# GEORGE ELIOT, G.H. LEWES AND THE VICTORIAN SCIENCE OF MIND: IS HETTY THE MISSING LINK IN THE EVOLUTION OF FEELING?

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Victorian science of mind and evolutionary theory converge in the ethics of Eliot's first novel. *Adam Bede* embodies George Eliot's and G.H. Lewes's early beliefs about the purpose of fiction, and is a testing ground for their moral philosophy. Eliot's method in the novel is a form of empirical verification that encompasses both aesthetic and emotional feeling as the testing ground for value, creating a parable of human nature that attempts to speak in a sophisticated language of feeling, and using scientific principles in order to re-establish ethics on the basis of the familiar rather than the metaphysical; as something both intuitively known and empirically verifiable.

"Feeling" is almost a technical term in Lewes's writing, and it acquires moral connotations in Eliot's novels. Ludwig Feuerbach—the only philosopher with whom Eliot claimed to be entirely in accord (*Letters* 2: 153)—held as his first principle and "the axis on which revolves the history of the world" that "the highest and first law must be the love of man to man. *Homo homini deus est*" (159); and this is the basic principle of Eliot's history of common life. "I have come to the conclusion," says the narrator of *Adam Bede*, "that human nature is lovable" (229).[1] The characterisation of human nature as "lovable" rather than "lovely" suggests Eliot's investment in human nature as capable of being loved by the right reader. In *Middlemarch* she elaborates on the evolution of the lovable as a process of exchanged qualities: "A human being in this aged nation of ours is a very wonderful whole, the slow creation of long interchanging influences; and charm is a result of two such wholes, the one loving and the one loved" (444). Love, which is the highest faculty in Eliot's scale of human development, has two halves, one belonging to the right reader, the other to human nature itself. It is the novel's intention to demonstrate that this moral potentiality inherent in human nature exists independent of the laws of church or state; it comes from the community as a repository of shared feelings.

The ability to "read" human nature with love, and correspondingly to read the love in human nature, connects feelings with language and with mental linguistic processes. As Adam Bede puts it, the good clergyman Mr Irwine's sermons minister to his listeners in undogmatic language, "like finding names for your feelings" (227).[2]

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[1] Eliot also writes that our "fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are" (222).

[2] See also Eliot's statement in "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming": "All human beings who can be said to be in any degree moral have their impulses guided . . . by the intellect of human beings who have . . . created traditions and associations which have taken the rank of laws" (44). Tradition encapsulates the hard-won moral knowledge of past generations. M.C. Henberg notes that "aided by tradition, the moral realist will thus find names for his feelings" (29-30).

Naming feelings represents the first stage in externalising morality and the process uses the most basic symbols. As Adam continues, naming feelings is useful "so as you can talk of 'em when you've never known 'em, just as a man may talk o' tools when he knows their names, though he's never so much as seen 'em" (227-28). This naming clearly gives the imagination "tools" for intuiting lessons in moral understanding. Here is a movement beyond empiricism, together with the suggestion that naming establishes a community that grows out of feeling, and begins a process which initiates new members into that same community.

Eliot shared Hume's belief that the "operation of morality depends on some internal sense or feeling which nature has made universal in the whole species" (Henberg 35). When Eliot lost her faith she sought an alternative basis for a sense of intellectual and spiritual community, which she found in the concept of feeling. As she wrote at this time: "Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds, agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the *truth of feeling* as the only universal bond of union" (*Letters* 1: 162). As has frequently been pointed out, Eliot was profoundly influenced by Feuerbach,[3] and translated his work *The Essence of Christianity* in 1854. Like Eliot, Feuerbach's pivotal idea was that a sense of moral community is an innate part of consciousness. This morally binding force of sympathy underpinned Eliot's idea of all human relations: "My fellow-man is my objective conscience; he makes my failings a reproach to me. . . . The consciousness of the moral law, of right, of propriety, of truth itself, is indissolubly connected with my consciousness of another than myself" (Feuerbach 158; ch 16). In his later work, Lewes specifies that what distinguishes humans from animals is the human "relation to a social medium, with its product, the General Mind" (*Problems* 4: 139; cf. 160-70) which is the inherited repository of language and ethics.[4] An education in feeling works to bind the community together and reinforce the "natural" place of each of its members. Feeling is the language both of individuals and of community.

