key to All Mythologies,” from the voluble Mr. Brooke’s

⁴ These two terms grow out of Michael McKeon’s account of the conflict and ultimate rapprochement between contemporary responses to the novels of Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson. As he describes, contemporary readers and critics of the two writers were particularly concerned with the categories of “naturalness” and “morality” in the novel, with the two often standing in inverse relation to one another. We might also hear echoes here of the reviewer’s description of *Middlemarch*’s flaw, which opposes Eliot’s depiction of “human nature as supporting a theory”—a version of “what ought to be”—to the ideal storyteller’s “human nature as he sees it”—“what is.” See *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 415-419.

⁵ David Kurnick. “An Erotics of Detachment: ‘Middlemarch’ and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice.” *ELH* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 483. William Myers summarizes the widespread opinion of Eliot’s contemporaries in terms that resonate with the above reviewer’s claim about the extent to which “theory” is at work in her fiction, emphasizing the vast network of other texts and ideas with which her novels are in conversation: “her writing was not simply influenced in a relatively haphazard way by her philosophical and scientific reading but was deliberately and consistently an attempt to synthesize in fiction an elaborate and coherent theoretical analysis of the human situation.” In examining the way that Eliot’s own vast intellectual interests and knowledge make their way into her novels, Myers suggests that her contemporaries viewed her as a “teacher,” and her novels as the space in which this teaching was carried out. *The Teaching of George Eliot* (Totowa, NH: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 4.

frequent, and suspect, proclamations about his love of scholarship to the narrator's more understated allusions to a vast network of literary and historical works that point to the breadth and depth of her own knowledge, the novel is infused with wisdom and its pursuit at both its diegetic and narratorial levels.

In what follows, I'd like to examine how the "real exercise of mind" required by *Middlemarch* relates to the novel's conception of education—both the one it represents in its pages and the one it seeks to enact. In particular, I'll trace the way the novel displaces certain proposed pedagogic models in favor of a mode of novelistic learning that it claims for itself. I'll first take up the centrality of wisdom and learning in the novel, considering the way that certain forms of scholarly knowledge are introduced in the text and then dismissed through the figure of Casaubon and ultimately positing that Eliot replaces the more arid book learning that he represents with a form of knowledge grounded in experience and feeling.⁶ I'll then explore the way that the novel reflects on its own form in terms that come to be synonymous with its reflection on the world it represents and the education of its central characters, examining in particular how the narrator's use of the metaphor of the web comes to stand for an operation particular to the novel. Finally, I'll turn to the education that the novel prepares for Dorothea to consider how *Middlemarch* brings together experience, education, and novel reading through its use of the figure of the heart and heartbeats. I'll suggest that the novel uses this figure not only to set its own work apart from that of the many other types of texts—scholarly manuscripts, political speeches, grammar books, to name a few—that circulate in its pages, but also to explore the central tension that constitutes its own scope, namely, that between the larger form of wisdom offered by its web-like construction and the more intimate knowledge to be found in and among its "beating hearts" and "warm hands." The type of education that *Middlemarch* explores is one that is essentially bound up in the seemingly contradictory nature of the two main impulses of the novel's form, and one to which the novel itself lays sole claim in its capacity to shuttle itself and readers between these two levels of representation.

Experience and Knowledge

From the start, *Middlemarch* is preoccupied with learning. It is, in fact, the introduction of a scholar and his pursuit of knowledge that puts the plot of *Middlemarch* in motion: when Casaubon comes to dine at Tipton Grange, Dorothea is captivated by a seriousness and intellect that makes her sure that she is in the company of a "great soul," of "a living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile complete knowledge with devoted piety; [...] a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint" and who promises some scope for her intellectual ardor "beyond the shallows of ladies'-school literature."⁷ The novel's first "romantic" plotline is set in motion by its young heroine's association of the trappings of scholarship with moral elevation, religious ardor, and expansive vision. The terms in which Dorothea conceives of life with Casaubon as husband—she imagines that their union would "deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and

⁶ Here we might see Eliot's novel not just within the tradition of the eighteenth-century didactic novel more generally, but specifically in the didactic tradition of sentimental women's fiction. For an overview of the relationship between didacticism and women's writing, see Hilary Havens's introduction to *Didactic Novels and British Women's Writing, 1790-1820*, ed. Hilary Havens (New York: Routledge, 2017). For a discussion of the "didactic singlemindedness" of the sentimental novel, see John J. Richetti, *The English Novel in History, 1700-1780* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 238. For an account of the link between the novel, women, and emotion and the transformation of the novel form through texts by and about women, see the introduction to Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Norton, 2000), 14, 16. All subsequent citations are given parenthetically in the text.

give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path” (19)—promises a future defined by education and enlightenment, with her husband as the teacher who will guide her through the “provinces of masculine knowledge” (41) and eventually lead her to a greater understanding of the worlds and its truths, intellectual, moral, and spiritual.⁸

However, even as it celebrates learning and often proclaims its own wisdom, the novel also mounts a criticism of pedantry and certain forms of didacticism. It’s at the very moment that Casaubon captures Dorothea’s heart and mind that the narrator begins to undermine the type of learning that he typifies and that her enraptured protagonist initially celebrates, thereby also undermining the very pedagogic and developmental trajectory that it seems to lay out for Dorothea’s subsequent formation over the course of the novel. Dorothea may not yet be aware of the disappointments in store for her as Casaubon’s wife, but it doesn’t take much more than an initial dinner spent in the company of Casaubon for the reader to see what she doesn’t. After laying out the project that is Casaubon’s life work, the narrator describes the manner in which he explains his research to his auditress, drawing our attention to the scholar’s view of his world and Dorothea’s place in it: “In explaining this to Dorothea, Mr Casaubon expressed himself nearly as he would have done to a fellow-student, for he had not two styles of talking at command: it is true that when he used a Greek or Latin phrase he always gave the English with scrupulous care, but he would probably have done this in any case. A learned provincial clergyman is accustomed to think of his acquaintances as of ‘lords, knyghtes, and other noble and worthi men, that conne Latyn but lytille” (16). The narrator emphasizes here the pervasiveness of Casaubon’s identity as a scholar: all the world is his school, and all the people in it his fellow scholars and his students.⁹ While he is unable to address even a young woman like Dorothea in anything but the mode of a scholar, the gap that he assumes between himself and his interlocutors casts him in the constant role of pedagogue, translating, explaining, and instructing so that his pursuits might be legible to those unanointed by such learning.

Or at least that would seem to be the hierarchical relationship that the narrator describes between the scholar and the world that surrounds him. She ascribes knowledge to Casaubon and ignorance to everyone else, and, interestingly enough, she does so by using a quotation from a text that only a perceptive and knowledgeable reader would have a hope of recognizing, calling on her own scholarly learning and textual knowledge to underscore Casaubon’s. The narrator quotes from the Prologue of *The Book of John Mandeville* here— or, more accurately put, she misquotes Mandeville’s text. In excerpting just a portion of the passage in question, she inverts its meaning and aligns its argument about the relative merits of scholars with what we would imagine to be Casaubon’s own. In its full form, the original sentence reads: “But lords and knights and other noble and worthy men that con Latin but little, and have been beyond the sea, know and understand, if I say truth or no, and if I err in devising, for forgetting or else, that they may redress it and amend

⁸ Note that here, as in *Felix Holt*, the types of education and knowledge that the novel negotiates through Dorothea are presented in gendered terms, at least at first. While there’s a similar re-valuation of these forms of knowledge at work in this text, as I’ll go on to argue— the “provinces of masculine knowledge” that Dorothea imagines as the apex of her intellectual formation are ultimately emptied out and other forms of knowledge that we might read as coded feminine ascend to a position of privilege— the multi-plot complexities of *Middlemarch* trouble any attempt at a holistic reading of the novel’s gendering of education, in ways that *Felix Holt*’s simpler plotting doesn’t.

⁹ While Casaubon and Felix Holt are otherwise strikingly dissimilar, their author does seem to indicate a parallel shortcoming in the two men that plays into each text’s larger reflection on education: both Felix the political preacher and Casaubon the scholar have just one mode of expression and are similarly inflexible in adapting their messages and styles to different audiences and situations.

it.”¹⁰ It is, in fact, precisely those men who “conne Latyn but lytille,” upon whom we can imagine Casaubon heaping scorn, who possess the most valuable form of knowledge and who have authority over the text that an author like Mandeville produces: they have been out into the world and have done things in it. Mandeville himself stresses, here and elsewhere in the Prologue, that he is writing of what he has seen in his time spent beyond the sea and in foreign lands, emphasizing the experiential foundation for all of this knowledge: he is an author, and his story is of interest, precisely because he has gone out into the world and brought back knowledge of it. Indeed, as Casaubon himself admits shortly thereafter, such knowledge from experience, which Mandeville values so highly, is precisely what he as a scholar must forego, for “when a man has great studies and is writing a great work, he must of course give up seeing much of the world” (25). But in the excerpted passage, it’s precisely the men of the world whose experience constitutes the basis for stories and written texts, and who ultimately have the authority to evaluate—to “redress” and “amend”—their final written form. While Mandeville’s long journey through the world and “beyond the sea” gives him the authority to know and to write, Casaubon’s long and laborious path is entirely confined to the desiccated pages of books and notebooks, which, Mandeville would suggest, prevents him from gaining the true knowledge that can only come from an experience of the world itself.

It seems, then, that the author of this (mis)quoted passage would in fact side with the opinions of those characters in the novel who “conne Latyn but lytille” or not at all, rather than partaking in Casaubon’s dismissal of their worldly interests and endeavors as Eliot’s citation initially seems to suggest: they exist in the world in a way that Casaubon himself does not, and in their many, often cruel, observations about him, they emphasize the extent to which the scholar is limited by the narrowness of the textual world he inhabits, and for which he forsakes the concerns of the real one. Sir James refers to Casaubon as “a sort of parchment code” (44), while Mrs. Cadwallader claims in jest that “Somebody put a drop [of his blood] under a magnifying-glass, and it was all semi-colons and parentheses” (45), both accounts suggesting that Casaubon’s obsessions have in fact caused him to morph from flesh-and-blood human into a text, even as he fails to actually produce the text to which he has devoted his life.¹¹ Will Ladislaw and the increasingly disillusioned Dorothea both remark upon the narrowness of a world circumscribed by the scholarly works that serve as his sole interlocutors: according to the former, Casaubon’s “plodding application, rows of notebooks, and small taper of learned theory” allow him to explore nothing more than “the tossed ruins of the world” (53), and the latter eventually comes to see that in lieu of the “new vistas” that Casaubon’s mind seemed to promise (55), her husband is “lost among small closets and winding stairs [...] With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men’s notions about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight” (126). Dorothea, echoing Will, not only emphasizes the spatial constriction and archaic nature of Casaubon’s world but also suggests that he is not in the world at all, as he foregoes the sunlight itself in favor of textual reflections on outdated notions of its source. Her reference to those “bitter” comments in his marginal notes and manuscript drafts also indicates a one-sided conversation occurring in the absence of any flesh-and-blood interlocutors or real-time dialogue—and of any

¹⁰ See *The Travels of John Mandeville: The Version of the Cotton Manuscript in Modern Spelling* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), 6. The text, which first circulated in the mid- to late-fourteenth century, recounts the experiences of a traveler calling himself John Mandeville as he journeys through the Middle East and Asia.

¹¹ This is of course not to say that Sir James, Mrs. Cadwallader, or Casaubon’s other critics are themselves paragons of wisdom. The novel finds ample opportunity to show up their shortcomings and inanities as well. They just happen to escape from and to see through the particular set of limitations that the scholar imposes on himself and that the novel needs to dismantle in order to put other forms of learning in place of the one Casaubon stands for.

generosity of spirit on the part of their author.¹² Casaubon's knowledge, Latin and all¹³, remains lifeless, confined to the narrow chambers of his mind rather than entering into a larger exchange in which it might be communicated and thus put to some greater use.

The novel makes quite clear through its characters' unforgiving assessments of Casaubon's shortcomings that his scholarly pursuit of the "Key to All Mythologies" will not lead to the wisdom and understanding to which Dorothea aspires. In other words, we might say that what the "Key to All Mythologies" seems to promise, but never delivers, is synthetic form: Casaubon's project seeks to unlock the unifying secret that will bring previously disparate pieces of knowledge into one illuminating, intricate whole. Dorothea realizes the futility of his endeavor, and of her own future labor over her husband's scholarly remains, and suggests that the fragments to which Casaubon has devoted his life will never be anything more: "And now she pictured to herself the days, and months, and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins—sorting them as food for a theory which was already withered in the birth like an elfin child" (297). Unlike in *Felix Holt*, where a larger male energy promised to bind together the scattered pieces of the novel's heroine, it's the work of the male scholar and of the tradition he privileges that fails to come together into any coherent shape or direction here, no matter what energy is devoted to the task. Indeed, the "theory," or synthetic energy that promises to give form to the fragments, is itself a false ideal, and part of the problem, already "withered in the birth" and unable to provide any meaningful "key" to the ruins it seeks to understand.

It would, of course, be a mistake to conclude from the novel's treatment of Casaubon that *Middlemarch* dismisses scholarship and learning outright. Casaubon may be the most extreme case, in so totally defining himself by means of textual scholarship and authorship and thereby closing himself off to the world, but he's not the novel's only scholar: Lydgate's medical research, Farebrother's interest in biology, and Mrs. Garth's teaching all provide more positive counterpoints to Casaubon. Notably, they all combine book learning and intellectual study with a more outwardly-directed, emotional attachment to the world that the narrator and the novel seem to value highly. As Mrs. Garth says of the kitchen lessons she gives to her children, "She thought it good for them to see that she could make an excellent lather while she corrected their blunders 'without looking,'—that a woman with her sleeves tucked up above her elbows might know all about the Subjunctive Mood or the Torrid Zone—that, in short, she might possess 'education' and other good things ending in 'tion,' and worthy to be pronounced emphatically, without being a useless doll" (154). While privileging book learning, she pairs her concern with intellectual matters with practical and familial duties, and it's in this marriage of scholarship and daily life that she's shown to be an effective teacher.

¹² The shortcomings of character suggested by this one-sided conversation—already implied by his manner of addressing Dorothea in the above quotation—can be viewed in light of the novel's larger interest in communication and miscommunication between its characters. As Robert Kiely argues in "The Limits of Dialogue in *Middlemarch*," "the misuse of language on the part of her fictional characters is often regarded as a flaw subject to moral correction," explaining that "Eliot's idea of good language, like Feuerbach's, is based on its efficacy as a link between human beings" (104). It's precisely this sense of connection and communication that is missing from Casaubon here and in the above Mandeville misquotation, both of which emphasize his complete disregard for the particulars of his interlocutor and his subsequent "misuse" of language. In *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 103-123.

¹³ Indeed, Will Ladislav notes that part of the problem might, in fact, lie in the extent to which Casaubon privileges his knowledge of Latin while remaining ignorant of other scholarship: as he observes to Dorothea's dismay, many of Casaubon's difficulties might be cleared away if he could just read German (132-133).

Lydgate similarly has one foot firmly planted in the world outside of his books, even as he looks forward with so much pleasure to the long evening hours that he can spend among his scientific journals, much to the dismay of his young wife. Unlike the abstract, purely intellectual exercise of Casaubon's "Key to All Mythologies," Lydgate sees in his chosen profession the "most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and social good," and the narrator specifically comments that he "was an emotional creature, with a flesh-and-blood sense of fellowship which withstood all the abstractions of special study. He cared not only for 'cases,' but for John and Elizabeth, especially Elizabeth" (93). This insistence on the "flesh-and-blood" specificity that brings Lydgate down from the abstractions of the mind into the realities of the world is particularly striking when read next to Casaubon as "parchment code," and the particular attraction that Lydgate feels for the "Elizabets" who come to his professional attention shows that his blood, at least, is made up of more than "semi-colons and parentheses." (Though it's also his attraction to a particular "Elizabeth" in the form of Rosamond Vincy that proves his ruin.) Whatever sense of failure Lydgate and readers are left with in light of his ultimate moral compromise and circumscribed achievements—and I certainly don't mean to downplay the importance of this failure to *Middlemarch's* project¹⁴—the strength of his sense of vocation and his insistence on the intersection between scholarly study and worldly improvements is essential to the novel's valuation of knowledge, particularly as it contrasts with the model of scholarship offered by Casaubon.

While *Middlemarch* remains firmly committed to intellectual seriousness and scholarly pursuits, it's notable that Eliot so clearly sets up the figure of a consummately bookish scholar only to dismiss him and the type of knowledge he stands for so thoroughly, underscoring that his story is not the place where we should locate the type of learning that *Middlemarch* ultimately celebrates or itself seeks to enact.¹⁵ In contrasting Casaubon's approach to book learning with that of its other scholars, the novel suggests that we have to look elsewhere for the type of knowledge and wisdom that the text itself promotes, and returning to the Mandeville quotation in its original form seems to

¹⁴ Failure is, in fact, a defining feature of *Middlemarch*, and one that sets it apart from other novels. Franco Moretti states that in its representation of the conflict between vocation and everyday life, *Middlemarch* is the only nineteenth-century English novel that "dares to deal with the major theme of the European *Bildungsroman*: failure"—namely, the failure of vocation. (This failure is, of course, not confined to Lydgate, though his plotline offers a stark example of it. Moretti cites Mr. Brooke, Casaubon, Bulstrode, Dorothea, and Will as other important examples of stunted or failed vocation.) *The Way of the World* (New York: Verso, 2000), 216. Barbara Hardy, who reads Eliot's fiction as "a critical analysis of the stories we tell about life," sees the novel's engagement with failure as a defining feature that separates *Middlemarch* not only from the work of other nineteenth-century writers like Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens but also from Eliot's earlier novels: if other novels "set out to show a similar process of learning how to dispense with fantasy" and "write about moving from romantic daydream to realistic acceptance," *Middlemarch* is the only text that doesn't "succumb to fantasy after all" or "end with dream-conclusion and wish-fulfillment." "Towards a Poetics of Fiction: 3) An Approach through Narrative," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1968), 13. In this, *Middlemarch* is notably different from the earlier *Felix Holt*.

¹⁵ Seth Lerer suggests that Casaubon's scholarship is perhaps not as far off from the novel's own project as we might think, which might help to explain the narrator's notable moments of sympathy for this character even as the novel at large tends to cast his project as so misguided. He proposes that the character's pursuit of a totalizing system in his "Key to All Mythologies"—so easy for us and for his counterparts in the novel to dismiss as absurd—is in fact not an anomaly but is continuous with the search for error and attempt at correction that defines all scholarly pursuit and that casts the "academic self" as someone who annotates, compiles, and establishes texts. In this attempt, Casaubon, Dorothea, and Eliot herself are all connected, making *Middlemarch* a story about both reading and authorship. While Lerer's reading laudably bucks the tendency to take aim at the easily mockable target that Casaubon provides and helpfully draws attention to the way the novel reflects on its own status as a text, what is missing from his approach is a consideration of the novel as a *novel*. However didactic and interested in academic scholarship it may be, *Middlemarch* itself is not primarily an academic text, nor is the self it seeks to form primarily an academic one. See "My Casaubon: The Novel of Scholarship and Victorian Philology" in *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

indicate where: in the realm of experience. While the narrator misquotes this line in her early description of Casaubon, she later has Caleb Garth put forth an argument about knowledge that's quite similar to the original sentiment of the Mandeville: "A good deal of what I know can only come from experience: you can't learn it off as you learn things out of a book" (347). *Middlemarch* itself does undeniably embrace book learning, but it also suggests that this learning is not fully sufficient in and of itself, and that the type of knowledge it itself seeks to produce will proceed by other means.¹⁶ Moreover, Caleb's description of "book learning" implicitly hints at a feature of experience that we might see as central to the particular form of "book learning" that Eliot's novel offers its reader: namely, duration. Experience for Caleb, and the wisdom it offers, is synonymous with process, producing knowledge that grows out of the extended, gradual accumulation of experience through living, as opposed to the implicitly quicker "learning off" of facts from books. In this regard, we might see *Middlemarch* itself—the length and complexity of which require the reader to live with its story over time, rather than to "learn it off"—as fitting more squarely within Caleb's definition of experience than of books.

I'd like to propose that the valuation of knowledge as experience and experience as knowledge that arises from the Mandeville quotation and Caleb's claim is centrally at work in *Middlemarch*. This isn't, of course, an entirely novel claim. As Zadie Smith puts it in her reading of the novel, experience, and most particularly emotional experience, is at the heart of the novel's central portrait of personal development, that of Dorothea's transformation over the course of the story, and ultimately constitutes the truest form of knowledge in the text: "It was [Eliot's] contention that human experience is as powerful a force as theory or revealed fact. Experience transforms perspective, and transformations in perspective, to Eliot, constitute real changes in the world. 'Our subtlest analysis of schools and sects,' she wrote, '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.' Experience, for Eliot, was a powerful way of knowing."¹⁷ We might recognize many of the terms in this passage, both in Eliot's claim (from "Janet's Repentance," in *Scenes of Clerical Life*) and in Smith's account of it here, from the pedagogic project that Eliot undertakes in *Felix Holt*: "perspective" maps onto the transformed vision for which the earlier novel advocated; "real changes in the world" suggest Eliot's interest in reform in both works, as a subject of representation and as a project in which the novel itself might be participating; and Eliot's above reference to the "love" that makes this possible speaks to the emotion that serves both as the cause and the result of the changed perspective and real-world reform that the novel is interested in cultivating. We might go on to translate Smith's initial formulation of "experience, for Eliot, was a powerful way of knowing" to its corollary, "*feeling* was a powerful way of knowing."¹⁸ It's this conception of experiential

¹⁶ While it explicitly displaces book learning in favor of experiential knowledge, the Mandeville misquotation also underscores the scholarly knowledge that is an essential part of reading this particular novel. Whether in unknowing error, like the poor character whose limitations she is describing, or in a knowing wink to the reader who will catch her misleading reference, it's important to note that Eliot herself turns to textual citation to describe her scholar, whose entire life consists of textual obscurity. There are certainly other cases for experience made in *Middlemarch*, but presumably only a reader with some form of scholarly knowledge, or with a good annotated edition of the novel, will recognize this initial, misleading argument in its favor.

¹⁷ Zadie Smith, "Middlemarch and Everybody," in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 32.

¹⁸ As mistaken as she is about Casaubon and what his learning represents, Dorothea does actually seem to intuit this central connection between knowledge, feeling, and experience from the beginning of the novel. Considering her initial impression of her future husband and the vistas of knowledge he seems to open up to her, she concludes: "He thinks with me [...] or rather, he thinks a whole world of which my thought is but a poor twopenny mirror. And his feelings too, his whole experience—what a lake compared with my little pool!" (16). While Dorothea is of course horribly mistaken here in her assessment of Casaubon himself, which the narrator goes on to underscore by noting the disparity

knowledge, rooted as it is in the emotion-laden perception that Eliot describes above, that I'd like to explore further in light of the novel's interest in education.

In what follows, I'd like to move beyond Smith's definition of experience in Eliot to trace the way experience and the workings of the novel form are brought together to produce a particular type of experiential knowledge in *Middlemarch*, with this form constituting the medium that transforms perspective and enacts change. To this end, I'll first turn to the form of the novel itself to examine what type of knowledge it might seek to produce for its readers before tracing the specific content of one storyline within that larger form in which feeling and experience are at the center of the model of education the novel enacts.

Middlemarch's Web

Middlemarch is centrally concerned with form: the formation of its characters, its own form as a novel, the reform of the world it represents.¹⁹ Central to its pedagogic project is the way that its form mirrors and enacts the central lessons that it stages for the characters within its story-world, and the terms by which its narrator reflects on the shape of her narrative come to stand for a particular type of knowledge production that is specific to the operations of the novel itself.

Not all critics agree that form is a central concern of *Middlemarch*. Henry James, for example, is again one of Eliot's more adamant detractors on this front: even as he praises the novel's other strengths, he levels against it the charge of formlessness. While he admits that a "concentration" of the novel into a more concise and clearly delineated form would likely have diluted those very aspects of the novel he praises, he maintains that *Middlemarch* is "a treasure-house of details, but it is an indifferent whole" and that "its diffuseness makes it too copious a dose of pure fiction" to be entirely successful as a novel.²⁰ In Zadie Smith's paraphrase of James's objection, he thinks there's just too much of the novel; it can't help but overwhelm readers given the "too copious" scope of its world.²¹ In the contrast James draws between the novel's successful "details" and less successful "whole," we can hear echoes of the fragmentary, "feminine" observations that he praises in *Felix*

between the "signs" she is reading and the "interpretation" she gives to them, she does understand from the start that knowledge might be inextricable from "feelings" and "experience," and her own education as the novel continues will stem less from "thoughts" like those on which Casaubon fixates than from enlarging the "little pool" of her own emotional experience.

¹⁹ Kent Puckett observes that, as we've already seen in Casaubon's scholarly pursuits, even the novel's characters share the text's concern with "more and less comprehensive kinds of form—Casaubon's "Key to All Mythologies" and Lydgate's search for the primal tissue, Dorothea's plan for modern cottages and *Middlemarch* itself." See "Stupid Sensations: Henry James, Good Form, and Reading *Middlemarch* Without a Brain," *The Henry James Review* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 293. We might compare what Puckett refers to here as form to what Gillian Beer calls "unity," which she casts as the central concern that unites the various intellectuals in the novel. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 162.

²⁰ See James's review of *Middlemarch* in *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American and English Writers* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 959.

²¹ "Middlemarch and Everybody," 29. Smith is another reader who thinks that James sometimes misses the point in reading Eliot, claiming that certain of his criticisms of *Middlemarch* demonstrate a failure to engage with the novel on the terms that the text lays out for itself, as I argued in the case of his reading of *Felix Holt*. She shows, for example, that his criticism of Fred Vinny's prominent role in the novel essentially boils down to the complaint "But why always Fred?" in an unthinking echo of the narrator's own "But why always Dorothea?" thereby implying that he hasn't actually learned the lesson that the novel attempts to teach itself and readers in reminding us of the multiple centers of self that might exercise equal demand on our attention and sympathy (30). While this particular complaint may seem rooted more in questions of character than of form, it is very much related to the capacious social whole that the novel seeks to represent and that necessitates what he reads as its formal diffuseness, as will become apparent in the discussion to follow.

Holt and the lack of unifying form and movement—a “synthetic” power that he aligns with masculine value—for which he censures the novel. And yet, as we’ve already seen, *Middlemarch* also attracts criticism for an overly and overtly synthetic gesture that runs throughout its story, namely its didactic aim and the “theory” of “human nature” that it insists on foregrounding, the interpretive gesture that consistently undercuts its seeming commitment to its realist effect. To make sense of this apparent tension, it’s worth turning to the primary formal metaphor that the novel itself uses to reflect on its own project and construction: the figure of the web.²²

The narrator first introduces this term as a metaphor for the sample of life that her novel represents: in comparing her project to that of the “great historian” Fielding, the narrator explains the more limited scope of her project and the comparative restraint of her style in relation to that of her predecessor by describing her focused attention on a specific set of interwoven human lives: “I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.” The web functions here as a figure for social life itself: each individual life composes a single thread within a much larger web of human relations, forming a pattern that connects the seemingly disparate lives and “human lots” of each individual to those of their neighbors and ultimately to others whose experiences are much less obviously proximate to their own. The narrator’s focus on her own relationship to the portion of the web on which she trains her attention also suggests that we might read this passage as an initial manifesto for the realist project in which she is engaged: her use of this figure suggests that these patterns of “woven and interwoven” lives exist independently of her examination of them, and her task is therefore to trace the interpenetration of threads, and the patterns that they create, in the “particular web” that makes up the world of her novel: the provincial town of Middlemarch.

If Eliot’s narrator first distinguishes her project from Fielding’s by stressing the much narrower sample of the world on which her narrative attention will have to focus—no traipsing about “that tempting range of relevancies called the universe” for her²³—the novel’s juxtaposition of multiple plotlines and the prolonged attention it gives to the many characters who people its universe, however unworthy they may seem of such attention (think of James on Fred Vincy),

²² In “Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*,” J. Hillis Miller traces the three families of metaphors that together allow the narrator to reflect on her aim and manner of representing the totality of provincial life by exploring one small sample of it: the flowing web that serves at various moments as a metaphor for Middlemarch society, the subjective life of the individual, and the novel’s own project (130-135); the optical metaphors that accompany and disrupt the apparently objectivist implications of the web metaphor by insisting that seeing is never a neutral, objective, or passive act (136-140); and the interpretive metaphor that shows that seeing is never merely optical but is always an act of interpretation (142-143). These metaphors provide three models from which to view the world—from the position of the objectivist scientist, the subjective perspectivist, or the reader of a text—and together dismantle the sense of totality towards which the text is working, since each metaphor produces a different view of it (143-144). In focusing on the web metaphor here, I don’t mean to dismiss these other levels on which the text operates: indeed, as Miller very convincingly shows, they can’t quite be separated out from each other. The question of perspective and interpretation will become particularly important in considering Dorothea’s education and its correlation to the novel’s own didactic impulses. However, the web is the most centrally *formal* of Eliot’s metaphors and is important to how the narrative constructs the reader’s experience of its story, and is thus deserving of isolated attention. See Miller in *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 125-145. For a discussion of the prevalence of web imagery in Victorian writing more generally, see Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 156-159.