### Feeling and Mind

In *Adam Bede*, there is something scientific and rigidly methodical in Eliot's descriptions of the way feeling works and progresses. Lewes gives a scientific exposition of collective mind, "the unit of collective life" which refines all productions within the community, be they products of religion, science or art. This process is described as evolutionary and essential to the development of all products of human society (4: 78, 80). We can see this sense of interconnected achievements—emotional, cultural and scientific—which enrich the social good in chapter 54: "The growth of

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[3] "Feuerbach allowed [Eliot] to retain an 'essence' of Christianity" (Knoepflmacher 44, see also Dodd).

[4] According to J. Hillis Miller: "The Victorian novelists tend to assume that each man finds himself from his birth surrounded by a transindividual mind, identical with the words he learns. This mind surrounds him, embraces him, permeates him, from the first day of his life to the end. To write a novel is to identify oneself with this general consciousness, or rather to actualize a participation in it which already exists intently by virtue of a man's birth into the community" (qtd Collins 479n17). I would argue that in *Adam Bede* Eliot appeals to just such an inward conception of humanity while also demonstrating the likely fate of those whose impenetrable egoism shuts them off from knowing they are part of the essence of humanity.

higher feeling within us is like the growth of faculty . . . we can no more wish to return to a narrower sympathy, than a painter or a musician can wish to return to his crude manner, or a philosopher to his less complete formula" (574). The "methodical" growth of feeling is linked to the development of art and technical proficiency. By making feeling, or sympathy, a process continuous with technical achievement, Eliot universalises it while at the same time making a connection between development in art and development in life. This all forms part of the gradation from simple to complex, from primitive to sophisticated, in feeling as in physical forms.

Implicit in her treatment of moral character in *Adam Bede* is the notion of evolution in human ethics. Eliot returned to these concepts in a late notebook, where she wrote: "Ethics is a mixed science to which conduct is the corresponding art. From the scientific point of view you have to consider the forms of force or energy concerned & how they are generated & what changes they will beget directly & incidentally. Hence it seems an unfruitful attempt now to consider ethics apart from social and psychological evolution" (qtd Pinney 364). "The scientific point of view" thus involves exploring and quantifying the scientific aspect of ethics. It is clear that Eliot contemplates both evolution and ethics in terms both of changes within the individual (psychological change) and changes in the relation between the individual and environment (sociological change). On the same page of the notebook, Eliot quotes *Adam Bede*; here we can see Eliot reconsidering the moral tenets of her early fiction. In her theory of the evolution of ethics, the propelling ethical—or moral—force is a physical entity. Ethics is a "mixed science" which requires embodiment in "art in conduct" and "art in words" as part of an evolution of ethics within General Mind.

In seeing thought as biological and mind as scientifically verifiable, Eliot's philosophy of mind relies on evolutionary theory. In the same way that we accept the idea that man is an animal, reasoned Lewes, so we can understand that "Thought is Feeling" (*Problems* 5: 11). Eliot wrote "Thought is Feeling" into her notes while preparing the final series of Lewes's *Problems of Life and Mind* for publication after his death.[5] It is now impossible to tell if Eliot or Lewes first invented this catch-phrase. It has been argued, however, that Lewes was influenced by Eliot's exposition on feeling to write the phrase "Thought is Feeling" in his last work.[6] In that book, Lewes establishes a relation between the animal and human mind in its lower form in order to treat humans as creatures that share primitive behaviour with animals. For Eliot thought at its higher levels is more than feeling, and she emphasises connections between the workings of reason as abstract thought and the highest workings of moral thought. She sets up a character like Hetty Sorel as embodying the limits of morality when viewed physiologically, but Adam's moral sense is clearly beyond the physiologically based frame of Hetty's. Eliot's novel explores rustic life as a simplified model of human nature, and treats the hero's development of a higher consciousness as a victory for the

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[5] These notes are now in the Huntington Library, HM 12995, leaf 34. Lewes writes again in *Problems* about what was for him an emphatic concept: "We only know what we have felt" (5. 395), and: "The doctrine of this work stands by the primary judgement of Feeling, and is a Reasoned Realism because it does so" (1. 184, also 178).

[6] Shuttleworth, "Sexuality and Psychology in *Middlemarch*" *Nineteenth Century Contexts* (forthcoming).

ethic of feeling, a victory which is rewarded with a love match with Dinah, made possible by the failure in feeling which leads Hetty to murder her child.

Eliot considers human types in terms of a kind of individuation which explains organic function as moving from simple to complex, and she posits a similar development in scientific method and knowledge about the human organism. This idea is found in both Lewes and Eliot. Lewes puts it this way: "Goethe clearly perceived that the march of Nature was always from the simple to the complex, from the homogenous to the heterogeneous; but he also saw that in studying nature we should follow the same method" ("Goethe" 499). And in a similar vein Eliot writes: "In the various branches of Social Science there is an advance from the general to the special, from the simple to the complex, analogous to that which is found in the series of the sciences, from Mathematics to Biology" ("Natural History" 130). Eliot uses mathematical analogy to describe the process of growth which accompanies complication in biological evolution, "with its geometrical progression towards fuller and fuller being" (*Letters* 3: 338). Not only can human and moral development be better understood using mathematical metaphors; the development of mathematical reasoning is itself implicit within such changes. As Lewes puts it: "The rules of Arithmetic were late in mental evolution and are still inconceivable by the bulk of mankind" (*Problems* 4: 169). But now that mathematics forms part of the general mind of modern civilisation, it is a specialised skill which any clever human can, with some effort, acquire out of the innate collective experience of which he is a part. While the acquisition of this skill is vital to maintaining the race's moral tone, Eliot recognises, somewhat uneasily, that the gulf between those to whom both arithmetic and higher moral values are alike "inconceivable," and those who constitute the intellectual and moral vanguard, creates a tense competition for survival. This is worked out in the relation between Hetty and Adam, and later between Latimer and Bertha, and Lydgate and Rosamond. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot is thinking about evolution as the development from a rudimentary to a complex state, in terms at once organic, moral and social.

Eliot wishes to conjoin arithmetic with a moral sense and to make conscience a faculty subject to intellectual gradations in the possession of conscience. Lewes and Charles Darwin (*Descent* 1: 100) see arithmetical skill as a specialised mechanical habit exclusive to humans; and for them, morality arises out of instincts which are continuous with animals: the instinctive fear of punishment. Eliot's alterations to *Problems of Life and Mind* aim to draw the moral sense away from instinct; in her revision of Lewes she calls the moral sense, which is merely the shunning of punishment, "the check imposed by egoistic dread on egoistic desire" (*Problems* 4: 145). Because they are egoistic, instincts provide only an underdeveloped state of conscience which she shows to be limited in her troubled character Gwendolen Harleth. In Eliot's revision of Lewes's writing we can see her subtle creation of a new version of the moral sense, beyond physical instinct; a moral sense which comes into being when "the sanction which was once the outside whip has become the inward sympathetic pang" (4: 150). Eliot prefers to consider the moral sense as an "ideal force" (4: 144) of fellow feeling that curbs the primitive egoistic instinct. In order to make this claim for the moral sense within the pages of *Problems of Life and Mind*, Eliot retains Lewes's and Darwin's idea that conscience and arithmetic are exclusive to humans: "If we take the term Moral Sense to mean the power of discerning right and wrong, this is as impossible to an animal as the

power of discerning arithmetical proportions".[7] Algebra, or the discernment of "arithmetical proportions," is a higher form of logic equivalent to moral reasoning. Eliot emphasises the evolution of the moral sense from a kind of self-protecting reflex, inherited from animals, into a force of habitual fellow feeling, which is found only in highly developed humans. Beyond basic morality, which is a fear of imagined or remembered punishment, Eliot posits a moral sense which is a pure force because it is an abstract quality, like arithmetic; "because," as she writes in one of her additions to *Problems of Life and Mind*, "right and wrong are abstractions" (4: 148).[8]

Eliot contrasts the idea of the attainment of conscience to Lewes's and Darwin's descriptions of the primitive moral sense. Again and again in the sub-chapter on the moral sense, Eliot introduces these two variants: "a lower order of minds" (4: 148), "the less endowed specimens of our race" (145), and "the moral sense in this lower stage" (150); as opposed to "select members of a given generation" (146). The new position is thus created out of Lewes's and Darwin's accounts which forms a physical basis for it, allowing Eliot to conclude that "while man, in his moral beginnings has a marked kinship with the animals," (151) his moral potential takes him to a moral end which cannot be explained by reference to animal psychology. For Eliot, what is involved is the marriage of physiology to psychology in order to create something higher in "this necessary co-operation of the impulsive and the perceptive, the emotional and the intellectual in the development of morality" (147-48).