²³ U.C. Knoepfelmacher reminds us that Eliot is, in fact, still interested in the universe, but that her universe is very different in nature from Fielding’s: from her later position in history, and without Fielding’s confidence in “a divinely ordered world,” Eliot’s narrator has to become a “genuine historian,” deriving for herself, from human life, the laws that her predecessor took for granted. See *George Eliot’s Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 16-17.

actually result from Eliot's insistence on representing a much more capacious world than Fielding does. However wide-ranging his narrative may appear and however all-encompassing the wisdom he seems to offer in his intrusive narrative commentary, a novel like *Tom Jones* is closely focused on the picaresque adventures of the particular protagonist for whom his novel is named, whereas Eliot's novel is invested in providing an expansive vision of Middlemarch society and the various complicated connections between the many individual lives that compose it.²⁴ The title of her novel is significantly not *Dorothea Brooke*, *Tertius Lydgate*, or *Fred Vincy*²⁵: none of these singular names adequately accounts for the view of the world-as-web that *Middlemarch* puts forth, which only a collective name like this one can begin to hint at.²⁶

What seems like *Middlemarch*'s "diffuseness," then, is in fact part of the novel's realist effect: the novel self-consciously takes as its structuring principle the same structure that it sees undergirding the lives it represents.²⁷ Having established this correspondence between the world and its own form, however, the novel then turns its web-like construction to interpretive and pedagogical use, the myriad "details" of its portrait of Middlemarch life working towards a didactic "whole" that can only be enacted by the particular form that this novel adopts and teaches its readers to recognize. Before turning to the way Eliot complicates this metaphor in *Middlemarch* and uses it to advance her text's didactic aim, however, I'd like to return to *Felix Holt*, where this image is also at work.

²⁴ As Roy Pascal notes, this expansiveness of the novel is something that sets it apart from the German novel tradition: the nineteenth-century German novelist Friedrich Spielhagen criticized *Middlemarch* because "the angle of vision changes every moment," continually drawing the reader's attention away from the novel's "true" heroine. Friedrich Spielhagen, *Der Held im Roman* (1874), quoted in Roy Pascal, *The German Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 281. Pascal goes on to suggest that even as it remains tightly focused on the single family, Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* is one of the most successful German attempts at a "spacious novel" like Eliot's that balances both centripetal and centrifugal forces.

²⁵ In "*Middlemarch* and Everybody," Smith points out that to each character in the novel, *Middlemarch* has a different protagonist: for Mary Garth, Fred Vincy is the main character; for Ladislav, it's Dorothea; for Lydgate, it's Rosamond; for Rosamond, it's herself (30). If we were to try to name this novel after an eponymous protagonist, the title would have to change depending on the subjective viewpoint from which we surveyed its story.

²⁶ This "little town peopled with mediocrities," as Franco Moretti terms it, at once gives Eliot a complex, pre-existing social whole on which to train her narrator's attention and helpfully delineates and limits the sample on which she'll focus, but it also provides a middle ground in which we can see various historical and social conflicts play out: this setting allows the novel to survey "the conflict *between modernity and tradition*: urban culture and provincial life, *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, abstract vocation and everyday viscosity." *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, 219, 220 (emphasis in original). Both the town's middling nature and its significance as a representative space in which such conflicts can be negotiated is inscribed in its very name, *Middlemarch*. The role of the "middle" as an important space for novel form will be central to my reading of *Der Zauberberg*, and I'll return to the ways that middle-ness of various sorts underlies both Eliot and Mann's conception of novelistic pedagogy.

Patrick Brantlinger suggests that the title also indicates the novel's attitude toward reform. In the shift from the individual emphasized in the title of *Felix Holt* to the collective *Middlemarch*, we can see the later novel's more nuanced portrait of reform at work: "The accumulated actions of numerous obscure individuals constitute a force making for social amelioration; but the actions of a single individual are likely to be insignificant, and perhaps also blind and misguided." *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 230.

²⁷ To borrow Ian Watts's description of the new relationship between form and content in the eighteenth-century novel, we could say that the "formlessness" that James ascribes to Eliot's work might be "the price it must pay for its realism." *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 13. While Eliot certainly isn't engaged in the same rejection of the formal conventions of genres like tragedy or of traditional plots that Watt is tracking in his account of the genre's rise, James, much like readers of those earlier examples of the genre, does seem to be responding to *Middlemarch*'s refusal to adhere to certain formal conventions that he expects of it in the service of its "fidelity to human experience" (13): its insistence on the details by which it purports to offer a full and authentic record of both individual experience and Middlemarch society in all of its multiplicity necessitates the "diffuseness" of which James accuses it.

While the moral resonances with which Eliot quite obviously invests the image of the web and its threads are certainly important in this earlier novel—in the web of sympathetic relations tying Esther's fate to that of the Transomes in the novel's domestic plotlines and in the relation of the local to the national in its political ones²⁸—the web in *Felix Holt* most frequently symbolizes the network of secrets and conspiracies by which its minor characters seek to manipulate the stories of its major characters for their own profit. If Esther stands, as I've argued, as one analog for the reader and for the work of the novel overall, *Felix Holt's* many plotters stand as another, albeit imperfect, model. The novel's various conspirators—Jermyn, Christian, Johnson—serve as diegetic readers of Esther's history and inheritance, attempting to piece together the fragments and clues of her story along with the reader as the novel parcels them out. They also become, in turn, partial authors of its revelation; they help to push this story along and bring its secrets to light by means of their own plotting. By using the figure of multiple “threads,” which will later become central to *Middlemarch's* web imagery, to emphasize these acts of “reading” and “writing” in which *Felix Holt's* plotters are engaged, Eliot implies that her metaphor moves beyond the realist documentation of a web-like world to acts of purposeful narrative construction.

These plotters take up the terms of Eliot's eventual metaphor for her own novelistic work to describe their trade in stories and secrets: Jermyn rejoices that he “shall hold all the threads between [his] thumb and finger” (218), and Christian, who also uses the metaphor of a chess game and its strategies, senses that “he held various ends of threads, but there was danger in pulling at them too impatiently” (246). They, like the novelist, seek to examine the threads of individual storylines, to trace and “unravel” the connections between them in an attempt to arrive at the secret of Esther's identity and the lawful ownership of the Transome Estate. On the one hand, they all work in tandem on the same tangled knot of the story: as characters within the web of life that the novel represents, they of course have a much more limited perspective from which to do this and are forced to fumble about within its tangled threads, lacking the narrator's more comprehensive, panoramic view of the whole, but their machinations and occasional discoveries help to move forward the inheritance plot around which the novel is structured. As actors within the novel's web, their investigations spur the sequence of revelations and identifications by which the novel is preparing to bring Esther to Transome Court and to confront her with the transformative vision of Mrs. Transome that will serve as the climax of her development and of the novel's own pedagogical arc. On the other hand, the intradiegetic plotting of the various conspirators can also seem to work at cross-purposes with the novel's own larger plotting of its narrative. In attempting to see how this web of secrets has been woven together, these characters are not motivated by the same didactic aim that causes the narrator to trace this story and pull its many complicated pieces together: namely, the ultimate goal of successfully carrying out the education it has been preparing for Esther. They are instead attempting to unravel this past history and ultimately to assert narrative control over its revelation in the hope of achieving financial gain and power. We might think here of Peter Brooks on the danger of the narrative short-circuit, or the danger of reaching the end of the story too quickly, and not in the proper way.²⁹ These plotters represent a certain danger for Esther's formation: there's a chance that one of them will pull too impatiently at the threads of her story, as Christian himself fears, and unravel it to the detriment of the character whose education the text is

²⁸ Which importantly relates back to the novel's topic of reform and its political implications, again linking form and reform. As Baruch Nolan (who, to be sure, shouldn't be taken as the voice of the novel) says, “It's all one web, sir. The prosperity of the country is one web” (208). The narrator remarks by way of conclusion that “Treby Magna prospered as England prospered” (474), reminding us that this seemingly small story of individual lives is just one of many interconnected stories in the country's overall development, as is also the case in *Middlemarch*.

²⁹ Peter Brooks, “Freud's Masterplot: A Model for Narrative,” in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 103-104.

so carefully structuring and within which the revelation of her identity— at the proper time and in the proper way— will play an important role.

While the novel draws our attention to the temporary danger of such short-circuits in the space it gives to these characters in its middle, the failed plots of these minor characters are of course ultimately pieces of the novel's own larger plot, serving as negative examples of the more benevolent plotting in which the novel itself is engaged and heightening the pleasure of the successful pedagogical end to which the novel is destined to come. Their secrets and plots are in fact integral to the ultimate unfolding of the inheritance story, and the novel calls attention to them by means of its own plotting.³⁰ Just as the narrative relies on the form of the novel to make legible to readers the key scenes of likeness and recognition that structure and make possible Esther's education, it draws attention to the plots and chance encounters that push the inheritance story forward with, at times, an almost exaggerated degree of coincidence and complexity. (The various threads of the inheritance-plot-in-progress can be as hard for the reader to keep track of as they are mystifying for the characters involved.)

An important example of the novel's reliance on coincidence is the encounter between Christian and Johnson on nomination day in Duffield, to which the narrator draws obvious attention through the chapter break between chapters XXIX and XXX.³¹ Following an extended meditation on those threads of the plot of which Johnson is aware and, in more general terms, on the larger plotting that is taking place among the novel's conspirators at the end of Chapter XXIX, the narrator observes that "Mr John Johnson and Mr Christian, otherwise Henry Scaddon, might have had a concentration of purpose and an ingenuity of device fitting them to make a figure in the parceling of Europe, and yet they might never have met, simply because Johnson knew nothing of Christian, and because Christian did not know where to find Johnson" (283): even the most assiduous plotter can't overcome the ignorance imposed by chance and circumstance. Following the chapter break and chapter epigraph, she continues, "Christian and Johnson did meet, however, by means that were quite incalculable. The incident which brought them into communication was due to Felix Holt, who of all men in the world had the least affinity either for the industrious or the idle parasite" (284). In a novel rife with coincidences, the narrator explicitly draws attention to the apparent implausibility of this meeting through the commentary surrounding the chapter break, using her title character to draw the two men together, however implausibly. While the event in Duffield provides realist justification for this unlikely meeting, the novel doesn't simply allow this coincidence to unfold quietly in its diegetic world. Eliot's use of the chapter break temporarily takes

³⁰ By "plotting," I refer here to the way the novel's meaning emerges through the continuity and tensions between its story and discourse.

³¹ As I've argued previously, this is a formal strategy that Eliot uses multiple times in *Felix Holt*: she emphasizes the Felix Holt/Harold Transome face-off with which the novel confronts its heroine using a chapter break earlier in the novel, and she re-employs this formal device in structuring Esther's climactic vision of Mrs. Transome.

Gillian Beer discusses the effect of coincidence in narrative, in Eliot in particular and also more generally: "Coincidence functions in narrative in a way similar to that of rhyme in poetry or pun in sentence. The pleasure comes in part from a sense of the randomly contiguous proving to have shared meaning— or, rather, having joint meaning extracted from them. There is an element of the willful in such achievement, a willfulness which subtly reveals itself in the skill with which it is almost obliterated. The chanciness of rhyme, pun and coincidence bring to the fore the extent of the purely contingent. Yet, paradoxically, there is a trace of some underlying design imputed. Coincidence may privilege teleology: that is, it implies a providence which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will. In that way, it dangerously reinforces the supremacy of the writer, even while it appears at the level of event to flout the concept of order. [...] Coincidence is in large measure a matter of paying attention. We are surrounded continuously by coincidences. We observe them only when they challenge, confirm, or play into our preoccupations." This account helpfully underscores the formal element of coincidence as well as the interpretive use to which it can be put by the writer, both of which are central to my reading. *George Eliot* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 128.

us out of the realist pretense of simply seeing things as they are by reminding us that we are reading a constructed novel and by commenting on the events and characters we are following. The larger vision and aim of the narrator/novelist breaks into the narrative, underscoring that it's she who ultimately holds all of the threads of this story and who is weaving them together in a very particular form and for a particular purpose. Whatever minor triumphs *Felix Holt's* plotters occasionally achieve over each other in their attempts to penetrate the novel's central secret, it is, in the end, the novel's larger vision and energy that win out, these minor plotters' designs subordinated to the novel's overall needs and larger plotting.

In calling such obvious attention to the coincidences on which its story relies, and by allowing its conspirators to use the terms that more properly belong to the narrator and author, *Felix Holt* implicitly suggests that the web might also signify an activity by which our understanding or interpretation of a story is shaped. In both Jermy and Christian's claims about their manipulation of the "threads" of the inheritance story, these threads exist prior to and independent from their attempts to trace the pattern they form, but the active way in which they attempt to assert control over this story and its key revelations by interacting with these threads implies that the web also functions as a figure for plotting itself. To draw on Peter Brooks's multifold account of "plot" and "plotting," it is an "activity of shaping" that allows us to seek in narrative a "line of intention and portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning" and an "interpretive activity" by which readers negotiate the relationship between story and discourse.³² The would-be narrators of *Felix Holt's* inheritance story are at once readers of the pattern its threads form, involved in an act of interpretation by which they seek to understand its tangled shape, and partial authors of it, attempting, in turn, to shape the way that others read its design as it continues to unfold around them. The novel's plotters thereby participate in the same acts of unraveling and weaving as the narrator/novelist herself, though for different purposes.³³ The fact that the metaphor that will become so central to the moral vision of *Middlemarch* is initially cast in such suspect terms here, linked as it is to some of the novel's most morally dubious characters, at first distances it from these larger moral resonances and aligns it instead with acts of plotting that are analogous to the reading and writing in which the work of the novel is bound up. In subordinating all of this plotting to its larger pedagogic design, the novel ultimately uses this metaphor to underscore the fundamentally textual and novelistic quality of its own project.

If we return to the introduction of the web metaphor in *Middlemarch*, we can begin to trace the ways that the narrator's "unraveling" moves beyond a simple act of realist documentation of the "human lots" her story follows. Her choice to focus on the sample of the web that she privileges in *Middlemarch* is not a disinterested one: the narrator is invested in teaching us to see this web in a certain way, and to engage in a particular "interpretive activity" that shapes how we understand its meaning.³⁴ The slippage between her characterization of the "web" as a referent to be

³² *Reading for the Plot*, xiii, 13. Brooks offers many definitions for plot and its operation, all of which are developed in his readings of the texts on which he focuses in each of the work's chapters, but for a dense concentration of initial definitions and an introduction to his overall understanding of plot, see the Preface and first chapter, "Reading for the Plot."

³³ The parallel between *Felix Holt's* plotters and the novel's own operation is of course imperfect, as the narrator's "holding" and "pulling" of threads occurs from a very different perspective and position of power than that of the characters stumbling about within the web of life that the novel represents. (And these characters are, of course, inseparable from this larger plot, existing as they do within the novel.) Nevertheless, I think it's an instructive one, and one that the novel invites us to consider, given its own careful plotting and Eliot's return to the metaphor of "threads" in her later novel.

³⁴ And in contrast to *Felix Holt's* plotters, for Eliot "interpretation is through and through an ethical issue," as Suzy Anger reminds us and as we'll see in this novel's use of the web metaphor. See Anger's account of Eliot's hermeneutics

apprehended—a figure for the real social world the novel represents and that its structure attempts to reproduce, the meaning that seems to dominate the passage in which she first introduces it—and her own act of constructing this web through the telling of this story—an act of narrative persuasion directed at the reader—foregrounds a central tension at work within the novel. The web metaphor seems to stand simultaneously for, and to shuttle us back and forth between (just as the novel itself does), the novel's realist pretensions to represent the particular, detailed lives and experiences of its characters and the overarching didactic aim and meaning of its storytelling.³⁵

The novel makes clear the ethical significance of its web-like form by staging lessons in reading its interwoven patterns, and it complicates its own seemingly objective representation of the web of Middlemarch life by reminding us, as Miller does in his reading of the novel's primary metaphors, that even the narrator's panoramic knowledge of her story runs up against limitations. While her perspective is certainly more capacious than that of a particular character moving within the tangled web of the story, it can at times be as subjectively positioned and subjectively interested in a particular view or experience as the view of any of her characters.³⁶ The novel draws explicit attention to this fact in the service of its larger didactic insistence on the ethical significance of learning to view life as a web of interpenetrated lives. In fact, the narrator stages for herself the same lesson that so many of her characters have to learn over the course of the story: the novel's famous "but why always Dorothea?" proclamation at the beginning of Chapter XXIX (175) suggests that the novel is at times as blinded by that troublesome speck of Dorothea's self as Dorothea herself is (260).³⁷ Fredric Jameson has termed this moment "a social bill of rights (or Droits de l'Homme) for

in her larger study of interpretation in Victorian culture. *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 99.

³⁵ Gillian Beer's description of the operation of plot in the nineteenth-century is helpful here: "Plot must appear to have an equivalence with ulterior organisation beyond the control, and to some extent the knowledge, of the single psyche. It can never be generated solely out of the subjective individual. [...] Plot in nineteenth-century fiction is a radical form of interpretation: it fixes the relations between phenomena." *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 151. In rejecting the singular, subjective viewpoint that is insufficient for its larger organization, the novel becomes an experimental space in which form and meaning struggle against and mutually constitute each other. While Beer's focus on form in *Middlemarch* is quite different from my own interest in the novel's education, there is an affinity between her description of the novel's experimental plotting and my account of its pedagogical plotting: "*Middlemarch* creates an experimental situation by its use of structural analogy and by its 'provisional framing', which draws the focus ever more sharply, shifting and refocusing where necessary, testing situations through diverse consciousnesses" (154).

³⁶ Or, as Elizabeth Ermarth puts it, the narrator and the generalized historical awareness that she affords is made up of extremes: it moves between extreme personalization and abstraction. *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 237. This is an important characteristic of *Middlemarch's* narrator, one that risks being obscured if we simply label the narrator "omniscient." It might be added to Jonathan Culler's list of reasons why Eliot's extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator is not only not the omniscient narrator *par excellence* that she is often taken to be but is really not omniscient at all. In making his case against omniscience in Eliot, Culler cites both the narrator's "unraveling," which is not the act of an all-knowing, godlike figure but of a historian investigating and surveying the world, and the narrator's frequent moralizing observations, which aren't presented as necessarily true but as bits of wisdom gleaned from observation and offered up for the reader's consideration in a mode of narrative persuasion—a description of the novel's operation that is especially useful for my reading of the formal lessons it offers readers. See "Omniscience" in *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 199.

³⁷ Such moments when the narrator questions or expresses her own feelings of sympathy toward her characters point to yet another way that the novel shuttles back and forth between two impulses: the narrator inhabits at once a panoramic, bird's-eye position over the web that she is tracing, one that allows her to see its patterns in a way that her characters cannot, but she also inhabits a much more proximate position to the individual threads within her web, one that spurs her to acts of sympathy toward those characters. If Culler asks us to consider ways in which this narrator is not quite the omniscient narrator we think, the two planes on which she functions suggest that her aspirations remain, in fact, somewhat godlike: she seeks to see all from her position over the web and also to see into and act within the hearts of her characters, moving among them and their feelings at a profoundly intimate level.

the novel as a form,” one by which Eliot puts forth the democratic argument that everyone has a right to narrative centrality.³⁸ It also simultaneously reminds us just how difficult this democratic project is and how messy it might be to represent this republic of equal selves. It’s worth emphasizing that the type of moralizing that Eliot engages in here is as much a commentary on the novel as a form as it is a larger ethical observation about the world: she’s not, or not only, concerned with how people like Casaubon and Dorothea see themselves and each other within their marriage, but is actively drawing our attention to the tension within her own fiction and its possible forms, a tension that directly maps onto the thematic lesson with which the novel is challenging Dorothea by means of this marriage and its disappointments. As Alex Woloch puts it in his reading of this passage, “Eliot does not *impose* a moral problematic onto realist narration but rather theorizes or brings to the surface a dynamic literary process that has informed the realist novel all along. Eliot’s comment is an overt ethical intervention, certainly, but it also astutely identifies a literary structure, a central narrative procedure through which a literary text organizes itself.”³⁹ All novels, we can imagine Eliot’s narrator claiming, could counter their own representational choices with the same challenge that she does above. The novel’s insistence that *Middlemarch* is not, or not only, the story of Dorothea is part and parcel of the ultimate complexity of the web-like life it traces, but its “riot of subjectivity”⁴⁰ is also a carefully limited and plotted whole. In calling attention to the necessary asymmetry of even a novel that is so invested in representing a democracy of interwoven selves, the narrator again underscores the extent to which its form reflects and enacts the lessons in sympathy that its characters confront in its story-world.

What the novel is most interested in tracing in its juxtaposition of various plotlines is something that tends to go unnoticed by the individuals whose lives constitute the threads of Middlemarch’s (and *Middlemarch*’s) web. As the narrator remarks in a moment of explicit moralizing, embedded in a description of Lydgate’s contradictory attitudes towards his patients’ finances and his own, we are all ill-equipped to take note of the threads and patterns that make up even our own individual experience, and so our ability to transcend the thread of our own life and to see the way it is woven into a larger societal whole is especially limited:

It is true Lydgate was constantly visiting the homes of the poor and adjusting his prescriptions of diet to their small means; but, dear me! has it not by this time ceased to be remarkable— is it not rather what we expect in men, that they should have numerous strands of experience lying side by side and never compare them with each other? Expenditure— like ugliness and errors— becomes a totally new thing when we attach our own personality to it, and measure it by that wide difference which is manifest (in our own sensations) between ourselves and others. Lydgate believed himself to be careless about his dress, and he despised a man who calculated the effects of his costume; it seemed to him only a matter of course that he had abundance of fresh garments— such things were naturally ordered in sheaves. (364)

This passage serves as a good example of the way that the narrative shuttles back and forth between its realist representation of particulars and its didactic impulses even at the sentence level. The narrator interrupts her account of Lydgate’s particular inability to see the contradiction between the

³⁸ Fredric Jameson, “The Experiments of Time: Providence and Realism,” in *The Novel*, Volume 2, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 119.

³⁹ Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 45.

⁴⁰ Smith, “*Middlemarch* and Everybody,” 30.

economy he recognizes as necessary for his patients and his failure to practice something similar at home with a general observation about human behavior that both immediately aligns the reader with the narrator and her assertion of this claim (“is it not rather what *we* expect”) and that suggests through her subsequent use of this same first person plural pronoun that we, too, might be guilty of this same fault: she invites us to identify with Lydgate’s blind narcissism and then turns this identification to didactic effect by drawing attention to it through her larger moralizing claim. Following this didactic generalization, she reverts back to the particular example of Lydgate’s failure to compare the “numerous strands of experience” that might teach him to correct his behavior, and she moves so far into this particular thread of life and the very limited perspective it affords that the passage ends in an instance of free indirect discourse that captures Lydgate’s unconscious justification of his dress, shuttling us from the abstract wisdom that the narrator’s lesson offers back to the realist representation of her character’s experience. In this way, the narrative dramatizes the limited vision of the individual while also performing the more expansive vision for which it advocates, itself comparing and commenting on the interweaving of threads that Lydgate himself is unable to see.⁴¹

In adopting the web as the formal principle of its own construction, the novel proposes to make visible something about our world that would otherwise go unremarked, and if the novel’s apparent formlessness mirrors what the web might look like when viewed from within the tangle of its threads, its choice of what threads to place side by side and to interweave is motivated by a particular didactic intent: it needs to teach its heroine and readers to pay the same type of attention to the web-like nature of life—and of the novel that represents it—as its narrator does, and to foster sympathetic impulses towards those figures whose threads are interwoven with our own.⁴² Just as Culler noted that the novel’s moralizing claims are a form of persuasion by which the narrator attempts to win the reader’s assent and to convince us of the wisdom of these observations derived from the experiences she is chronicling, the novel traces so many interwoven lives and plots for the purpose of persuading us of the significance of their convergence, challenging us to see form and meaning where we might otherwise just see formlessness. This is, in fact, an agenda that the narrator lays out in the Prelude to the novel, in her introduction of the Saint Theresa figure: “With dim lights and tangled circumstance [the later-born Theresas] tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness” (3). Just as Eliot proposes in the moralizing turn at the beginning of *Felix Holt* that we need to be taught to hear the “low moans in the night” and to see the “writing” of pain on an anguished face, she similarly emphasizes in the Prelude to *Middlemarch* an experience that remains unseen and uncomprehended, and thus “formless”—illegible as a story with meaning and significance.⁴³ Here, however, the difficulties of perception seem to lie both with the latter-day

⁴¹ A notable exception to our relative ignorance of the larger web in which we’re enmeshed is when it touches on self-interest and hampers our individual needs and pursuits. Lydgate comes to see that Middlemarch society is in fact made up of a complexly interwoven web of individual interests and needs that intersect and compete with his own when he faces the pressures of the vote for the chaplaincy: “For the first time Lydgate was feeling the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity” (115). While he is otherwise no more capable than any other individual of comparing the “numerous strands” that make up his experience or the threadlike connections between his own lot and that of others, Lydgate himself employs the narrator’s larger metaphor in an attempt to explain the tangled social pressures exerted on him as he experiences their inconvenience in this moment, self-interest providing a powerful source of illumination.

⁴² I’ll trace a particular example of this in the discussion of Dorothea’s plotline to come.

⁴³ While the two novels express a similar interest and aim here, it’s also worth noting how different they are in form and in scope: however convoluted the plot twists that constitute *Felix Holt*’s legal plotline may be, the earlier novel is essentially structured by means of the marriage plot that brings together Esther and Felix and to which the novel’s other narratives, including Mrs. Transome’s, are formally subordinate, while *Middlemarch*’s multiple protagonists and their

Therasas themselves and those who observe their fate: it's not only the latter who are unable to read these Theresa stories for what they are, but the former also struggle to see through the "dim lights" and "tangled circumstances" of daily experience and to shape their story into a meaningful whole.

While the novel's didactic claims about the interpenetration of human lives and its larger structure argue for the significance of the web on which the narrator bases her portrait of *Middlemarch*, the novel can't give up Dorothea, its own latter-day Theresa whose thread continues to shape the pattern of *Middlemarch*. It's in this plotline that Eliot enacts the novel's clearest pedagogical lesson, and provides readers with a model for the ethical import of learning to read the web, both in life and in the novel that formally reproduces it. That the novel will rely on its web-like interweaving of lives and plots in its heroine's formation is suggested early on, when the novel's two primary protagonists briefly meet and then part ways, neither sparing much thought for the other: "Certainly nothing at present could seem much less important to Lydgate than the turn of Miss Brooke's mind, or to Miss Brooke than the qualities of the woman who had attracted this young surgeon. But any one watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which we look at our unintroduced neighbor" (61). Whatever interest Lydgate's philanthropic ideas about cottages and hospitals may hold for Dorothea and however curious Lydgate might be about this young woman's decision to marry someone like Casaubon after their initial meeting, the narrator notes that neither has any real or lasting sense of the other's existence or experience. The narrator's shift from close character observation to general wisdom claim, however, indicates that the novel's wager is, of course, that "the turn of Miss Brooke's mind" will ultimately be of great importance to Lydgate, as will Rosamond's qualities to Dorothea, and it's in Dorothea's recognition of the "convergence" of these disparate "human lots" at the end of the novel that Eliot stages her text's pedagogical conclusion—a conclusion that operates by means of teaching Dorothea to consider her story the way a reader of the novel does.⁴⁴ I'd now like to turn to the particular thread of Dorothea's plotline itself, to examine how the novel prepares and brings to a climax her education by fulfilling the above prediction and to consider how Eliot's portrait of its heroine's formation makes an argument for the type of work that a novel itself is able to accomplish for its readers.

interwoven stories both disrupt the traditional marriage plot and require a much more formally complex narrative. As much as Dorothea and Esther's individual lessons in reading may mirror each other, the interpretive demands that the novel places on the reader in charting Dorothea's development in *Middlemarch* require her to navigate a much more capacious represented world and more complex novel form than her earlier work does.

⁴⁴ David Kurnick remarks that this passage provides us with a "virtual definition of Eliot's gospel of sympathy—one that marks that gospel's psychologism and gradualism. The work of the novel is to make visible the 'slow preparation of effects' through which lives inhabiting different 'lots' from our own become legible to us." *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 92. And the "work of the novel" heralded by this juxtaposition of characters is, as George Levine notes, related to the form of the novel that sets out to explore these "human lots" and their interpenetration: "It is rather easy to see that such a way of understanding relationships must almost inevitably lead *both* to the multi-plot novel (seen usually as 'loose and baggy' by modernist writers) and the complications of point-of-view narration (virtually indispensable to the development of modernist narration)." See his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11. We might also add to the list of features that contribute to the "work of the novel" the extended duration that was implicit in Caleb's contrast between experience and book learning and that we can see traces of in Eliot's emphasis on the "slow preparation of effects," in Kurnick's comments on gradualism, and in Levine's emphasis on the novel's "loose and baggy" form.