Feeling is the fulcrum of Eliot's moral philosophy, but in *Adam Bede* she traces gradations in the development of feeling into socially productive "energy": "What was a moment before joy, vexation, or ambition, begins its change into energy. All passion becomes strength when it has an outlet from the narrow limits of our personal lot in the labour of our right arm, the cunning of our right hand, or the still, creative activity of our thought" (257). Here Eliot's familiar anti-egoistic ethos is linked with biological function, and feeling is refined as it is transformed into higher modes of expression: from brute force to dexterous "cunning" and the marvel of creative thought. It is the evolution of activity, linked to gradations in feeling, which determines human behaviour and, in turn, ways of understanding human nature.

Adam's innate response to Hetty's beauty is likened by Eliot to being "wrought upon by exquisite music" (399). Eliot extends the metaphor into a paean extolling the strength of inherited feeling and the moral potentiality which the individual (in this case, Adam or the male reader) must possess in order to

> feel its wondrous harmonies searching the subtle windings of your soul, the delicate fibres of life where no memory can penetrate, and binding together your whole being past and present in one

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[7] This passage appears in a manuscript written entirely in Eliot's hand (Beinecke 6 no 33). It differs substantially from the version in Lewes's hand (Beinecke Lewes writings no 32) and slightly from the published version (*Problems* 4: 145). For further discussion of Eliot's changes and how they reveal Eliot's moral philosophy see Collins, who relates ideas in *Problems* to Kant and *Middlemarch* (470-83).

[8] Darwin's famous description in *The Descent of Man* of the moral instinct in bees challenged the Victorian investment in conscience. For an excellent discussion of Darwin's moral sense and contemporary response see Simon Petch, "Law, Equity and Conscience in Victorian England" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25 (forthcoming).

> unspeakable vibration: melting you in one moment with all the tenderness, all the love that has been scattered through the toilsome years, concentrating in one emotion of heroic courage or resignation all the hard-learnt lessons of self-renouncing sympathy, blending your present joy with past sorrow, and your present sorrow with all your past joy. (399)

Eliot gets quite carried away in this passage (which continues down the page in like vein) and its lyrical encapsulation of the many ideas she wished to associate with Adam's susceptibility to Hetty. The reference to "delicate fibres of life where no memory can penetrate" suggests that the response to music or beauty (or, in another passage, the meaning of the word "love") is one of those innate experiences which lie beneath articulation—and is hence "unspeakable"—and which join with better feeling to create a biological "spot of time." It is a fusion of individual with General Mind. It is interesting, however, that Adam's *heroic* susceptibility to "the exquisite curves of a woman's cheek and neck and arms . . . the liquid depths of her beseeching eyes, or the sweet childish pout of her lips" (399-400), a susceptibility to which Adam yields himself uncritically, becomes in Tertius Lydgate a "spot of commonness" when *he* allows himself to be conquered by female curves.

The narrator in *Adam Bede* comments that "we must learn to accommodate ourselves to the discovery that some of those cunningly fashioned instruments called human souls have only a limited range of music" (141). In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot returns to this critical account of that kind of feminine beauty which is exploited by the sexual instinct of women possessing "lower natures": "[Scintilla was] not in the least a wicked woman; she was simply a pretty animal of the ape kind" (137). Such creatures impede the "progress" of a species: as Eliot notes elsewhere, "natural selection is not always good, and depends (see Darwin) on many caprices of very foolish animals" (*Letters* 4: 377). There is a sense in Eliot, too, that nature allows and even encourages the success of weak yet beautiful women who tyrannise over stronger partners. In *The Mill on the Floss* this is stated explicitly: "Nature herself occasionally quarters an inconvenient parasite on an animal towards whom she has otherwise no ill-will. What then? We admire her care for the parasite" (75).[9] The carelessness of nature infects the narrator with her shoulder-shrugging "What then?" leaving the reader uncomfortably aware of the likely fate of the attacked animal, abandoned by nature and narrator alike to the arbitrary powers of fate.