“Warm Hands” and “Beating Hearts”

Eliot's concern with form in *Middlemarch* extends beyond her reflection on novelistic form to the novel's representation of the characters who populate its world, to the interplay of form and formation that I've previously cast as central to *Bildung*. While the web metaphor suggests, at least partially, that the novel's story and structure are fixed by the patterns of a real-world referent whose threads the narrator is merely tracing, form is a much less stable term as applied to the people of *Middlemarch*: the shape and structure of their character is not a given, nor is it easily fixed; form is instead an end goal in an ongoing process of formation that the novel might trace. As Mr. Farebrother reminds Dorothea, who wants to advocate for Lydgate following his disgrace in the Bulstrode scandal, “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” (454). Farebrother emphasizes here that there is no pre-given form to which a man's nature necessarily corresponds, nor is there a definite teleological model that prescribes the endpoint of his development.⁴⁵ Indeed, this statement is his correction to Dorothea's claim that “there is a man's character beforehand to speak for him,” implying that Lydgate's innocence is necessarily implied by her already-established sense of who he is and what he stands for. (We might hear echoes in Dorothea's statement of the belief in easily legible “picture-writing” that surrounds Felix Holt.) The open-ended state of character that Farebrother describes doesn't entirely negate any concern with form; much like the articulation of *Bildung*, it insists instead that the form of one's character is always in a process of coming-into-form.⁴⁶

In this regard, Farebrother seems to act as a mouthpiece for the novel's own idea of character. Of the young Lydgate and his prospects, the narrator remarks:

He was at a starting point which makes many a man's career a fine subject for betting, if there were any gentlemen given to that amusement who could appreciate the complicated probabilities of an arduous purpose, with all the possible thwartings and furtherings of circumstance, all the niceties of inward balance, by which a man swims and makes his point or else is carried headlong. The risk would remain, even with close knowledge of Lydgate's character; for character too is a process and an unfolding. The man was still in the making, as much as the Middlemarch doctor and immortal discoverer, and there were both virtues and faults capable of shrinking or expanding. The faults will not, I hope, be a reason for the withdrawal of your interest in him. (96)

⁴⁵ In contrasting the development of a person to the block of marble carved by a sculptor, we might hear echoes of Schiller's project of aesthetic education, but this open-ended idea of character seems to have a greater affinity with the Goethean model of the organic growth of the individual than with the prescribed form that Schiller's model assumes. See, for example, Letter 4.4, in which Schiller calls on the metaphor of the sculptor to introduce the circular structure of the pedagogue's work, for whom the subject of *Bildung* is at once the material on which he works and the end goal of this work. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man In a Series of Letters*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 20.

⁴⁶ We can see the value of form in determining character, even when that character might be in a state of flux, in the Rector's observation about Mr. Brooke early in the novel, one of whose primary shortcomings is that it is impossible to say exactly what his character consists of: “Brooke is a very good fellow, but pulpy; he will run into any mould, but he won't keep shape” (45). Mr. Brooke's character is as unfixed as his politics and opinions, for which he's the object of frequent censure, and an unformed “pulpiness” is no more the novel's ideal of character than the block of marble that Farebrother argues against.

The very interest of a story like *Middlemarch*, the narrator seems to claim here, is the fact that the lives of its characters, and indeed the very question of who these characters are and what they will turn out to be, is such an enigma at the outset. However they appear to themselves or to the outside world, they aren't fixed like sculptures in stone but are a constant "process" or "unfolding," and the fact of their being "in the making" is what makes them worthy of the novel's interest. Whatever hope and attention we invest in a character like Lydgate, the narrator stresses that there's a real risk that he might not turn out as he initially seems to promise; the "unfolding" of his character in the novel's "middle," to use Brooks's term, could just as easily take one of the many false routes that his faults threaten as it could achieve its ideal form. And while *Middlemarch* is interested in a wide variety of diverse characters, all of whom face their own moments of crisis in the "process" of their life and the "making" of their person, it's notable that the novel's three main plotlines belong to young men and women coming into adulthood and making their initial foray into the complexities of the social world and its demands, all of which act on and form their characters in ways that may be unpredictable to us and to them at the outset.⁴⁷

In its interest in using novel form to trace the formation of its youthful protagonists, we can see *Middlemarch* as inheriting the project of the *Bildungsroman*. In Dorothea's plotline, however, the novel also revises some of the masculine assumptions of its predecessors: to use the distinction drawn by feminist critics of the *Bildungsroman*, her development doesn't follow the apprenticeship model of a text like *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* but can instead be read as a novel of awakening, in which the (female) protagonist's development typically begins where the hero's of the conventional male *Bildungsroman* ends—in the aftermath of marriage and as a reaction against its limitations.⁴⁸ If, for a male *Bildungsheld* like Wilhelm Meister, marriage and its attendant responsibilities signify a successful adoption of bourgeois ideals and promise integration into the structure of productive society, for a woman like Dorothea it brings to light the disparity between her needs and desires as a human subject and the limited social role available to her as a woman.⁴⁹ While I ultimately find this awakening model insufficient as a description of how *Middlemarch* ultimately conceives of its heroine's education because of the extent to which it ignores the novel's larger reflection on this education, I'd like to briefly trace the steps this awakening follows, before expanding my discussion to show how the novel subordinates this narrative of individual transformation to its larger argument about how the novel itself might enact such an education for its reader.

While the "unfolding" of Dorothea's character is quite distinct from that of Esther Lyon, given that her formation occurs in the period of disillusionment following her marriage to Casaubon rather than having an ideal marriage as its endpoint, the initial signs of this education and its stakes are quite similar in the two novels: both *Middlemarch* and *Felix Holt* signal their heroines' development through metaphors of vision. Celia describes Dorothea's limitations in terms of sight early in *Middlemarch*: "You always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you

⁴⁷ See Franco Moretti on the importance of "youth" to the *Bildungsroman* as a symbolic form of modernity. *The Way of the World*, 3-6.

⁴⁸ See the introduction to *The Voyage In* for a discussion of the distinction between the apprenticeship and awakening models, as well as for a more extended treatment of such "fictions of female development" and their relation to the traditional male *Bildungsroman* and its assumptions. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), especially 11-12.

⁴⁹ See Susan Rosowski, "The Novel of Awakening," in *The Voyage In*. Rosowski's reading of Dorothea's development sketches out two primary stages: in the first, Dorothea's increased self-knowledge leads her to a greater understanding of the world around her and of her responsibilities in it, while the terms of Casaubon's will lead to a second important release from illusion. The limitations of the social roles available to women are central to her reading of the trajectory of *Bildung* available to a female protagonist like Dorothea: she has to be capable of an inward movement toward self-knowledge and of an outward movement toward an awareness of the social reality of her circumscribed place in the world (66-67).

never see what is quite plain” (24). Celia summarizes here both those elements that make her sister such a suitable subject for the transformation and self-realization the novel is preparing for her and the faults that prove that she hasn’t yet attained it.⁵⁰ Dorothea is capable of an expansive, inspired form of epic vision, but the vistas in which she longs to exercise her intellectual and moral faculties are largely the product of her imagination, as we saw in the example of Casaubon. Indeed, it is her blindness to the reality around her that leads her to marry Casaubon and to suffer the disappointments in store for her. The crucial first step in her education, or her awakening, requires her to recognize the disjunction between her ideals and the reality of her marriage. Rather than finding her life made whole and significant by the great, formative force of her husband’s intellect, Dorothea is struck by the “stupendous fragmentariness” of her life as a bride in Rome (123).⁵¹ Having finally recognized these fragments for what they are, she attains a new form of self-knowledge that entails a truer sense of her place in the world, of what it means to be the wife of a man like Casaubon and the duties expected of her.

While this first awakening of sight is a crucial step in Dorothea’s formation, the initial self-knowledge that she gains doesn’t in itself complete her development. Were Dorothea’s transformation to stop with her recognition of the disparity between her ideal marriage and the reality of life with her husband, she would risk becoming a version of Casaubon, embittered and fated “never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self” (177) conscious only of its own disappointments and suffering. She next has to recognize that her husband has a self with needs and desires as important as her own. Dorothea herself frames this as a matter of sight, acknowledging both her improved vision and the ethical step that it requires of her: “She was no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting herself to their clearest perception: and now when she looked steadily at her husband’s failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness” (228). While the novel of course goes on to show the impossibility of this task that Dorothea undertakes, she defines the clarity of perception for which she strives as a type of dual vision that encompasses both self and other, and that leads to a sympathy for that other person that straddles the boundary between moral “duty” and the more emotional response of “tenderness.” As in the case of Esther, this learned sympathy occurs first within the intimate space of the home before she learns to extend it outward to those whose demands on her sympathy are less obvious and proximate but no less compelling.

While such a reading of transformed vision and the sympathy it inspires is undeniably at work in *Middlemarch*, it doesn’t fully account for the novel’s reflection on the education in which it is so clearly invested, nor does it allow us to trace the ways that Dorothea’s formation is in close conversation with the novel’s larger reflection on the overall aim and theory behind its form. I’d like to offer an alternate reading of how the novel structures Dorothea’s education, and of the extent to which this education mirrors and makes an argument for the type of work that a novel itself is able to accomplish. In particular, I’d like to move from the novel’s more synthetic features, from its

⁵⁰ In spite of her perceptive reading of her sister, Celia herself represents a subject seemingly impervious to this same type of formative experience. Celia is incapable of recognizing the rupture between her own perceptions and reality, convinced that she “always said just how things were” (30), much as her husband Sir James Chettam can’t understand why he should have to give reasons for his beliefs, when they are so obviously in line with reality. This entirely unselfconscious vision explains both their necessarily peripheral role as minor characters in a novel that is so concerned with the real education and improvement of its characters as well as their contentment relative to the suffering that Dorothea has to endure.

⁵¹ Here, too, we might compare Dorothea’s awakening vision to Esther’s: both are initially confronted with the chaos of fragments and formlessness; as they discard their previous, limited view of the world, they suffer from the lack of any stable, pre-given forms with which to replace what they’ve lost. In her use of the visual field, too, Eliot emphasizes the connection between form and formation.

overall web-like form and overt moralizing moments, to the other extreme on which it operates, namely, the particular experiences and feelings of those individuals whose lives compose its web, and propose that it's in the interplay of these two level— between the novel's "beating hearts" (which its larger formal reflections teach us to recognize as important) and its formal web— that it enacts its climactic scene of education and makes an argument for its own didactic and moral project.

To begin, we might turn to another of *Middlemarch*'s most famous and oft-quoted passages, one that, like the narrator's "But why always Dorothea?" plaint, interrupts the narrative of Dorothea's suffering in the early days of her marriage to didactically comment on what is at once a real moral problematic and a fundamental challenge of literary form:

That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (124)

This passage ostensibly lays out the dilemma of human perception: we are stuck within our restricted selves by the limitations of our vision, missing much of what passes in the human lives around us.⁵² However, if we were graced with a limitless ability to see and to hear, we would soon be overwhelmed by the chaos of the multitudinous feelings that surround us, human and otherwise. The "stupidity," or the habits of perception and self-interest that regulate our daily interactions with the world, prevents us from seeing much of what happens in "ordinary human life," but it also protects us from an influx of unlimited feeling that we're ill-equipped to process or understand. We could say that it's in this dilemma that a novelist like Eliot finds her calling, transforming this meditation on perception into a reflection on the art of the novel: the "unraveling" in which she claims to be engaged performs an important act of selection, isolating and drawing our attention to certain significant threads of life that might otherwise go unnoticed and organizing them into a coherent whole that shapes the unbearable raw material of life into a comprehensible form.

But even more than describing the realist novelist's vocation, this passage points to a fundamental dilemma in the scope of the novel's own vision, to the precarious balancing act between the panoramic, godlike perspective that a totalizing view of the web would seem to necessitate and the intimate understanding of the sensations and emotions of those beating hearts living within it.⁵³ As much as this passage might seem to advocate for the more expansive and enlightened vision that would puncture the "stupidity" in which we're all encased, the novel that follows implicitly argues against such a radical reconfiguration of our interest and attention. Whatever objective moral value there might be to recognizing "that roar which lies on the other side

⁵² We might also compare this to the introduction of *Felix Holt* and the attention the narrator brings to the sights and sounds of suffering that go unnoticed by most observers.

⁵³ Alex Woloch similarly underscores the fundamental ambivalence of this passage and ties it to the novel's self-reflective stance toward the project it is undertaking, but he reads this tension as commenting centrally on the novel's character system. For him, this passage echoes the ambivalence that *Middlemarch* as a whole exhibits in its balance between major and minor characters, a balance that questions but doesn't reject the "asymmetric norms" of omniscient narration. It "simultaneously registers the imperative to look at the masses of 'ordinary life' and anxiously worries that the sight might be too much" in a hybrid act of sympathy and hostility that shows the realist novel to be "caught between idealism and anxiety, between including and distorting minor characters, in the double pull of democracy and inequality." *The One vs. the Many*, 32.

of silence,” Eliot doesn’t seem to claim any real practical value for it: experiencing this “roar” would produce no knowledge or experience from which we could learn and improve our relation to mankind; it would in fact prove fatal.⁵⁴ In choosing to represent a small sample of life rather than the entire “roar,” the novelist can’t, however, simply maintain a distant, panoramic vision of everything within the web of her story; the figure of the squirrel’s heart beat indicates that she also has to move within the individual threads of this web to attain a close sense of the “beating hearts” and “warm hands” of its individuals.⁵⁵ The novel thus has to shuttle between its synthetic and didactic view and the few chosen threads to which it can devote a close attention to feelings and experience, to something as easy to overlook as the patterns of a heartbeat.

And indeed, following the realignment of her vision in the wake of her honeymoon, Dorothea’s education proceeds by means of an attention to hearts and heart beats, the same figure that the novel has taught us to recognize by means of the above didactic claim. Similar to the novel’s use of visual metaphors in narrating Dorothea’s development, the first indication that she might learn something by hearing and understanding what’s signaled by another’s heartbeats comes in the form of a negative statement about a type of experiential knowledge that she does not yet have: “She was as blind to [Casaubon’s] inward troubles as he to hers: she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her husband which claim our pity. She had not yet listened patiently to his heart-beats, but only felt that her own was beating violently” (128). Dorothea seems to recognize here the significance of her own emotional experience, but not only does she fail to take account of her husband’s, she hasn’t yet accepted that there is in fact a heart there with feelings of its own to be understood. Moreover, while she acknowledges that her “violently” beating heart signifies something important, the messiness of the emotional tumult that leads to it remains largely suppressed: the violence of her emotion is not simply the result of a general unhappiness about marriage, but also of her unacknowledged desire for Will Ladislaw. If in its formal register the novel uses the metaphor of the web to introduce the lesson that Dorothea, and others, will have to learn over the course of the novel— that is, coming to understand how the thread of her life is interwoven with those of her neighbors— it calls on the figure of a beating heart, in an echo of the “squirrel’s heart beat” passage just a few pages earlier, to describe the way that her education will proceed in diegetic, and more experiential, terms: she’ll have to learn to take account not only of her own heart and feelings but also those of the people around her, and to reckon with the unruly complications that come from forms of emotional experience, from sympathy to erotic love, that she hasn’t yet learned to acknowledge.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ We might read Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil* as a commentary on the dangers of knowing what lies on “the other side of silence.” For Rae Greiner, this text vividly lays out the “suspicion that knowing what others are thinking can threaten rather than consolidate our sympathies.” See “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel,” *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (October 2009): 293.

⁵⁵ Neil Hertz, who sees in this passage allusions to Eliot’s earlier “Janet’s Repentance” as well as Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, reads it as a commentary on the paradoxical positioning of the novel’s narrator: “this passage seeks language adequate to a slightly different task: that of stabilizing the incommensurable relation between an author conceived of as somehow ‘outside’ (but uncertainly outside) her creation and a privileged (but fictitious) consciousness within that imagined world.” The “pulse” suggested by the squirrel’s heart beat— a term that Eliot explicitly introduces in later passages that revolve around the heart— serves as the central figure in Hertz’s study of the continuity between Eliot’s work and “sublime” passages in eighteenth-century Romantic texts. *George Eliot’s Pulse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 39-40.

⁵⁶ While the heart is most strongly tied to emotional experience and education as articulated in this passage about Dorothea’s marriage, it is also the inspiration for Lydgate’s intellectual vocation: “But he opened the volume which he first took from the shelf: somehow, one is apt to read in a makeshift attitude, just where it might seem inconvenient to do so. The page he opened on was under the head of Anatomy, and the first passage that drew his eyes was on the valves of the heart. He was not much acquainted with valves of any sort, but he knew that *valvae* were folding doors, and

It's in the intimate space of marriage that this drama of hearts and heart beats plays out most clearly for Dorothea, as she learns to recognize and negotiate the conflicting demands of her own heart and that of her husband, who seems even more deaf to her heartbeats than she to his. In fact, the novel suggests that marriage is the formative relationship in which such lessons are typically learned, and Dorothea finds the emotional affinity that is lacking in her relationship with Casaubon in her bond, real or imagined, with others who have suffered similar trials and felt similar pangs of the heart.⁵⁷ She characterizes the difficulty of marriage and its reality in terms of isolation and estrangement: "All existence seemed to beat with a lower pulse than her own, and her religious faith was a solitary cry, the struggle out of a nightmare in which every object was withering and shrinking away from her. Each remembered thing in the room was disenchanted, was deadened as an unlit transparency" (173). Whereas marriage seemed in its ideal form to allow two hearts to beat as one, Dorothea's existence is out of synch here not only with her husband, but with the entire world around her: her pulse beats faster; her faith produces only a "solitary cry" that remains unanswered; objects flee from her. What rescues Dorothea from this moment of despair is a sense of companionship with someone whose heart has experienced similar disappointments, namely, with the miniature of Will's grandmother: "What breadths of experience Dorothea seemed to have passed over since she first looked at this miniature! She felt a new companionship with it, as if it had an ear for her and could see how she was looking at it. Here was a woman who had known some difficulty about marriage" (173). Whereas the miniature was before merely a picture, it now comes to life, as its features seem to grow and breathe under Dorothea's continued gaze. The picture's attachment to Will Ladislaw is of course not insignificant: Dorothea is arguably already in love with him, and he is the source of strong feelings in her that have troubled her wildly beating heart and led to her further unhappiness in her marriage. The image of this woman with first-hand experience of an unhappy marriage strangely comes to take the place of an ideal observer, with an ear to hear the suffering that otherwise goes unexpressed and an eye to see what those around her are blind to.⁵⁸ What Dorothea momentarily finds in the kindred spirit of this portrait is what she has to learn to

through this crevice came a sudden light startling him with his first vivid notion of finely-adjusted mechanism in the human frame [...] But the moment of vocation had come, and before he got down from his chair, the world was made new to him by a presentiment of endless processes filling the vast spaces planked out of his sight by that wordy ignorance which he had supposed to be knowledge. From that hour Lydgate felt the growth of an intellectual passion" (92). Given the central role that hearts and their beating come to play in the novel as a whole, it's not insignificant that this first scene of inspiration and learning for Lydgate is in response to an illustration of this same organ.

⁵⁷ On the significant link between marriage and sympathy in the Victorian novel, see Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), especially her section on "Marriage, Sympathy, and the Law," 9-14.

⁵⁸ Knowledge of the "difficulty about marriage" is a central realm in which this type of emotional education occurs for other characters as well. Harriet Bulstrode, for example, is a minor character whose one moment of moral awakening is signaled by an acceptance of the difficulties of marriage and whose fortitude is enabled by a movement of the "heart," an impulse of feeling that prompts her to do right: "and then, after an instant of scorching shame in which she felt only the eyes of the world, with one leap of her heart she was at his side in mournful but unrepining fellowship with shame and isolation" (462). In addition to such individual moments of awakening and transformation, this knowledge also serves as a marker of kinship between characters who might otherwise see themselves and their experiences as entirely separate from those of others, and prompts a sympathy between them that is also figured through a response of the heart, as in the case of Lydgate and Dorothea: "At last he turned towards her and said impetuously— 'Why should I not tell you?— you know what sort of bond marriage is. You will understand everything.' Dorothea felt her heart beginning to beat faster. Had he that sorrow too?" (472). If in the first passage, Harriet Bulstrode's "leap of the heart" happens within the emotional demands of the marriage bond, in the latter case, Dorothea's heart beats faster when she is the recipient of Lydgate's tale of marital unhappiness, as a response to another's suffering and in recognition of an experience that is familiar to her. These accelerated heartbeats also indicate that Dorothea and Lydgate are finally beginning to recognize and take interest in the "stealthy convergence" of their lots.

provide for others, an imagined figure who cares enough about her experience that she will listen to her beating heart and understand what its patterns signify.

While learning to trace the interwoven threads of individual lives might promise a more comprehensive overview of the web, learning to hear and accept her husband's heartbeats doesn't provide Dorothea with anything so grand. It instead leads to another image rooted in particulars and proximity, in a quiet assertion of intimacy and feeling that can only be experienced from within the tangled thread of the web itself. Governing her anger at her husband and recognizing the sorrow that must have "wrung his heart" upon learning of his likely imminent death, Dorothea resolves to submit to his needs and signals the revised terms of their companionship in a moment of (admittedly short-lived) quiet physical connection and mutual gratitude: "When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature. She put her hand in her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together" (266). The book titled "Three Love Problems" ends with this image of two clasped hands, in as much of a resolution as this particular love problem seems to allow. It's a resolution that the novel quickly undercuts, of course, in the title of the next book, "The Dead Hand" echoing and transforming the final image of the scene we've just witnessed. In contrast to the warm hand that Dorothea offers to her husband in this moment of compassion and seeming reconciliation, Eliot emphasizes the "dead hand" that will come from beyond the grave to control Dorothea and extend the "difficult about marriage" she negotiates here.

If Dorothea first becomes attuned to the signs of another's heartbeat and the transformative acts of sympathy to which such knowledge can lead in the context of her relationship with Casaubon, the figure of the heart, and the tensions inherent in its demands, is also central to the climactic moment of transformation in the novel's last book, one that serves as the apex of her formation: namely, her dark night of the soul following her visit to the Lydgates and her subsequent encounter with Rosamond. This scene not only brings Dorothea's education within the story-world to its conclusion, but it connects this diegetic portrait of character formation back to the novel's larger reflection on its own perspective and form, offering Dorothea a brief moment of almost novelistic vision that serves as inspiration for her subsequent sympathetic impulse:

It was not in Dorothea's nature, for longer than the duration of a paroxysm, to sit in the narrow cell of her calamity, in the besotted misery of a consciousness that only sees another's lot as an accident of its own.

She began now to live through that yesterday morning deliberately again, forcing herself to dwell on every detail and its possible meaning. Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only? She forced herself to think of it as bound up with another woman's life—a woman towards whom she had set out with a longing to carry some clearness and comfort into her beclouded youth. [...] All the active thought with which she had before been representing to herself the trials of Lydgate's lot, and this young marriage union which, like her own, seemed to have its hidden as well as evident troubles – all this vivid, sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance. She said to her own irremediable grief, that it should make her more helpful, instead of driving her back from effort.

And what sort of crisis might not this be in three lives whose contact with hers laid an obligation on her as if they had been supplicants bearing the sacred branch? The objects of her rescue were not to be sought out by her fancy: they were chosen for her. She yearned toward the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her,

and rule her errant will. 'What should I do—how should I act now, this very day, if I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence, and think of those three?'

It had taken long for her to come to that question, and there was light piercing into the room. She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and 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. (485-6)

Dorothea is initially, and inevitably, trapped within the “cell” of her own personal misery and self-interest. To use the novel’s own “parable” for vision (166), Dorothea first views the scene by the light of her own “candle,” and so she sees the “scratches” of the scene’s events as arranged entirely by and around her own needs, desires, and disappointments.⁵⁹ However, in reliving, or rereading, the scene at the Lydgates, she radically shifts the perspective from which she views the day’s momentous events, transcending the limitations of that troublesome speck of the self (260) that is consumed with sadness, self-pity, and repressed desire and forcing herself to view the “scratches,” so conveniently arranged in the concentric circle of the pattern imposed by her own self, first by the light of another person’s “candle” (“She forced herself to think of it as bound up with another woman’s life”) and then by the light of three (“And what sort of crisis might not this be in three lives whose contact with hers laid an obligation on her as if they had been supplicants bearing the sacred branch?”). This act of almost superhuman perception is made possible only by the training that she has already undergone in being forced to take stock of the needs of another’s interests and feelings that may run counter to her own (“all this vivid, sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance”). Experience, and more specifically emotional experience, has become knowledge: having been trained to see by means of the “centre of illumination” of Casaubon’s candle in the context of married life and having recognized various affinities between her own “difficulty about marriage” and that of others, she is now tasked to apply the same act of moral imagination to those whose demands on her are less immediate and obvious but, in the end, no less significant, and which make their demands known by means of their “contact” with her own life.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The full “parable,” which applies most immediately to Rosamond’s self-centered vision, appears at the beginning of Chapter XXVII, in a typically didactic narratorial intrusion into the story of Fred Vincy’s illness: “An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example” (166-167).

⁶⁰ While this education has been structured, as I’ve argued, by means of the novel’s reflection on its characters’ hearts and heart-beats, it is the heart itself— or at least one particular mode in which it feels— that has to be entirely suppressed in this scene. Dorothea’s disciplined application of different forms of perception and knowledge in her attempt to act in supreme sympathy towards these other sufferers of course necessitates her further suppression of her desire for Will. Sympathetic love and erotic love come into conflict, and Dorothea can only attain the former at the expense of the latter. Martha Nussbaum’s reading of the conflict between love as erotic desire and as moral duty in *The*

The type of vision that Dorothea achieves here is the one for which the novel has been advocating all along, one that seemed to belong only to the narrator, and not to the characters who can't see beyond the "formlessness" of their own tangled threads. Dorothea is of course still an inextricable part of this complicated node of intersecting lives and feelings, and so her perspective isn't "selfless" in the way the narrator's might be.⁶¹ The narrator/author doesn't need or desire anything from her characters the way that they do from each other, and so her own movements of sympathy and love toward them are quite different from their diegetic analogs. However, in "[compelling] to silence" this self and its pains, Dorothea manages, at least temporarily, to inhabit two perspectives at once: the particular position of her own self, and its interests and desires, and the larger-scale vision of the three lives/threads arrayed before her in a tangled mess—the two perspectives that the novel has been shuttling between all along. Dorothea has come not only to see, but also to experience intimately, the "stealthy convergence of human lots" that the novel proposed to trace between her and Lydgate, and she rises to the demands of this view by choosing to "unravel" the tangled threads of that unhappy convergence by privileging the needs of those who don't have the same vision of it that she does.

Dorothea's reward for this selfless act of (re)reading is a chance to then view the world from a transformed perspective, with a panoramic view of a tapestry of lives spread out before her. As she looks out on figures whose lives are less emotionally tangled with her own, her position at the window above the road and the fields mimics in some sense that of the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator of *Middlemarch* whose birds-eye view of the web allows for the interweaving of the stories that compose it. Dorothea's sense of "the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance" gives her a web of her own to observe and trace, at least momentarily.⁶² To think back to the climax of Wilhelm's education in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, we might read this as Dorothea's "Tower" moment. Instead of being offered a chance to read the tale of her own life in manuscript form, she is offered a vision of lives beyond herself from the perspective of one who is simultaneously part of that life and is temporarily allowed to exist outside of it. Having been granted such a vision, Dorothea is then presented with another choice: having already rejected the "selfish complaining" of the self-centered vision provided by the light of her own "candle," she also refuses to take on the position of a detached observer or narrator, looking out on life "from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator."⁶³ She instead recognizes that she is something that *Middlemarch's*

Golden Bowl is instructive here. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 127-130.

⁶¹ Indeed, as Elizabeth Ermarth argues, a degree of selfishness is the prerequisite for the type of knowledge to which Dorothea ultimately comes, suggesting that sympathy in Eliot is not necessarily synonymous with a complete relinquishing of self-interest: "Dorothea's crucial lesson in the novel necessarily involves Rosamond and Lydgate because it is only through her jealousy of another woman that Dorothea learns the force of her own claims. In her night of crisis it is *her* anger and *her* pain that she feels. Once she has put herself into the picture, she then can perform in a meaningful way the shift of perspective that acknowledges difference. 'But why always Dorothea' is something Dorothea finally learns how to say meaningfully, not by relinquishing personal claims but by acknowledging them." *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*, 234.

⁶² If Dorothea attains a scope of vision here that we would expect only the narrator/novelist to have, her temporary novelistic perspective also reproduces the shortcomings of her author and the "asymmetric norms" that Woloch observes in even the most seemingly capacious of novels. Raymond Williams notes the way that lower-class characters are relegated to the landscape in Eliot's fiction, which is echoed here in Dorothea's view of the man, the woman, and the shepherd as part of "the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance." See *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 177-180.

⁶³ We might read this scene as an example of detachment, the central category of Amanda Anderson's study of the role of disinterest in Victorian culture. What Dorothea temporarily achieves here, before also showing it to be unsustainable as a permanent position, is "the *aspiration* to a distanced view," a perspective that affords new forms of self-critical and

narrator never can be⁶⁴: a character within the web, one with her own individual desires and experiences but whose expanded vision also places moral demands on how she views and values the larger patterns she has recognized.

While the climax of Dorothea's formative experience depends on her achievement of the type of synthetic, panoramic vision that otherwise seems to belong only to the realm of the novel as a whole, accessible to its narrator and its readers in a way that it isn't to the characters moving within its world, it is prompted by and leads back to an understanding that grows out of feeling, from a sense of the proximity between individuals and their suffering, in a scene that demonstrates the extent to which a close encounter with one heart and its feelings can in turn inspire the emotions, and transformation, of another. When Dorothea returns to the Lydgates' home to counsel Rosamond, she continues to hold up as inspiration for herself the narratorial view that she has of the web connecting those involved in this scene and the resonance her actions will have within the pattern of their lives: "She tried to master herself with the thought that this might be a turning point in three lives—not in her own; no, there the irrevocable had happened, but—in those three lives which were touching hers with the solemn neighbourhood of danger and distress" (490). However much it might resemble the narrator's birds-eye view of this particular node in the web of her story, Dorothea's view is crucially distinct from the narrator's: it is fundamentally informed by her sense of these lives "touching hers," and the sense of duty and emotional response to which this proximity leads. In fact, Dorothea is almost entirely taken over by feeling here, her emotional response again figured through references to the response of the heart: "in looking at Rosamond beside her, she suddenly found her heart swelling, and was unable to speak" (488).⁶⁵ Having lost the power of speech, Dorothea's emotions speak for her: while she manages to hold back her tears, her emotion "passed over her face like the spirit of a sob" (488), as something to be read in her body itself.⁶⁶

As this feeling grows, along with the bond that it implies between Rosamond and herself, Dorothea increasingly loses the sense of herself as an actor within this scene; she becomes almost entirely identified with feeling itself: "Dorothea, completely swayed by the feeling that she was uttering, forgot everything but that she was speaking from out the heart of her own trial to Rosamond's. The emotion had wrought itself more and more into her utterance, till the tones might have gone to one's very marrow, like a low cry from some suffering creature in the darkness. And she had unconsciously laid her hand again on the little hand that she had pressed before" (489-490). There's an interesting slippage here in the location from which Dorothea's emotion issues: "heart" is at once the organ of feeling, working within the semantic field of the heartbeats and swelling emotions that have led her to this moment, and the center of her own suffering, underscoring that her knowledge of and sympathy for Rosamond's pain grows directly out of the pain that is at the "heart of her own trial," further binding the two women together before they are physically linked

moral understanding. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 6.