Eliot was able to control the primitive aspect of existence within *Adam Bede*, but it is given an increasingly bitter and ironic treatment in subsequent novels. This development in her thinking can be read as being in some ways an acknowledgment of the validity of Darwin's thesis of "the universal struggle for life" (*Origin* 519; ch 3). The Darwinian picture of a normal or natural existence which is constantly destroying life gives a place for the primitive and savage. In the *Origin*, Darwin describes the

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[9] Here, Eliot ironically treats Darwinian natural science: he praises the "beautiful co-adaptation . . . in the humblest parasite which clings to the hairs of a quadruped or feathers of a bird" (*Origin* 114). A natural and even efficient process which exists in the wider world of existence we call "nature" is a grotesque *mal* adaptation in Eliot's portrait of humanity.

"struggle for Existence" as "including dependence of one being on another, and including . . . the success in leaving progeny" which can be reduced to the simple equation: "the victory of one organic being over another" (520, 523). Parasitic and sexually predatory relations are thus made into a standard part of life, and such relations impede the sort of philosophical progress Eliot and others hoped to see at work within human development.

**The Evolutionary Struggle**

"The Lifted Veil," a story Eliot wrote shortly after *Adam Bede,* treats the subservience of superior intelligence to a primitive mind. This depiction of a ruthless power to survive would seem to defeat the supremacy of the moral sense and higher development, which in *Adam Bede* are saved from the threat posed by the primitive. The story centres on a young man named Latimer who is cursed by exceptional intelligence which gives him the ability to read the consciousness of those around him. In *Adam Bede*, sympathetic experience of other minds leads to greater human understanding and interconnection, and is vital to moral development. Latimer, on the other hand, is passive and weak in the face of preternaturally revealed circumstances. It is an inversion of the empowerment that is accorded to insight and intelligence in *Adam Bede*.

Latimer remains powerless to break the nexus of Bertha's control even after he discovers her unmotivated plot to murder him. The first-person narrative ends literally with the "death of the author." Because Latimer is the narrator, only his version of the tale is available to the reader, yet his omniscience is strangely checked by Bertha's mind. It is as though Eliot was haunted by her sense of the primitive mind which remains obscure to higher intelligence. Specimens of lower minds such as Bertha's are beyond the comprehension of science, except those branches of psychology and biology which treat abnormalities and aberrations; the primitive exists beyond redemption by higher feeling. Yet it is seemingly more powerful than higher feeling: Bertha's irrational, half-hidden hatred directs and concludes the Gothic plot. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot organised the plot to effectually dispose of Hetty. She did this so thoroughly, given that Hetty was already disarmed—a soft target, upon which all Eliot's narrative artillery is brought to bear —as to suggest that Hetty represents a force which is a greater threat than Eliot cares to admit. Hetty's primitive force rebounds in "The Lifted Veil" but it is still not exorcised.

The reason why Bertha's thoughts are beyond divination by her husband/ narrator and, by extension, the story's reader, is that Bertha is scarcely human. It is in her excitement at the prospect of murdering Latimer that her thoughts sink below the intelligible. Although he can by now see into the "narrow room of this woman's soul," it is because her murder-plot is "too subtle to express itself in words or tones" that it is beneath all the logics of human expression. As Eliot observes in *Adam Bede*: "It is our habit to say that . . . the higher nature commands a complete view of the lower" (207) but the primitive consciousness, Hetty's or Bertha's, remains beneath rational, and even scientific knowledge. "The psychology of animals may be simpler than that of man," Lewes writes, "but it is assuredly less intelligible" (*Problems* 4: 128).