⁶⁴ Harry Shaw suggests that the narrator at times betrays a desire to be more like Dorothea and her other characters in this regard, to descend from her authoritative, birds-eye perspective and to enter into history, citing the scene between Dorothea and Will at the end of the novel as an especially notable example: "We feel the narrator edging toward story space and thus toward a position in the grain of history, for instance, in moments of desire— moments some critics have deplored as embodying a simple loss of control or a failure to maintain distance." *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 246.

⁶⁵ Barbara Hardy suggests that the silent communication at work in this scene emphasizes the mutual sympathy between the two women— to an extent usually reserved for scenes between lovers in Victorian fiction. "Middlemarch and the Passions," in *This Particular Web: Essays on Middlemarch*, ed. Ian Adam (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 13.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the way sentiment, sympathy, and the body converge in Eliot, see Marc Redfield's "The Aesthetics of Sympathy: George Eliot's Telepathy Machine," in *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), especially pages 135-138.

by the held hands of the last sentence. Indeed, her “cry” shows the extent to which her own thread of desire and self-interest is entirely tangled up in this other woman’s, even if she refuses to admit it; the advice she gives to Rosamond about constancy in marriage stands in for any admission of her own experience in this regard, with her continued sense of duty to the dead Casaubon and her ongoing desire for Will.⁶⁷ If Dorothea was unable to speak before, her speech is now pure feeling. What she utters is emotion itself, an expression of suffering that does in fact succeed in going to “one’s very marrow”: the otherwise entirely self-centered Rosamond undergoes her own moment of transformative vision and partial education here when faced with “this strange unexpected manifestation of feeling” from Dorothea and the responsibility it seems to demand from her. Indeed, what Rosamond is most surprised by is the sympathetic proximity between Dorothea and herself, which contrasts so starkly with the “aversion and dread” she expected to feel towards her, and she feels “her soul totter all the more with a sense she had been walking in an unknown world which had just broken in upon her” (490). Feeling is the agent of education not only for Dorothea, but for Rosamond, too, albeit in a more limited and temporary way, as she admits to Dorothea in a singular moment of sacrifice the truth of Ladislav’s affections and returns to her own husband.⁶⁸

The saturation of feeling in this scene points to another way in which the novel’s beating hearts might function as an educative force, one that would argue for an essentially novelistic form of persuasion over that of more openly pedagogical texts. At the diegetic level, a book like *Middlemarch* is obviously much more invested in the “warm hands” and “beating hearts” of its characters than a text like Casaubon’s “Key to All Mythologies.” But the *Harper’s* epigraph makes an even stronger claim: reading a novel is like “*grasping a warm hand*” or “*leaning against a beating heart*,” bringing the reader into close proximity with those organs of emotion and intimacy, and as we’ve seen in the above, such physical proximity engenders responses in kind from the one who is confronted with it. The value *Middlemarch* places on this type of emotional experience in producing acts of sympathy, both for its characters and readers, not only sets it apart from the type of scholarly tomes that Casaubon values but also from the “calmness” and the “dispassionate” style of a novel like *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, a book with which Eliot seems to have such a deep affinity.⁶⁹ The “tingling nerves” that Aristotle can’t inspire are a crucial part of the novel’s operation and definition of “knowledge,” as is the feeling that it elicits. This doesn’t negate the novel’s obvious investment in more seriously intellectual forms of learning and knowledge, nor does it deny the importance of the narrator’s larger wisdom claims and panoramic observations. Instead, it suggests that the pedagogic project of *Middlemarch* is located in the novel’s ability to work both on its formal/interpretive and realist/sympathetic levels, and to shuttle the reader back and forth between them.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ellen Argyros reads this scene as an unwitting confession, one with roots in Eliot’s reading of Feuerbach’s conception of both confession and prayer as the acts of a divided self. “*Without Any Check of Proud Reserve*”: *Sympathy and Its Limits in George Eliot’s Novels*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 166-170. In the extent to which Dorothea seems to identify with and enter into the consciousness and pain of Rosamond here, she suggests that Dorothea makes *Middlemarch* the most optimistic of Eliot’s novels about the power of the sympathetic imagination to overcome the constraints placed on it by the boundaries of the self (4).

⁶⁸ It is, of course, important to stress here that Rosamond’s transformed feelings are exceedingly brief. As Kent Puckett notes, she never has to feel real shame, the way that so many of Eliot’s characters do (including Esther in *Felix Holt*). This climactic scene with Dorothea therefore doesn’t produce any lasting lesson: she entirely escapes punishment and is one of the few characters in the novel to remain largely happy and to get what she wants. *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 102-103.

⁶⁹ As described by Henry James, “Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,” *Literary Criticism* Vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 948.)

⁷⁰ In his account of a similar type of shuttling in which the reader is engaged and harking back to the tensions of didactic fiction with which I opened this chapter, David Kurnick draws on the nineteenth-century debate—which he sees replicated in current critical discourse on the novel—about whether novels could function as a tool for instruction or

It's Dorothea who finally gives explicit voice to the link between feeling and knowing, in response to Celia's curiosity about how the strange circumstances of Dorothea's marriage to Will Ladislaw could ever have come about: "Can't you tell me?" said Celia, settling her arms cozily. "No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know" (506). In emphasizing the central importance of *feeling with* as a prerequisite to understanding, Dorothea suggests what's particular about the novel's production of knowledge, and what sets it apart from the many other types of knowledge-producing texts that circulate in its pages, even as it maintains a clear investment in more intellectual forms of knowledge. The novel locates its own pedagogical work in the dual perspective that it invites its readers, like Dorothea in her moment of transcendence, to inhabit, one that moves back and forth between the work of more abstract interpretation and that of feeling with particulars. On the one hand, the panoramic view of the web's many threads can't get us close enough to the beating hearts and hands in which the story's main drama is contained, and without this proximity to experience, the "omniscient" narrator's command over the vast swath of this story isn't really as all-knowing as it might seem. But on the other hand, Dorothea herself repudiates any claim to telling her story in a way that makes Celia feel, and thus know: her proximity to her own experience and feeling notwithstanding, she can't trace all of the threads that would teach her listener to feel the way the novel has taught her to. What Celia can't be is the reader of *Middlemarch*, just as Dorothea can't be its author.⁷¹ It takes the novel's own dual vision to accomplish what its characters can't, and the shuttling that is so central to the novel's form and project comes to constitute the distinctive education that it affords its reader.

were instead simply a space for mindless entertainment and sensual pleasure. Rather than argue for the novel reader as always "(erotically) entranced or (intellectually) edified," he claims that "the reader of Eliot is always both." "Abstraction and the Subject of Novel Reading: Drifting through *Romola*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 3 (November 2009), 491.

⁷¹ While our conclusions about the novel are quite different, I find David Kurnick's reading of Dorothea's contradictory desires and her ultimate relationship to novel-reading supremely instructive. While Dorothea can never equal her creator ("Troublingly for an author whose highest value is the sympathetic imagination, Eliot seems incapable of conceiving of characters who might be capable of conceiving of something like *Middlemarch*"), he notes that she can aspire to escape the closure of her own story as a novelistic character and to gain the freedom of a novel-reader: "Dorothea, it seems clear, can only lose out in any competition that pits her against her creator in a game of wits; but I want to suggest that it is as a figure for the novel-reader that Eliot's desiring heroine functions most powerfully as an agent and pursuer of knowledge. Dorothea's most pressing desire, I argue, may be to leave behind her starring role *in* fiction and achieve that peculiar participant-observer status proper to the consumer *of* fiction." "An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice," 584.

Chapter 4

The Pedagogic Urgency of *Der Zauberberg's* Middle Way

„Ist das ein Pädagog!“ sagte er... „Ein humanistischer Pädagog, das muß man gestehen. Immerfort wirkt er berichtend auf dich ein, abwechselnd in Form von Geschichten und in abstrakter Form. Und auf Dinge kommt man mit ihm zu sprechen, – nie hätte man gedacht, daß man darüber reden oder sie auch nur verstehen könnte. Und wenn ich unten im Flachlande mit ihm zusammengetroffen wäre, so würde ich sie auch nicht verstanden habe“, fugte er hinzu.¹⁸⁶

When Vladimir Nabokov voiced his well-known disdain for the “novel of ideas,” Thomas Mann was one of the offending novelists, and *Der Zauberberg* one of the novels, he had in mind. In a *Time* interview in 1969, he clarifies, at the behest of the interviewer, his earlier statement that “mediocrity thrives on ideas,” explaining how a novelist’s attempt to stuff his work with weighty content in fact leads to a degradation of the novel’s form: “By ‘ideas’ I meant of course general ideas, the big, sincere ideas which permeate a so-called great novel, and which, in the inevitable long run, amount to bloated topicalities stranded like dead whales.”¹⁸⁷ The result of these ideas is not just a mediocre, or even bad, novel for Nabokov, but also a disingenuous one. For him, these “big ideas” aren’t a sign of the rigor of Mann’s project, but rather make him guilty of a self-serious, and ultimately unsuccessful, intellectual masquerade, his novels passing off vapidities as wisdom and seducing along the way readers who are too unschooled to tell the difference between the two. If his objection to such “bloated topicalities” initially seems like purely a matter of novelistic content, it is of course also bound up in questions of novel form, and indeed, we can see him veer between a consideration of the two in his complaints about Mann elsewhere. “Violently” objecting to Mann’s inclusion among such modernist literary greats as Proust and Joyce, for example, he characterizes him as a “ponderous conventionalist” and “tower of triteness,”¹⁸⁸ objecting to everything from his style (“plodding and garrulous”) to the clichéd subjects of his work.¹⁸⁹ With no regard for the style, the design, the details, the careful plotting that are so central to Nabokov’s own novelistic theory

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fisher, 2010), 286. [“‘What a pedagogue,’ he said. ‘A humanist pedagogue, admittedly. He just never stops correcting you, sometimes in the form of stories and sometimes more abstractly. And you end up talking with him about things – that you never would have thought you would talk about or even understand. And if I had run into him down in the flatlands, I’m sure I would *not* have understood them,’ he added.” *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Knopf, 2005), 239-240.] All subsequent references to Mann’s novel and to Woods’s translation will be cited parenthetically.

¹⁸⁷ See the March 1969 *Time* interview in Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 121.

¹⁸⁸ See his 1958 letter to M.H. Abrams, responding to the latter’s *Glossary of Literary Terms*, in *Selected Letters 1940-1977*, ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 242. It’s Abrams who here commits the crime of inserting the unworthy and over-inflated Mann between two “sacred names” in the art of the novel, showing that, at least in Nabokov’s eyes, even highly trained literary readers were also taken in by this “big fake” (90) whose mediocrity he is bent on unmasking. The contrast that Nabokov seeks to draw in decoupling Mann from these other two modernist giants, however, also implicitly undermines the coherence of his argument against Mann and suggests the subjective value system in which it is ultimately founded: Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* is nothing if not filled with ideas, and the novels of all three writers might be called “bloated” by a skeptical reader bent on undermining their projects.

¹⁸⁹ As recounted in a 1973 letter written by Nabokov’s wife on his behalf, on the occasion of his having taken “the trouble to read some of Mann’s work quite closely, using a good dictionary, and paying special attention to language and imagery” in spite of his admittedly “very limited” German. See *Selected Letters*, 525.

and practice,¹⁹⁰ Mann's "novel of ideas" calls attention to its self-claimed seriousness and value in a performance of intellect and abstraction that masks its empty center and its actual incoherence as a novel.

Nabokov's objections admittedly don't hold up as a very coherent or nuanced reading of Mann's text, in the end, and they're in many ways more remarkable for their style than for their substance. However, he's not alone in reacting negatively to the length and substance of Mann's novel, and it can be difficult for even fundamentally sympathetic and admiring readers of *Der Zauberberg* to entirely dismiss more reasonable versions of his criticisms: as more sensitive readers have observed, it *is* filled with big, general ideas whose treatment can occasionally seem bloated¹⁹¹; the novel's pace can seem plodding and its narrator garrulous; and some of the opinions its characters put forth, and the manner in which they do so, can read as trite.¹⁹² And yet, much like Henry James's claims about *Felix Holt*, these reactions seem to speak much more to the reader's own vision of the ideal novel than they do to the particulars of *Der Zauberberg* itself, which proves upon careful reading to reflect on and to argue for the significance of many of those choices and conventionalities that make someone like Nabokov dismiss it. Indeed, Mann builds into the novel a certain self-awareness about the novelistic project he is undertaking, by which the text implicitly offers a critical commentary on its own creative choices and proleptically challenges much of the above criticism by providing a theory of its own design.¹⁹³ It's this underlying theory that I'd like to trace in the chapter to follow, considering how Mann brings together the content and form that are so objectionable to a reader like Nabokov to advance an argument about the novel's potential as a pedagogic force, precisely through its use of and commentary on the idea of form itself.

In the tradition of many a novel before him, Mann centers his text on a young protagonist, Hans Castorp, whose education, carried out by means of the various characters, experiences, and ideas with which the novel presents him, comprises both the plot and the stakes of *Der Zauberberg*.

¹⁹⁰ Values that we can trace over the course of his writings on novels in, for example, *Lectures on Literature*.

¹⁹¹ Hugh Ridley notes that the intensely philosophical nature of the novel was especially objectionable to British readers in the wake of the publication of the first English translation, and criticisms of the novel's length and content tended to regard these traits not just as markers of an unsuccessful individual text, but as indicative of a larger national literary spirit, marking the text as especially German. While some German critics at the time of its publication were put off by the novel's "smell of intellectuality" (as the Expressionist and later head of the Nazi cultural bureaucracy Hanns Johst claimed), others were primed by other contemporary novels for its length and essayistic features (which, in fact, some approvingly cited as Mann's successful refusal to succumb to the temptations of Expressionism) but complained instead of its overwhelming "Naturalism." See *The Problematic Bourgeois: Twentieth-Century Criticism on Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks and The Magic Mountain* (Columbia: Camden House, 1994), 49-50, 35-36, 10. On the relationship between *Der Zauberberg* and its ideas in the context of the early twentieth-century development of essayism in the German novel, see Stefano Ercolino, *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 46-67. While he ultimately finds much more value in Mann's work than Nabokov does and is interested precisely in the type of modern novel that can accommodate ideas in a form that challenges previous notions of the novelistic, Ercolino notes the extent to which the novel's essayistic insertions of ideas are both redundant and too long from the point of view of Hans Castorp's education—its ideas are in excess of *Bildung*. For more on the relationship between the modern novel, the essay, and the *Bildungsroman*, see also Claire de Obaldia, "Novels 'Without Qualities,'" in *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 193-256.

¹⁹² Or worse, for certain readers: following its publication, those on the right read *Der Zauberberg* as a betrayal of the bourgeois values that Mann had been known for upholding, attacking him for becoming, in the wake of his political shift, the *Zivilisationsliterat* he had previously criticized, while the left accused him of indulging bourgeois values in an overly anachronistic novel. Ridley, *The Problematic Bourgeois*, 35-37.

¹⁹³ And which he claims as a defining characteristic of the novel genre more generally, claiming for it a constitutive critical consciousness and self-awareness. See "Die Kunst des Romans," in *Essays. Band 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977), 352.

This education begins when the “einfacher, junger Mensch” (11)¹⁹⁴ described in the first sentence of the first chapter travels from Hamburg to Davos for a three-week visit to his sick cousin, only to remain there in the alpine sanatorium for the next seven years. Hans’s story, such as it is, is simple, and relatively little happens to him over the course of the thousand-page work: he arrives at the Berghof, becomes convinced he is ill and decides to stay on as a patient, makes friends and falls in love, converses and reads books, and decides to return to the world below with the outbreak of World War I at the conclusion of the seven years the novel chronicles, which are largely marked only by the circular repetition of the monotones of daily life in the sanatorium. If such a schema of the plot fails to account for the length of the novel,¹⁹⁵ Hans’s story does set out what’s at stake in it, and accounts for why the novel makes us, and him, live so long with the mundanities, eccentricities, and abstract ideas circulating around him: the novel follows its protagonist over the course of his intellectual, emotional, and moral formation, and it’s not at all clear from the start whether this strange educational trajectory, taking place under such odd circumstances, will prove successful, nor whether the novel will ultimately embrace or turn on their head the conventions that its pages take on.

One of *Der Zauberberg*’s many conventionalities is its adoption of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century form of the German *Bildungsroman* to tell the story of Hans’s development, a sub-genre of the novel that might well read as a “plodding” artifact of the previous century better left behind by the novel’s modernist renaissance.¹⁹⁶ Even before introducing us to the specific protagonist whose formative trajectory the novel will chronicle, *Der Zauberberg* already begins to comment on the archaic nature of its own content and form, and on its decision to focus so closely on an individual like Hans Castorp and his youthful experiences within the strange bourgeois world of the sanatorium.¹⁹⁷ Introducing readers to a project that the narrator himself sees as already outdated, the novel’s “Vorsatz”¹⁹⁸ is, oddly, as much an act of valediction as it is one of introduction.

¹⁹⁴ “Ordinary young man” (3). In this regard, Hans is the typically unremarkable, “mediocre” or “middle-of-the-road” protagonist, about whom not even his author can say much more at this point in his story, described by Lukács in his reading of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley*. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 33, 37.

¹⁹⁵ The novel pokes fun at its own long-windedness and minimal action in the section “Abgewiesener Angriff” [“An Attack Repulsed”], halfway through the sixth and penultimate chapter and about two-thirds of the way through the novel, in which James Tienappel arrives at the sanatorium in a vain attempt to talk sense into Hans and finally bring his young relative back home to Hamburg. In just a few pages, the novel recapitulates, with a healthy dose of humor, the long process of acclimatization to alpine life that it has spun out over the course of hundreds of pages in Hans’s case, until an exasperated Tienappel finally flees the madness and escapes back to normal life. Having compressed the events of the first several hundred pages into this single section, it’s as if the novel then doubles down on its plotlessness in the following chapter, “Operationes spirituales,” giving itself over entirely to Settembrini and Naphta’s philosophical discussions.

¹⁹⁶ Mann’s novel is in much more direct imitation of and conversation with the tradition of novelistic *Bildung*, ranging from *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* through its various offspring, than Eliot’s work, which is of course separated from the genre’s strictest instantiations by language and national tradition, and also by the gendered experiences of her heroines. As this chapter will go on to discuss, the novel also self-consciously comments on its own place within this lineage.

¹⁹⁷ The sanatorium is a space that is at once utterly estranged from the everyday bourgeois world that its inhabitants leave behind and that is defined entirely by bourgeois conventions: it’s governed by ironclad traditions and rules dictating every aspect of daily life, which are self-enforced by the inhabitants who so quickly internalize and police its norms. As much as the sanatorium is set apart from and in opposition to the society of the “flatlands,” both belong to the sphere of bourgeois life, which is rapidly being outpaced by history over the course of the narrative.

¹⁹⁸ The English translation’s use of “foreword” doesn’t quite capture the implications of “Vorsatz,” a title whose resonance Mann obviously chooses to emphasize by eschewing the more expected “Vorwort” to head his preface. Beyond the word’s more standard definition (“intention,” also used in the legal context), the term calls up musical rather than textual associations, alluding to the first phrases of a symphony that will be taken up and adapted over the course of

It describes Hans Castorp's story as one that is "sehr lange her, sie ist sozusagen schon ganz mit historischem Edelrost überzogen und unbedingt in der Zeitform der tiefsten Vergangenheit vorzutragen" (9).¹⁹⁹ In one sense, this statement tells us nothing new about the story, or indeed about any other story that we encounter in a novel: stories are set in the past and are narrated in the past tense, as the next paragraph of the "Vorsatz" goes on to admit. And yet, the narratorial "we," who speaks with such authority that it's hard not to read it as the authorial voice of Mann himself, emphasizes the extreme past-ness of this particular story from the moment he introduces it, emphasizing that there is something particularly past, and even archaic, about it. Paradoxically, this status of the story has nothing to do with time itself: "sie verdankt den Grad ihres Vergangenseins nicht eigentlich der Zeit" (9).²⁰⁰ Instead, Hans Castorp's story belongs to a distant past, and will perhaps prove to have been rendered passé, by the great change that Europe has undergone in the time since Hans first found himself on the *Zauberberg*, by the "Leben und Bewußtsein tief zerklüftenden Wende und Grenze" (9)²⁰¹ of the First World War that separates the reading and writing of the novel from the world and characters it depicts. If there's something "märchenhaft" (10)²⁰² about this tale— as we've already been led to expect by the title's promise to transport us from the sphere of everyday existence to a magical, other world, to the "*Zauberberg*"²⁰³— it doesn't belong to the far distant, unplaceable world of conventional fairy tales, but has instead been rendered a fairy tale precisely by the world-changing rupture of the war that is so recent, the separation of just a few years making this story now truly and irrevocably *past*.

The "Vorsatz" thereby also suggests that we're not only saying goodbye to a world, a time, a people, a way of life that has disappeared and is now fodder for the storyteller, that "raunenden Beschwörer des Imperfekts" (9),²⁰⁴ but moreover that the very nature and form of this story might themselves now also belong to the realm of the *Märchen*, this novel itself rendered as suddenly outdated and inaccessible as the world it describes. The great change that the world has undergone since the beginning of Hans's tale has rendered his story— its emphasis on the life narrative of the individual and its faith in his growth, its structure and movement as a *Bildungsroman*— the stuff of fairy tales. The form and content of Hans's tale don't just render it conventional but also obsolete, in the world of ongoing new "beginnings" that the Great War ushered in and that have replaced stories like this one.²⁰⁵

And yet, we can't take the narrator's protestations of obsolescence at face value: in anticipating and explaining away some of the complaints or criticisms it can imagine a reader

the piece, suggesting that a principle of similar musical composition might define this work and that the ideas presented in these introductory pages will recur as leitmotifs throughout the pages to come.

¹⁹⁹ [His story is one that "took place long ago, and is, so to speak, covered with the patina of history and must necessarily be told with verbs whose tense is that of the deepest past."]

²⁰⁰ ["it does not actually owe its pastness to *time*"]

²⁰¹ ["a rift that has cut deeply through our lives and consciousness"]

²⁰² ["like a fairy tale"]

²⁰³ A sense that is furthered by the title's allusion to other works whose motifs the novel will take up: the blending of the everyday and the fantastical and the resulting transformation of the world— and dissolution of the subject— in Ludwig Tieck's "Der blonde Eckbert," the *Venusberg* and hero's quest to find redemption in *Tannhäuser*, the *Walpurgisnacht* scene from Goethe's *Faust*. The actual space and society that is introduced when Hans arrives atop the mountain is in fact much more familiar and conventional than this opening might suggest, but the novel continues to emphasize some of its otherworldly characteristics and to make use of motifs that remain in conversation with these fairy-tale qualities throughout.

²⁰⁴ ["conjurer who murmurs in past tenses"]

²⁰⁵ The novel's own reflection on its outdatedness provides us one way of understanding Nabokov's reactions to Mann's text: rather than representing simply the idiosyncratic response of an individual, and not especially generous, reader, they also suggest a historical perspective on the novel, one that seems to affirm the narrator's assertion about the anachronism of his project.

launching against its project— we can also think here of the way the novel draws our attention to its length and the attendant risk of readerly boredom that its pages hold in the final paragraph of the “Vorsatz,” as the narrator openly reflects on the relationship between the *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit* of Hans’s tale— the novel is also emphasizing those very characteristics of its own design and aim that it wants us to think about and to take seriously. The implicit wager of the “Vorsatz” is that this story is worth telling, and is moreover worth telling in the long and outdated form that suits its content. The history of the novel’s composition and publication also suggests that the preface’s insistence on its own pastness might in fact be better read as an argument for its significance in the present. Mann began work on the novel before the war, and he initially intended it to be a short, comic novella, a counterpart to *Der Tod in Venedig*. His writing was interrupted by the outbreak of the war, however, and when he later returned to his prewar manuscript, it was with a radically reconceived notion of the text’s possibilities, based on the shift that took place in his own political views during the intervening years.²⁰⁶ Whatever the preface suggests in its insistence on the work’s distant, fairy-tale nature, it was very much a postwar Mann who insisted on the telling of this particular story in the particular form of this very long novel, which was published in 1924. The text’s— and his own— drastic shift over the course of the “Wende and Grenze” that would seem to mark its conventions as belonging to another time and place in fact suggests his belief in its continued relevance to the postwar world in which it would be read, and this seeming act of disavowal draws our attention to those very elements of its form and story whose significance it wants us to consider.

The saga of Hans’s education on the magic mountain, therefore, isn’t merely concerned with the development of its individual bourgeois hero: the novel’s interest in Hans’s formation is fundamentally grounded in its reflection on its own form, and on form more generally. As I’ll go on to discuss, Hans Castorp’s story can be read as a battle between form, in its many instantiations, and its opposites: between life’s biological forms and the death and *Auflösung* that rule on the *Zauberberg*, between the norms and rules of the social world and the dissolute lifestyle of the sanatorium’s bestiary of characters, between faith in humanist progress and nihilism, between the Apollonian and Dionysian realms, between a novel that successfully shepherds its young hero to its desired conclusion and one that gets lost in the swirl of snow and ideas that surrounds him and through which its pages meander along the way. While this conflict importantly plays out at the diegetic level of the novel’s story and ideas, what’s particularly significant to *Der Zauberberg*’s merging of form and education is the way that it also enacts and resolves this conflict at the narratorial level, beginning with those formal qualities to which it has drawn our attention in the *Vorsatz*. It’s not— or not only— that the novel’s length and digressions enact for us the circular quality of Hans’s sanatorium life or that we’re forced to live through the pedagogical monologues and philosophical debates by which Hans’s mentors do battle for his soul, allowing the reader to be formed by the same experiences as its protagonist. Rather, the novel structures itself in such a way that its very form as a literary text mirrors the ultimate pedagogical argument that it makes by means of its protagonist’s development, and it comments— comically, critically, ironically— on the very formative project it

²⁰⁶ For a more extended account of the history of the novel’s composition and publication, see Hans Rudolf Vaet, “The Making of *The Magic Mountain*,” in *Thomas Mann’s The Magic Mountain: A Casebook*, ed. Hans Rudolf Vaet (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13–30. The trajectory of Mann’s political writings show the larger development in his thought that is reflected in this novel’s history: while *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, written between 1915 and 1918, betrays his early conservatism (and his political and aesthetic distance from his brother Heinrich), his 1924 *Von deutscher Republik* argues in favor of democracy and the Weimar Republic and indicates his move toward the liberal left, in a political transformation that culminates in his outspoken opposition to the Nazis both before and during his exile in the United States.

undertakes, questioning whether its own form and the vision of formation it purports to offer are even possible in the wake of the catastrophic event in which its story comes to a close.

To trace this pedagogical project, I'll first discuss the novel's discourse on literature, examining the way it mockingly gives voice to numerous flawed conceptions of literary value as a means of foregrounding its own marriage of literary form and the particular version of pedagogical formation it offers. Next, I'll consider the way that the novel adopts, rewrites, and ultimately comments on the plot and form of the *Bildungsroman* in the construction of Hans Castorp's story, negotiating a number of contradictory positions— between the *Bildungsroman* and a novel of anti-development, between convention and innovation, between form and *Auflösung*— and seeming paradoxically to adapt the given form of the *Bildungsroman* only to undo it by representing the absolute dissolution of form and order and the de-formation of its protagonist. I'll then turn to the way that the novel foregrounds questions of form and implicitly re-constructs the forms it seems to undo, in both its diegetic world and in its own construction as a text, to enact the “middle ground” that it ultimately posits as the successful conclusion of the education represented by the novel, ultimately claiming this “middle ground” as a defining characteristic of novel form itself. Finally, I'll return to the novel's treatment of those “big, sincere ideas,” which so turned off readers like Nabokov, to consider the extent to which they are necessary to the pedagogical project that the text undertakes and to examine how they fit into the theory of the novel that *Der Zauberberg* ultimately advances.

“*Placet Experiri?*”

Much more so than *Felix Holt* or *Middlemarch*, *Der Zauberberg* makes explicit the degree to which it is offering a meditation on, and an ultimate argument about, literature. While its most far-reaching claims about the novel come, like Eliot's, in the way the form and content of the narrative interact to articulate a theory of the novel that Mann is producing, a project that I'll outline in a later section of this chapter, he draws our attention to this central concern of the novel by giving voice to debates about literature in *Der Zauberberg*'s story-world. The various definitions and opinions articulated by the characters don't give a definitive or comprehensive answer to how *Der Zauberberg* wants us to conceive of literature's form and potential— the viewpoints expressed in these debates are often simplistic, and verge at times on the absurd— but they represent one important way in which an idea that circulates in the novel's diegetic realm alerts readers to and prepares them for an underlying concern to which the work as a whole will ultimately try to propose an answer.