The sense of this unusual proposition had already been expounded in Eliot's fiction. Eliot reverses the sense of Keats's Romantic axiom "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Beauty is not truth; it may well be unintelligible. Beauty is a force in evolution and the survival of those individuals which are best adapted: survivors go on to perpetuate the species in their own image. The animal which can attract a mate with its beauty subjugates that mate to its own will and to supplying its material needs. Sexual instinct is the motive force behind Eliot's depiction of the primitive in femmes fatales. Just as Lewes links human characteristics with those of animals, so the primitive nature of Hetty, the novel's "fallen woman," sees her likened to animals throughout the novel and this is symptomatic of her lack of a moral nature. A plainly evolutionary metaphor exposes Hetty's primitive consciousness as the limiting factor in her selfishness: "We are none of us aware of the impression we produce on Brazilian monkeys of feeble understanding—it is possible they see hardly anything in us" (249). Eliot suggests that in order to understand Hetty readers must lose all their "rational prejudices, as much as if [they were] studying the psychology of a canary bird" (294). As Sally Shuttleworth has noted: "Hetty's tragedy seems to stem less from the inequities of the social organism than from the limitations of her own nature" (45). However, although Eliot uses animal imagery to describe Hetty, she does not use it to describe her seducer Arthur: since he is civilised by virtue of his possession of an imagination which can grasp moral ideas, he is redeemable by the hard experience of consequences. Arthur's is a higher nature, and his moral wavering is vividly presented to the reader to show he possesses a moral impulse which requires tutoring and "channelling" into morally more suitable habitual pathways of judgement and behaviour.

According to Lewes's and Eliot's model, the first manifestation of a moral sense occurs as a response to pleasure or pain; this is the "Logic of Feeling" man possesses in common with the higher animals. The moral sense based on simple feelings can be seen operating in Hetty: "Poor Hetty's vision of consequences [was] at no time more than a narrow fantastic calculation of her own probable pleasures and pains" (385). She does not tap into the common inheritance which supports the moral sense, "seeing nothing of this wide world but the little history of her own pleasures and pains" (415). Hetty comprehends nothing but her own most basic experience and she seeks to know no further. Morality requires that this primitive form of feeling be translated into something higher. The novel proposes that love underlies all that is of substance in the world, and it aims to create sympathy as a force that will lead to moral order. While feeling is usually regarded as a spontaneous activity originating within the organism, Eliot assumes it can, like most forces, be prompted and directed into habitual channels by external stimuli. The novel creates a spiritually empowering experience of sympathy for Hetty's suffering, for the reader and for the book's "finer" characters. Because she feels no sympathy and no feeling except self-love, Hetty is expelled from the novel's community—and so effectively from the novel itself—and banished to a fate only slightly better than death: New South Wales.

Eliot does not name where Hetty is "transported o'er the seas" (509) but the American War of Independence led to the establishment of New South Wales as Britain's convict colony. The penal colony was only 22 years old when Hetty was sent there; the unusual landscape peopled by a race which the settlers considered primitive

made the British view convict life as a fall from the Edenic type of civilisation described in the novel. By the mid-Victorian era, phrenologists were debating the opposing views that either convicts were made savage by convict life in Australia or, conversely, expelling all the savage convicts to Australia made the colony savage. Either way, Australian convict life was seen as "savage," bringing out the dark, primitive faculties in the race (De Giustino). Hetty is not allowed to return from convict life; although her crime is pardoned, she perishes before she can return to England. Arthur's sorrow at being unable to "save [Hetty] from that wretched fate of being transported" (515) and Dinah's description of Hetty as "the poor wanderer" (582), only enforce the idea of a barren exile. Hetty's exportation and death in England's convict settlement reverse Lyell's optimistic view of how the progress of (English) civilisation may be seen in the process of colonisation as transforming an entire primitive landscape. This landscape "had been exclusively inhabited for thousands of years by inferior animals" into a mirror of English common life. As Lyell put it:

> When a powerful European colòny lands on the shores of Australia, and introduces at once those arts which it has required many centuries to mature; when it imports a multitude of plants and large animals from the opposite extremity of the earth, and begins rapidly to extirpate many of the indigenous species, a mightier revolution is effected in a brief period than the first entrance of a savage horde. (1: 647)

Eliot sends Hetty into exile to improve the English landscape in the novel and it is unlikely that Hetty could exert any positive influence in the colonies.