Given his position as the novel's spokesperson for liberal humanism, Lodovico Settembrini, the Italian humanist man of letters who serves as one of Hans Castorp's primary mentors atop the mountain, is of course the text's biggest proponent of literature, and he invests the most time and energy in seeking to defend it against ignorant interlopers. The novel first prompts Hans to think about literature, and introduces this topic as one worth discussing and defending, in a conversation between the humanist and the two cousins on Hans's third day on the mountain. Settembrini first describes his father, a poet and man of letters who gave himself over completely to literature and learning, before contrasting this idealized vision of the literary scholar with the present company surrounding him at the sanatorium, and in particular at his table in the dining room:

Welche Gesellschaft, in der ich zu speisen gezwungen bin! Zu meiner Rechten sitzt ein Bierbrauer aus Halle—Magnus ist sein Name—mit einem Schnurrbart, der einem Heubündel ähnelt. ‚Lassen Sie mich mit der Literatur in Ruhe!‘ sagt er. ‚Was bietet sie? Schöne Charaktere! Was fang' ich mit schönen Charakteren an! Ich bin ein praktischer Mann, und schöne Charaktere kommen im Leben fast gar nicht vor.’

Dies ist die Vorstellung, die er sich von der Literatur gebildet hat. Schöne Charaktere... o Mutter Gottes! (139)²⁰⁷

The distinction between the portrait of Settembrini's past and present couldn't be clearer, and even the as-yet uneducated Hans Castorp recognizes the shortcomings in Magnus the brewer's conception of literature, which so pains Settembrini here. (Though, to be fair to poor Magnus, the reader might sympathize with the brewer's desire to be left alone to eat his dinner in peace after sitting through enough of the humanist's lengthy lectures.) It's not only Magnus, however, who serves as evidence of the cultural decline Settembrini bemoans, first in reducing all of literature to the presence of "beautiful characters" and then in dismissing even this simplified version of literature because it fails to reflect in a practical manner the world as he knows it. Even the self-professed scholar's own speech doesn't do more than replicate the narrowness of the world he is forced to inhabit. As Hans points out to Joachim, Settembrini's indignant dismissal of such ignorance doesn't much help one to understand what literature *is*, or why one should be so exercised about a definition like Magnus's: "Bierbrauer Magnus ist ja wohl etwas dumm mit seinen 'schönen Charakteren', aber Settembrini hätte doch sagen sollen, worauf es denn eigentlich ankommt in der Literatur. Ich mochte nicht fragen, um mir keine Blöße zu geben, ich verstehe mich ja auch nicht weiter darauf und hatte bis jetzt noch nie einen Literaten gesehen" (145-6).²⁰⁸ Indeed, where we, like Hans, might expect Settembrini to issue a corrective to the brewer's notion, taking the opportunity to more meaningfully induct the two young gentleman into the republic of letters of which he dreams, he instead succumbs to gossip and ill-natured caricature, following the above complaint about "beautiful characters" with a description of Magnus's wife, who "verliert Eiweiß, während sie mehr und mehr in Stumpfsinn versinkt" (139),²⁰⁹ in lieu of an actual definition and defense of literature for the two cousins. It seems as if not only Settembrini's body but also his mind and soul are trapped by the "erniedrigende Eindrücke" that surround him (139),²¹⁰ and debased in turn: where his father wandered freely in the realm of ideals, the son is mired in gossip.

This is, in fact, one of the chief contradictions in Settembrini throughout the text: while we, like Hans, may waffle between seeing him as a "Drehorgelmann" (84)²¹¹ spouting nonsense and as a serious teacher and mentor providing meaningful instruction, this latter identity is consistently challenged by his minute knowledge of the many scandalous goings-on of the *Berghof* patients whom he claims to despise, his love of gossip and tale-telling, and his sometimes cruel art of description and caricature. These features, along with his love of ideas and joy in pontificating, are qualities he shares with the novel itself, whose narrative is defined by the same tension and whose sympathies can thus be hard to pin down. To the extent that the narrator revels in the type of mocking caricature in which Settembrini indulges here, we might see the novel as implicitly offering one version of an argument against Magnus's view of literature that Settembrini himself refuses to provide the cousins: its art is distinctly not that of "schöne Charaktere."

²⁰⁷ ["And then at my table – the society in which I am forced to dine! To my right sits a brewer from Halle, Magnus is his name, with a moustache like a wisp of straw. 'You can forget literature,' he says. 'What's in it for me? Beautiful characters. What am I supposed to do with beautiful characters? I'm a practical man, and beautiful characters almost never occur in real life.' That's his notion of literature. Beautiful characters... O Mother of God!" (113)]

²⁰⁸ ["Magnus the brewer is certainly a little silly with his 'beautiful characters,' but Settembrini should have said what literature is actually about. I didn't want to ask for fear of leaving myself wide open. I don't really understand much more about it myself, and I've never met a literary man before." (119)]

²⁰⁹ ["losing protein and sinking deeper and deeper into dim-wittedness" (113)]

²¹⁰ ["debasing sights" (113)]

²¹¹ ["organ-grinder" (65)]

Following Settembrini's departure, Hans continues to expound on this theme to Joachim, offering an initial account of what might set literature apart: "Aber wenn es nicht auf die schönen Charaktere ankommt, so kommt es offenbar auf die schönen Worte an, das ist mein Eindruck in Settembrini's Gesellschaft" (146).²¹² We might also be tempted to dismiss Hans's attempt at a definition as overly simplistic, if a slight improvement over Magnus's, and given Hans's previous forays into a dangerous type of aestheticism—to Settembrini's horror, he attempts in this same conversation to convince the Italian that the combination of sickness and stupidity in a person is "das Trübseligste auf der Welt" because it's a type of "Stilfehler" or "Geschmacksverirrung" that robs the ill person of her due elegance and nobility (140-141).²¹³—we might read this description of literature as more of the same, a problematic fixation on surface style with no regard for the quality of its content or the integrity of its form. And yet, the narrative also takes pains to suggest that a bit more credit is due to Hans here, however short his definition falls. In attempting to supply an answer where Settembrini has failed to, Hans is displaying all the marks of a good student: he's open, receptive, and curious, attempting to work through something that he doesn't understand and willing to try out new ideas in an attempt to comprehend it more fully.²¹⁴ Moreover, the definition that he advances shows that he has, in fact, been paying very close attention throughout his conversations with Settembrini. He doesn't pull "beautiful words" out of a void, but arrives at it inductively, by listening to and analyzing Settembrini's own speech: he observes to Joachim that he takes pleasure simply in "wie [Settembrini] zu sprechen versteht," how "jedes Wort springt ihm so rund und appetitlich vom Munde," and he wonders whether the content of his speech might be secondary even to Settembrini, who himself seems taken with "das Sprechen, wie er die Worte springen und rollen läßt... so elastisch wie Gummibälle" (145).²¹⁵ While Hans's definition may need

²¹² "[But if it's not a matter of beautiful characters, then evidently it's a matter of beautiful words, that's my impression when I'm around Settembrini." (119)]

²¹³ ["the most pitiful thing in the world"; "stylistic blunder" and "aberration of taste" (114-115)]

²¹⁴ Much later in the novel, the narrator will reflect openly on Hans's development and praise precisely these characteristics—his capacity to observe those around him, his receptivity and openness. They not only enable any education that he undergoes on the mountain, but they are moreover the very reason why his community of teachers and mentors is able to cohere for as long as it does. (See page 812 [689].) At the same time, these traits are exactly what open him to the dangers of the *Zauberberg's* temptations and make him such a problem student for Settembrini. This tension between these dual impulses, and the way the novel ultimately negotiates between them, is something I'll return to in considering the extent to which the novel's philosophy of the middle comes to be grounded in Hans's character.

²¹⁵ ["just the way he speaks, how each word leaps from his mouth so round and appetizing"; "the way he lets his words roll and bounce, like little rubber balls" (119).] Lest we take these descriptions as just another of Hans's odd enthusiasms and misguided observations, the narrative has been careful to note Settembrini's particular mode of speech, and the pleasure his listeners take in hearing it, ever since his first entrance into the novel: his speech is precise—Settembrini himself describes it as "graphic" (73)—and the narrator notes that "seine Lippen formten die Worte mit einer gewissen Lust" (84) ["his lips took a certain delight in forming the words" (65)], each of which "kamen prall, nett, und wie neuschaffen von seinem beweglichen Lippen, er genoß die gebildeten, bissig behenden Wendungen und Formen, deren er sich bediente, ja selbst die grammatische Beugung und Abwandlung der Wörter mit einem offensichtlichen, sich mitteilenden und heiter stimmenden Behagen" (93) ["emerged taut, neat, and brand-new from his mobile lips; he savored every educated, biting, nimble turn of phrase that he used, taking obvious, effusive, and exhilarating enjoyment even in grammatical inflections and conjugations" (73)]. Even at this early stage in their relationship, the careful form and style of Settembrini's expression inspires Hans himself to try "to speak with a little more eloquence" (69) [indem er sich unwillkürlich bemühte, ein wenig beredt zu sprechen" (88)]. The description of Settembrini's words as having such definite and striking shape is in stark contrast to Frau Chauchat's "knochenlose Sprache" (165, 323) ["boneless language" (136, 271)], by which Settembrini and the narrator emphasize that her language, like everything else about her, lacks form and order and participates in the general *Auflösung* that the humanist works against. This close attention to the graphic nature of his speech is an important way in which the novel casts Settembrini as a representative of the value of form, beyond the obvious content of his lectures. It is, moreover, a characteristic that the novel will later connect to the humanist's commitment to Hans's education: Hans observes to himself after one of Settembrini's monologues criticizing

some work and refinement, particularly before the novel would be willing to adopt it as its own, he bases it on the example of the one “Literat” (86) of his acquaintance, pointing, albeit in an incomplete way, to a literary value that both Settembrini and the novel seem to hold dear. He proves himself to be a budding formalist, not in the traditional literary-theoretical sense, but in the novel’s own: an appreciator of form itself.

While Settembrini is the chief representative of literature and its value in the novel, embodying Mann’s interest in “graphic” acts of expression and the shaping of meaning through form and style, the narrative doesn’t adopt his views wholeheartedly, and it in fact pokes fun at his outdated notion of and naïve faith in literature.²¹⁶ Settembrini finally defines literature as “die Vereinigung von Humanismus und Politik” (226),²¹⁷ a definition in which the passions of his father and grandfather, respectively, are brought together in the vocation of the son, who thereby assumes the mantle of both a cultural and familial heritage in his devotion to literature and letters. This triad of interests comes together in the literary project that Settembrini takes on while at the sanatorium: his contribution to the *Soziologie der Leiden* to be published by the “Bund zur Organisierung des Fortschritts” to which he belongs.²¹⁸ As he excitedly explains to the cousins, his illness unfortunately keeps him from attending the League’s meetings and participating fully in their deliberations, but he is nevertheless able to take part in its chief task— “das menschliche Leiden durch zweckvolle soziale Arbeit zu bekämpfen und am Ende völlig auszumerzen”— by contributing to its new undertaking of compiling a vast, multi-volume encyclopedia “worin die menschlichen Leiden nach allen ihren Klassen und Gattungen in genauer und erschöpfender Systematik bearbeitet werden sollen” (347).²¹⁹ The humanist is, unsurprisingly, responsible for the encyclopedia’s treatment of literature, which, insofar as it treats human suffering, the League would be remiss to neglect: “Darum ist ein eigener Band vorgesehen, der, den Leidenden zu Trost und Belehrung, eine Zusammenstellung und kurzgefaßte Analyse aller für jeden einzelnen Konflikt in Betracht kommenden Meisterwerke der Weltliteratur erhalten soll” (348).²²⁰ While confined by his body’s own suffering state to the

the young man’s inactivity that his mentor speaks “auf erfreuliche Art, klar, wohl lautend und – man kann wohl sagen – plastisch” (343) [“in the most delightful fashion – clearly, euphoniously, and, one may well say, graphically” (290)], though Hans doesn’t feel that he can compliment his teacher on his powers of expression because of the extreme “pedagogic urgency” (290) that also infuses his lecture [“so dringlich erzieherisch hatte der Humanist noch niemals gesprochen” (344)].

²¹⁶ It’s Naphta who will enter the novel to openly characterize Settembrini in such terms, and the latter’s view of literature is just one of the many beliefs that the Jesuit will puncture over their course of their long debates. While the novel will ultimately give over plenty of space to the argumentative dismantling of Settembrini’s positions through dialogue, advancing other, more coherently argued if less palatable counter-theses in their place, it’s significant that the narrator calls into question Settembrini’s reliability long before Naphta is around to do so: the novel itself is careful to direct readers’ attention to the inconsistency of the humanist’s claims before it uses this other character to give voice to opposing positions.

²¹⁷ [“the union of humanism and politics” (188)] Here again, the narrator emphasizes Hans’s avidity as a student, while also suggesting to its reader that this is a topic that we, too, might do well to pay attention to as students of the novel: immediately following Settembrini’s definition, the narrator notes, “Hier horchte Hans Castorp auf und gab sich Mühe, es recht zu verstehen; denn er durfte nun hoffen, Bierbrauer Magnussens ganze Unbelehrtheit einzusehen und zu erfahren, inwiefern die Literatur denn doch etwas anderes sei als ‘schöne Charaktere’” (226). [“Hans Castorp pricked up his ears at this and took pains to understand it, because he had reason to hope that he would now be able to grasp the nature of Magnus the brewer’s crass ignorance and learn in what way literature was something totally different from ‘beautiful characters’” (188)]

²¹⁸ [The *Sociology of Suffering* by the “League for the Organization of Progress”]

²¹⁹ [“to further human happiness, or in other words finally to eradicate human suffering by combating it with practical social work”; “in which human sufferings of all classes and species will be treated in detailed, exhaustive, systematic fashion” (292)]

²²⁰ [“Literature is therefore to have its own volume, which is to contain, as solace and advice for those who suffer, a synopsis and short analysis of all masterpieces of world literature dealing with every such conflict.” (293)]

sanatorium, he plans to devote his convalescence to the monumental task entrusted to him, thereby using his literary talents to promote the cause of human happiness from his mountaintop prison.

It's hard to know exactly where to start in unraveling the inanity of this project, and of Settembrini's wholehearted and entirely unselfconscious enthusiasm for it. The novel allows the character to present this undertaking without any form of narrative interruption or critical commentary,²²¹ leaving the reader herself to work through the contradictions. First, whatever Settembrini claims about the importance of order and classification, there seems to be quite a gap here between the time and intellectual labor required by a production like the encyclopedia and the "practical social work" that he envisions it doing.²²² It is, moreover, hard to imagine the reader who will work through the encyclopedia's twenty-some odd volumes to attain the comprehensive and synthesized understanding of the subject that he envisions and casts as a prerequisite for true reform, and it's a stretch to imagine that reader finding much "Trost" in its entries. Settembrini himself, however, does seem to find "Trost" in the contemplation of this work: his belief in the project and its hoped-for effect betrays an essential optimism about human progress even in the face of the immense suffering that the project acknowledges. We as readers, though, of course have a different perspective on this project than Settembrini: we know that his world is inevitably moving toward human suffering on a scale currently unimaginable to him in the form of the impending world war—a human catastrophe that this project can neither account for nor avert.

Beyond the skepticism we might have about the larger project of *The Sociology of Suffering*, and the efficacy of channeling the League's humanist efforts into such a project, this conversation throws into relief the contradictions inherent in Settembrini's views on literature. As he himself notes, his task is an enormous, and we might add almost impossible, one, given that "in der Tat der schöne Geist sich fast regelmäßig das Leiden zum Gegenstande gesetzt hat" (348), whether in the form of masterpieces or less impressive works.²²³ In approaching the literary works he champions and loves in this way, Settembrini is guilty of a similar act of simplification as Magnus the brewer: if the latter erroneously fixated on "beautiful characters" to the exclusion of everything else that defines a literary text, the humanist strangely seems to define literature here as "about suffering," reducing its value to its representation of such content. His sole task as the encyclopedia's man of letters is to chronicle the examples of suffering that he finds—a distinctly *un*literary endeavor, and one that ignores the fact that the literary presentation of human suffering might provide readers with a great deal more "Trost" and ultimate understanding than even the most comprehensive encyclopedic catalogue. At the same time, his self-professed goal as a member of the League is to entirely eradicate suffering from the world, but as he has noted, all great literature is, to some degree, about suffering, and were all human suffering to be entirely eradicated, leading to the perfection of humankind of which he dreams, we can only imagine that great literature itself might be eradicated right along with it.²²⁴ Settembrini's defense of the project that brings together the primary strands of his intellectual vocation proves as riddled with logical holes as any of Hans Castorp's more

²²¹ At least beyond Hans's congratulatory remarks to the humanist, which include such observations as "wie muß es Sie freuen, daß Sie nun behilflich sein können, die menschlichen Leiden auszumerzen!" (348) ["And how happy it must make you that you can be helpful in eradicating human suffering." (293)]. As naïve and unschooled as Hans is about many things, he's proven himself too shrewd an observer so far, including in his skepticism about the practical import that Settembrini's intellectual fixations might possibly have on the real world, for the reader to take this as an entirely unironic comment.

²²² We might read this endeavor as Settembrini's own "Key to All Mythologies"—a "Key to All Suffering," as it were—though his concern with integrating scholarship and social work sets his intellectual work apart from Casaubon's.

²²³ ["especially because literature has regularly chosen suffering as its topic" (293)]

²²⁴ Including, it's worth noting, the novel we are reading, which is about nothing if not suffering.

questionable theories and hypotheses, and the grand literary undertaking that he outlines here is one that would reduce and destroy the very novel in which we find his character.

However misguided it may be, Settembrini's project is based in a belief that intellectual labor—in this case, the proper classification of content and the synthetic understanding that we can work toward with the help of such an ordered system of knowledge—can lead to real effects in the world, that writing can translate to action and change,²²⁵ and it is indeed this same belief that underpins his glorification of literature at other moments in the novel, even if the ultimate text toward which he directs his efforts stands in tension with this idealization. In his earlier discourse on literature as the “union of humanism and politics,” he describes the power and beauty of the “Word,” and thereby of written texts, in terms that equate word and deed:

Und er sprach von ‘Worte’, vom Kultus des Wortes, der Eloquenz, die er den Triumph der Menschlichkeit nannte. Denn das Wort sei die Ehre des Menschen, und nur dieses mache das Leben Menschenwürdig. Nicht nur der Humanismus, – Humanität überhaupt, alle Menschenwürde, Menschenachtung und menschliche Selbstachtung sei untrennbar mit dem Worte, mit Literatur verbunden – (‘Siehst du wohl’, sagte Hans Castorp später zu seinem Vetter, ‘siehst du wohl, daß es in der Literatur auf die schönen Worte ankommt? Ich habe es gleich gemerkt.’) –, und so sei auch die Politik mit ihr verbunden, oder vielmehr: sie gehe hervor aus dem Bündnis, der Einheit von Humanität und Literatur, denn das schöne Wort erzeuge die schöne Tat. (226)²²⁶

He follows this more abstract discourse with the parable-like example of a poet who took great care with his handwriting in the belief that it would help him to elevate and improve his style, whose message Settembrini takes farther by shifting the end goal of such an exercise from mere poetic style to action: “Schön schreiben, das heiße beinahe auch schön denken, und von da sei nicht weit mehr zum schönen Handeln” (227).²²⁷ As Hans happily notes, “beautiful words” finally take center stage in Settembrini's meditation on literature and its power, supporting his earlier hypothesis about how we might improve on Magnus's “schöne Charaktere” definition of literature, but the humanist makes a much more far-reaching argument about the power of words and style than his student's intuition previously suggested. In giving such primacy of place to “eloquence” before tying literature to politics, he suggests that literary form, structure, and style are the height of human achievement, and as much the means by which literature, or the “beautiful Word,” can “[give] birth to the beautiful deed” as any element of the content it represents.

While the novel expends enough narrative energy surreptitiously mocking Settembrini and dismantling his views that we can't take any of his speeches at face value, it also takes great pains to

²²⁵ We might compare this belief to the one that underpins the account of reformist writing and its relationship to the nineteenth-century novel: while Settembrini's project in *Soziologie der Leiden* deals with the classification of information rather than the writing of fiction, and relies on the production of factual knowledge rather than sympathy, both trace a direct link between the writing and reading of a text and reformed attitudes and action in the outside world.

²²⁶ [“And he spoke now about the ‘Word,’ about the cult of the Word, about eloquence, which he called the triumph of humanity. Because the Word was the glory of humankind, and it alone gave dignity to life. Not just humanism, but humanity itself, man's dignity and self-respect – they were inseparable from the Word, from literature. (‘You see,’ Hans Castorp said later to his cousin, ‘you see? Literature is a matter of beautiful words. I saw that right off.’) And politics were bound up with literature, too – or rather they were derived from the oneness of humanity and literature. For the beautiful Word gave birth to the beautiful deed.” (188)]

²²⁷ [“Writing beautifully was almost synonymous with thinking beautifully, and from there it was not far to acting beautifully.” (188)]

prepare us for this speech by means of its protagonist's exploratory comments about literature, and I don't think it wants to dismiss the core claim that Settembrini makes here quite as readily as it does some of his others, even if we're meant to peel away much of the overblown humanist rhetoric that surrounds it. Indeed, when Mann later goes on to subtly destroy Settembrini's literary authority in the *Soziologie der Leiden* discussion, he leaves the "beautiful words" argument largely intact: the humanist's chief error is that he conceives of the literary texts in question not as instances of "das schöne Wort," which might in turn produce some "schöne Tat," but as the most simplified version of their content, as individual examples of instances of suffering that in turn map onto and promote real suffering in the world, while entirely discounting the various forms of literary "Eloquenz" that make them part of the "Kultus des Wortes" and "Triumph der Menschlichkeit" that he champions above. The question that the novel then leaves us with in its simultaneous embrace and disavowal of Settembrini as its literary spokesperson is what corresponding action—what shift in thinking leading to what deed—its own instantiation of "das Wort" might lead to.

It's here that we have to turn to the novel's pedagogical aims. I'd like to propose that the translation from "schön schreiben" to "schön denken" to "schönen Handeln" describes the novel's sense of its own purpose, and that it's in the educative force of its own story and structure that the novel also seeks to turn its own "words" into "deed." This is of course mirrored in the story itself: Hans spends the novel interacting with word and thought in the hopes that he will finally be spurred to act by the end of the text, embracing life and action in the world beyond the sanatorium. But as itself an example of "das schöne Wort," the novel wants to give birth to something that's not confined to the intra-textual experiences of its protagonist, and the "schöne Tat" that it claims as its end goal is the transformation that might come about through its own writing and reading: to adapt Settembrini's parable of the poet's handwriting, the novel's particular writing, and the reader's engagement with it, invites different modes of thinking that in turn translate to the real act of the readerly education that's achieved by the end of the text. Before turning to some of the formal ways in which *Der Zauberberg* seeks to enact this pedagogical project, I'd first like to look at two other diegetic models the novel gives us for the form that this project might take, both of which also occur between Hans and Settembrini and which contribute, albeit in less explicit ways, to its ongoing reflection on literature.

The novel offers a partial portrait of its own pedagogical mode in a conversation between its protagonist and Settembrini, in which the latter makes explicit the teacherly role that he would like to take on in his relationship with the young man. Having been confined to bed-rest in the wake of the fever and cold that has allowed him more permanent admission to the community of patients at the *Berghof*, Hans Castorp receives a surprise visit from Settembrini, who has been urging the engineer to flee the sanatorium and its temptations since almost their first introduction and conversation.²²⁸ The two men engage in yet another exchange about illness, death, and life, with the

²²⁸ In a classic example of the novel's occasional use of painfully obvious imagery—an example that might certainly serve as fodder for Nabokov's "tower of triteness" comment—the novel makes absolutely clear Settembrini's role in the scene to follow, and in the novel overall, in its description of his entrance into Hans's room: "auf Hans Castorps fragendes Herein erschien Lodovico Settembrini auf der Schwelle, – wobei es mit einem Schlage blendend hell im Zimmer wurde. Denn des Besuchers erste Bewegung, bei noch offener Tür, war gewesen, daß er das Deckenlicht eingeschaltet hatte, welches, von dem Weiß der Decke, der Möbel zurückgeworfen, den Raum im Nu mit zitternder Klarheit überfüllte" (273). ["And in response to Hans Castorp's tentative 'come in,' Lodovico Settembrini appeared on the threshold. All of a sudden the room was dazzlingly bright – because the visitor's first gesture upon opening the door had been to switch on the ceiling lamp, and in a flash the room was overflowing with a sudden clarity that was reflected off the white of the ceiling and furniture." (228)] In case the reader hasn't yet caught on to the role Settembrini plays in the education the novel is structuring for Hans, his sudden illumination of the dark sickroom makes abundantly evident the extent to which the humanist conceives of himself, and the ideas and principles for which he advocates, as bringing necessary light to the dark world of the unenlightened.

Italian arguing, as always, for the duty that Hans owes to life and productivity, one that can't be fulfilled from his present horizontal condition atop the mountain. In making this case to Hans yet again, Settembrini attempts to anchor their conversation, and the abstractions and enthusiasms to which Hans is prone, in the particular stories of patients who had previously succumbed to the seductions of sanatorium life and who were never again able to escape it. While Settembrini's aim in this scene, as in their previous conversations on the same subject, is of course patently clear to both his interlocutor and to the reader, he makes explicit the pedagogical role he is taking on in relation to the young patient before bidding Hans farewell: „wollen Sie mir auch fernerhin', sagte er, und es war eine leichte Bewegung in seiner Stimme, ‚erlauben, Ihnen bei Ihren Übungen und Experimenten ein wenig zur Hand zu gehen und berichtigend auf sie einzuwirken, wenn die Gefahr verderblicher Fixierungen droht?'" (285).²²⁹ Settembrini's offer, and Hans's acceptance of it, formalizes the teacher/student relationship that has already developed between them, and there's something solemn and moving about this shared moment in which they explicitly accede to this bond. However dry or distant we might imagine the pedagogue to be in his "corrective" ("berichtigend") role, the narrative stresses the emotional dynamic of this newly formed tie, noting the "leichte Bewegung" in Settembrini's voice as he pledges himself to the cause of his new pupil and as we witness the official start to what will be the longest-lasting, and arguably most important, relationship represented in the novel.

After Settembrini departs, Hans describes his newly accepted mentor to Joachim in terms that aren't entirely complimentary, his "Ist das ein Pädagog!" suggesting that the pupil might tire of the humanist lectures directed at him before too long (286).²³⁰ Whatever failings the passive Hans has exhibited so far, his account of Settembrini shows him once again to be a keen observer, a fact that will come to frustrate his new teacher, as we've already seen, when he chooses to exercise this skill in support of heresies against humanism. He turns these powers of observation on Settembrini himself and on the type of lessons that he offers, noting that his corrective pedagogy thus far consists of two different modes—it both deals in abstractions and ideas and seeks to influence its subject through stories. While we may sense some incipient frustration with the pedagogue and his methods in Hans's initial outburst, and while both will certainly come in for their share of mockery over the course of the text, Hans notes that there's something effective about this mode of pedagogy: already in their limited acquaintance, Settembrini has made his pupil consider and discuss topics that would previously have been beyond his ken. If Hans demonstrates the mark of a good student here in demonstrating his receptivity and willingness to engage—even if his eager openness does threaten to lead to as many "pernicious fixations" as it does salubrious conclusions—some credit seems also due to the teacher who has opened him up in this way and confronted him with new ideas and conversations that would have otherwise been foreclosed to him, and whose influence will only grow as the relationship between the two men deepens over the course of the novel.

I've highlighted this passage, and given over the chapter's epigraph to Hans's early assessment of his educator, because I'd like to suggest that his characterization of Settembrini is an

²²⁹ ["would you allow me," he repeated with some emotion in his voice, 'to lend you a helping hand in your exercises and experiments and to play a corrective role whenever I see danger looming in the form of some pernicious fixation?'" (238-239)]

²³⁰ As different as the two men are, we might also imagine one of Felix Holt's would-be pupils responding in such a way to one of his many "sermons," though Mann will make us sit through many more of Settembrini's monologues than Eliot and her realist ethos allowed Felix. Settembrini is of course more aware of the form and style of his teachings than Felix, but both novels complicate our sense of the lessons they would seem to be most obviously trying to convey through their chief pedagogues by rendering the two men problematic and, frankly, occasionally annoying spokespeople for ideas that we might expect the novel to mount a stronger defense of.

important moment in which the novel gives at least partial voice to the project that it is itself undertaking, and to one of the means by which it will seek to translate its “schöne Wort” into “schöne Tat” for its reader, while also underscoring the difficulty we might have in attributing much “beauty” to its words and methods. Given the novel’s fixation on education, it’s hard not to read such moments of open reflection on the modes of pedagogy with which its protagonist is faced as a simultaneous commentary on the very project the novel itself is seeking to carry out, but it’s also not difficult to imagine skeptical readers of the novel throwing up their hands at its more garrulous or idea-driven moments and exclaiming, along with Hans, “what a pedagogue!” As Nabokov’s criticism suggests, and as the novel itself confirms, the particular pedagogy of *Der Zauberberg* is crucially concerned with the ratio of ideas to story, and with the connection between them, and the novel challenges its readers here to consider what new ideas and modes of discourse it might be opening us up to that we would reject in other contexts. It’s also worth noting the simultaneous serious and mocking context in which it does so: if Hans’s characterization of Settembrini also describes the operations of the novel, then we’re also invited to respond with the same mix of exasperation and admiration that he does, considering why the education the novel offers has to come to us in the form that it does.

There’s another term from Settembrini’s pledge to Hans that might help us to understand how the novel conceives of its own form and ideas, and the extent to which they enable it to engage in a pedagogical project similar to the one represented in its pages: just as the mountaintop sanatorium provides a staging ground for the “Übungen und Experimenten” that define Hans’s education— even listening to Settembrini’s lectures on the humanist and political dimensions of literature is an “experiment” in Hans’s eyes (189)— so is *Der Zauberberg* itself a space of narrative “Übungen und Experimenten” for the reader, and the novel’s primary experiment involves the parallel formation of its protagonist, reader, and even narrator, by means of its interplay of ideas and novelistic form.²³¹ We might contrast the experimental tendencies of the protagonist and the novel—the former in freely pursuing the various questions and theories that come to obsess him at the sanatorium, including those that his mentor would forbid as “pernicious fixations,” and the latter in stuffing the space of the novel with so many characters, ideas, debates, and narrative intrusions that Hans’s story risks being entirely lost and its stakes forgotten — with Settembrini’s, and his encyclopedia’s, emphasis on “Ordnung und Sichtung”: if the production of knowledge in the latter case depends on the imposition of form and order through the proper “Klassen, Gattungen, Systeme” (347),²³² Hans and his narrative depend on a freer space of inquiry, on the spirit of “*placet experiri*” which is as likely to lead to failure as it is to the successful realization of Hans’s potential.²³³

²³¹ And the particular nature of this experiment might explain why the novel eschews some of the formal or stylistic experimentation and innovation that we might expect of a text often placed side by side with other modernist giants; the experimental exercises in which it needs to engage its protagonist and reader require a different form.

²³² [“order and classification”; “classes, species, and systems” (292)]

²³³ Settembrini first uses this phrase to describe Hans’s speech about the indecency of someone like Frau Stöhr’s combination of sickness and stupidity, in the same conversation as that containing the story of Magnus’s “schöne Charaktere”: “Sie wollen sagen, daß Sie es so ernst nicht gemeint haben, daß die von Ihnen vertretenen Anschauungen nicht ohne weiteres die Ihren sind, sondern daß Sie gleichsam nur eine der möglichen und in der Luft schwebenden Anschauungen aufgegriffen, um sich unverantwortlicher Weise einmal darin zu versuchen. So entspricht es Ihrem Alter, welches männlicher Entschlossenheit noch entraten und vorderhand mit allerlei Standpunkten Versuche anstellen mag. *Placet experiri*’, sagte er, indem er das c von ‚*placet*’ weich, nach italienischer Mundart sprach. ‚Ein guter Satz. Was mich stützt macht, ist eben die Tatsache, daß Ihr Experiment sich gerade in dieser Richtung bewegt.’” (141). [“You wish to say that you did not mean to be taken so seriously, that the view you have advocated is not yours per se, but rather merely one possible view out of many hovering in the air as it were, which you then seized upon in order to have an irresponsible go at it. It is characteristic of your years to eschew manly resolve in favor of temporary experimentation with all sorts of standpoints. *Placet experiri*,’ he said, pronouncing the c of *placet* with the soft Italian *ch*. ‘A fine maxim. But

The primary tension at work in *Der Zauberberg* and behind its pedagogical impulses isn't, then, the seeming tension between the novel's abstractions and its story. These are, in fact, not so far apart from one another as we might think; they instead work together, as Hans notes, toward a common end. The defining tension that the novel has to negotiate is instead born from its marriage of experimentation and "pedagogical urgency." Much as Eliot's novels had to balance a simultaneous adherence to realist detail, ethically documenting the particulars of the world as it is, and their overarching pedagogical design on the reader, which revealed a distinct aim behind the text's allegedly realist representation, Mann's novel has to convince readers that they, like Hans, are working through the openness, the chaos, and even the danger of free "exercises and experiments" while also meticulously crafting these experiments in such a way that they will lead to the novel's desired end, fulfilling the text's didactic aim.²³⁴ This tension constitutes the crucial difference between Hans's education within the story and the reader's at the hands of the novel: while the former is aware only of the individual experiences and ideas with which he is confronted, we're well aware that we are moving through a narrative structure that is very carefully attempting to move us towards a particular mode of thinking and towards a particular end, one that is teaching us how it intends to be read as it develops. It's this interplay between content and form that I'd like to turn to now in examining the argument the novel makes about form and its pedagogical significance.

"Wozu die Form erhalten"

The *Bildungsroman* is, as I've discussed, a genre that is crucially invested in the interconnection between form and formation, both in the process of *Bildung* itself and in the novel that represents it. While *Der Zauberberg* takes up these central concerns, the novel also begins immediately to dismantle and to comment ironically on the genre's conventions and values. *Der Zauberberg* is, on its surface, more a novel of decline than it is one of conventional formation, and it quickly reverses many of the tropes that define the necessary bourgeois education and acclimatization of the typical *Bildungsheld*.²³⁵

what disconcerts me is simply that your experiment has taken precisely the direction it has." (115)] If experimentation is, as he notes here, a common stance of youth and a viable model for intellectual inquiry and education, it can also be taken too far and become dangerous, if one too fully embraces the openness it offers and eschews the rigor and accountability to the good and right that he sees as pedagogically necessary. It's Hans Castorp himself who uses the phrase later in the novel, first parroting it back to Settembrini (and pronouncing it with the same Italian "ch" as his mentor) in defense of the questionable ideas and passions to which his "Zustand des Experimentes" (499) ["experimental state" (423)] leads him, and second in his internal conflict over whether to take part in Krokowski's séance, the spirit of experimentation finally convincing him in favor of such "fragwürdigste" ["highly questionable"] and pedagogically forbidden activities and inspiring him with "der unbedingten Neugier des Bildungsreisenden" (922) ["the unconditional curiosity of the tourist thirsty for knowledge" (784)]: "Das Placet experiri aber, ihm eingepflanzt von einem, der solche Versuche freilich aufs prallste mißbilligen mußte, saß fest in Hans Castorps Sinn" (922). ["And yet the old *placet experiri*, planted in him by someone who would have most stoutly disapproved of any experiments of *this* sort, had taken firm root in Hans Castorp's mind." (784)]

²³⁴ While I'm describing a similar operation here in Eliot and Mann's novels, the actual shape of their projects and the texture of their narratives is of course strikingly different, and though both authors are invested in a type of readerly training, the worlds and texts that they ask us to negotiate are quite distinct. The inward revolutions and sympathetic awakenings of Eliot's heroines don't much resemble Hans Castorp's intellectual meanderings (nor does *Middlemarch*'s own interest in the intellect and scholarship), and the realist tracing and "unraveling" of life in Little Treby and *Middlemarch* that defines the shape of Eliot's narrative—and that her readers must be taught to interpretively trace and unravel in turn—run counter to Mann's focus on his singular protagonist, the caricaturized world and schematized debates through which he moves, and the literary form that contains his story.

²³⁵ Mann himself saw *Der Zauberberg* as bringing the German *Bildungsroman* tradition to a parodic close. See, for example, "On Myself" and "On my Own Work" in *"On Myself" and Other Princeton Lectures*, ed. James N. Bade (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 49, 65. For an account of *Der Zauberberg* as a parody and renewal of this tradition and of the critical tradition of reading the novel as a *Bildungsroman* and *Erziehungsroman*, see Jürgen Scharfschwerdt, *Thomas Mann und der*

Like Wilhelm Meister and his counterparts, Hans's story begins with his departure from home and his movement out into the world, but his journey occurs in reverse. Whereas Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship consists of extended formative encounters in the social world, exposing him to various occupations and ways of life that ultimately prepare him for a proper marriage and a productive adulthood, Hans is well-integrated in the bourgeois society of his Hamburg home at the beginning of the novel: he begins, in a sense, where we might expect the *Bildungsheld* to end up at the end of his novel, having determined his place in the world and preparing to enter fully his chosen career. It's this orderly, everyday world that Hans leaves behind in the novel's first pages, traveling instead to the mysterious and fairytale-like world of the magic mountain, whose conventions serve to undo the young man's incipient ties to productive life and labor in the flatlands.

The journey itself already produces in Hans a sense of utter disorientation: if the "Vergessen" brought on by the Lethe-like qualities of the space and time that separate him from his home first seems to return him to "einen freien und ursprünglichen Zustand" (12),²³⁶ he soon becomes excited and anxious before suffering from "einen leichten Schwindel und Übelbefinden" (14) when surrounded by the wild and dizzying natural landscape through which the train transports him, that "heilighphantasmagorisch sich türmende Gipfelwelt des Hochgebirges" in which the sanatorium lies (13).²³⁷ While there's a moment in which he senses himself in the limbo of travel, "schwebend zwischen [Heimat und Ordnung] und dem Unbekannten" (13),²³⁸ still tied to the world behind him, he soon realizes that home, and all it stands for, lies both far behind and far below the foreign realm in which he finds himself.

Having already, in just these first few pages, removed its protagonist from the realm of "Heimat und Ordnung," social values that we might expect a text like this one to champion, the novel then characterizes Hans's arrival at the sanatorium as a journey into the realm of death, further emphasizing the symbolic distance between the world he has left and the strange one that he is entering. Everything that Hans observes and that Joachim explains on their drive from the train station stands in marked opposition to the world below, dissolving its forms and conventions: the sanatorium patients' altered sense of time ("Die springen hier um mit der menschlichen Zeit, das glaubst du gar nicht" (16)²³⁹; the blue spittoons so casually carried by the patients, and affectionately referred to by those up above as "blauer Heinrich," in just one example of the different modes of speech that identify the long-term sanatorium inhabitant; the alpine community's location "in ewigem Schnee" that surrounds and transforms the landscape into a primal wilderness (18)²⁴⁰; the casual relationship to the traces of death that surround them, such as the bobsleds carrying corpses down the mountainside in winter (10); the introduction of pale, black-clad Dr. Krokowski dissecting the psyches of those patients who submit to his shadowy science. Perhaps the most striking symbol of the world Hans has entered, and of his simultaneous repulsion by and attraction to its reversal of previously stable signs and values, is the sound of the *Herrenreiter's* cough that greets him in the sanatorium's hallway:

Aber im ersten Stockwerk blieb Hans Castorp plötzlich stehen, festgebannt von einem vollkommen gräßlichen Geräusch, das in geringer Entfernung hinter einer Biegung des Korridors vernehmlich wurde, einem Geräusch, nicht laut, aber so

deutsche Bildungsroman: Eine Untersuchung zu den Problemen einer literarischen Tradition (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967), 114-119, 161-168.

²³⁶ ["forgetfulness"; "free and pristine state" (4)]

²³⁷ ["attack of dizziness and nausea"; "world of ineffable, phantasmagoric Alpine peaks" (5)]

²³⁸ ["hovering between [home and a settled life] and the unknown ahead" (4-5)]

²³⁹ ["You wouldn't believe how fast and loose they play with people's time around here." (8)]

²⁴⁰ ["eternal snow" (9)] The all-encompassing snow in *Der Zauberberg* echoes the effect of the sea in *Der Tod in Venedig*.

ausgemacht abscheulicher Art, daß Hans Castorp eine Grimasse schnitt und seinen Vetter mit erweiterten Augen ansah. Es war Husten, offenbar, – eines Mannes Husten; aber ein Husten, der keinem anderen ähnelte, den Hans Castorp jemals gehört hatte, ja, mit dem verglichen jeder andere ihm bekannte Husten eine prächtige und gesunde Lebensäußerung gewesen war, – ein Husten ganz ohne Lust und Liebe, der nicht in richtigen Stößen geschah, sondern nur wie ein schauerlich kraftloses Wühlen im Brei organischer Auflösung klang. (23-24)²⁴¹

While coughs of all kinds will of course make up the soundtrack of Hans's life at the *Berghof*, this one is notable not only for its extreme grotesqueness, but also for the way it serves as a microcosm for much of what Hans will become acclimated to, and even come to embrace, on the magic mountain. Even as he finds it "vollkommen gräßlich" and responds with a "Grimasse," he is also "festgebannt," "mesmerized" as if the cough is exerting almost a magical influence on him and prefiguring the spell that will keep him chained to the *Zauberberg* for seven long years. The source of this enchantment is so striking because of the way it forces Hans to entirely reconceive of what coughs symbolize: whereas coughs in the flatlands previously stood as a sign of illness, they now come to signify a "gesunde Lebensäußerung," a sign of life's persistence and the natural functioning of the body and its processes, a reassertion of health. Finally, the description of the *Herrenreiter's* cough also introduces one of the key terms by which the novel will challenge our assumptions about its commitments to form and formation: it opposes the values of "Leben," "Lust," and "Liebe" with which the body asserts its primacy and fights to regain its form and health with the absolute "Auflösung" of organic form and function in this new and disturbing tubercular cough.

If the sounds of such organic decomposition at first horrify Hans, he is soon seduced by the various forms of *Auflösung* that characterize the alpine *Totenreich* in which he finds himself.²⁴² Where we would expect the proper *Bildungsroman* to transform the raw material of its young hero's personality into its mature shape, molding him into a full adult subject,²⁴³ Hans earns his title as a "Sorgenkind des Lebens" (434)²⁴⁴ by gleefully shedding form from the moment of his arrival,

²⁴¹ ["They had reached the second floor, when Hans Castorp suddenly stopped in his tracks, mesmerized by a perfectly ghastly noise he heard coming from beyond a dogleg in the hall – not a loud noise, but so decidedly repulsive that Hans Castorp grimaced and stared wide-eyed at his cousin. It was a cough, apparently – a man's cough, but a cough unlike any that Hans Castorp had ever heard; indeed, compared to it, all other coughs with which he was familiar had been splendid, healthy expressions of life – a cough devoid of any zest for life or love, which didn't come in spasms, but sounded as if someone were stirring feebly in a terrible mush of decomposing organic material." (13-14)]

²⁴² Erich Heller's reading of the novel (presented in the form of a dialogue) also emphasizes the extent to which the novel's central drama revolves around form and dissolution, therefore bringing together its content and its form. *Thomas Mann, The Ironic German* (New York: Meridian Books, 1961), 172, 186.

²⁴³ There is, of course, a long tradition of more recent writing on the *Bildungsroman* that calls into question the stability of these values and the extent to which the *Bildungsroman* enacts them as it develops over time and across national and linguistic traditions, as I discussed in the introduction. And as we saw there, even those German novels that are taken as the clearest examples of the genre and its constitutive values tend to be much more open and complex than more reductive explanations of the *Bildungsroman* acknowledge. I continue to call on what may seem a simplistic or stereotypical account of the *Bildungsroman's* plot, however, because it is central to nineteenth-century German accounts of the form and to the retroactive rewriting of the German literary canon that took the Goethean *Bildungsroman* as the center of national literary and cultural value. As Jürgen Scharfschwerdt notes, we can see from Mann's letters and collected works that his sense of the *Bildungsroman* derived exclusively from its origin point in *Wilhelm Meisters Lebrjahre*: he saw his work as influenced by and in conversation with Goethe's novel, and didn't read Adalbert Stifter's *Nachsommer* until 1918 and encountered Gottfried Keller's *Grüner Heinrich* even later. See *Thomas Mann und der deutsche Bildungsroman*, 15-17.

²⁴⁴ ["one of life's problem children" (366)] This title is bestowed on Hans by Settembrini.

embracing the various types of *Auflösung* that the sanatorium and its life make possible.²⁴⁵ The cold and the incipient fever that initially delay his departure and the diagnosis that ultimately convinces him to stay on as a patient are in fact relatively minor elements in the more general dissolution of his ties to life and order, and these signs that his body might be partaking in the general deterioration are in fact a very late example of Hans's larger *Auflösung*: his x-ray might serve as his permanent "passport" to the world of the *Zauberberg* (287),²⁴⁶ but he proves his loyalty to its values long before he receives it. His predisposition toward the particular temptations of the sanatorium's "horizontal" lifestyle is already signaled by his general passivity, while his love of such intoxicating "drugs" as his daily porter, his preferred "Maria Mancini" cigars, and music indicate a general looseness that the *Zauberberg* intensifies. While his abandonment of the norms of the social world that formed him is at first indicated by relatively minor lapses—for example, he is overtaken by inappropriate but uncontrollable laughing fits during his first evening on the mountain, and he eventually gives up wearing the hat to which he at first clings—his renunciation of "Heimat und Ordnung" soon becomes complete. He eventually cuts all ties to his career and a life of labor,²⁴⁷ laying aside his copy of *Ocean Steamships* for good, and he adopts the "Zeitsinn" of those on the mountain, relying on the measurements of the thermometer and the timetable of the invalid rather than the universal movement of the hands on the clock. Not only does he lay aside the external forms of the bourgeois social world in this way, but he also exhibits an increasing tendency toward moral *Auflösung*, culminating in his *Walpurgisnacht* exchange of a pencil and personal pronouns²⁴⁸ with Clavdia Chauchat and his late night visit to her bedroom. In short, the novel seems intent on giving a much more compelling portrait of the de-formation of Hans's character than it does of his formation,²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ That this extreme dissolution of habit and acclimatization to the values of the realm above is by no means a foregone conclusion for any newcomer is evident in Joachim's continued military bearing and adherence to Hanseatic order in spite of the sanatorium's looser mores, not to mention his extreme commitment to regaining his health and returning to his soldier's duty below, in contrast to his cousin's easy assumption of the sanatorium's lifestyle and dissipations.

²⁴⁶ The contradictory ways in which we might read the x-ray's relationship to form serves as a clear example of the novel's ambivalence in defining this key concept, even as it relies so heavily on it in delineating the various conflicting values that structure the narrative: the x-ray at once reveals internal form, rendering visible the skeletal structure that supports the body and its processes and is connected to life, but it also plays into the cult of sickness and death at the sanatorium and of the supernatural in the séance scene, all of which the novel sets up in opposition to the structures of life and organized form that characters like Settembrini value.

²⁴⁷ Settembrini tries in vain to maintain Hans's ties to the world of work by reminding him of his duties and career below. He is the sole character to insist on calling Hans "Ingenieur" ["engineer"] throughout the novel, attempting to recall him to the identity he has rejected.

²⁴⁸ See page 461 [390] for Settembrini's passionate account of the affront to "Zivilisation und entwickelte Menschlichkeit" ["civilization and human progress"] that Hans Castorp's refusal to adhere to the "üblichen Form der Anrede" by using "informal pronouns and first names" represents. If the "du" that he extends to Settembrini threatens to dissolve all the norms of the "gebildeten Abendlande" ["educated West"], we can only imagine the humanist's horror at the *Auflösung* inherent in the "du" with which he addresses Clavdia, and all that it implies about what will happen between them.

²⁴⁹ I'm aware that my analysis, like the novel itself, is shifting between multiple definitions of form here. In taking up the mutually constitutive demands of form and formation at the heart of *Bildung*, *Der Zauberberg* foregrounds questions of form to an exaggerated degree, and it is an especially slippery, if also absolutely central, term in the novel, applying equally to social, biological, and literary forms without a rigorous delineation of its distinguishing features within each field. Moreover, while the *Auflösung* that the novel casts as form's opposite sometimes indicates an utter dissolving of formal qualities, as in the *Herrenreiter's* cough, it more often involves an inversion or perversion of the values of one form through the imposition of another: for example, while the sanatorium certainly undoes many of the social forms that structure the outside world, life within this space is as defined by social structures as life in the flatlands. (Eliot's work, and especially *Middlemarch*, takes up a similar range of what we might term "forms": we might think of Lydgate's interest in biological form, the novel's investment in the form and formation of its characters, the social forms of life in *Middlemarch*, the web and other metaphors for its own construction as a literary text. While it displays a similar interest in such formal features, form isn't a term and concept that Eliot takes up explicitly in the way Mann does, nor are her

and it's hard to see how his experiences on the mountain will constitute anything but a bad education, despite Settembrini's best efforts to the contrary.²⁵⁰

Having personally succumbed to the temptations of various forms of social, moral, and even physical *Auflösung*, Hans comes to embrace the larger philosophy of illness and death that the novel casts as central to the sanatorium and its perversion of values—arguing, as we've seen, for the elegance and dignity that humans gain in illness and lack in health, paying tribute to the moribund as the noblest and holiest of patients, and becoming fascinated with death and its processes.²⁵¹ In exploring such “pernicious fixations,” he seems to definitively leave behind life, questioning not only the norms and behaviors that make up its outer social forms, but also the very organic structures and processes by which biological life is maintained. At the end of an extended conversation with Behrens about the operations of the human organism and the body's journey from life to death, Hans articulates his clearest philosophy of death²⁵² by voicing a deep skepticism about and rejection of form:

novels as interested in thinking about what lies on the other side of form: her novels seem more invested in tracing and analyzing those forms that underlie and structure the world she represents, and in reproducing them in the space of the novel, while the unraveling of form is so central to Mann's parodic project.)

While it is therefore difficult to provide a definition of form and its opposite(s), I find Caroline Levine's reminder that it involves “an arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping” and produces order (social, political, etc.) useful in accounting for the way the novel opposes it to *Auflösung*: the *Auflösung* can involve both the dissolution of that arrangement and the re-ordering or re-shaping that follows it. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3. The slipperiness of these two terms is also reflected in critical arguments made about form in this novel: while John Krapp can argue that the novel's ultimate transformation is from form to formlessness, Henry Hatfield can claim that it lies in Hans Castorp moving from “shapelessness to form.” John Krapp, *An Aesthetics of Morality: Pedagogic Voice and Moral Dialogue in Mann, Camus, Conrad, and Dostoevsky* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 38; Henry Hatfield, *From the Magic Mountain: Mann's Later Masterpieces* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 62.

²⁵⁰ The early inclusion of a chapter about Hans's grandfather suggests that the tale of its protagonist's individual *Auflösung* might also be intended as a commentary on the more general decline of his larger social and cultural world. Even before he arrives at the sanatorium, Hans represents the loss or degradation of many of the forms of Hans Lorenz Castorp's rigid life and work: from descriptions of their posture, dress, and behavior, the narrator makes clear the difference between the elder and the younger Hans, and by the time our Hans is presented with the x-ray of his lungs—this visual representation of the grandson, or at least a part of him, echoing and standing in clear contrast to the visual image of the grandfather that was described in such detail early in the novel, the portrait that shows an imposing representative of a northern *Bürgertum* that is already beginning to pass away—the family decline seems complete. Since this early chapter is an important precursor to the novel's account of Hans's *Auflösung*, it's also worth noting that Hans Lorenz Castorp also provides Hans with his first opportunity to reflect on the bodily reality of death and decay, a topic that will continue to fascinate him as he pursues his study of the body. See “Von der Taufschale und vom Großvater in zwiefacher Gestalt” [“The Baptismal Bowl/Grandfather in His Two Forms”].

²⁵¹ These are ideas that Mann had rehearsed already in his essay “Goethe and Tolstoy,” in which he credits the nobility of Schiller and Dostoyevsky to their sickness and early deaths, which allegedly deepened the humanity of the two writers. In arguing for illness as a “dignified human process,” he explores the Nietzschean idea of man as “das kranke Tier,” suggesting that man's fulfillment might come about through sickness: “In spirit, then, in disease, resides the dignity of man; and the genius of disease is more human than the genius of health.” In *Essays of Three Decades*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1948), 108-109. We can imagine Hans Castorp trying out this latter formulation in one of his moments of philosophizing and being roundly scolded for it by Settembrini. On the Romantic roots of the sanatorium's cult of death and timelessness, see Helmut Jendreich, *Thomas Mann: Der demokratische Roman* (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1977), 281-284.

²⁵² That Hans sees himself engaged in a far-reaching and systematic philosophical activity in his anatomical interests is suggested by the echo of Kant's philosophical questions in Hans's own sequence of queries in this discussion: “‘Was ist der Körper!’ rief er auf einmal stürmisch ausbrechend. ‘Was ist das Fleisch! Was ist der Leib des Menschen! Woraus besteht er!’” (374). [“‘The body!’ he suddenly cried in a rapturous outburst. ‘The flesh! ‘The human body! What is it? What is it made of?’” (316)] In the novel's parodic rewriting of the Kantian line of questions, Hans focuses entirely on

„Und wenn man sich für das Leben interessiert“, sagte Hans Castorp, „so interessiert man sich namentlich für den Tod. Tut man das nicht?“

„Na, so eine Art von Unterschied bleibt da ja immerhin. Leben ist, daß im Wechsel der Materie die Form erhalten bleibt.“

„Wozu die Form erhalten“, sagte Hans Castorp.

„Wozu? Hören Sie mal, das ist aber kein bißchen humanistisch, was Sie da sagen.“

„Form ist ete-pe-tete.“ (375-376)²⁵³

It would likely come as a great surprise to Settembrini that Behrens, the leader of the sanatorium's cult of illness, would defend life and form in this way, and in fact reprimand Hans for his lack of humanist principle, when Behrens has never been guilty of the slightest humanist sympathy before this scene. The fact that it is Behrens, however, and not the Italian or even the loyal Joachim, who is yet again the bemused witness to his cousin's shocking philosophizing, who attempts to rein Hans in suggests that he has, finally, gone too far down the path towards total *Auflösung*. The very person who should be fulfilling the position of *Bildungsheld* and serving as our example of successful character formation is also the person who speaks out against the very values that define it in this radical dismissal of form, and moreover of the very possibility of organic life. Even more so than the sanatorium's inversion of signs and perversion of values, Settembrini's self-contradictions, or the novel's own ironic aping of the conventions of its novelistic predecessors, Hans seems to provide the most definitive argument against *Der Zauberberg's* successful enactment of *Bildung*. It appears that he has, as Settembrini feared, become “lost to life, lost to the form of life for which he had been born” (235),²⁵⁴ and his rejection of life and its attendant forms threatens to leave Hans and the novel both “im Brei organischer Auflösung” heralded by the *Herrenreiter's* cough that initially greeted him upon his arrival to this realm of death.

Hans Castorp's Middle Way

Having thoroughly called into question the viability and value of form at multiple levels—organic form, health, and life; social mores and moral order; time; individual formation and human progress; the form of the *Bildungsroman*—the novel, and its protagonist, threaten to become mired in total *Auflösung*, but it is, paradoxically, precisely in this exploration and embrace of formlessness that Hans rediscovers and returns to form, and to the education that seemed foreclosed by his above heresies. As winter sets in and the sanatorium's surroundings are blanketed in snow, Hans embarks

the biological body, and these questions ultimately spur his research in the next chapter, all of which is aimed at answering the overarching, repeated question, “Was war das Leben?” (386, 387, 388) [“What was life?” (326, 327, 328)].

²⁵³ [“And so if someone is interested in life,” Hans Castorp said, “it's death he's particularly interested in. Isn't that so?”]

“Well, there's a certain difference all the same. Life means that the form is retained even though matter is being transformed.”

“But why retain the form?” Hans Castorp asked.

“Why? Now listen here – there's nothing the least bit humanist about a comment like that.”

“Form is namby-pamby nonsense.” (317)]

²⁵⁴ In the same conversation in which he assumed the mantle of mentor to the young man, Settembrini warned Hans about this danger, predicting that he could “ganz leicht dem Leben, der Lebensform, für die er geboren ist, verlorengelangen” (281). He then proceeds to tell Hans cautionary tales of other young people who succumbed to this same danger, knowing that Hans “love[s] stories” and hoping that they might spur him to action in a way that his more abstract pedagogical lessons don't.

on a serious course of study. He has long ago discarded *Ocean Steamships* as irrelevant, and he is uninterested in the various works on engineering and shipbuilding sent to him by his family. However, inspired by the ideas about life and death that he pursued with Behrens, he purchases multiple scientific volumes, in several languages, on anatomy, physiology, and biology, and devotes his rest cures to his study of “organisierten Materie,” reading “mit dringlichem Anteil vom Leben und seinem heilig-unreinen Geheimnis” (386).²⁵⁵ While he admittedly seems to spend as much time drowsing in the moonlight—and eventually dreaming of the image of Clavdia Chauchat and imagining her kiss—as he does engaged in serious reading, this is by far the most industrious and committed we have seen Hans since his arrival on the mountain, and while he arrives at the subject of his “Forschungen” because of his attraction to death’s undoing of the forms of life, he is motivated here by an intense desire to understand those very forms, guided by the central question “Was war das Leben?” If this investigation begins, like so many of Hans’s other undertakings, in “pädagogisch verbotenes Gebiet” (438),²⁵⁶ it soon leads him back to an exploration of structure and organization, and not just toward their undoing. While the narrator may not treat this new obsession with the same reverence that his protagonist does, reserving his characteristic irony for the account of his long nights of study, he also thinks enough of it to spend twenty pages rehearsing, in long, detailed passages, the information that Hans learns about reproduction, atoms, pathology, and more from his scientific texts, forcing the reader to take part in this research as well. Having undertaken to satisfy his intellectual curiosity—of which we’ve already seen examples in the avid interest in and questions he formulates about Settembrini’s pedagogical monologues—through this course of study, he discovers that life and death, form and *Auflösung*, are in fact two sides of the same phenomenon, and he and the novel both seem to walk back the extreme claims by which he rejected form just one chapter earlier.