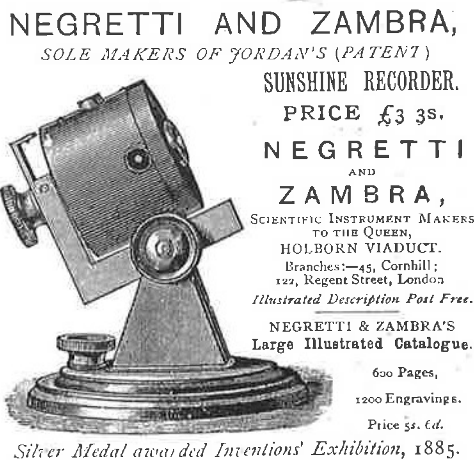
The characterisation of Hetty also questions Lewes's views on what he calls "the Logic of Signs" as distinguishing man from the animals. According to Lewes, it is the power of symbolic expression and the capacity to love which separates humanity from animals (*Problems* 4: 136-38; 5: 238). Significantly, Hetty lacks both these sophistications. The "blank in Hetty's nature" is her deficiency of feeling; the "absence of any warm, self-devoting love" (203). In the darkened prison cell, Hetty's cousin Dinah tries to persuade her to confess to murdering her newborn child, by making her aware of the presence of God. Dinah says rhetorically, "There is some one else in this cell, some one close to you." Hetty's frightened reply—"Who?" (494)—shows she has no understanding of symbolic ideas and language.

Language can be a taught skill but effective mastery of its poetic power for communicating feeling depends on the capacity for higher feeling and associated higher thought. Hetty's confession in the dramatic climax of *Adam Bede* is presented barely in order to expose Hetty's bare, bleak soul, withdrawn momentarily from the abyss of its own darkness by the force of Dinah's pure sympathy. Dinah's words are the most spiritually-charged of any character in the novel, but her words cannot effect change in Hetty. As Jay Clayton puts it: "Dinah merely assists at a revelation which has no narrative consequence whatsoever" (649). Dinah's last-minute pardon for Hetty's soul in the form of a confession is a consequence negated by Hetty's last-minute legal pardon which sends her into exile within an externalised "primitive." She is then beyond rescue by words; when she is freed to return home, Hetty dies. Clayton reads Dinah as

Eliot's personification of Wordsworth's visionary power (658-60) which allows her to transform Hetty's story, by making her confess, to end on a "higher level" (661, 995). But the confession scene exposes a raw primitivity in its subject: Hetty replaces the plot's missing link by telling how she killed her newborn baby.

**Conclusion: Hetty as the Missing Link**

In her first full-scale novel Eliot launches her philosophy of feeling. For this experimental work, she uses a philosophy of mind based on Lewes's science to give direction to her narrative. Hetty is in this sense the "missing link," the bridge between Eliot's fiction and Victorian science, and between primitive nature and sophisticated intelligence which, according to Lewes's theories, are distinguished from one another by the latter's mastery of symbols and altruistic feeling. But as the focus of feeling for all the novel's characters, Hetty is a hollow centre. And, at the last, in what Eliot intended to be the novel's climax, the silences and the misunderstandings between Hetty and Dinah in the prison cell hint at the survival of something primitive within consciousness, which works against the operations of conscience. As Adam, the character who best experiences the narrator's tale, puts it: "There's a deal in a man's inward life as you can't measure by the square" (227). In what is again a more grim reincarnation of an *Adam Bede* metaphor in *Daniel Deronda*, the narrator writes: "There is a great deal of unmapped territory within us which would have to be taken account in an explanation of our gusts and storms" (235). Evolutionary theory did not inspire Eliot with great ideas of progress, as it did some Victorians like Herbert Spencer. As one of the many systems science used to explain away the complexities of life, it failed as a monism. Shortly after *Adam Bede* was published, Eliot wrote: "To me the Development theory & all other explanations of processes by which things come to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under processes" (*Letters* 3: 227). On the edge of Eliot's narratology there exists the concern that this unfathomable quality of character lies beyond both the novel and beyond redemption by "feeling," as Hetty is finally let go from the novel's community to expire in the "primitive" life of the colonies.



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