Just as his fascination with illness and organic decomposition leads him to the newfound industry of research, so does his reverence for death shift from a mere morbid fascination to a course of productive action. Inspired by news of the *Herrenreiter*’s death, and appalled by the disrespect he sees in the other patients’ refusal to discuss, or even to acknowledge, the frequent tragedy that occurs among them, he decides to visit and pay his respects to the deceased, thus breaking with the tradition of the sanatorium. There is, of course, much that would horrify his humanist mentor in this behavior: when standing by the deceased’s bed and observing the corpse, Hans is “gelöst und versunken, die Hände vor sich gekreuzt, den Kopf auf der Schulter, mit einer Miene, ähnlich derjenigen, mit der er Musik zu hören pflegte” (411).²⁵⁷ He shows himself not only to be a “skilled expert” (348) in the face of death, and extremely reverent towards the deceased sufferer, but also to have a continued attraction to death’s mysteries: the tilt of his head towards his shoulder is not only, as the narrator observes, his common stance when listening to music, which is itself a tempting agent of a certain intoxicating form of self-*Auflösung*, but it also recalls his practice

²⁵⁵ [“organized matter”; “He read with burning interest about life and its sacred, yet impure mystery” (326)] Beyond its obvious thematic relevance to the novel’s conceptual framework of life and death, health and sickness, we might also read Hans’s scholarly study of anatomy and physiology as yet another of *Der Zauberberg*’s nods toward Goethe and his influence. As A.S. Byatt notes, in a somewhat cryptic parenthetical triangulation of the three authors at the heart of this dissertation, “Goethe was an anatomical researcher—Mann in the essay [“Goethe und Tolstoy”] describes the moment when Goethe saw ‘a broken sheepskull on the Lido and had that morphological insight into the development of all the bones of the skull out of the vertebrae which shed such important illumination upon the metamorphosis of the animal body.’ (It is possible that if Goethe had not been an anatomist and morphologist, George Eliot would not have invented the interlocking form and subject matter of *Middlemarch*.)” See Byatt’s introduction to *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Knopf, 2005), xvi.

²⁵⁶ [“pedagogically forbidden territory” (370)]

²⁵⁷ [“relaxed and preoccupied, his hands clasped before him, his head tilted to one shoulder, with an expression much like the one he usually wore when listening to music” (347)]

of “regieren,”²⁵⁸ those frequent, long unstructured periods of daydreams in which, as often as not, he thinks distinctly unhumanist thoughts. And yet, as much as this initial impulse to see the *Herrenreiter*’s corpse, and the obvious delight he takes in the visit, are a sign that he hasn’t relinquished his sense of the dignity to be found in death and still adheres to its cult in spite of the progress he has made in his life-directed “Forschungen,” this first visit soon inspires him to undertake with Joachim a program of charitable acts towards the sanatorium’s moribund.²⁵⁹ Hans first suggests that they endeavor to brighten the birthdays of the moribund by sending the patient in question a potted plant along with their best wishes, in the hopes of then being permitted to pay a short visit and exchange “ein paar menschliche Worte” (416)²⁶⁰ before the poor man or woman passes away. When news reaches him through a nurse, however, of the suffering of young Leila Gerngroß, who is unlikely to experience another birthday, he decides to abandon the initial rules he has set in place for their missions of mercy and to call on any of the bored and suffering moribund who might desire the cousins’ company, developing a regular routine of repeated visits. Their charity culminates with their attentions to Karen Karstedt, a poor young outpatient living in the village, whom the cousins escort to cafés, the theater, and even the cemetery that will soon become her final resting place. While his fascination with death and the dying continues, he is also increasingly gratified by the basic knowledge that the objects of his visits appreciate his efforts and that he is doing good. Whatever irony there is behind the narrator’s description of the joy he takes at his sense of his own importance,²⁶¹ his obsession with death does lead to something charitable and life-affirming—to a “Tun und Treiben” (441)—a “schöne Tat”—that seemed formerly beyond the capabilities of our “Sorgenkind des Lebens.”

Hans’s new “Tun und Treiben”—two words that have never before been associated with the novel’s passive and happily horizontal hero—bring about an improvement not only in his own stance and behaviors, but they also force a change on the novel itself. During this “Totentanz” chapter, Hans is particularly irritated by the inanities and small cruelties that define so many of the interactions between the sanatorium’s patients, reflecting on the extent to which figures like Frau Stöhr, with her malapropisms, gossip, and smallness of spirit, interfere with his “geistigen Bemühungen” (419).²⁶² In the face of such behavior among “Denen hier oben,” he is inspired to

²⁵⁸ [“playing king”]

²⁵⁹ While the two cousins pay these visits together and Joachim is swayed by Hans’s arguments about the good they can do for the sanatorium’s most unfortunate while fighting against the prevailing “egotism” that rules the *Berghof*, it’s clear to everyone involved that this is very much Hans’s undertaking. As the narrator ironically notes, Hans Castorp knows how to manipulate Joachim’s fear of showing a “Mangel an Christentum” [“lack of Christian charity”] so that his questionable “Antrieb und charitativer Unternehmungsgeist” (426) [“impulse for altruistic enterprise” (360)] wins out over his cousin’s understandable reluctance to engage in this strange project, while Settembrini, who sees right through his student’s professed good intentions to his ongoing fascination with the “Kindern des Todes” [“death’s children”], explicitly states that “Der Leutnant ist eine respectable, aber einfache und geistig unbedrohte Natur, die dem Erzieher wenig Unruhe verursacht” (433-434) [“The lieutenant is a respectable fellow, but his is a simple temperament, not prone to spiritual dangers – the sort that never perturbs a teacher” (366)]. Whatever fault or hypocrisy there is to be found in the cousins’ “Mildtätigkeit” (433) [“deeds of mercy” (366)], it lies with Hans Castorp alone.

²⁶⁰ [“a few humane words” (351)]

²⁶¹ He “empfand eine beglückende Ausdehnung seines Wesens dabei, eine Freude, die auf dem Gefühl von der Förderlichkeit und heimlichen Tragweite seines Tuns beruhte, sich übrigens auch mit einem gewissen diebischen Vergnügen an dem untadelig christlichen Gepräge dieses Tuns und Treibens mischte, einem so frommen, milden und lobenswerten Gepräge in der Tat, daß weder vom militärischen noch vom humanistisch-pädagogischen Standpunkte irgend etwas Ernstliches dagegen erinnert werden konnte” (441). [“And each time he felt his whole being expand with a joy rooted in a sense of helpfulness and quiet importance, but intermingled with a certain jaunty delight in the spotless Christian impression his good deeds made – an impression so devout, caring, and praiseworthy, in fact, that no serious objections whatever could be raised against it, either from a military or a humanistic-pedagogic standpoint.” (373)]

²⁶² [“spiritual strivings” (355)]

enact some sort of change: “Denn diese Würde zu schützen und vor sich selber aufrecht zu halten, war er im Innern treulich bestrebt” (417).²⁶³ This “Würde” is something that the narrative itself has been undermining from the beginning of the novel in its ironic presentation of the sanatorium and its inhabitants and in the critical stance it takes towards the cult of death that pervades it and to which its protagonist succumbs. As a result, the narrator can, in his parodic presentation of “Denen hier oben,” seem as mean-spirited as Frau Stöhr: while the novel’s principle characters, such as Hans, Joachim, and Settembrini, are allowed to become fuller personages, the figures who surround them are largely a collection of caricatures, identified by their most ridiculous and repeated behaviors or physical traits and treated in comic tones.²⁶⁴ Once Hans begins visiting the moribund, however, the tone with which the narrative treats the new patients to whom it introduces us subtly shifts: it presents figures like Leila Gerngroß and Karen Karstedt in more serious terms and through much fuller descriptions, foregoing its earlier practice of always attaching comic or cruel epithets to characters as its sole act of description and instead lingering over their stories and suffering. Had Leila Gerngroß been introduced earlier, we can imagine that she would have appeared only as the girl with the “wet hands,”²⁶⁵ but while the narrator repeatedly observes this striking physical feature, which also leaves such an impression on Hans, he also lingers over a detailed description of her and her suffering in a way that is quite new to the narrative. Its hero having undertaken an interest in and sympathetic stance toward her, the narrator begins to do the same, and the novel’s representation of its minor characters changes accordingly. The novel’s newfound sympathy for suffering comes to a quiet climax in its genuinely moving depiction of Karen Karstedt, particularly when the narrator recounts her self-awareness about and quiet acceptance of her own suffering and imminent death and her pilgrimage to the cemetery where she knows she will soon lie.²⁶⁶ The narrator seems to take to heart here the same lesson that Hans learns: the novel doesn’t just show its hero taking seriously the suffering of others and treating the dying with respect, but it itself extends this same respect towards the moribund it introduces, disavowing its former style of caricature in favor of characters who are deserving of sympathy, its narrative transforming alongside its protagonist.

The lessons that Hans learns in the above scenes, which seem to push him back from his dangerous obsession with *Auflösung* towards the side of form and life, culminate in the novel’s memorable “Schnee” chapter, which casts itself as the climactic moment in Hans’s development.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ [“people up here”; “For it was his sincere desire faithfully to defend and uphold that dignity [of this place of suffering] in his own eyes” (352)]

²⁶⁴ Such caricatures occur throughout the novel’s early chapters, and are essential to the narrative’s account of such scenes as meals in the dining room and its description of the recurring characters whom Hans and Joachim join there. For numerous such examples in a very short space, see the description of the crowd that gathers on the sanatorium’s veranda after lunch on page 328, which makes reference to “wulstlippigen Gänser,” “dem schwedischen Recken,” “einem bebrillten jungen Holländer mit rosigem Gesicht und monomanischer Leidenschaft für den Briefmarkentausch,” “verschiedenen Griechen, pomadisiert und mangeläugig, bei Tische zu Übergriffen geneigt,” and “der bucklige Mexikaner,” to name a few. [“thick-lipped Gänser,” “the Swedish bruiser,” “a young Dutchman with lots of diamonds, a pink face, and a mania for philately,” “various Greeks, with slicked-down hair and almond eyes, who tended to reach for things at meals,” and “the hunchbacked Mexican” (276)]. Ziolkowski notes that the novel’s narrator is as much a part of the *Berghof* world as any of its inhabitants, his point of view bounded both by the space and time of the story. We might take his tendency toward gossip and caricature as one example of his rootedness in this locale. Thomas Ziolkowski, *Dimensions of the Modern Novel: German Texts and European Contexts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 95.

²⁶⁵ The repeated focus on liquidness in the various references to how wet her hands are recalls the *Auflösung* that so fascinated Hans a few chapters earlier: it’s as if her ailing body is dissolving and losing physical form.

²⁶⁶ See pages 450-452 [380-382].

²⁶⁷ Mann himself suggested that this scene is the climax of Hans’s “Grail-Quest” in his 1939 lecture at Princeton, “On my own Work”: “The Grail, which Hans Castorp may not find but does perceive in a dream close to death – is the idea of man, the conception of a future humanity that has passed through the profoundest knowledge of sickness and death.” *On Myself and Other Princeton Lectures*, 65. While many critics have taken Mann’s assertion at face value and advanced

During his second winter at the *Berghof*, Hans finds that he has two chief wishes: “der stärkste davon war der, mit seinen Gedanken und Regierungsgeschäften allein zu sein”; “der andere aber, verbunden mit jenem galt lebhaft einer inniger-freieren Berührung mit dem schneeverwüsteten Gebirge, für das er Teilnahme gefaßt hatte” (659).²⁶⁸ While both of these wishes may seem to place him in “pedagogically forbidden territory,” particularly given his reflection on the snowy landscape as a space of “primal monotony” (559) resembling the sea just a few paragraphs before, in which it would be quite possible to lose himself, the latter desire leads him to take up skiing, an activity of which his mentor Settembrini wholeheartedly and joyously approves. Reveling in the newfound freedom and “courage” (564) that he finds on his solo excursions into the mountains, Hans decides to prolong an afternoon hike in spite of the threat of an impending snowstorm. He soon becomes lost in the swirling snow and darkness of the storm and, after finding that he has been expending energy walking in circles, he takes shelter against the wall of a small hut. He falls asleep and has an extended dream: he first moves through an idyllic Mediterranean landscape populated by beautiful young men and women riding horses and shepherding goats, dancing to music and learning archery; everything in this Apollonian ideal is beautiful, ordered, and joyous. When he’s made aware of a structure of columns and blocks, he enters a temple at whose heart he finds a horrifying scene of Dionysian sacrifice, two half-naked old women busy dismembering and eating a small child above a basin. It’s with this gruesome image that he awakens to find himself stretched out on the snow, and as he contemplates in half-consciousness the dream he’s just had, he begins to reflect on his experiences since coming to the sanatorium. In particular, he ponders the various binaries that have defined his education thus far: life and death, health and sickness, Settembrini and Naphta, nature and spirit. He ultimately rejects the very premise on which his education, and the novel, seem to be based: that is, that these extremes pose a problem to be solved and that the student has to decide in favor of one or the other, and he decides to embrace a state of contradiction in which he can chart a middle way through these opposing sides. Remembering his dream’s portrait of the necessary interconnectedness of the Apollonian and Dionysian— “Auch Form ist nur aus Liebe und Güte: Form und Gesittung, verständig-freundliche Gemeinschaft und schönen Menschenstaats – in stillem Hinblick auf das Blutmahl” (692)²⁶⁹— he determines to keep faith with the lesson he ultimately arrives at in the snow: “Der Mensch soll um der Güte und Liebe willen dem Tode keine Herrschaft einräumen über seine Gedanken” (692).²⁷⁰ In case the reader doesn’t trust Hans’s own framing of this sentence as the moral of his adventure, and indeed of his entire experience thus far in the novel, the text sets it off typographically, underscoring Hans’s claim that this is the climax of his education. While he has rejected the choice between seeming oppositions as a false one and articulated a new commitment to

their own readings of “Schnee” as the novel’s clear center of value and meaning, Martin Swales is among those who have sought to decenter “Schnee”: he argues that there are other, equally important focal points for the novel’s chief insights (for example, the themes of medicine, form, and love), and that the novel ultimately ironizes the meaning it seems to derive from each. Swales suggests that the ambivalence of these lessons that are so quickly forgotten once attained calls into question not only the role of the “Schnee” chapter itself, but any reading of the novel as a story of traditional development. “The Story and the Hero: A Study of Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 46 (1972), 359-76. My own reading seeks to take seriously both the weight that the novel itself gives the “Schnee” chapter in its clear marking of this scene as a climax of sorts and the way the novel goes on to undercut the seeming meaning of this chapter in the several hundred pages that following this scene.

²⁶⁸ [“the first, and stronger, was to be alone with his thoughts to ‘play king’ [...] His other wish, however, bound up with the first, was to enjoy a freer, more active, more intense experience of the snowy mountain wilderness, for which he felt a great affinity” (560)]

²⁶⁹ [“And form, too, comes only from love and goodness: form and the cultivated manners of man’s fair state, of a reasonable and genial community – out of silent regard for the bloody banquet.” (588)]

²⁷⁰ [“For the sake of goodness and love, man shall grant death no dominion over his thoughts.” (588)]

contradiction and compromise between them, he also seems to have come down firmly on the side of life and form in embracing this lesson, refusing to let death hold sway. And yet, as much as it emphasizes Hans's revelation here, the narrator calls it into question just a few paragraphs later: "Die hochzivilisierte Atmosphäre des 'Berghofs' umschmeichelte ihn eine Stunde später. Beim Diner griff er gewaltig zu. Was er geträumt, war im Verbleichen begriffen. Was er gedacht, verstand er schon diesen Abend nicht mehr so recht" (695).²⁷¹ What seems to be the novel's chief lesson, and most convincing argument for form and life, dissipates almost as quickly as it comes, falling victim to the general *Auflösung* of the sanatorium and leaving Hans much the same as he was before he ventured out into the snowy mountains.

Hans's formative experiences in much of the novel seem at first to consist of a battle between life and death, form and *Auflösung*, Settembrini's idea of progress and Naphta's nihilism, with the sides and stakes of this conflict clearly drawn by the proponents of either side, but in the examples of Hans's intellectual pursuits, his charitable deeds, and the lesson of the *Schneetraum*, neither side comes out entirely the winner. Settembrini remains so nervous about Hans's fate, and the outcome of his education remains so ambiguous, precisely because he refuses to move toward either extreme, insisting that life and death can be part of the same process, that *Auflösung* can lead to a renewal of form,²⁷² that a humanist "Tun und Treiben" can coexist with a reverence for death's dignity, that Apollonian order is built from Dionysian chaos. While Hans might forget the exact contours of the resolution he forms in the snow, he does continue in his commitment to compromise and to the middle ground in his subsequent life at the sanatorium. He is seduced by music and participates in séances, but he also continues his intellectual pursuits. He continues to listen to the philosophies of both Settembrini and Naphta, refusing to take sides as their debates become increasingly heated and as they evince more and more hatred for each other, instead attempting to mediate between them. He resumes his relationship with Frau Chauchat when she reappears at the *Berghof* with Mynheer Peeperkorn, but he sublimates his erotic desire into a more measured form of friendship and partnership, in which the two assume an almost fraternal stance toward each other in caring for the sick Dutchman. In this way, he subtly puts into practice a version of his resolution from "Schnee," even as he seems to have forgotten this briefly revelatory experience. This in turn shifts our sense of what constitutes a successful or failed education for Hans, and the stakes of the various conflicts the novel has staged throughout: while the novel's pedagogues continue to do battle for his soul and to hold fast to their half of the binaries they represent, the novel increasingly suggests that resolution won't come from Hans siding with one or the other but instead in learning to negotiate between them.

In committing to this middle way, Hans Castorp becomes himself almost an instantiation of the middle ground that he seeks between the extremes that surround him. In a moment of almost Eliot-like description of the community of mentors and friends that Hans has assembled around himself at the *Berghof*, the narrator describes the acumen with which Hans is able to view the personalities who surround him and the way that they stand in relationship to one another: "Wunderlich hin und her laufende Beziehungen! Es reizt uns, ihre verschlungenen Fäden einen Augenblick allgemein sichtbar zu machen, so, wie Hans Castorp selbst sie auf diesen Spaziergängen verschmitzten und lebensfreundlichen Auges betrachtete" (812).²⁷³ It's striking that the narrative

²⁷¹ ["An hour later he was cradled in the highly civilized atmosphere of the Berghof. He did justice to his supper. His dream was already beginning to fade. And by bedtime he was no longer exactly sure what his thoughts had been." (590)]

²⁷² We can think here of the mountain flowers that bloom only after the utter *Auflösung* of the melting snow that plunges the alpine landscape into such shapeless chaos at winter's end: what first seems to herald complete formlessness leads to the reassertion of organized life. See 508-509 [430-431].

²⁷³ ["What a strange interweaving of relationships it was! We are intrigued by the idea of making that tangle of threads visible to all for just a moment, much as Hans Castorp himself was able to observe it with a shrewd and life-affirming

openly adopts Hans's own viewpoint here in order to give readers the comprehensive portrait of the group that the narrator goes on to describe, and Hans must certainly have undergone some development from the naïve and unreliable youth who first arrived at the sanatorium to gain such authority in the narrator's eyes. He is not only the figure with the clearest view and greatest understanding of this web of relationships, but he himself is also at the middle of it, the center that holds the web together and through which all of the threads pass: "Spannungen, Fremdheiten, sogar stille Feindseligkeiten gab es selbstverständlich genug zwischen ihnen, und wir wundern uns selbst, wie es unserem unbedeutenden Helden gelingen mochte, sie um sich zusammenzuhalten, – wir erklären es uns mit einer gewissen verschmitzten Lebensfreundlichkeit seines Wesens, die ihn alles 'hörenswert' finden ließ und die man Verbindlichkeit selbst in dem Sinne nennen könnte" (811-812).²⁷⁴ While each of these figures has, to varying degrees, been influential to Hans's development, and while some of them explicitly position themselves as pedagogical authorities, it is in fact Hans who is responsible here for the shape of his community and for the maintenance of its order, and the narrator implies that Hans's mentors might do well to learn a lesson or two from him. It's in passing through the middle point of Hans that their opposing views and philosophies are tempered, put in actual relation to and conversation with one another so that some larger understanding might grow out of his mediation of them.²⁷⁵

While the narrator explicitly claims in the latter section of the novel that Hans has grown and has learned through the experience he has recounted for us,²⁷⁶ its strongest support for its protagonist's successful formation is through its formal enactment of the middle position that comes to define its matured hero. It's worth mentioning that almost all of the novel's formal choices— and *Der Zauberberg* is a novel that is obsessed with games of form, from the number of letters in each of the main characters' names (seven, of course) to the temporal structure of the narrative to the novel's use of its intertexts— reinforce topics treated in the story world, but the following example is one that deals specifically with Hans's primary lesson, and thus the novel's

eye on their walks together." (689)] If the narrator's description of Hans's web of relations in this moment seems to echo, in its language and spirit, Eliot's tracing of the various interwoven threads of her characters' lives, this similarity is so notable precisely because of how different the two narratives actually are: unlike Eliot's multi-protagonist, multi-plot, web-like novel, *Der Zauberberg* never loses sight of Hans Castorp. Indeed, this singular moment of reflection on the "strange interweaving of relationships" can only be given voice to here because it's visible and of interest to Hans himself, the "tangle of threads" signaling a certain momentary awareness or experience on Hans's part and not a principle of composition of the novel itself that we see clearly reflected in its form.

²⁷⁴ ["To be sure, there was quite sufficient tension, strain, and even silent hostility among them; and we ourselves are amazed that our inconsequential hero managed to keep the group together. Our only explanation is that there was something shrewdly life-affirming in our hero's nature, which allowed him to find everything 'worth listening to' and which one might also call obligingness, in the sense that it not only bound him to very different kinds of people and personalities, but also to some extent linked them to one another." (689)] As Swales puts it, "Hans Castorp himself is and remains 'mittelmässig'; he is and remains the 'Mittel-mass,' the middle way, in which all the extremes potentially are present." In other words, it's his averageness that makes him the middle point around which the novel can cohere. *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 119.

²⁷⁵ Here, too, Lukács's description of Scott's middling hero seems helpful: it's not only that Hans is a mediocre or middling figure, but he is quite literally the middle point through which all of the novel's ideas and conflicts pass. Without his mediation, the binary oppositions by which the novel is structured would remain precisely that; by allowing them all to pass through its protagonist, the novel manages, if not to completely synthesize them, at least to make them speak to each other in different, and hopefully more illuminating, ways. In Lukács's account, the forces revealed through this middle space of the hero are historical ones, and while *Der Zauberberg* doesn't quite fit the profile of the historical novel as set up by *Waverley*, we might also see the clash of ideas in Mann's novel as a historical account of sorts, an attempt to work through the ideas and trends that led to the war in which the novel ends and after which the novel was written.

²⁷⁶ For another example, see his account of the way that Hans's newfound maturity plays into his relationship to the gramophone on page 913 [776].

pedagogy. The novel is structured, as Hans observes that his own life at the *Berghof* is, by oppositions between ideas and characters, and the narrative makes very obvious what these binaries are and how Hans reacts to them. The text offers more subtle reinforcement for Hans's conclusions, however, in its construction of binaries that are visible only in retrospect, making the reader participate in its pedagogy of the middle by recognizing how the novel's form supports it.

One such example lies in the parallel fates of Joachim and Mynheer Peeperkorn. At first glance, these two characters appear to have little to do with each other: they never meet in the text, and they belong to totally different spheres of Hans's experience. While both characters stand, in their own way, for the life and form that are lacking in the sanatorium and its cult of illness and death, their convictions are so different that it's hard to imagine either approving of the other. As we've seen, Joachim is an entirely form-driven character, in the Apollonian sense: everything about his beliefs and behaviors stems from his adherence to order and his desire to do his duty. Even his approach to his illness and convalescence is directed towards a desire for action: he submits so conscientiously to the regimen of the sanatorium precisely so he can return to a soldier's life in the *Flachlande*. If there's no room for self-indulgence and comfort in Joachim's worldview, Peeperkorn stands entirely for the satisfaction of the senses and bodily desires, for the primacy of organic form even in the face of death. In a scene that is simultaneously an excessive Dionysian bacchanalia and a reenactment of the Last Supper, one of his first activities after arriving at the sanatorium is to throw a feast overflowing with food, spirits, and games, which leaves all of its participants intoxicated. Accompanied at the *Berghof* by his traveling companion Clavdia Chauchat, Peeperkorn also embodies sexual desire and fulfillment, and in describing life as a fertile young woman to Hans,²⁷⁷ he offers a vision of healthy desire and fecundity that has been missing in the novel's depiction of the sick and dying women who have been the sole erotic objects in the text thus far. While they stand for different versions of life and form, neither Joachim nor Peeperkorn is an obviously pedagogical figure: Joachim is too well-known to Hans, his cousin's habitually quiet and loyal companion, and Peeperkorn is incapable of stringing a coherent sentence together. Indeed, one of the first things that we learn from the narrator about this new character is "so braucht deshalb niemand zu besorgen, daß hier abermals ein Veranstalter geistiger und pädagogischer Konfusion auf den Plan tritt" (766).²⁷⁸ How, then, do they participate in shaping the novel's underlying pedagogical message?

The most obviously life-affirming figure in the novel, Peeperkorn's appearance is enigmatic—he explodes into the narrative for a few short chapters and then dies, exiting the novel as suddenly as he appears.²⁷⁹ The brief existence of this vibrantly alive character seems paradoxical,

²⁷⁷ "Das Leben— junge Mann— es ist ein Weib, ein hingespreitet Weib, mit dicht beieinander quellenden Brüsten und großer weißer Bauchfläche zwischen den ausladenden Hüften, mit schmalen Armen und schwellenden Schenkeln und halbgeschlossenen Augen, das in herrlicher, höhnischer Herausforderung unsere höchste Inständigkeit beansprucht." (791) ["Life, young man, is a woman, a woman sprawled before us, with close-pressed bulging breasts and a great, soft belly between those broad hips, with slender arms and swelling thighs, with eyes half-closed in mocking defiance, demanding our most urgent response." (672)] We might contrast this image of life as a woman with the "image of life" that appears to Hans at the conclusion of "Forschungen" in the form of a ghostly imagining of Clavdia that leaves him "melting with lust and dismay" (340).

²⁷⁸ ["no one need worry that yet another instigator of intellectual and pedagogic confusion has now made an appearance" (650)] While the narrator presents the basic facts about Peeperkorn's identity and makes this observation about the role he will play— or rather, won't play— in the text, we might take it as yet another sign of his growing faith in the mature Hans's capabilities that he leaves much of the physical description of Peeperkorn's appearance and stance— the type of observations that the narrator elsewhere revels in— to Hans himself.

²⁷⁹ Swales notes that the appearance of Peeperkorn presents yet another challenge to any reading of "Schnee" as the clear value-center of the novel: Peeperkorn is indisputably one of the novel's most important characters, and he doesn't appear until after Hans Castorp's snow dream, calling into question some of what has preceded him in the novel to this point. See "The Story and the Hero: A Study of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*," 361.

and it is, in fact, his boundless desire to enjoy life that leads to his suicide: he prefers to kill himself rather than continue to live after losing his virility. In retrospect, however, and in accordance with the structure of the narrative, we can understand his death as an extension of the novel's treatment of Joachim. In the last sentence of the chapter before Peeperkorn is introduced (the chapter following the one that details Joachim's rapid decline and concludes with the tragic scene of his death), the narrator once again underscores that Joachim's "Biereifer," or zealotry, was the cause of his "letalen Ausgang" (765).²⁸⁰ This concluding observation is followed directly, in the first words of the next chapter, by the name of the Dutchman, whose Dionysian love of life seems to replace, and offer an alternative to, Joachim's Apollonian rigidity. While the two figures are in this sense antitheses—Peeperkorn shows not the slightest trace of anything resembling Joachim's particular form of zealotry—they in fact share a crucial characteristic, namely their embodiment of an absolute perspective and personality, the zealotry that the narrator takes pains to emphasize before transitioning from Joachim to the introduction of the new character Peeperkorn. Both men die of their own accord, and because of their commitment to life and the values they ascribe to it: Joachim by returning to duty in spite of his illness and Peeperkorn by poisoning himself once he realizes that he can no longer live as fully as he believes he should. The Dutchman's final speech during the excursion to the waterfall can be read as a symbol of these unavoidable "lethal outcomes": although the noise of the falling water makes conversation a useless endeavor, entirely covering the sound of voices, Peeperkorn insists on carrying out his long address to his audience of sanatorium guests, refusing to adapt his outsized personality and desires to the environment that surrounds him. The deaths of these two different figures, who die in sequence in the novel, point to the inevitable extinction of such absolutely rigid personalities and world views: those who don't, that is to say, learn the lessons that Mann's protagonist does. The novel's negation of these inflexible principles—both of which seem to affirm life while ultimately destroying it—implicitly affirms Hans's attempt to find a middle way between them, and his success at tempering and adapting extremes: while the seemingly life-filled Peeperkorn and Joachim become two more of the novel's "children of death," Hans survives.

The novel has given us many ways to understand Hans's middle-ness: he is described as utterly average and mediocre; he belongs to the bourgeois world with whose middlingness the novel has long been associated; he stands literally and figuratively between the many binary oppositions that the text traces.²⁸¹ Such ideas of the middle ground already appear in the essay in which Mann explored many of the central themes that would make their way into *Der Zauberberg*. In "Goethe and Tolstoy," he claims the space of the "middle" for the German people: "We are a people of the middle, of the world-bourgeoisie; there is a fittingness in our geographical position and in our *mores*."²⁸² Given Mann's reactionary beliefs at this point in his career and his later renunciation of them, the "middle" that he equates with German-ness here is not unproblematic: it speaks to a more pernicious form of compromise, to a refusal to act or to choose, to a lack of political and ethical commitments. We could certainly read Hans's suspended state throughout much of *Der Zauberberg* in similar terms: as a form of passivity or quietism, a survival strategy that is as much an abdication of responsibility as it is a moderate tempering of extremes that allows life to continue.

And yet, Mann's novel also finds pedagogical potential in the space between extremes and in the acts of mediation that can constitute this middle space. While the above dangers of the middle as

²⁸⁰ ["fatal outcome" (649)]

²⁸¹ The tension that Martin Swales sees as central to the *Bildungsroman* as a genre might also be applied to Hans's character as its *Bildungsheld*: namely, between the *Nacheinander* of his practical being and activity in time and the *Nebeneinander* of his potentiality, the tension in the definition of the self that defines both *Bildung* and the literary form that represents it. *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, 28-29.

²⁸² See "Goethe and Tolstoy" in *Essays of Three Decades*, 174.

compromise might render us suspicious of attempts to permanently eschew forms of knowledge that require taking a stance one way or the other, the novel continually suggests that Hans is able to achieve insight precisely because of his position between the novel's various pedagogues, and his subsequent tempering of the ideas that pass through him. In claiming the middle ground as the terrain for the education the text is intent on exploring, the novel also transforms its formal enactment of the middle into a more general argument about the act of novel writing itself. Mann aligns irony, a signature characteristic of his own style and which he elsewhere identifies as the very spirit of *Epik*,²⁸³ as also positioning itself in the middle ground, as "the pathos of the middle... its moral too, its ethos."²⁸⁴ Hans's formal position within the narrative and Mann's comments about the style by which this story is best told would suggest that he sees his own writing as partaking in this middle space and its possibilities, and that by in turn enacting this middle ground, his novels make possible their own work of knowledge production and insight.

Another of the novel's self-reflective passages suggests that this knowledge production is also an act of compromise, one that operates by simultaneously offering and withholding insight. In his early days on the mountain, Hans goes to his first lecture by Dr. Krokowski, arriving late because he has taken an extended walk during which he suffers a nosebleed. While waiting for the bleeding to stop, he recalls in great detail his childhood fascination with his schoolmate Hippe, from whom he once borrowed a pencil. Arousing himself from this daydream, he finally realizes that it's Hippe whom Clavdia Chauchat reminds him of, prompting him to wonder "Darum also interessiere ich mich so für sie? Oder vielleicht auch: habe ich mich darum so für ihn interessiert?" (177).²⁸⁵ He doesn't take the time to sort through these confusions, but instead hurries back for the lecture, where Krokowski's subject is, coincidentally, "die Macht der Liebe" (180),²⁸⁶ or more specifically, "die Gestalt und Maske, worin die nicht zugelassene und unterdrückte Liebe wiedererscheine" (183).²⁸⁷ However skeptical we may be of Krokowski and his practice, he is, of course, unwittingly describing precisely what has just happened to Hans and will continue to unfold throughout the text. Hans's attraction to and disorientation around Clavdia proves to be connected to his suppressed childhood feelings for Hippe, which resurface here in the bodily symptom of his nosebleed. (Krokowski goes on to argue that "Das Krankheitssymptom sei verkappte Liebesbetätigung und alle Krankheit verwandelte Liebe" (183).²⁸⁸) While Hans may not make the connection between what he has experienced and what he has just heard—indeed, he reflects at the conclusion of the lecture that he is only a visitor and that, since he's healthy, none of this has anything to do with him (186 [153])—Krokowski's lecture is very clearly meant to draw the reader's attention to the "Gestaltung" of the story that Hans himself can't recognize. Behrens bears out this diagnosis, implicitly supporting both Krokowski's theory of the bodily signs of repressed love and their application to the novel we are reading, when Hans finally submits to the doctor's examination of his lungs: he hears muffled tones that suggest "veralteten Stellen" or a "Vernarbung" (257)²⁸⁹ and also finds evidence of a new "feuchte Stelle" (258)²⁹⁰ that threatens to worsen, a diagnosis that he confirms from Hans's x-ray, on which "es seien die alten Stellen sowohl wie die frischen zu sehen gewesen" (310).²⁹¹ His

²⁸³ See "Die Kunst des Romans," 353.

²⁸⁴ "Goethe and Tolstoy," 173.

²⁸⁵ ["Is that why I've been so intrigued by her? Or maybe that's why I was suddenly so interested in *him*." (145, emphasis in original)]

²⁸⁶ ["the force of love" (148)]

²⁸⁷ [the "form or mask" in which "suppressed and unsanctioned love reappear[s]" (150)]

²⁸⁸ ["Any symptom of illness was a masked form of love in action, and illness was merely transformed love." (151)]

²⁸⁹ ["old infections," "scarring" (214)]

²⁹⁰ ["moist spot" (215)]

²⁹¹ ["Both the old spots and the fresh one had been visible" (261).]

body bears signs of the old feelings for Hippe, which he discovers only when the new symptoms of his love for Clavdia flare up, suggesting that the love story to follow will involve some negotiation between these two objects of interest and desire, and that the plot we, and Hans, think we are following, may serve as a “Maske” for this other story to which the novel has so clearly drawn our attention.²⁹² In drawing our attention to this act of masking, however, the novel also teaches us to recognize the meaning that it simultaneously obscures and reveals in this moment, involving readers in the mediation of meaning that the form of the novel will enact.

As we’ve seen, *Der Zauberberg* enacts performances of the middle ground and its values at multiple levels: in the social world and character types that it treats, in its diegetic representation of and commentary on Hans Castorp’s education, in its narrative form, in its conception of writing as an Apollonian operation, and in the interpretive acts it demands of its reader. In both its story-world and at the formal level, the novel holds out hope for the middle ground as a way of balancing between extremes, and ultimately of producing knowledge. As John Krapp puts it, even this knowledge that it produces is hard to pin down: the novel doesn’t argue for a totalizing ethical lesson that would side with one of the many extremes it has dramatized in the play of voices throughout Hans’s story, but is instead ultimately a knowledge that is born out of “signifying and interpretive method,” a mode of reading that sustains the text’s dialogic nature.²⁹³ Before considering the implications of the middle for novelistic pedagogy more generally, I’d like to turn by way of conclusion to the way this middle ground of narrative provides Mann with the space in which to explore the ideas that pass through Hans Castorp over the course of his education and that are at the heart of this long novel.

In Defense of Ideas

Having focused on Hans’s formation and the novel’s formal construction and aims in the above argument about the novel’s pedagogical operations, I’m aware that I’ve sidelined the question of the “big, sincere ideas” that define the experience of reading *Der Zauberberg* and that many of the characters who people its pages would take as the primary substance of its hero’s education. Lest the above argument’s focus on form be read as a simple apology for the novel’s excursus into the ideas that fill so many of its pages, I’d like to return to the opening polemic about the relationship between novels and ideas and consider how the novel itself might proleptically argue against Nabokov’s criticism as part of its argument about novelistic form and formation. While *Der Zauberberg* conceives of its project in terms that can’t be boiled down simply to its content but that

²⁹² Krokowski’s lecture also suggests a different means by which the structure, and indeed the very writing, of this novel might serve as a “Maske” of sorts. Krokowski’s thesis and Hans’s old and new “spots” ask us to read the heterosexual love story between Hans and Clavdia, the official love story of the novel’s main plot, as a masking device for his repressed desire for Hippe, and the strange role that the request for a pencil plays in the ultimate *Walpurgisnacht* consummation of their relationship suggests that this earlier, “unsanctioned” affair continues to resurface for Hans. While I certainly don’t want to reduce the novel’s complexity to a simplistic biographical reading, Mann’s text is far too self-aware and draws far too much attention to its own construction of this particular aspect of the narrative (the Hans-Hippe-Clavdia triangle maps very closely onto Mann’s own history) to be a mere coincidence. The novel thereby also becomes a middle space in which its author can give form to certain experiences and desires that can’t be fully acted upon. Another central example of “masking” in the novel—and one that is crucially related to its rehearsal of ideas, to which I’ll turn shortly—is the way Mann ascribes ideas and characteristics of real interlocutors to his characters: Settembrini’s positions resemble those of Mann’s brother Heinrich; Naphta bears a resemblance to Lukács; Peeperkorn shares attributes with Gerhart Hauptmann.

²⁹³ Krapp, *An Aesthetic of Morality*, 69. His reading especially emphasizes the role of history and time in the novel, which serves as a reminder of the contingent and temporary nature of any argument that any one of the novel’s pedagogues can put forth.

are intimately bound up in its argument about the workings of novel form, its understanding of that form is inseparable from its devotion to the ideas over which it lingers. For all the novel's self-awareness of its characters', and its own, oddities and indulgences, and as much as it often points to the absurdity or error of the ideas it forces its readers to linger over at such length, it finally argues for the absolute deadly seriousness of ideas and debate about them, and whatever we might make of the ultimate viability of the positions being debated and defended, the education the novel seeks to offer would be incomplete without their inclusion. The vision of novel form that *Der Zauberberg* advances is one that can accommodate, and indeed that is, precisely because of this form, an eminently promising forum for working through, the "big, sincere ideas" that seem to call into question its novelistic status, and the text makes an argument for the responsibility of the novel to engage ideas in precisely this way by serving as its own middle ground through which they can be tested and their value and implications explored.

While the novel makes the case for ideas and their importance throughout— implicitly through the extensive space it gives to them, and more explicitly in its pedagogues' defense of their own intellectual pursuits and conversations— the ultimate conflict between Settembrini and Naphta casts intellectual convictions as a matter of deadly seriousness and significance, moving them from the realm of abstraction and the mind to that of action. The last of their long philosophical debates, once again with Hans, Wehsal, and Ferge as audience, comes to an explosive close when Naphta challenges his longtime philosophical sparring partner to an actual duel to settle their seemingly irreconcilable intellectual differences. Naphta's call to arms comes in response to Settembrini's disparagement as "S c h l ü p f r i g k e i t e n" (975)²⁹⁴ the ideas whose lengthy exposition he interrupts with this insult (most immediately, Naphta's claim that freedom belongs more properly to Romanticism and Catholicism than to the liberal humanist's misguided notion of individual liberty). Settembrini's objection lies less in his simple opposition to the ideas themselves than to their potentially deleterious effect on those who hear them, most particularly the impressionable Hans: "ich beliebe mich dahin auszudrücken, daß ich entschlossen bin, Sie daran zu hindern, eine ungeschützte Jugend noch länger mit Ihren Zweideutigkeiten zu behelligen!"; "Ich bin gewohnt, nach meinen Worten zu sehen, und mein Wort wird präzis den Tatsachen gerecht, wenn ich ausspreche, daß Ihre Art, die ohnehin schwanke Jugend geistig zu verstören, zu verführen und sittlich zu entkräften, eine I n f a m i e und mit Worten nicht streng genug zu züchtigen ist..." (976).²⁹⁵ Settembrini takes such offense and feels the need to intervene with such strong language here because he believes in the very real effect that words and ideas can have, but while he acts in the interest of his student, his stance is hypocritical, as Naphta is quick to point out: as a self-proclaimed pedagogue, one who believes in liberty, the spirit of inquiry, and the importance of ideas, he is abandoning all principled argument by silencing Naphta's opposing position and preventing his young charge from freely engaging with him.

If Settembrini seems, on the one hand, to contradict some of the very pedagogical principles that we would expect him to support, and on which the novel itself is modeling its own presentation of ideas, he also serves as a mouthpiece— albeit a problematic one, once again— for the seriousness and consequence with which the novel wants to invest ideas, and its treatment of them. When Hans attempts to talk him out of the impending duel, Settembrini responds with a passionate retort about the very real implications of what his protégé takes to be "merely" intellectual or abstract concerns:

²⁹⁴ ["scurrilities" (830, emphasis in original)]

²⁹⁵ ["I am saying that I am determined to prevent you from molesting vulnerable youth any longer with your dubious ideas"; "I am accustomed to paying close heed to my words, and they fit the facts precisely when I say that the manner in which you are unsettling the mind of wavering youth, seducing and morally weakening that mind, is *infamous* and cannot be punished severely enough." (830, emphasis in original)]

„Aber was hat er getan? Ich will ihn nicht etwa in Schutz nehmen, ich frage nur, was er zu Ihrer Beleidigung getan hat. Er hat die Kategorien über den Haufen geworfen. Er hat, wie er sich ausdrückt, den Begriffen ihre akademische Würde geraubt. Dadurch haben Sie sich beleidigt gefühlt, – mit Recht, wollen wir mal unterstellen –“

„Unterstellen?“ wiederholte Herr Settembrini und sah ihn an...

„Mit Recht, mit Recht! Er hat Sie beleidigt damit. Aber er hat Sie nicht beschimpft! Das ist ein Unterschied, erlauben Sie mal! Es handelt sich um abstrakte Dinge, um geistige. Mit geistigen Dingen kann man beleidigen, aber man kann nicht damit beschimpfen. Das ist eine Maxime, die jedes Ehrengericht annehmen würde, ich kann es Ihnen bei Gott versichern. Und darum ist auch das, was Sie ihm von ‚Infamie‘ und ‚strenger Züchtigung‘ geantwortet haben, keine Beschimpfung, denn auch das war geistig gemeint, es hält sich im geistigen Bezirke und hat mit dem persönlichen überhaupt nichts zu tun, worin es einzig so etwas wie Beschimpfung gibt. Das Geistige kann niemals persönlich sein, das ist die Vervollständigung und die Erläuterung der Maxime, und deshalb –“

„Sie irren, mein Freund“, versetzte Herr Settembrini mit geschlossenen Augen. „Sie irren erstens in der Annahme, daß Geistiges nicht persönlichen Charakter gewinnen können. Sie sollten das nicht meinen“, sagte er und lächelte eigentümlich fein und schmerzlich. „Sie gehen jedoch vor allem fehl in Ihrer Einschätzung des Geistigen überhaupt, das Sie offenbar für zu schwach halten, um Konflikte und Leidenschaften zu zeitigen von der Härte derjenigen, die das reale Leben mit sich bringt und die keinen anderen Ausweg lassen als den des Waffenganges. *All'incontro!* Das Abstrakte, das Gereinigte, das Ideelle ist zugleich auch das Absolute, es ist damit das eigentlich Strenge, und es birgt viel tiefere und radikalere Möglichkeiten des Hasses, der unbedingten und unversöhnlichen Gegnerschaft, als das soziale Leben [...] Wer für das Ideelle nicht mit seiner Person, seinem Arm, seinem Blute einzutreten vermag, der ist seiner nicht wert, und es kommt darauf an, in aller Vergeistigung ein Mann zu bleiben.“

Da hatte Hans Castorp seine Zurechtweisung. (980-981)²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ [‘But what did he do? I’m not trying to defend him, I am simply asking what he did to insult you. He cast categories to the wind. He robbed ideas of their academic dignity, as he put it. And you were offended by that – and rightly so, let us assume –’

‘Assume?’ Herr Settembrini repeated and stared at him.

‘And rightly so, rightly so. He did offend you. But he did not insult you! There is a difference, if you will permit me to say so. It was about abstractions, about ideas. You can offend someone with abstract ideas, but you cannot insult him with them. That’s a maxim that would be accepted in any court of honor, I can assure you of that, by God. And so what you said to him about its being ‘infamous’ and having to be ‘severely punished’ was no insult, either, because it, too, was meant intellectually. It all belongs to the realm of the intellect and has nothing to do with either of you personally, which is the only way something can be an insult. Intellectual abstractions can never be personal, that is the logical conclusion and extension of my maxim.’

‘You are mistaken, my friend,’ Herr Settembrini retorted with his eyes closed. ‘You are mistaken first in the assumption that intellectual matters cannot become personal. You should not suppose that,’ he said and smiled a singularly delicate and painful smile. ‘You are, however, above all mistaken in your assessment of the intellect, which you apparently consider too weak to produce conflicts and passions as harsh as those that real life brings with it and that can be resolved only by reaching for weapons. *All'incontro!* The purified abstraction, the ideal, is at the same time also the absolute, and is thus rigor itself, and contains far more profound and radical possibilities for hatred, for categorical and irreconcilable hostility than are found in social life. [...] Whoever is unable to stand up for an ideal

It is, of course, impossible to entirely defend Settembrini here, as it is at so many other points in the novel, even as we might feel sympathetic to the larger feeling or impulse guiding his reaction to Naphta. As Hans sees it, Naphta's crimes consist of nothing more than a rather inconsequential disdain for intellectual conventions that Settembrini holds dear— repeating Naphta's own assessment of the crimes of which Settembrini is hypocritically accusing him, and calling to mind the project of categorization that Settembrini prized so highly in describing his work on the *Soziologie der Leiden*, Hans explains that Naphta “hat die Kategorien über den Haufen geworfen” and “den Begriffen ihre akademische Würde geraubt”— and he can't see how these purely “intellectual” missteps can take on such significance that they might translate to real, physical action, certainly not to the potentially deadly duel that is fast becoming a certainty. And yet, having followed the novel through its exploration of the ideas and abstractions in question here, it's also hard to just dismiss Settembrini's claim, particularly when we think of the end toward which the novel is hastening with Europe's impending war. Whatever real pedagogical value there might be in allowing one's pupil to work through doubt and confront conflicting positions, to embrace the “experimental state” in which Hans loves to linger, Settembrini also recognizes that this exploration doesn't just occur in a vacuum but has real consequences, and that ideas translate to action or inaction— the flip side of the process by which “das schöne Wort” leads to the “Denken” and “Handeln” that undergird humanity and its progress. Settembrini doesn't get it entirely right— even here, Naphta is much closer to describing and predicting the actual state of affairs in Europe than Settembrini's humanist view allows— but the bloodshed in which the novel ends, first with Naphta's suicide and ultimately with the war, the great “Weltfest des Todes” in which Hans is lost to sight, would seem to back up his claim about the deadly earnestness of ideas and their implications, and the fact that some ideas *are* dangerous and need to be countered with all the “pedagogic urgency” one can muster.

Settembrini is an odd remainder in the novel. As strongly and uncompromisingly as he stands for one side in the novel's many staged debates, he doesn't quite fit in to its careful play with binary structures in the end. With the exception of Hans, whom he sees off to war, he is the only primary character who remains at the novel's conclusion, and his particular form of “zealotry” is allowed to live on, even after we've lost sight of Hans in the chaos of the battlefield. (Though we might question whether living through Europe's impending nightmare is an even more tragic fate than death for this staunch optimist and believer in liberal progress.) As assiduously as the novel works to distance itself from so many of this character's views, the fact that the novel can't quite give him up or say goodbye to him at the end shows, I think, that it is ultimately much more sympathetic to the humanist pedagogue and his project than it initially wants to let on. That this sympathy in fact lurks throughout the whole novel is evident in the difference between the narrator's descriptions of Settembrini's speeches and his physical person: while it consistently mocks the former as indicating his “organ grinder” characteristics, the latter, which tend to make note of the emotion in his voice, his smile, or his eyes, are infused with a surprising warmth, and the narrator and Settembrini's voices become closer and closer as the novel comes to its close. Indeed, Martin Swales suggests that when the narrator bids farewell to Hans at the end of the novel, he is speaking in the voice of Settembrini, noting also that he touches the corner of his eye with his finger in an echo of the humanist's frequent gesture throughout the novel.²⁹⁷ It's fitting that this final valedictory

with his person, his arm, his blood, is unworthy of that ideal, and no matter how intellectual one may become, what matters is that one remains a man.’

That put Hans Castorp in his place. (833-834)]

²⁹⁷ Swales, “The Story and the Hero,” 370-371.

moment belongs to the humanist: it's not just Hans whom we are bidding farewell to, unsure whether he'll emerge alive from the war; Settembrini's vision of Germany and Europe may also not survive intact.

And yet, much as the "Vorsatz" chronicles the novel's obsolete qualities only to make an argument for its continuing relevance in the postwar era, so too does this final merging of Settembrini and his author suggest that some of his ideas might live on and remain significant in the present. The novel doesn't argue monologically for any one of its characters' positions, preferring the openness of the "Übungen und Experimenten" by which its protagonist is exposed to them in dialogic form, but it is, in the end, one set of words and ideas that finally spurs its passive protagonist into action and that, we hope, will see him through his ordeal. While it's too late to prevent the catastrophe that *Der Zauberberg's* final pages recount, Mann's novel argues that there is some insight to be gained from the rehearsal of the ideas and attitudes that led to it, and the middle ground of the novel provides a space in which Mann can undertake this project, ultimately turning its word into thought into deed.

Afterword In the Middle

By way of conclusion, I'd like to return to the implicit question that opened this dissertation: namely, how novels "[help] us to *know*." More specifically, I'd like to consider how the various definitions of the middle and the in-between that have circulated in the preceding chapters might help us to further define the work of novelistic pedagogy that I've been tracing and the acts of knowledge production that are particular to the novel and its form.

The novel as a genre has long been synonymous with middle-ness, from its average hero²⁹⁸ to its middle-class social world and readership²⁹⁹ to its dominant realist practices.³⁰⁰ If ideas of the middle are in some ways definitional of the novel, however, it's not necessarily clear that this is something to be universally celebrated. As suggested by Nabokov's choice of insult to append to the novel of ideas, it's not far from "middle" to "mediocrity."³⁰¹ If it's easy to dismiss Nabokov's protests about mediocre novels as those of a disgruntled reader looking for his own writerly values in a novel that just doesn't share them, the threat of "mediocrity" is more deeply-rooted in the genre as a whole. As Patrick Brantlinger claims, it is inseparable from the operation of realism, hinting at one of its central problems: noting the extent to which Victorian ideas about art and politics were centrally concerned with compromise, he asks, "Is 'middlingness' a state to be condemned or at least struggled against in the name of some higher, ideal, albeit extreme state, or is it paradoxically a state of virtuous wisdom through compromise, 'standing midway in the gulf' between false extremes?"³⁰² This account of the paradoxical potential danger and promise of compromise echoes the dynamic at work in *Der Zauberberg*, as we saw in the previous chapter, and it's not hard to draw a similar line to *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*: the un-historical acts of the latter-day Saint Theresa, the limits of Lydgate's medical career, and Felix's choice of marriage over politics all seem to point to a

²⁹⁸ As described by Lukács in *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 33-37.

²⁹⁹ Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles list several ways in which the nineteenth-century British novel is centrally concerned with social middles of different types: "first, the middle class, which achieved political hegemony through industrial capitalism rather than revolutionary action; second, the centrist reform program pursued through institutional mediation in a purposefully ongoing process that stubbornly held to the middle, refusing both dramatic beginnings and resolved endings; and third, the hub of empire, as London marked the metropolitan center of an empire that stretched across the world. The novel's form, an aesthetic compromise between imaginative vision and historical discourse (Lukács famously called it the "epic of a world abandoned by God"), accords in its British variant a corresponding priority to the middle-ness of the world it inhabits by avoiding rhetorical excess and dramatic extremes." Introduction to *Narrative Middles*, ed. Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 7-8. Their first two categories of course have clear analogs in Mann's novel: *Der Zauberberg* is fundamentally a novel of the German bourgeoisie, and while historical events in early twentieth-century Germany pushed Mann out of his earlier conservative quietism, he is still very much not a proponent of revolutionary action.

³⁰⁰ As George Levine says, realism is fundamentally a product and embrace of the middle, at the levels of both content and form: it "belongs, almost provincially, to a 'middling' condition and defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures." *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 5.

³⁰¹ And to another disparagement related to the rhetoric of the middle: namely, "middle-brow." If, historically speaking, the entire enterprise of the novel genre might be said to be middle-brow, the term becomes a much more pointed attack when directed at specific practitioners of it like Thomas Mann. As Anthony Heilbut notes, the critic Alfred Kerr and the novelist Robert Musil, among others, considered Mann irredeemably middle-brow, and this is one insult that Mann found unforgivable. *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature*, (London: Papermac, 1997), 460-461.

³⁰² Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 224.

renunciation of that “higher, ideal, albeit extreme state” in favor of a “middlingness” that can’t accommodate its ideals.³⁰³

And yet, as much as these novels represent the compromises of their characters— and often recognize them as such— I would suggest that they do also hold out hope for this middle ground as a potential state of “virtuous wisdom.” In “Goethe and Tolstoy,” Mann suggests that this middle space, and the compromise that defines it, might be a pedagogical one. After suggesting that Germany and its people stand in a position of geographical and cultural in-betweenness, he continues in a vein of philological argumentation: “I have been told that in Hebrew the words for knowing and insight have the same stem as the word for between.”³⁰⁴ Here, he suggests that the production of knowledge might rely on precisely the in-between position that we see literalized in Hans Castorp’s placement at the center of conflicting ideologies and lessons in *Der Zauberberg*. Whatever compromise is inherent in this position, the negotiation of extremes that it entails is also, he argues, a space of insight, and his novel thereby also becomes an instantiation of this middle ground, in which conflicting ideas and knowledge claims are staged and negotiated, and ultimately, he suggests, transformed into insight for its protagonist and reader both.

This middle space of insight is, in a sense, also synonymous with life. As Frank Kermode notes, the middle is the space in which life occurs: “Men, like poets, rush ‘into the midst,’ *in media res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems.”³⁰⁵ It is, of course, this “middest” of life that novels of formation like those I’ve considered here are concerned with in charting the *Bildungswege* of their heroes. As articulated in the theory of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman*, however, the central wager of such novels is that their own form and the formation they represent are continuous with one another: to apply Schiller’s metaphor, their character is at once the material of the story and the aim of the narration, and the plot and stakes of the novel are therefore one and the same— a project that would seem to rely on those “fictive concords with origins and ends” out of which meaning emerges. And yet, as we’ve seen in the case of Goethe, Eliot, and Mann, such novelistic formation is never quite this neat, and we might say that their novels are in fact much more committed to inhabiting the openness of the middle than in reaching the closure they seem to promise. As Martin Swales argues of the German *Bildungsroman* in its foundational form, the novel is fundamentally a space of tension: between the *Nacheinander* of plot, of living, and the *Nebeneinander* of all the simultaneous possibilities of human existence and the meaning any one of these possibilities could enact. As Lukács says of Goethe’s foundational text, *Wilhelm Meister* is a novel that remains committed to human wholeness even as the text inscribes the impossibility of ever representing it: the best it can do is mediate between the real and the potential, and the endings of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and novels like it can’t help but be ironic, defusing the intimations of wholeness (for

³⁰³ Though it’s worth noting that all of these characters betray their belief in some type of “higher, ideal, albeit extreme state” even as they fail to attain it. If Hans Castorp is the parodic opposite of Wilhelm Meister in the journey that *Der Zauberberg* maps out for him, he does seem Wilhelm’s heir in one important regard: namely, his naïve *Schwärmerei*, his ability to be entirely taken in and shaped by ideas, however extreme or pedagogically suspect, and to inhabit fully and enthusiastically, at least for a time, the roles, environments, and ideals that make up these experiences. Dorothea and Lydgate share a similar ardor and enthusiasm, even if the freedom and field within which they can experiment with them are different on account of their gender. These protagonists are all guided by a sense of passion and vocation— often misplaced, and slow to kindle in Hans’s case— that is central to the novel of formation, from its first instantiation onward, even as its plot challenges it and moves them back toward the middle ground from which they want to set themselves apart.

³⁰⁴ Thomas Mann, “Goethe and Tolstoy,” in *Essays of Three Decades*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1948) 174.

³⁰⁵ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

example, Wilhelm's admission to the Tower) that the novel seemed to promise in a displaced climax before allowing the story to continue and peter out.³⁰⁶

The tension that is so central to Swales's reading of the German *Bildungsroman* is just one of the many tensions that has emerged as constitutive of the novels I've discussed: between realist detail and didactic whole, between the contingencies of formation (and the threat of its opposite) and the formal demands of the successful *Bildungsroman*, between content and form.³⁰⁷ To the extent that these tensions define the workings of the novel, they suggest that its meaning inheres in between, and in a space that exceeds, any single claim that the narrative or narrator can make about the novel's project. These novels also make us re-evaluate any absolute privileging of the "origins and ends" as the primary locus of meaning, even as their didactic structure and aims might seem to privilege precisely such a comprehensive, authorial view. Building on Kent Puckett's claim about the middle in Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*—"It is, in other words, the middle that makes sense of things; it is the middle that makes meaningful the temporal and structural difference between a before and an after."³⁰⁸—we might say that the middle doesn't just "make sense of things," but it *is* the thing itself: novel form is produced in the space between and in the negotiation of these extremes.

Finally, I would propose that the middle ground might also serve as a figure for the work of novel reading itself. As we've seen, the formative experiences that these novels construct for their protagonists are often figured as readerly endeavors. While this is made explicit in the case of Wilhelm Meister and his interaction with texts at key moments in his apprenticeship—most notably the manuscript of his own life—Eliot and Mann adapt this trope in more implicit ways, suggesting that the work of inductive observation, sympathetic response, and abstraction and interpretation—those very tasks in which their novels engage their readers—are key to the *Bildung* of their protagonists. If they serve as intradiegetic analogs of sorts for the reader who follows their stories, the reader, and the work of reading the novel, also serves as an analog for their formation within the story-world. In formally enacting such readerly lessons and in building into their pages a self-awareness about the intertwining of form and formation, these novels claim for themselves the work of education, knowledge production, and reform that they thematize, and they suggest that certain forms of knowing are best produced by the novel and its tools. In this emphasis on novelistic pedagogy, Goethe, Eliot, and Mann also ultimately put forth an implicit argument for the value of the novel: namely, as a form that helps us "to know" by merging the novel's aesthetic and ethical workings in a central project of education—an education that can only come from reading novels like these.

³⁰⁶ Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Goethe to Hesse*, 70-71.

³⁰⁷ Franco Moretti suggests that the relationship between form and content is always one of compromise. See "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000), 54-68.

³⁰⁸ Kent Puckett, "Before and Afterwardsness in Henry James," in *Narrative Middles*, ed. Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 95.

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